

Drivers of Socially Responsible Management in Thai SMEs: Evidence from Employment Practices Using the Theory of Planned Behavior

Received: August 7, 2025

Revised: October 27, 2025

Accepted: November 6, 2025

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ABSTRACT

Socially Responsible Management (SRM) embeds social responsibility in business operations, especially employment practices, shaping how entrepreneurs treat workers and affecting employee well-being. This study asks: (1) How do Thai agro-industrial SMEs implement SRM in training, fair wages, and workplace safety? (2) What factors motivate adoption? We use a mixed-methods design: a cross-sectional survey of 47 agro-industrial SMEs (owner-managers) in Ubon Ratchathani with structural equation modelling, plus semi-structured interviews coded thematically.

Results indicate that external drivers-laws, buyer/regulatory standards, and perceived business benefits are more salient than intrinsic attitudes. By block, training intentions hinge on perceived behavioural control perceived business benefits and production standards; fair wages hinge on law compliance, perceived business benefits, attitudes, and norms; and safety environment hinges on regulation, attitude, and norms. Intentions did not consistently translate into behaviour, pointing to an intention-behaviour gap under time, cost, and capability pressures. We outline light-touch, practice-specific supports-brief GMP/HACCP refreshers with an implementation-intention planner (training), a one-page wage-audit with peer benchmarking (fair wages), and quarterly educational safety walkthroughs (safety)-to be delivered via provincial and buyer networks with simple uptake indicators. Future research should test moderators/mediators (resources, enforcement, routines) and evaluate cluster pilots that strengthen perceived control and convert intentions into action.

Keywords: Socially Responsible Management (SRM), The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Thai SMEs, Human Resource Management (HRM)

ปัจจัยขับเคลื่อนการจัดการอย่างมีความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม ในวิสาหกิจขนาดกลางและขนาดย่อมของไทย : หลักฐานจาก การปฏิบัติด้านแรงงานโดยใช้แนวคิดทฤษฎีพฤติกรรมตามแผน

วันที่ได้รับต้นฉบับบทความ : 7 สิงหาคม 2568

วันที่แก้ไขปรับปรุงบทความ : 27 ตุลาคม 2568

วันที่ตอบรับตีพิมพ์บทความ : 6 พฤศจิกายน 2568

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บทคัดย่อ

การจัดการที่มีความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม (Socially Responsible Management: SRM) คือ การฝังแนวคิดความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมไว้ในกระบวนการดำเนินธุรกิจ โดยเฉพาะแนวปฏิบัติด้านการจ้างงาน ซึ่งกำหนดวิธีที่ผู้ประกอบการปฏิบัติต่อแรงงานและส่งผลกระทบต่อคุณภาพชีวิตการทำงานของพนักงาน งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งตอบคำถามว่า (1) วิสาหกิจขนาดกลางและขนาดย่อมในอุตสาหกรรมเกษตรในประเทศไทยดำเนินการ SRM ในด้านการฝึกอบรม ค่าจ้างที่เป็นธรรม และความปลอดภัยในการทำงานอย่างไร และ (2) ปัจจัยใดจูงใจให้เกิดการยอมรับและนำหลักการความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมดังกล่าวไปใช้ งานวิจัยใช้ระเบียบวิธีแบบผสมผสาน ประกอบด้วยการใช้แบบสอบถามแบบภาคตัดขวางในกลุ่มวิสาหกิจขนาดกลางและขนาดย่อมอุตสาหกรรมเกษตรจำนวน 47 แห่งในจังหวัดอุบลราชธานี (ผู้ตอบคือ เจ้าของ/ผู้จัดการ) วิเคราะห์ด้วยแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง (SEM) ควบคู่กับการสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้างและการถอดรหัสเชิงประเด็น

ผลการวิจัยชี้ว่า แรงผลักดันภายนอก ได้แก่ กฎหมาย มาตรฐานของผู้ซื้อ/หน่วยงานกำกับดูแล และการรับรู้ประโยชน์ทางธุรกิจมีอิทธิพลเด่นชัดกว่าทัศนคติภายในของผู้ประกอบการ เมื่อพิจารณาเป็นรายด้าน พบว่า “ความตั้งใจให้การฝึกอบรม” ได้รับอิทธิพลจากการรับรู้การควบคุม ความคาดหวังต่อประโยชน์ทางธุรกิจในอนาคตและมาตรฐานการผลิตเป็นสำคัญ “ความตั้งใจจ่ายค่าจ้างที่เป็นธรรม” มีความเชื่อมโยงกับความต้องการทำตามกฎหมาย ความคาดหวังต่อประโยชน์ทางธุรกิจในอนาคต ทัศนคติและบรรทัดฐานเชิงอัตวิสัย และ “ความตั้งใจที่จะทำให้มีความปลอดภัยในการทำงาน” ถูกขับเคลื่อนโดยกฎระเบียบ ทัศนคติและบรรทัดฐานเชิงอัตวิสัย ทั้งนี้ ความตั้งใจดังกล่าวมิได้แปรเป็นพฤติกรรมอย่างสม่ำเสมอ สะท้อนช่องว่างระหว่างความตั้งใจกับการปฏิบัติภายใต้ข้อจำกัดด้านเวลา ต้นทุน และขีดความสามารถ บทความนี้เสนอแนะว่า สำหรับการฝึกอบรม ควรมีการใช้เครื่องมือสนับสนุนอย่างง่ายและมีความเฉพาะเจาะจงในด้านการปฏิบัติ ได้แก่ คู่มือ GMP/HACCP

อย่างย่อ พร้อมคู่มือการวางแผนที่จะเปลี่ยนความตั้งใจไปสู่การปฏิบัติงานจริง ส่วนการจ่ายค่าจ้างที่เป็นธรรมนั้น สถานประกอบการควรมีแบบฟอร์มตรวจสอบค่าจ้างเพื่อเทียบเคียงกับบริษัทในกลุ่มอุตสาหกรรมเดียวกัน และมีกิจกรรม “เดินตรวจความปลอดภัย” รายไตรมาสเชิงให้ความรู้สำหรับการสร้างความปลอดภัยในสถานที่ทำงานโดยให้ดำเนินผ่าน เครือข่ายระดับจังหวัดและผู้ซื้อ พร้อมตัวชี้วัดอย่างง่ายสำหรับการนำไปใช้ งานวิจัยในอนาคตควรทดสอบตัวแปรกำกับและ ตัวแปรกลาง (ทรัพยากร การบังคับใช้ ขั้นตอนปฏิบัติงาน) และประเมินโครงการนำร่องของกลุ่มคลัสเตอร์ที่เสริมการรับรู้ การควบคุมและแปลงความตั้งใจเป็นการปฏิบัติจริง

คำสำคัญ: การจัดการที่มีความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม ทฤษฎีพฤติกรรมตามแผน วิสาหกิจขนาดกลางและขนาดย่อมของไทย การจัดการทรัพยากรมนุษย์

INTRODUCTION

Socially Responsible Management (SRM) is “an overall approach to management that fully embraces a philosophy of social responsibility” (Foster, 2021, p. 392). In practice, managers are expected to integrate social, ethical, and environmental concerns into corporate goals (El-Masry & Kamal, 2013). While SRM can, in principle, span all business functions, few firms achieve full integration (Foster, 2018). In human resource management (HRM), SRM materially shapes how employers treat employees.

In small and medium enterprises (SMEs), HRM is typically simple and informal: Many lack a professional HR unit (Cardon & Stevens, 2004) and often overlook HR principles in daily practice (Koyuncu et al., 2011; Shaharin, 2012). Owner-managers dominate people decisions (Harney & Dundon, 2007), so employment practices largely mirror their values and attitudes. Altruistic values are positively associated with sustainable HRM (Labelle et al., 2024). By contrast, formal-sector firms—especially those under greater stakeholder scrutiny—tend to institutionalize SRM-HRM and comply with labor standards (Knorringa, 2014), deploying SRM strategically to meet expectations and build legitimacy (Pimenta et al., 2024).

These differences matter for safety, performance evaluation, job security, satisfaction, commitment, turnover, and retention. Higher employee-focused social responsibility (ESR) fosters a “stay” mindset among new-generation workers (Lu et al., 2023). As CSR and HRM jointly underpin SME sustainability (Belas et al., 2024), understanding entrepreneurs’ SRM motivations can inform better policy and practice. Evidence links SRM-HRM to individual competencies and well-being, pro-environmental innovation, stakeholder satisfaction, and competitiveness (Purgat-Popiela, 2024). SRM-HRM also enhances innovation and reputation (Ramos-González et al., 2022), strengthens loyalty and relational marketing, leading to performance gains (Lechuga Sancho et al., 2018), and improves non-financial outcomes with indirect financial benefits (Kangas et al., 2025). Internally, CSR supports well-being via person–organization fit (Tang et al., 2025). In sectoral settings such as healthcare, SR-HRM promotes voluntary green behavior (Liu et al., 2024). For SMEs, SR-HRM is thus a strategic resource, not just an ethical ideal.

