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**Thantakarn, Suwichaya *The Role of Collectivism/Individualism and Job Autonomy on Job Burnout in Thailand***

**Abstract**

The current study was conducted to investigate 1) whether the cultural orientation (collectivistic and individualistic orientation) predicts need for job autonomy among Thai employees, and 2) whether the influence of cultural orientation plays roles in the relationship between employees' perceptions of job autonomy and job burnout levels in Thailand. There were 925 Thai employees who participated in the study. Mediation analysis, independent sample T-Test, and regression was conducted to examine the hypothesis. The results indicated that Thais who indicate an individualistic orientation will demonstrate higher levels of need for job autonomy compared to Thais showing a collectivistic orientation. Also, cultural orientation were found to predict the disengagement dimension of job burnout through job autonomy. Specifically, individualistic employees were more likely to disengage than those who were collectivistic employees when they were involved in a low job autonomy situation. However, in high autonomy situation, employees reported similar tendencies of disengagement and exhaustion regardless of their cultural orientation. This study suggests the importance of sociocultural context when dealing with job autonomy and employee burnout, and helps to reaffirm previously observed findings that cultural differences can potentially emerge at within-country levels in the form of important individual differences.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Job burnout is the natural outcome when an individual experiences excessive and prolonged stress (Maslach, 2003), and is defined as feeling of exhaustion and negative attitudes toward work (Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker, 2010). It is believed that job burnout tends to result in a dramatic decrease in one's performance. Once employees experience job burnout, they are less likely to return to the same level of enthusiasm for their employment (Hancock & Desmond, 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 1997); especially for those who are long-tenured employees (Cherniss, 1992). Since the success of an organization depends on employees' performance, understanding the circumstances that lead to job burnout is critical to maintaining healthy and efficient workplaces.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As many studies have been conducted to better understand job burnout, having little job autonomy is consistently confirmed as a contributing factor toward job burnout (Baker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Madathil, Heck, & Schuldberg, 2014; Shi, 2011; Shirom, 2010;). However, a closer look at the autonomy literature indicates that cultures of social institutions can influence the value of freedom in their members (Chirkov, 2011, p. 86). That is, while job autonomy is highly valued in individualistic cultures, job autonomy may be differently valued by workers in collectivistic cultures (Hahn, 2006; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Moreover, according to Shi's study (2011), it was found that the adverse effects of low autonomy situations were more likely to occur in individualistic countries than collectivist countries.

Although it is widely accepted that culture can significantly influence how an employee might value autonomy (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), the majority of burnout research

has not consistently considered the effects of culture as a vital variable. Therefore, this raises questions about the specific influence of cultural orientation on an employee's need for job autonomy, which in turn, may affect their susceptibility to job burnout.

Most empirical studies regarding collectivist and individualist cultures are more likely to focus on comparing the differences of cultural orientations across a sample of countries (known as a cross-country study). However, some researchers insisted that such cultural differences also exist at within-country levels in the form of individuals' differences (Moorman & Blakely, 1995). As an example, Kongsompong, Green, and Patterson (2009) explored Thai cultures at within-country levels, and found that Thais exhibited individual differences in their cultural orientations. Specifically, when Thais were categorized into relative collectivists and individualists, these two groups demonstrated significant differences in their attributes in term of social influence. Interestingly, in Thailand, influences of these cultural differences seemed to be more disparate compared to their collectivist/individualist counterparts in the U.S., Singapore, and Australia (Kongsompong et al., 2009).

According to previous research, Thais may reflect considerably different attributes when they hold different cultural orientations (Kongsompong et al., 2009). Also, many researchers posit that individuals with different cultural orientations place different values on autonomy (Hahn, 2006; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Thus, it is unclear whether low job autonomy always causes job burnout even in individuals with different cultural orientations within Thai organizations. Unfortunately, little research has considered the important contribution of cultural orientation when explored job burnout, and there is very little knowledge about job burnout in Thailand. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the influence of cultural orientation on

individuals' need for job autonomy, and its consequent effects on job burnout among Thai employees.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study is to examine 1) whether the cultural orientation predicts need for job autonomy among Thais employees, and 2) whether the influence of cultural orientation plays roles in the relationship between employees' perceptions of job autonomy and job burnout levels in Thailand. The results of study may allow organizations to better understand how job autonomy and culture may interact to predict job burnout, especially for employees who hail from different countries and cultures.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the association between the individual collectivist and individualist orientations of Thai employees and their need for job autonomy?
2. What is the association between collectivist and individualist orientations and Thai employees' job burnout levels at a given level of job autonomy?