In Thailand and Southeast Asia, research on SRM in employment remains limited. Much SME-HRM work originates in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Martdianty, Coetzer & Susomrith, 2017), and the literature is fragmented (Omidi & Dal Zotto, 2022; Oduro et al., 2021). Early Thai studies show hybrids of informal and formal practices (Sethakaset & Santimataneedol, 2008), including fair wages, health support, family assistance, and career development (Rajanakorn, 2012). Outcomes are generally positive. High-performance work systems are related to financial performance in Thailand, Taiwan, and Korea (Lawler et al., 2000). For Thai SMEs, social responsibility is integral to sustainable leadership and long-term performance (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). In services, HRM raises service quality and retention through compensation/benefits, management and rewards, and training (Tangthong & Agahi, 2018; Tangthong et al., 2014).

Regionally, the ASEAN Labour Ministers' CSR Guidelines (2016) highlight HR levers-training, decent work, industrial relations, and migrant worker protection-implying an SR-HRM bundle centered on training and development, health and safety, and fair relations and voice, with context-specific work-life balance. Within ASEAN, SR policies improve organizational perceptions (Malaysia) (Jonathan et al., 2020); in Vietnam, SR-HRM aids retention via shared value and relationship satisfaction, strengthened by servant leadership (Pham et al., 2023). Malaysian SMEs link well-being and lower job stress to sustainable performance and show that green readiness and CSR help institutionalize Green HRM (Sanusi & Johl, 2022; Wang Zihan et al., 2024). In Indonesia, internal CSR operates as a work/personal resource that boosts adaptive performance and, ultimately, firm performance (Ramadhan et al., 2022). Beyond ASEAN, SR-HRM builds a reputation through innovation in Spain (Ramos-González et al., 2022), and Green HRM advances environmental sustainability with CSR as a partial mediator (Wen et al., 2022). Regional drivers such as compliance and legitimacy pressures also shape disclosure and firm value (Handayati et al., 2022), while Vietnamese evidence suggests that institutions and sectors widely moderate employee-related CSR (Minh et al., 2025).

Thai SMEs-especially in the agro-industrial sector-face distinctive barriers: informal structures, minimal staffing, limited HR capacity, uneven enforcement (notably in rural areas), short-term economic pressures, and cultural obligations that may prioritize family/community over formal labor rights. These conditions complicate SRM adoption and underscore the need to understand both practices and motivations.

Ubon Ratchathani's 3,260 agro-industry factories-most employing 1 to 2 workers in mixed formal/informal arrangements-illustrate compliance risks and oversight challenges, with implications for SRM implementation. This study, therefore, focuses on three HR areas with direct welfare and productivity effects: human resource development and training, employee health and safety, and fair wages.

To our knowledge, no prior research examines whether Thai SME entrepreneurs practice SRM toward employees. Given SMEs' economic importance and informality, this gap is consequential. We address it through two questions: (1) How do Thai agro-industrial SMEs implement SRM-specifically training, fair wages, and workplace safety? (2) What factors motivate SRM practice in employment? We apply the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine attitudinal drivers.

This paper is the first study to apply TPB to Thai SMEs' SRM employment practices. Using qualitative interviews and quantitative SEM, we provide evidence on training, fair wages, and safety in a workplace, offering a nuanced account of SRM drivers in a developing-country context.

The following section reviews internal social responsibility in SMEs, TPB in employment, and employer motivations, and develops hypotheses. We then present the methods and results, followed by a discussion, implications, and conclusions with directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we review literature in four key areas: (1) linking SRM to HR as internal social responsibility; (2) internal social responsibility practices in SMEs; (3) the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a framework for employment responsibility; and (4) empirical TPB applications to responsible employment and the resulting research gaps.

Linking SRM to HR (SR-HRM) and Internal Social Responsibility

SRM operates through HR as SR-HRM—the HR arm of CSR—typically organized into employee-oriented, legal-compliance, and CSR-facilitation practices that build ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) and embed responsibility in daily people systems (Al Mamun et al., 2024; Dong & Zhong, 2021). In practice, this is an internal CSR bundle focused on the psychological and physical work environment—health and safety, training and development, fair treatment and labor relations, employee voice, and diversity/rights—rather than outward reputation work. Evidence links health and safety, diversity, and training to higher social performance, while work–life balance effects are context-dependent (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2021). Mechanisms run through social exchange: internal CSR/SR-HRM increases perceived organizational support, which raises affective commitment, citizenship, and performance; micro-CSR research also highlights pathways via organizational justice, trust, identification, and pride connecting responsible leadership and SR-HRM to innovative behavior (Bhatti et al., 2022; Dong & Zhong, 2021; Manzoor et al., 2023; Yassin & Beckmann, 2025). Therefore, the design should configure the SR-HRM bundle to strengthen AMO while maximizing perceived fairness and support so gains in satisfaction translate into commitment, engagement, citizenship, innovation, and performance (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2021; Al Mamun et al., 2024; Bhatti et al., 2022).

We focus only on three internal SRM–HR domains in agro-industrial SMEs—training, fair wages, and workplace safety—because they are salient variables, and auditable levers for employee welfare and operational continuity in this sector (e.g., GMP/HACCP audits, retention, accident risk). Framed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), each domain maps to attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (PBC), which together shape intention and behaviour. The survey operationalizes these constructs with TPB items, while interviews surface contextual drivers (time/budget capacity, buyer/inspector expectations, perceived hazards). Operational definitions and indicators appear in the research methodology part.

Internal Social Responsibility Practices in SMEs

Training

Training in SMEs is typically informal, ad hoc, and aimed at immediate problem-solving rather than long-term development (Jack et al., 2006; Kotey & Slade, 2005; Mulolli et al., 2015). As an internal

SR practice, it invests in human capital and signals a commitment to capability building beyond immediate tasks. “Just-in-time” self-learning with minimal guidance is common (Burhan, 2018). Larger/service-oriented SMEs or those with government support run more formal programs, but most train only when necessary due to low interest, high cost, or high turnover rate. External pressures-such as government programs or buyer requirements-also trigger training in Thailand (Thassanabanjong, Miller, & Marchant, 2009).

TPB Expectation: training reflects SRM via capability and development; intentions are sensitive to PBC (time, budget, delivery capacity) and shaped by subjective norms (buyer/program demands) and managerial attitudes toward staff development. We test predictors of training intention and behavior (H1–H4).

Fairness of Wages

We define wage fairness as at least minimum-wage compliance plus procedural fairness/regularity in pay; non-financial benefits may support retention (Cardon & Stevens, 2004). As an internal SR practice, wage setting directly affects economic well-being and perceptions of organizational justice. SMEs often adjust their payment practices with cash flow and risk.

TPB Expectation: fair pay reflects SRM via distributive/procedural fairness; intentions depend on attitudes (cost–benefit, ethics) and norms (market/reputational expectations), bounded by PBC under cash-flow constraints. We test predictors of fair-pay intention and behavior (H1–H4).

Safe Environment

Workplace safety, e.g., protective equipment and safe procedures, reduces accidents and costs (Cheruiyot & Maru, 2012). SMEs frequently adopt occupational safety and health (OSH) practices for legal compliance, rather than for intrinsic motivation (Kotey & Slade, 2005). Adequate safety improves morale, productivity, and attendance (Maine Department of Labor, 2013).

TPB Expectation: safety reflects SRM through the duty of care and risk prevention; while compliance norms and safety attitudes matter, enactment often hinges on PBC (equipment, supervision, systems), explaining intention–behavior gaps in resource-constrained firms. We test predictors of safety intention and behavior (H1–H4).

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Employment Responsibility

TPB explains intention and action via attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of training, fair wages, and safety in agro-SMEs, these constructs provide a parsimonious lens to examine how owners’ beliefs, perceived social pressures, and perceived

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control relate to intention and behaviour. We therefore test the influence of attitude/norms/PBC on intention and behaviour across the three domains (H1–H4). (Figure 1 summarises the TPB structure.)