The following hypotheses guided the study:

- H1: Thais who indicate an individualistic orientation will demonstrate higher levels of need for job autonomy compared to Thais showing a collectivistic orientation.
- H2: In relatively high job autonomy situations, Thais who indicate both individualistic and collectivistic orientations will report similar job burnout scores.
- H3: In relatively low job autonomy conditions, Thais who show a individualistic orientation are more likely to experience job burnout compared to Thais indicating a collectivistic orientation.

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarification, the important terms used in the current study have been defined below.

**Collectivistic orientation.** An individual's sense of having the preference for the culture which values in the group's goals rather than individual's goals (Hofstede et al., 2010).

**Individualistic orientation.** An individual's sense of having the preference for the culture which values in self-dependence rather than relying on the group's goals, which is opposed to collectivistic orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010).

**Job autonomy.** The degree to which employees have the ability to govern themselves when doing their jobs regarding the methods or procedures they use, the schedule to which they adhere, the power of the employees to make their own decisions, and the objective sense of control over their works (Adler, 1993; Brink, Emerson, & Yang, 2016; Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

**Job burnout.** Psychological stress in which employees experience a state of affective, physical, and cognitive exhaustion in their jobs, combined with a feeling of disengagement with their jobs and co-workers (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003).

**Need for job autonomy.** The degree to which employees desire to have freedom and discretion over their jobs in terms of work methods, work schedule, the power of making decisions, and the objective sense of job control.

## Limitations of the Study

The current study had several limitations. First, since the study employed a self-report approach to collect the data, some participants may not have responded in a completely honest manner to the inventories. In addition, according to Reeve and Assor (2011), perceived job

autonomy, which is one variable in the current study, is the inner endorsement of employees toward their employers. Reeve and Assor (2011) believed that these perceptions tend to be unstable over time and inconsistent across situations. Therefore, the experience of autonomy that participants reported in the study might be subject to change, which will undoubtedly influence the reliability of results.

### **Methodology**

Employees in Thailand were asked to complete a four part online survey. The first part contained the 16-item Oldenburg Job Burnout Inventory developed by Demerouti et al. (2003). The second part consisted of Yamaguchi's (1994) 10-item collectivism/individualism questionnaire. In the third part, job autonomy and needs for job autonomy were assessed by using the same 8-items consisting of statements regarding actual and desired autonomy, which was adapted from Brink et al. (2016). Finally, in the fourth part, participants completed general demographic questions. To provide a consistent data collection experience for all survey respondents, all scales were modified into 7-point Likert-style scales.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

The current study focuses on Thai employees' need for job autonomy and cultural orientation as they relate to their feelings of job burnout. In this chapter, theoretical and empirical evidence that considers the relationships between these theoretical constructs will be discussed. The first section will examine the theoretical and empirical findings regarding the construct of job burnout, including the definitions, dimensions, and predictors of job burnout. The second section will discuss the relationship between job autonomy and job burnout. In the third section, theoretical and empirical supports of job autonomy in a cross-cultural context will be presented. In the last section, the specific context of Thailand regarding cultural orientation, job burnout, and job autonomy will be discussed.

### **Defining Job Burnout**

The concept of job burnout is frequently confused with normal job stress and fatigue. Although they are related to one another, their characteristics are quite different. One might ask the question: How does job burnout relate to normally experienced job stress? McKenna (2000) claimed that job stress in an organization is just one of several causes of job burnout. Maslach (2003) suggests that job burnout occurs when individuals experience stress over an extended period of time in the workplace. Indeed, Maslach's definition of job burnout demonstrates two important main components associated with job burnout: stress experienced from work, and the length of time an employee is exposed to that stress.

While many employees experience high levels of job stress, the mere presence of stress is not the sole determinant of job burnout. For instance, many employees who experience regular job stress still maintain strong motivation for their jobs (Hancock & Desmond, 2001); while those who experience true job burnout tend to demonstrate very low levels of work motivation

(Potter, 1987). Based on this observation, Maslach (2003) suggested exposure time to stress as the second vital component of job burnout. This component becomes crucial in distinguishing regular job stress from persistent job stress that can cause job burnout. Yet, researchers have not identified a set length of time an employee must experience significant job stress to experience job burnout. Specifically, the amount of time required appears to depend on individual factors related to that employee, as well as other outcomes from regular job stress.