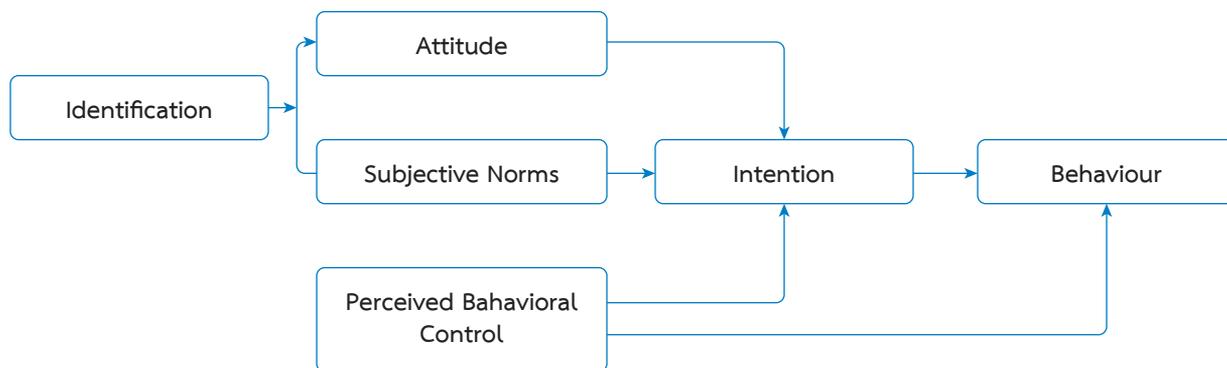


Figure 1: The Structure of the Theory of Planned Behavior

Source: Adapted from Ajzen & Fishbein (2005, p.194)

TPB Applications in Responsible Employment and Research Gaps

Our routine search found a few studies focused specifically on responsible employment using behavioural models. Examples include McCarthy et al. (2010), who model managers’ work–life balance (WLB) policy decisions, and Downey & Sharp (2007), who examine intentions to allocate resources for workplace health promotion. Three further studies investigate psychological factors shaping intentions to hire employees with disabilities (Ang et al., 2015; Fraser et al., 2010; McDonnall & Lund, 2020). Beyond employment per se, TPB has been applied to structure policies and practices that strengthen employees’ favourable attitudes, social pressures, and perceived control over green behaviours, thereby increasing pro-environmental intention and action (Nuswanto, 2024).

Across TPB applications to responsible employment, attitude is generally the strongest predictor of intention; subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC) also matter, though effects are less consistent. Notably, we found no TPB studies that directly test attitudinal antecedents of intention in three core SR-HRM domains-training, fair wages, and workplace safety-creating a clear gap this study addresses.

TPB has demonstrated validity in explaining CSR behaviours more broadly (e.g., Sánchez-Medina et al., 2014; Thoradeniya et al., 2012; Periyayya et al., 2016; Ozel & Çoban, 2023; Duong, 2024; Li & Shan, 2025). Given our interest in the psychological drivers of SME entrepreneurs’ decisions regarding training, fair pay, and workplace safety, TPB provides a well-fitting explanatory framework.

A limitation of TPB is its limited coverage of organizational culture, regulatory environments, and institutional enforcement-factors that can powerfully shape SRM practices, especially in informal

or developing-economy contexts such as Thai SMEs. These systemic forces may interact with individual attitudes in ways that TPB alone does not fully capture.

There is little work on employers' motivations to act responsibly toward employees. A review of employee-centred CSR (2000–2018) shows psychology accounts for only 2.1% of 2,385 publications (Low & Siegel, 2020), underscoring the paucity of micro-level evidence. Where motivations are studied, they often concern general CSR: Chinese managers' CSR cognitions align with economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary dimensions, with financial responsibility dominant (Wang & Dou, 2012). Other studies suggest that economic and ethical motives are mutually reinforcing rather than competing (Burhan, 2018; Grimstad et al., 2020).

Hypothesis Development

In light of the review hereto, we now present our explanation of how we arrived at our hypotheses. In doing this, we consider the role of the TPB driving factors (see Figure 1) in turn.

Attitude

Prior studies suggest that attitude is a significant determinant of responsible behaviour. Uhlaner et al. (2004) argue that family firms practice CSR out of a sense of obligation to close stakeholders, treating employees, customers, and suppliers as extended family. Similarly, Ibrahim (2014) and Espasandín-Bustelo et al. (2021) found that cultural and normative factors such as religious beliefs and local expectations can motivate SMEs to engage in internal CSR activities. Santos (2011) and Duddon et al. (2009) demonstrated that motivations for internal CSR include added value, internal economics, social dimensions, and ethical principles. Hammann et al. (2009) highlighted that value-based instruments reflect SME entrepreneurs' personal orientations, while Vyakarnam et al. (1997) found conflicts between entrepreneurs' values and business needs due to resource constraints, a situation that may be common among Thai SMEs. Across 20 studies reviewed, attitude had the most potent effect on intention, with 18 of 19 articles reporting a positive relationship. Although Vu et al. (2022) found no influence of attitude on green product purchase intention, most TPB studies on employment responsibility report a consistent positive effect. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H1: *Attitude positively influences intention to employ responsibly.*

Subjective Norms

Social expectations also shape behaviour. Family influence is essential: Bingham et al. (2011) found that corporate social performance improves with greater family involvement, and Amonarriz & Landart (2014) observed that shared family commitment drives a sense of duty toward CSR. In contrast, Lamb et al. (2017) reported mixed effects, suggesting that subjective norms may vary by context. Social capital congruence further encourages SMEs to treat employees as long-term assets (Perrini, 2006).

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Among 18 TPB studies examining CSR, 11 reported that subjective norms positively influenced intention, and several showed interaction effects with attitude. In employment responsibility studies, subjective norms were significant in two of four cases. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2: *Subjective norms positively influence intention to employ responsibly.*

Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)

Evidence for the effect of PBC is more mixed. Several studies show a positive influence: Tommasetti et al. (2018) found that PBC affects consumers' intention to prefer sustainable restaurants; Thoradeniya et al. (2012) reported an effect on managers' sustainability reporting intentions; and Periyayya et al. (2016) observed effects on purchase intentions for CSR-supported grocery brands. Other studies link PBC to pro-environmental action. However, Adams & Shauki (2012) found no significant impact on socially responsible investment intentions, and Julintron (2018) found no direct effect on Thai SME entrepreneurs' CSR intentions. Based on the majority of findings, we hypothesize that:

H3: *Perceived behavioural control positively influences intention to employ responsibly.*

Intention

The relationship between intention and behaviour is debated. Julintron (2018) found a direct effect of CSR intention on behaviour among Thai SME entrepreneurs, and Bennington & Minutolo (2013) found a positive link between waste-reduction intentions and behaviours. By contrast, Periyayya et al. (2016) and Thoradeniya et al. (2012) found only weak or partial effects, while Adams & Shauki (2012) reported no significant moderating role of intention. Given the mixed evidence but theoretical expectation in TPB, we hypothesize that:

H4: *Intention positively influences actual behaviour.*

Intention and Behavioral Gap

Many SMEs intend to adopt socially responsible management, but implementations can stall with employees. Perceived CSR translates into proactive behavior mainly when day-to-day cues create felt obligation and experienced meaningfulness, rather than through organization-based self-esteem (Huang et al., 2023). Consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, intention requires perceived behavioral control-skills, time, and tools-to convert into action (Conner & Norman, 2022). In SME settings, micro-training and coaching that raise environmental knowledge lift perceived control and green behavior (Galván-Mendoza et al., 2022). Yet HR often lacks the classic AMO (Ability-Motivation-Opportunity) supports-targeted training (ability), green-linked KPIs and compensation (motivation), and simple voice/time/tools (opportunity); evidence indicates that green-linked rewards are especially potent for green innovation, with training and recruitment close behind (Bindeeba et al., 2025). Taken together-across hospitality, manufacturing, and SME samples-design SR-HRM bundles so micro-training builds capability,

KPIs, and pay signal priorities, and employees have easy ways and time to act; this helps close the intention-behavior gap and turns CSR perceptions into everyday practice (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021).

The process of Hypothesis development is visually summarised in Figure 2 below.

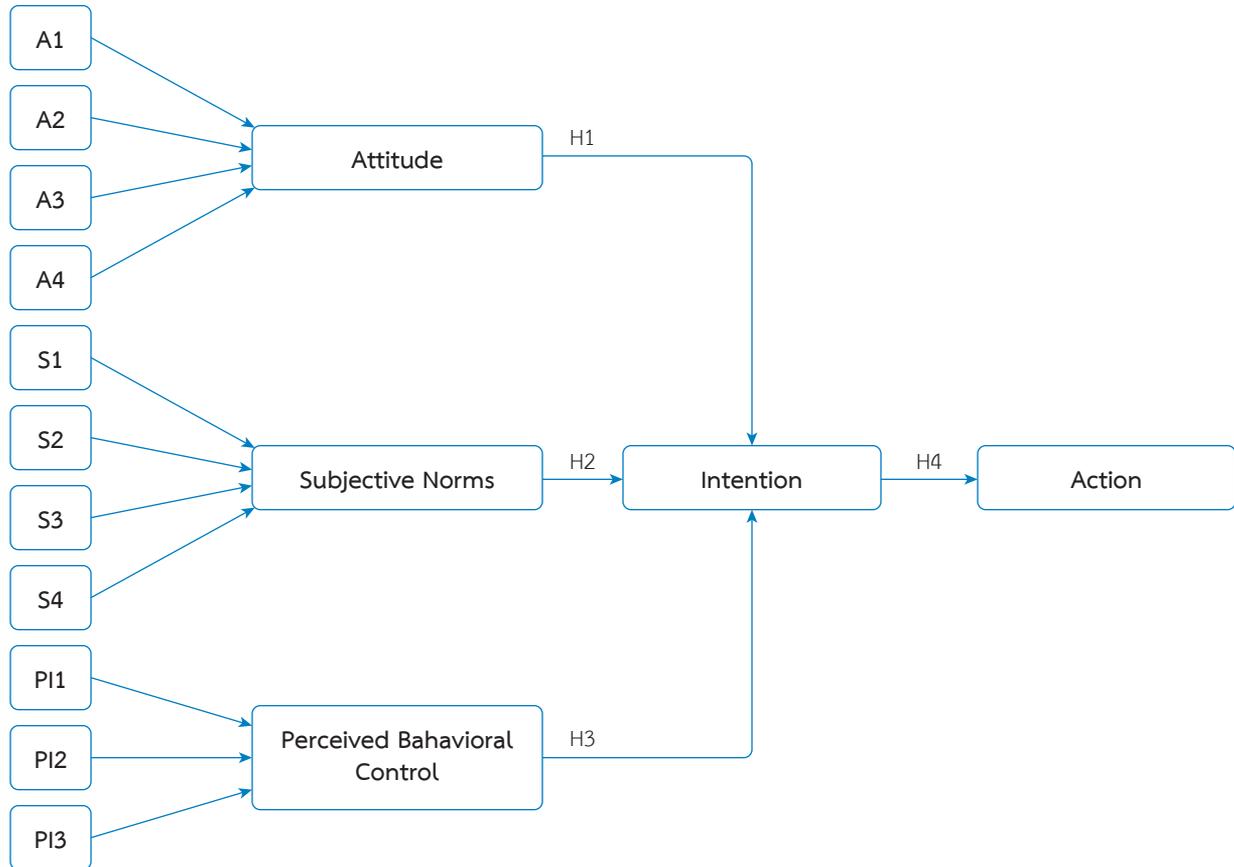


Figure 2: Hypothesis Development

Note 1. Each variable has an error (ei), but the error (e) is not shown in the Figure for simplicity’s sake.

Note 2. A1, A2, A3, and A4 are indicators of attitude toward HRM practices. For subjective norms, S1, S2, S3, and S4 indicate the extent to which close people influence the decision. PI1, PI2, and PI3 are indicators of perceived behavioral control-the level of confidence in their ability to perform that HRM aspect.

Measured variables are represented as labeled rectangles corresponding to questionnaire items. Endogenous constructs include action and intention, while attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are exogenous. Arrows depict predicted causal paths between constructs and their indicators.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 3 illustrates the broad theoretical framework of this article. The study aims to investigate the impact of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on the intention of SME entrepreneurs to engage in socially responsible practices across the previously noted key aspects of employment: employee training, fair wages, and a safe working environment.

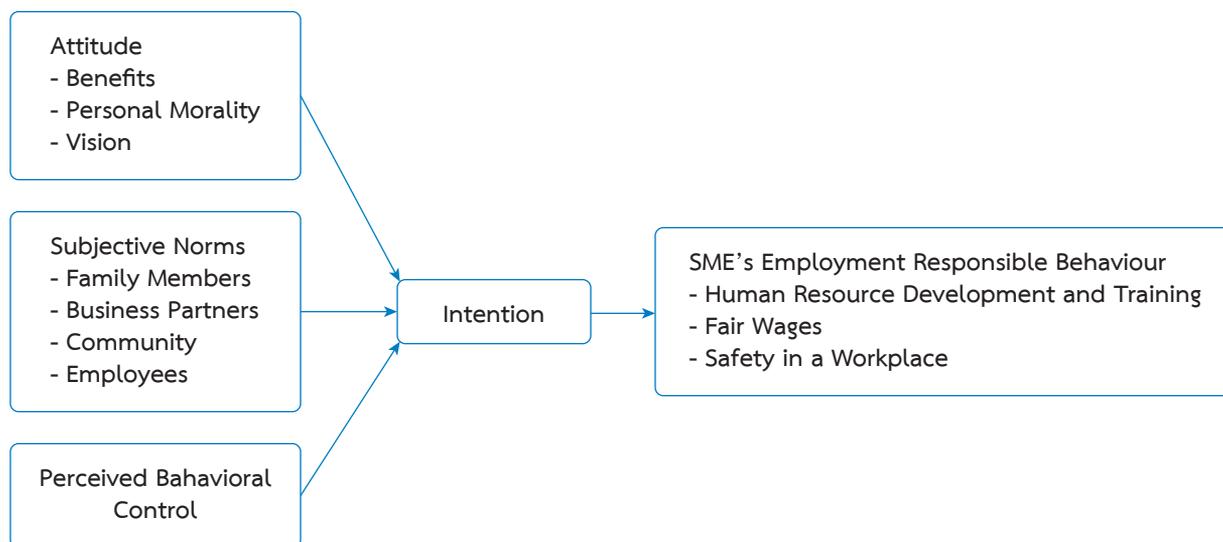


Figure 3: Theoretical Framework of the Research

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We used a concurrent mixed-methods design with a quantitative survey as the priority strand, implemented as within-case sequencing in which the survey typically preceded the interview during the same field window (same owner/manager respondent; n = 47). Due to scheduling and travel logistics, we completed a minority of cases in the reverse order. The qualitative strand was explanatory and credibility-oriented and did not influence quantitative estimates.

Sample and Participants

This study investigated 47 of 95 SMEs in Ubon Ratchathani Province registered as engaged in food and agriculture processing. It is thought that there are many more, typically small, businesses in the sector which are not registered with the Department for Industry. The sample enterprises covered various sectors such as rice milling, starch production, cassava processing, dairy, and general food production. The participants in the study were either owner-managers or decision-making managers responsible for employment decisions within their respective companies. Data were collected using two methods: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Questionnaire and Likert Scales

A 7-point Likert Scale questionnaire was employed in the study (Likert, 1967). Participants were presented with statements for each variable and asked to rate them based on their opinions. The survey encompassed ratings from “bad” to “good” and from “very expensive” to “very cheap”. A total of 47 owners or managers were surveyed, each completing one questionnaire. The questions were designed to measure respondents’ past behaviour, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and intentions related to three key SRM practices: providing employee training, ensuring fair wages, and maintaining a safe work environment. The questionnaire comprised 49 questions: 16 on training, 17 on paying fair wages, and 16 on providing a safe environment.

The questionnaire probed attitudes on whether practices were perceived as correct, helpful, and challenging, as well as subjective norms around employee training, fair wages, and workplace safety. It also assessed perceived behavioural control regarding confidence in implementing SRM practices. The questionnaire was reviewed by two academic colleagues with expertise in SME and CSR research to assess clarity and alignment with the study objectives. Minor adjustments were made to improve the wording and ensure item relevance. The interview guide was similarly refined through expert feedback to ensure that key constructs were addressed while maintaining open-ended flexibility. Thematic consistency across interview data was ensured by applying a TPB-informed coding structure.

Operational Definitions & Measurement.

- **Training:** provision of job/occupational safety and health (OSH) and compliance training in the last 12 months; intention to train; perceived ease (time/budget). Measured with TPB items on attitude, subjective norms, PBC, plus intention and self-reported behaviour.
- **Fair wage:** minimum-wage compliance and perceived distributive/procedural fairness (regularity, transparency). Measured via TPB constructs, intention to pay fairly, and behaviour proxy (self-reported practice).
- **Workplace safety:** PPE availability/use, basic OSH procedures, incident prevention. Measured via TPB constructs, intention, behaviour proxy (self-reported practice).
- **Unit:** firm (owner/manager).
- **Timeframe:** current practices/intentions during the study window.
- **Geography/sector:** agro-industrial SMEs in Ubon Ratchathani.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Detailed insights were sought through semi-structured interviews with the same 47 owners/managers. Interviews asked participants to explain why they do-or do not do-these practices, eliciting detailed accounts of motivations, barriers, and social expectations-such as perceived benefits, competing priorities, capability constraints, and buyer or policy pressures. Concentrating on employment practices (training, fair wages, workplace safety), the interviews mapped perceived trade-offs in SRM and the conditions under which adoption is pursued or deferred.

Procedures - Interviews were conducted in person at firm sites where feasible and by telephone when travel was not possible. Sessions lasted 30–45 minutes and followed a semi-structured guide of seven core questions (with probes) covering training, fair wages, safety, perceived constraints/enablers, and recent decisions.