In addition, the differences between job burnout and work stress are also related to their severity of impacts. Potter (1987; 1998) argued that job burnout seems more severe than normally occurring job stress. Employees experiencing job burnout will have feelings of hopelessness, and they tend to lose interest in their jobs. Jobs will seem to have no meaning and purpose for them (Potter, 1987; 1998). Besides various negative impacts in job contexts, job burnout is also more likely to spread to an individual's home life, causing adverse effects on happiness, energy, and mood. Moreover, Cherniss (1992) also found that employees who experience job burnout often find it difficult to recover, particularly when job burnout is found later in their careers. Unlike the characteristics of job burnout, job stress is more transient in nature and thus can be more easily reduced (Hancock & Desmond, 2001).

Even though there are the differences between job burnout and job stress, they result in a reduction of work productivity and commitment to an employer, while potentially increasing interpersonal conflicts in the workplace (Hancock & Desmond, 2001; McKenna, 2000). In 2009, Kwag and Kim found that job burnout was linked to lower levels of employee performance within organizations. This finding is consistent with research that demonstrates similar behaviors across varied occupations. As an example, Chen and Kao (2013) examined job burnout as indicated by the performance of bus drivers. The study showed that job burnout caused problems

that affects physical, mental, and social well-being of bus drivers, which led to abnormal behaviors in driving such as traffic violations, distracted driving, and reckless driving.

As a second example of job burnout in a specific employment field, Chen and Kao (2012) examined the performance of flight attendants who suffered from job burnout. The study substantiated the moderating effects of engagement and tenure on the relationship between job burnout and performance. That is, amongst flight attendants who experienced high levels of job burnout, if they had a longer job tenure, they maintained better work performance than those who had shorter job tenure.

A typical consequence of poor job performance or psychological withdrawal from one's employment is employee turnover (Campbell et al., 2013; Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014; Herda & Lavelle, 2012; Leiter, Jackson, & Shaughnessy, 2009; Leiter & Maslach, 2009; Shoorideh et al., 2015; Wong & Laschinger, 2015). Based on the study of Wong and Laschinger (2015), investigating 159 frontline clinical managers allowed them find the strong connection between job burnout and turnover intention amongst participants. More specifically, managers who have insufficient decisional authority over their work tended to experience job burnout, which, in turn increased their intentions to leave their jobs. This finding are in line with the study of Campbell et al. (2013), who examined the effects of burnout in social workers. As expected, social workers tended to psychologically withdraw from their jobs when they suffered from job burnout. The withdrawal reaction was used to protect themselves from losing their remaining physical and mental resources. Finally, this group of social workers would consider leaving their jobs. Similarly, Leiter and Maslach (2009) posits that job burnout is linked to the social withdrawal. That is, employees may think about quitting a job due to the emotional exhaustion of job burnout. The relationship between job burnout and employee turnover was also confirmed by various

researchers, such as Leiter et al. (2009), Shoorideh et al. (2015), Herda and Lavelle (2012), and Ching-Fu and Yu (2014).

It is clear that job burnout has serious consequences for individual employees, in the form of poor health and wellbeing, as well as the companies that employ them, in the form of increased turnover and decreased performance (Campbell et al., 2013; Chen & Kao 2012, 2013; Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014; Hancock & Desmond, 2001; Herda & Lavelle, 2012; Leiter et al., 2009; Leiter & Maslach, 2009; McKenna, 2000; Wong & Laschinger, 2015). Moreover, job burnout is a relatively persistent issue for employees, due to the difficulty in recovery for individual workers. Thus, the best way to address the employment issues of job burnout is through prevention. In order for an organization to prevent job burnout in employees, they must understand both who is likely to experience job burnout and the specific elements to focus on for prevention.

### **Dimensions of Job Burnout**

In 1997, Maslach and Leiter developed a multidimensional model to explain the phenomenon of job burnout. This model suggests a conceptual framework to measure and find interventions to deal with job burnout. The model consists of three dimensions: 1) emotional exhaustion, 2) cynicism or disengagement/ depersonalization, and 3) personal accomplishment. Maslach (2003) also insisted that potential factors of job burnout will be related to these three dimensions in different ways. Consequently, identifying these three dimensions would allow researchers to investigate factors influencing each dimension, which can increase the ability to predict job burnout.

Based on Maslach and Leiter (1997), when an employee experiences chronic strain, feeling exhausted will be the first symptom of job burnout. In this stage, the employee will feel

drained by work and is generally unable to handle regular issues. The second stage of burnout is cynicism toward one's job. Employees who suffer from cynicism are negative, callous, or extremely isolated from their job duties and coworkers. This is often referred to as depersonalization. This isolation response is to protect themselves from exhaustion and disappointment at work (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). According to Lee and Ashforth (1990), and Maslach (2003), job burnout researchers consistently revealed that exhaustion was strongly correlated with cynicism across a wide range of occupations and organizations. The third and final stage of job burnout is reduced personal accomplishment. Entering this stage leads employees with job burnout to feel that their jobs no longer matter, and that work seems both overwhelming and unworthwhile (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Houkes, Winants, Twellaar, and Verdonk (2011) investigated the causal order of the job burnout stages. The results indicated different stage progressions through three job burnout dimensions for male and female physicians. Specifically, female physicians tended to begin in the exhaustion stage, followed by the cynicism stage and finally the reduced accomplishment stage. Conversely, male physicians who suffered from job burnout started at the cynicism stage and then proceeded to the exhaustion stage. Interestingly, male physicians did not appear to ever reach the reduced personal accomplishment stage, however this did not specifically prevent high ratings of job burnout (Houkes et al., 2011).

While the three-factor model proposed by Maslach and Leiter (1997) has been highly influential in job burnout research, others have suggested that reduced personal accomplishment (or inefficacy) is actually an outcome of exhaustion and cynicism, rather than a separate third stage of burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). This suggestion led to the development of a job burnout measure called the Oldenburg Job Burnout Inventory (OLBI) developed by Demerouti et

al. (2003). The OLBI aims to assess job burnout across the two most consistent dimensions of job burnout: exhaustion and cynicism/disengagement. This instrument was created in response to the limitations of the Maslach Job burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) developed by Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, and Jackson (1996). Exhaustion in the OLBI is not only defined as an emotional exhaustion like the MBI-GS, but also involves physical and cognitive exhaustion. In addition, the OLBI also covers individual depersonalization as well as the perceived relationship between an employee and his or her job. Due to its shorter length, simple rating system, directness and comprehensiveness of statements, and higher levels of reliability and validity, the OLBI has been suggested by several researchers as the best psychological instrument to measure job burnout (Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker, 2010; Khan & Yusoff, 2016; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Reis, Xanthopoulou, & Tsaousis, 2015).

### **Factors Influencing Job Burnout**

Due to the importance for employers to predict job burnout, a large portion of the literature has focused on investigating the potential determining factors that predict job burnout. Personal characteristics are one of the factors that have been identified as a cause of job burnout. These factors include individuals' personality (Hurt, Grist, Jr, & Mccord, 2013; Lingard, 2003), age (Diehl & Hay 2010; Haley, Mostert & Els, 2013; Jeffrey Hill et al., 2008; Rath, Huffman, Phillips, Carpenter, & Fowler, 2015) , job tenure (Cheung & Tang, 2007), and emotional dissonance (Bakker, 2006; Cheung & Tang, 2007; Diestel & Schmidt, 2011).

While personal factors are important, job characteristics are also a vital predictor of job burnout, and their effects seem to outweigh almost all other factors (Lingard, 2003). Examples of job characteristics related to burnout include job autonomy (Bakker et al., 2004, 2005; Madathil et al., 2014; Shi, 2011; Shirom, 2010), leader characteristics (Lambert, Hogan, & Barton-

bellessa, 2012; Madathil et al., 2014), interpersonal conflict (Pseekos, Bullock-yowell & Dahlen, 2011; Ujiwara, Sukishima, Sutsumi, Awakami, & Ishi, 2003), the clarity of rules for promotion (Haley et al., 2013), and perceived equity in a workplace (Lingard, 2003). In addition, a mismatch between personal and work characteristics is also reported as a determining factor of job burnout (Pseekos et al., 2011; Tong, Wang, & Peng, 2015).

Although various predictive factors of job burnout have been well explored, the literature still shows conflicting findings. Moreover, several studies have suggested that other outside factors may moderate employees' feelings of job burnout, and these factors may either act as buffers or catalysts of job burnout (Bakker et al., 2004, 2005; Chen & Kao, 2012; Etzion, 1984; King & Sethi, 1997; Shirom, 2010; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). Ultimately, job burnout appears to be a complex construct that still needs to be better understood by both researchers and organizations.