Timing & Order - Data collection for each firm occurred within the same field window with the same owner/manager respondent. In most visits, the questionnaire was administered first, followed by a semi-structured interview; in some visits, the interview preceded the questionnaire due to field logistics (production schedules, compliance checks, seasonal operations). To minimize order/priming effects, we did not reveal survey items or interim results during interviews and avoided item-by-item prompting.

Analysis - The interviewer took contemporaneous short notes and expanded them the same day into summaries. We undertook a note-based content analysis: recurring terms and phrases were collated in a spreadsheet and mapped to TPB categories (attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, intention/action) using a deductive template, with inductive descriptive sub-labels added where needed (e.g., GMP/HACCP pressure, turnover risk, time/cost limits).

Credibility - We used convergent triangulation with the survey/SEM results to assess pattern consistency and searched for discordant cases when themes appeared strong. We acknowledge the limits of a note-based, single-coder approach and position the interviews as complementary to the quantitative core.

Integration and Validity

Mixing occurred at (i) design (concurrent, quantitative surveys as a priority, within-case sequencing) and (ii) methods (a common interview guide targeting TPB constructs regardless of order). Interviews explored mechanisms like GMP/HACCP pressures, turnover risks, and time/cost constraints, while assessing the credibility of non-significant SEM paths. They did not alter SEM estimates. Validity was enhanced through triangulation, as interview themes aligned with SEM paths. Qualitative coding mapped to TPB constructs (attitude, norms, perceived control, intention/action), clarifying why intention may not lead

to action under time and cost pressures. Legitimation was addressed via sequential clarity, independence of strands until integration, and neutral probing to limit order/priming effects.

Construct Validity and Reliability

TPB indicators (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, intention, behaviour) were adapted from published TPB scales cited in the review, with minor wording changes to fit SME employment decisions (training, fair wages, workplace safety). Content validity was addressed by mapping each item to its construct definition and through author/expert review; a small pilot with owner/managers ensured clarity and relevance. To limit common-method bias, anonymity was assured, and question blocks were separated. Given the study’s scope and sample, we document scale provenance and construct mapping here; a full psychometric evaluation (e.g., CFA with AVE/CR and HTMT) is noted for future work. We assessed internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha (listwise deletion) for each construct and report results in Table A1 (Appendix).

Path Analysis and Structural Equation Model

Path model specification and reporting - We estimated a covariance-based SEM (ML) and report standardized coefficients (β). Model fit is evaluated using χ^2/df (and its significance). Paths are interpreted by β and test statistics (t/p) with a two-tailed $\alpha = .05$. The diagram labels constructs and arrows; the results tables summarize all paths and decisions.

SEM rationale and scope - SEM is suitable for studies with multiple latent constructs and conceptual relationships (Hair et al., 2014), though care is needed to avoid treating soft measures as hard outcomes (Foster, 2022). In this study, we test potential causal links among attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, intention, and behaviour, including the intention-behaviour path. The number of items for each TPB construct is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Number of Questions on Each TPB Element

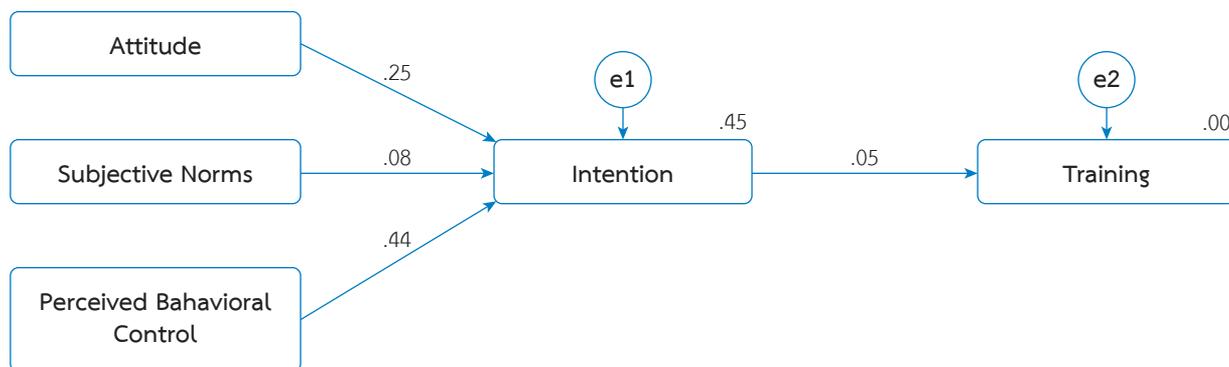
The Number of Questions	Training	Fair Wages	Safety in the Workplace
Past Behaviour	2	3	2
Attitude	4	4	4
Subjective Norms	4	4	4
Perceived Behavioral Control	3	3	3
Intention	3	3	3
Total	16	17	16

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This section elucidates how SMEs engage in Socially Responsible Management (SRM), specifically through training, fair wages, and a safe working environment. For each aspect, the article outlines the characteristics of SRM practices among SME entrepreneurs, followed by an analysis through the TPB.

SRM for Training Employees

The findings reveal that half of the sampled SMEs do not provide employee training, with many perceiving the work tasks as uncomplicated and hence not requiring formal training. One entrepreneur remarked, “We have no time. Training has to be on a holiday or weekend.” However, some SMEs enlist external trainers, particularly when they need to comply with international food standards like Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP). In these cases, comprehensive external training on hygiene and food production practices becomes necessary. Additionally, government regulations mandate fire and safety training, prompting SME owners to incur costs to hire officials to provide the essential training. The structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis and the squared multiple correlations for training are shown in Figure 4 and in Tables 2 and 3.



Chi-square = 1.615, df = 2, Sig = .446, CNIN/df = .808

Figure 4: Path Analysis for Attitudinal Factors of Training

Table 2: Statistical Analysis for the Structural Equation Model for Training

Variables	Estimate*	S.E.	C.R	P	Decision
Attitude → Intention	.253	.145	1.816	.069	Reject H1
Subjective Norms → Intention	.079	.126	.538	.590	Reject H2
Perceived Behavioural Control → Intention	.441	.143	3.018	.003**	Accept H3
Intention → Actual Behaviour	.053	.114	.374	.709	Reject H4

* The estimate is the standardized regression weight

** Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3: Squared Multiple Correlations for Training

	Estimate
Intention	.455
Behaviour	.005

Measurement (Reliability) - Internal consistency for the Training block is acceptable for attitude ($\alpha = .738$) and social norms ($\alpha = .742$); intention is marginal ($\alpha = .664$); PBC is low ($\alpha = .359$); and the behavioural set shows a negative α ($-.704$), indicating opposite item polarity (see Table A1).

Model fit. $\chi^2 = 1.615$, $df = 2$, $p = .446$ (CMIN/df = 0.808), indicating good fit.

Structural Paths (Standardized, β ; two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$).

- **H1:** Attitude influences Intention: **Rejected** ($\beta = 0.253$; C.R = 1.816; $p = .069$).
- **H2:** Subjective norms influence Intention: **Rejected** ($\beta = 0.079$; C.R = 0.538; $p = .590$).
- **H3:** Perceived behavioural control influences Intention: **Accepted** ($\beta = 0.441$; C.R = 3.018; $p = .003$).
- **H4:** Intention influences Behaviour: **Rejected** ($\beta = 0.053$; C.R = 0.374; $p = .709$).

Explained Variance. Intention $R^2 = .455$; Behaviour $R^2 = .005$.

Note. Estimates are standardized regression weights (β). Given low reliability for PBC and the behavioural indicators, paths involving these constructs should be interpreted with caution.

Discussion

Per the SEM results, perceived behavioural control (PBC) is the only significant predictor of SMEs’ intention to provide training ($\beta = .441$, $p = .003$), explaining a moderate share of variance in intention ($R^2 = .455$), while intention does not translate into reported behaviour ($\beta = .053$, $p = .709$). However, intention did not lead to actual behaviour, which contrasts with previous CSR studies using the TPB, where attitude played a significant role. In this case, the decision to train is based on business needs rather than attitudes or subjective norms. The difference could well be that between a developing country such as Thailand and a developed economy.

The interviews highlighted that Ubon Ratchathani SMEs prioritize practical considerations, such as regulatory requirements or productivity, over personal beliefs or external opinions about training. Entrepreneurs are more likely to follow through if they feel capable and see a clear need for training. However, if they view training as unnecessary, they often don’t act on their intentions, showing that good intentions alone are not enough to drive behaviour. One interviewee stated, “*They* (the employees)

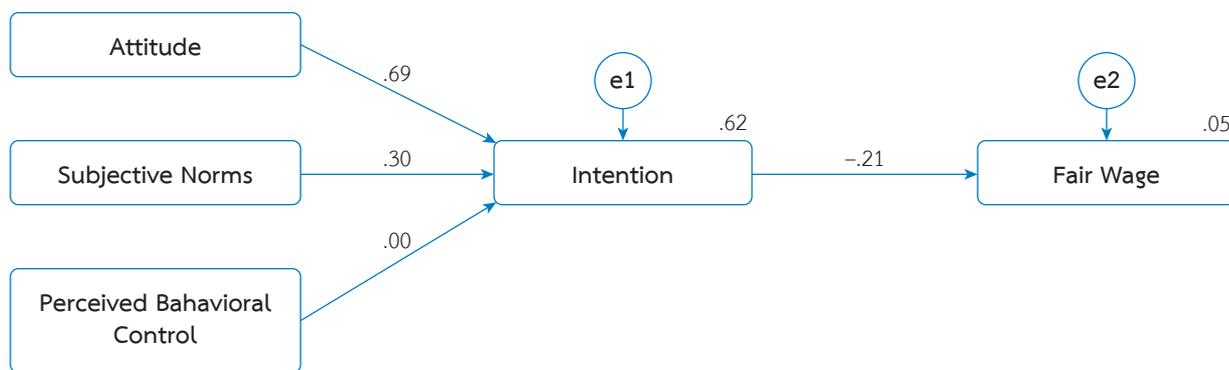
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do not need more training. They just have to work on the task they are skilled at.” Another employer said, “There is no need for more knowledge. We rely only on experience.”

Interviews point to capability, time, and cost constraints, which align with the SEM result that perceived behavioural control, not attitude or norms, drives training intention.

SRM by Paying Fair Wages to Employees

The sampled SMEs utilized both daily and monthly salary structures, with daily wages ranging from 320 to 500 baht (about 9 to 14 US\$ per day). In some cases, entrepreneurs offered additional benefits such as meals and housing. In industries like rice milling, where skilled workers are crucial for operational efficiency, offering competitive wages is vital for retaining the workforce, even when tasks are less frequent. The SEM analysis for fair wages is presented in Figure 5, Tables 4 and 5



Chi-square = 3.702, df = 3, Sig = .295, CNIN/df = 1.234

Figure 5: Path Analysis for Attitudinal Determinants of Paying a Fair Wage

Table 4: Statistical Analysis for the Structural Equation Model for Fair Wage

Variables		Estimate*	S.E.	C.R.	P	Decision
Attitude Intention	→ Intention	.695	.119	6.832	0.00**	Accept H1
Subjective Norms	→ Intention	.299	.088	3.029	.002**	Accept H2
Perceived Behavioural Control	→ Intention	.002	.155	.019	.985	Reject H3
Intention	→ Actual Behaviour	-.209	.131	-1.593	.111	Reject H4

* The estimate is the standardized regression weight

** Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 5: Squared Multiple Correlations for Fair Wages

	Estimate
Intention	.624
Behaviour	.052

Measurement (Reliability) - Internal consistency for the Fair Wage block is good for attitude ($\alpha = .796$) and intention ($\alpha = .947$); social norms is marginal but usable ($\alpha = .645$); PBC shows a negative α ($-.403$), indicating opposite item polarity; and the behavioural set is near-zero ($\alpha = .005$), so interpret with caution (see Table A1).

Model fit. $\chi^2 = 3.702$, $df = 3$, $p = .295$ (CMIN/df = 1.234), indicating good fit.

Structural Paths (Standardized, β ; two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$).

- **H1:** Attitude influences Intention: **Accepted** ($\beta = 0.695$; C.R. = 6.832; $p < .001$).
- **H2:** Subjective norms influence Intention: **Accepted** ($\beta = 0.299$; C.R. = 3.029; $p = .002$).
- **H3:** Perceived behavioural control influences Intention: **Rejected** ($\beta = 0.002$; C.R. = 0.019; $p = .985$).
- **H4:** Intention influences Behaviour: **Rejected** ($\beta = -0.209$; C.R. = -1.593 ; $p = .111$).

Explained Variance. Intention $R^2 = .624$; Behaviour $R^2 = .052$.

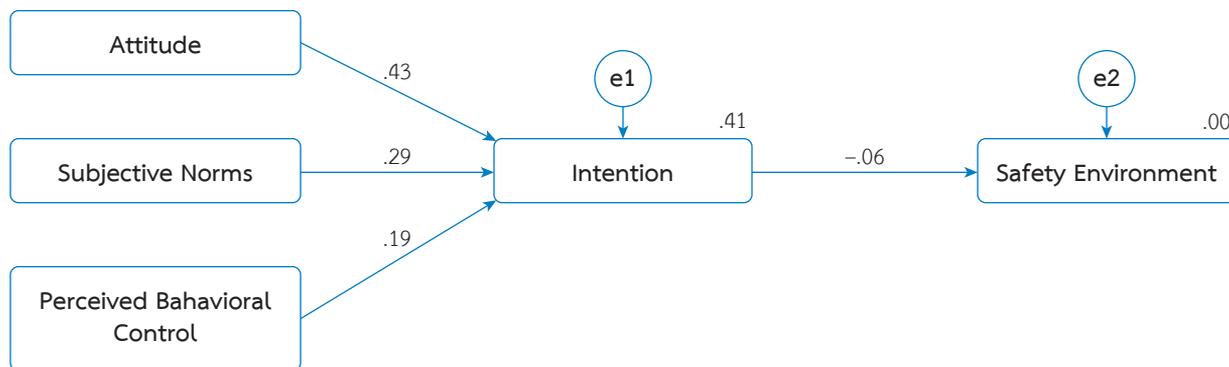
Note. Estimates are standardized regression weights (β). Given low reliability for PBC and the behavioural indicators, paths involving these constructs should be interpreted with caution.

Discussion

For fair wages, the model fits well ($\chi^2(3) = 3.702$, $p = .295$; CMIN/df = 1.234) and shows that attitude ($\beta = .695$, $p < .001$) and subjective norms ($\beta = .299$, $p = .002$) strongly predict intention ($R^2 = .624$), while PBC is null ($\beta = .002$, $p = .985$). Intention, however, does not translate into reported behaviour ($\beta = -.209$, $p = .111$; Behaviour $R^2 = .052$). Measurement is acceptable for attitude ($\alpha = .796$) and intention ($\alpha = .947$), marginal for social norms ($\alpha = .645$), but problematic for PBC (negative $\alpha = -.403$, suggesting reverse polarity and near-zero for behaviour ($\alpha \approx .005$), so paths involving these constructs should be read cautiously. Taken together-and echoed by interviews-employers frame fair pay pragmatically: intentions are driven by beliefs about consequences (retention, stability) and by external expectations (legal compliance, buyer/community standards) rather than perceived behavioural control over wage-setting. As one owner put it, “*If they have enough, they will not steal; they will also not switch firms.*”

Socially Responsible Management for Safety Environment

SMEs generally provide basic safety equipment, such as dust masks and gloves, primarily to meet GMP requirements. The structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis for workplace safety is outlined in Figure 6, Tables 6 and 7.



Chi-square = 1.963, df = 2, Sig = .375, CNIN/df = .981

Figure 6: Path Analysis of Attitudinal Factors of Providing a Safe Environment

Table 6: Statistical Analysis for the Structural Equation Model for Providing a Safe Environment

Variables	Estimate*	S.E.	C.R.	P	Decision
Attitude → Intention	.427	.122	3.566	0.00**	Accept H1
Subjective Norms → Intention	.291	.119	2.467	.014**	Accept H2
Perceived Behavioural Control → Intention	.194	.169	1.555	.120	Reject H3
Intention → Actual Behaviour	-.060	.159	-.400	.689	Reject H4

* The estimate are standardized regression weights

** Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 7: Squared Multiple Correlations for Providing a Safe Environment

	Estimate
Intention	.412
Behaviour	-.006

Measurement (Reliability) - Internal consistency is good for attitude ($\alpha = .811$) and intention ($\alpha = .975$); social norms is marginal but acceptable for exploratory work ($\alpha = .626$); the two-item sets (safety behaviour, PBC) show low/negative α (see Table A1).

Model fit. $\chi^2 = 1.963$, $df = 2$, $p = .375$ (CMIN/df = 0.981), indicating good fit.

Structural Paths (Standardized, β ; two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$).

- **H1:** Attitude influences Intention: **Accepted** ($\beta = 0.427$; C.R. = 3.566; $p < .001$).
- **H2:** Subjective norms influence Intention: **Accepted** ($\beta = 0.291$; C.R. = 2.467; $p = .014$).
- **H3:** Perceived behavioural control influences Intention: **Rejected** ($\beta = 0.194$; C.R. = 1.555; $p = .120$).
- **H4:** Intention influences Behaviour: **Rejected** ($\beta = -0.060$; C.R. = -0.400; $p = .689$).

Explained Variance. Intention $R^2 = .412$; Behaviour $R^2 = -.006$ (approximately zero).

Note. Estimates are standardized regression weights (β). Given low reliability for the two-item sets, paths involving these constructs should be interpreted with caution.

Discussion

For workplace safety, the model fits well ($\chi^2(2) = 1.963$, $p = .375$; CMIN/df = 0.981) and shows that attitude ($\beta = .427$, $p < .001$) and subjective norms ($\beta = .291$, $p = .014$) significantly predict intention ($R^2 = .412$), while PBC is non-significant ($\beta = .194$, $p = .120$), and intention does not translate into reported behaviour ($\beta = -.060$, $p = .689$; behaviour $R^2 \approx 0$). Reliability is strong for attitude ($\alpha = .811$) and intention ($\alpha = .975$), marginal for norms ($\alpha = .626$), and weak for the two-item PBC and behaviour sets, so those paths warrant caution. Taken together and consistent with Adam & Shauki (2014)-owners' beliefs about safety and stakeholders' expectations (e.g., GMP/HACCP and inspectors), rather than perceived behavioural control, shape workplace safety intentions. Yet, actions stall, reflecting a perceived low-hazard environment (rice milling rather than chemicals) and an absence-of-accident heuristic that blunts follow-through. Some stated that "*there was no accident*" as a reason for thinking so.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This article contributes to understanding socially responsible management in Thai SMEs by elucidating three practices: employee training, fair wages, and a safe workplace. The research utilized interviews with owner-managers and questionnaires to analyze the antecedents of entrepreneurs' intention to be responsible, employing the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and SEM. This study marks the initial application of both techniques. This study is also the first study to examine the motivation behind responsible employment from a psychological perspective, using the Theory of Planned Behavior and interviews in a Thai context. This method allows the researcher to uncover the underlying factors that influence entrepreneurs' decisions to engage in internal CSR. Previous studies on this subject did not address this specific topic. Instead, they focused on particular motivations for SMEs to adopt more

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responsible practices, such as mindset (Cordano & Frieze, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2010), family involvement, and socioeconomic wealth (Bingham et al., 2011; Cui et al., 2018; Pittino et al., 2016).

The training practices observed in the sample align with the findings of Chi et al. (2008), indicating that SMEs typically provide limited, if any, formal training for their personnel. Entrepreneurs tend to inform their staff only about machine usage. This situation resonates with studies by Madianty et al. (2020), Chandarakumara (2013), and Thasanabanjong et al. (2009), indicating that training in SMEs is often informal, unstructured, and short-term – the first and second of these papers examined Indonesia, and the third examined Thailand. Thai SMEs differ from their Indonesian counterpart in that Thai entrepreneurs are willing to invest in training when necessary to meet business standards, demonstrating their recognition of the value of knowledge, given the multifaceted tasks often expected of employees in small firms.

Regarding fair wages, SMEs in Ubon Ratchathani demonstrated responsibility driven by the benefits derived from such actions, echoing Ibrahim's (2014) findings. Beyond legal compliance, the perceived benefit lies in retaining experienced workers for the long term. This result contrasts with Cardon & Stevens' (2004) study, which suggested that SMEs' reward and compensation systems are informal and non-financial. In contrast, our sample revealed that compensation and benefits in Thai SMEs are primarily financial, encompassing salary, yearly bonuses, and overtime pay. This shift is attributed to the economic needs of SME employees, dispelling any notion that rewards in Thai SMEs might have a significant non-financial element.

The fact that our sample firms viewed observing minimum wage legislation as necessary may be seen as an ethical stance in itself, since it is by no means unheard of for employers in Thailand to cut corners if they think they can get away with such behaviour.

Concerning the provision of a safe workplace, the sample SMEs' decisions hinged on external pressures, particularly rules and regulations, rather than the entrepreneurs' values. This determination is influenced by factors such as time and finances. This outcome aligns with Kotey & Slade's (2005) study, emphasizing that SMEs prioritize safety due to rules and legal considerations. However, it contradicts Santos' (2011) assertion that internal CSR motivations may encompass added value, internal economic and social dimensions, and ethical standards.

In summary, this article expands on the scope of responsible practices in Thai companies as outlined by Rajanakorn (2012). It extends beyond the provision of fair wages and health expenses to encompass broader support for employees, including family support and career development. Responsible practices, as elucidated in this research, encompass employee training, ensuring a safe working environment, and compliance with relevant laws.

Table 8 below summarizes the antecedents of SME entrepreneurs’ intention to adopt responsible practices in three HRM areas. A combination of motivations drives each practice. The sample firms were motivated to train their personnel by perceived behavioural control and extrinsic factors, such as GMP and HACCP regulations, and the desire to enhance job performance. Additionally, they adhere to a legal minimum wage of at least 320 baht per day, reflecting both attitude and subjective norms.

In creating a safe workplace, attitudes and subjective norms influence intention, while external motivators include GMP, HACCP, and business benefits. The study reveals that the motivations underlying employment behaviour are diverse, a finding that contrasts with previous studies. Responsible employment is motivated by a sense of connection with a place, role breadth, self-efficacy, felt responsibility, a sense of responsibility toward stakeholders, and cultural norms. Each employment behaviour is driven by factors such as GMP and HACCP regulations, regulatory obligations, and benefits to the business.

Table 8: The Overall Results of Path Analysis for Different Aspects of Employment Responsibility

HRM Aspects	Influence of Attitude on Intention	Influence of Subjective Norms on Intention	Influence of Perceived Behavioural Control on Intention	Influence of Intention on Actual Behaviour	Other motivation	R ² Explaining Constructs to Intention	R ² Explaining Intention to Behaviour
Training	No	No	Yes (44%)	No	GMP and HACCP Standards, Benefits for Business	45.50%	0.50%
Fair Wages	Yes (69.5%)	Yes (29.9%)	No	No	Legal Requirement and Benefit for Business	62.40%	5.20%
Safe Environment	Yes (42.7%)	Yes (29.1%)	No	No	GMP and HACCP Standards, Benefits for Business	41.20%	-0.60%

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Furthermore, the explained variance (R^2) indicates that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control can explain 40–60% of the variance in intention. Attitude emerges as the most significant factor, aligning with studies by Ang et al. (2015), Julintron (2018), Bennington & Minutolo (2013), and Jacobs (2016). This study suggests that entrepreneurs' beliefs and values regarding fair wages and a safe working environment strongly influence their intentions, outweighing the impact of close relationships and confidence.

Our results show that several SRM practices increase intentions, yet intentions do not consistently translate into behaviours (H4 rejected). These results contrast with Julintron (2018), who reports that positive intention influences CSR behaviour among SME entrepreneurs. Interviews indicate binding constraints—time and cost pressures, capability limits, turnover risk, and compliance demands (e.g., GMP/HACCP)—that block enactment even when intentions are positive. In terms of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), actual control (resources and opportunities) appears binding: intention is necessary but not sufficient. This finding aligns with evidence that perceived CSR translates into action when daily cues create felt obligation and experienced meaningfulness (Huang, Geng, Yang, Law, & He, 2024) and when perceived behavioural control is strengthened through skills, time, and tools (Conner & Norman, 2022). At the same time, SME HRM remains informal and resource-constrained, so Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) supports are often underbuilt: targeted Ability (training), clear Motivation (KPIs/recognition/compensation), and practical Opportunity (voice, time, simple tools) (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021; Bindeeba, Khan, & Memon, 2025). Economic and social signals—tight budgets, unclear benefits, cohort-specific norms—further dampen action (Hinterhuber & Khan, 2025; Alam, Ahmed, & Rahman, 2025; Mason, Hansen, & Tzavella, 2025; El Haffar, 2022). Compared with many Western settings where internalized values often drive CSR, Thai agro-SMEs rely more on external pressures (e.g., compliance and buyer standards), thereby amplifying resource constraints relative to, for example, Malaysian cases (Sanusi & Johl, 2022).

According to the literature on this topic, external stakeholder pressure and entrepreneurs' moral values motivate entrepreneurs to act responsibly (Burhan, 2018; Knorringa, 2014; Lahdesmaki, 2005; Santos, 2011). However, this paper argues that external motivations, such as laws, regulations, and the benefits derived, are more likely to drive the early stages of ethical employment practices than entrepreneurs' pure, ethical concerns. This contradicts previous findings suggesting that intrinsic motivation plays a more significant role than extrinsic motivation (Burhan, 2018; Grimstad et al., 2020; Proença & Branco, 2014; Spence & Rutherford, 2001). In this article, external motivations, such as business benefits, outweigh intrinsic values. This may reflect the place of Thai rural SMEs on their potential development paths.

Taken together, our results mostly align with studies emphasizing external, compliance- and benefit-driven motives for SMEs, while they diverge from work that privileges intrinsic ethical drivers-especially when intention does not translate into behaviour. Consistent with ASEAN evidence, Indonesian firms respond to compliance and community-legitimacy pressures in their CSR disclosure (Handayati, Sumarsono, & Narmaditya, 2022), while Vietnamese service-sector SMEs enact employee-related CSR in patterns shaped by national institutions and sectoral logics (Minh, Khan, Bensemann, & Sulaiman, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Thai agro-industrial SMEs practice socially responsible management (SRM) in three employment areas-training, fair wages, and a safe workplace-and what motivates these behaviours. Using SEM within the TPB framework, supported by owner-manager interviews, we find a clear pattern across blocks: perceived behavioural control is the primary antecedent of training intention. At the same time, attitude and subjective norms are the primary antecedents of fair-wage and safety workplace intentions. However, intention did not consistently translate into behaviour. In the data, Intention R^2 is moderate ($\approx .41-.62$ across blocks), whereas Behaviour R^2 is near zero ($\approx 0-.05$), underscoring an intention-behaviour gap.

Interview evidence helps explain this gap. Owner-managers pointed to time and cost pressures, capability limits, turnover risk, and compliance demands (e.g., GMP/HACCP) that can block action even when intentions are positive. In TPB terms, actual control (resources/opportunity) appears binding-intention is necessary but not sufficient. Within this context, external influences-law/regulation and perceived business benefits (e.g., retention from paying fair wages)-often outweigh purely ethical concerns. We did not model these interactions formally, so we treat them as contextual rather than causal claims.

Taken together, the results suggest that SRM adoption in rural Thai SMEs reflects a mix of internal motivations (attitudes and subjective norms) and external factors (standards, compliance, and costs). Where concrete benefits are salient, broader uptake may be feasible, but any effect on firm sustainability should be regarded as conditional on resources and compliance capacity. Several hypotheses were not supported; given the short/low reliability of the behaviour scales and the developmental stage of the firms studied, this is informative rather than troubling. The whole process is shown in Figure 7.

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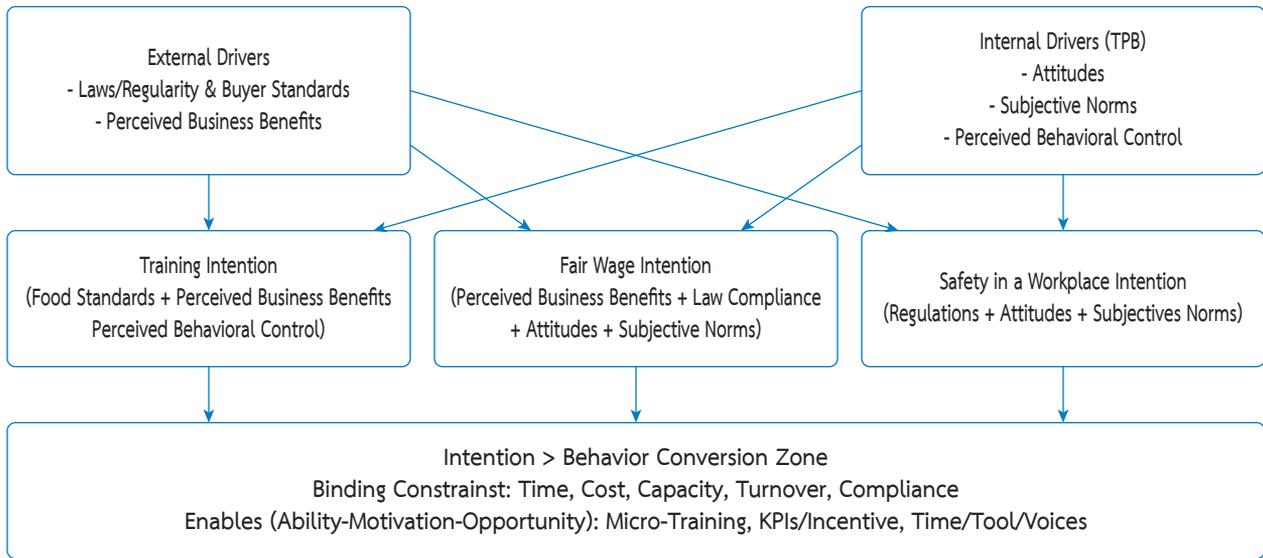


Figure 7: The Whole Process of HR-SRM in SMEs

Policy and Practice Implications

Because the drivers differ across the three areas in our results-training is shaped by perceived control and external standards; fair wages by attitude, subjective norms, law compliance, and perceived business benefits; safety in the workplace by regulations, attitude, and subjective norms-a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work. A practical way forward is to tailor light-touch support to each case: for training, require a line supervisor focal and provide quarterly GMP/HACCP micro-refreshers with a one-page implementation-intention planner and on-the-job coaching; track completion centrally to lift perceived behavioural control; for fair wage, institute a quarterly peer benchmark plus a one-page wage-audit checklist (minimum wage, overtime, basic benefits), communicate results to staff, and close gaps in the next pay cycle; for a safe workplace, phased (educational) audits with clear compliance checklists. These can be delivered through existing provincial offices, chambers, and buyer-supplier networks, scheduled off-peak, and supported by modest incentives (e.g., small training vouchers or first-audit fee waivers). Uptake can be tracked with simple indicators-training hours per employee, wage-audit pass rates, and recorded safety incidents-and we suggest short pilots (up to six months) in SME clusters before scaling.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has a few limitations. First, while the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a strong foundation for analyzing behavioural intentions, it does not fully capture broader systemic and organizational influences—such as regulatory enforcement, industry norms, or internal company culture, which may also shape socially responsible management (SRM) practices. As a result, the gap observed between intention and behaviour may partly reflect factors not accounted for in the TPB framework.

Second, the study used a relatively small, non-probability sample of 47 SMEs from a single province (Ubon Ratchathani). As such, the sample is not statistically representative, and findings are not generalizable to all Thai SMEs or sectors. The cases cover ~50% of the registered agro-industrial SMEs in the province, making the analysis informative in this context, but the results should be read as indicative patterns rather than population estimates. Caution is warranted when applying the findings to other regions or industries. Future studies should expand the geographic and sectoral scope and employ probability sampling to test external validity. As participation was voluntary, potential selection/non-response bias cannot be ruled out.

Third, a limitation is that surveys and interviews were conducted with the same respondents, which reduces independence between strands; the benefit is tighter internal coherence for TPB-based interpretation. Moreover, a complete set of measurement diagnostics (e.g., CFA with AVE/CR and discriminant validity tests) was beyond this study's scope and sample size; future work should report these statistics on a larger, multi-province sample. Some behaviour and PBC measures were short and showed low internal consistency; findings involving these constructs should be interpreted with caution.

Fourth, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference; paths are interpreted as associations within TPB. Future studies could consider combining TPB with other frameworks, such as institutional theory or stakeholder theory, to capture better the interaction between internal psychological drivers and external structural forces. It may also be valuable to investigate how organizational culture, market dynamics, and government regulations shape or moderate the impact of entrepreneurs' attitudes. It should, however, be noted that the use of multiple conceptual frameworks in a single modelling exercise is not without its own (applied) mathematical problems.

Nevertheless, this focused approach enabled us to conduct a detailed, context-specific TPB-based analysis that might not have been possible with a broader, more heterogeneous sample. Expanding the sample to include other Thai regions or ASEAN countries would also strengthen the comparative relevance and applicability of findings. Moreover, this study did not involve moderating or mediating variables such as firm size, industry characteristics, or ownership structure. These factors may influence the strength or direction of the relationships observed.

Statements and Declarations

- Ubon Ratchathani Business School, Ubon Ratchathani University, financially supported this work.
- Non-financial interests: none.
- The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.
- All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Compliance Procedure

- The study adhered to core ethical principles throughout. All participants were clearly informed of the research's purpose and participated voluntarily.
- No sensitive or personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were fully anonymized. Participants were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- Data was stored securely and was accessible only to the research team. These steps were taken to ensure that the research remained ethically sound and respectful of participants' rights and privacy.

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Appendix

Table A1: Cronbach's Alpha (Listwise Deletion) for Each Construct

SRM	TPB Elements	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Training	Attitude	0.738	4
	Social Norms	0.742	4
	Perceived Behavioral Control	0.359	3
	Intention	0.664	3
	Behaviour	-0.704	2
Fair Wage	Attitude	0.796	4
	Social Norms	0.645	4
	Perceived Behavioral Control	-0.403	3
	Intention	0.947	3
	Behaviour	0.005	3
Safety Environment	Attitude	0.811	4
	Social Norms	0.626	4
	Perceived Behavioral Control	-0.89	3
	Intention	0.975	3
	Behaviour	-0.35	2