### **Job Autonomy as a Predictor of Job Burnout**

A key aspect of job burnout is the degree to which employees have abilities to govern themselves in their jobs; which is referred to as job autonomy (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). According to Madathil et al. (2014), job autonomy had a negative relationship with the first two dimensions of job burnout; namely, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization; whereas a positive relationship was found between the third dimension of job burnout, which was personal accomplishment. Also, Shi et al. (2011) claimed that a higher degree of job autonomy could help to decrease the stress that arose from supervisor conflict, thereby lowering rates of job burnout. In 2004, Bakker et al. (2004) provided confirmatory evidence that job autonomy positively influenced the disengagement dimension of job burnout, and allowed employees to perform extra effort above their task performance. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, apart from the direct

effects, some studies suggested that autonomy also plays a role as an intermediary of job burnout. For example, Shirom (2010) discovered that autonomy mediated the effects of workload on job burnout. As an example, the number of patients under the care of physicians exerts considerable influence on job burnout through the mediation of job autonomy. Job autonomy was also found as an intermediary of job burnout in the study of Fernet et al. (2014). Specifically, Fernet et al. discovered that job autonomy influenced the two types of passion: harmonious and obsessive passion, and those types of passion were associated with the first dimension of burnout: emotional exhaustion.

To summarize, most researchers posit that employees who have lower levels of autonomy in their jobs tend to suffer from job burnout more than those who have higher autonomy (Bakker et al., 2004; Fernet et al., 2014; Madathil et al., 2014; Shi et al., 2011; Shirom, 2010). However, it is important to note that the vast majority of research conducted on the relation between job autonomy and job burnout has been conducted with samples drawn from highly individualistic societies such as the United States. Of importance to this thesis is the consideration that employees in collectivistic societies may significantly differ in their value of job autonomy, compared to employees in individualistic societies.

### **Autonomy in Cross-Cultural Context**

The impact of culture on autonomy has been continuously reported in cross-cultural research over the past decades. In 2011, Shi et al. conducted a cross-cultural study regarding autonomy, revealing that negative impacts caused by low autonomy situations were more likely to occur in the U.S. rather than in China. They also found that job autonomy could act as a buffer to supervisor conflict in the U.S., while it could inflate such conflict in China. This finding was in line with the study of Reeve, Vansteenkiste, Assor, and Ahmad (2014), who found that

individual participants from collectivistic societies were relatively familiar with low autonomy situations, compared to those from individualistic societies. McCann, Honeycutt, and Keaton (2010) also suggest that individualists emphasized their self-autonomy, while collectivists focused on group goals.

Based on the empirical survey research, Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) developed the well-known Model of National Culture theory. This model aims to distinguish each country's preferences for independence. One dimension of the model, Individualism, indicated that different societies valued independence differently. Based on the study of Hofstede (2001), societies around the world could be categorized into two types; individualistic and collectivistic; with collectivists placing more value on the group compared to individualists, who preferred self-dependence. In other words, collectivists are more likely to conform and are more affected by other people's thoughts, such as family, supervisors, or friends, in comparison with those who are individualists (Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2005). Based on overall cultural responses, researchers have identified individualistic nations to include the U.S., Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand; whereas collectivistic nations include China, Japan, Thailand, Korea, India, Russia, Mexico, and many African countries (Hofstede, 2001).

Although autonomy is viewed as a basic psychological need for people in both individualistic and collectivistic societies (Wichmann, 2011; Chirkov, 2011, p. 111), the actual amount of job autonomy desired by an employee can vary significantly across cultures. Based on this notion, it is likely that employees within individualistic societies perceive values of autonomy as more salient than employees within collectivistic societies (Hahn, 2006; Iyengar &

Lepper, 1999; Shi et al., 2011). Thus, this raises the issue of how cultural factors may lead to different patterns of reported job burnout.

Since the majority of burnout research has been conducted within individualistic societies, there is little empirical evidence confirming that lack of job autonomy can also predict job burnout in collectivistic societies, where job autonomy is lightly valued. Therefore, investigating effects of autonomy on job burnout cross-culturally is still needed. However, although most cross-cultural research is more likely to focus on comparing the differences of cultural orientations across a sample of countries (known as a cross-country study), some researchers asserted that the cultural differences also displayed at within-country levels in the form of individuals' differences (Moorman, & Blakely, 1995). Hence, the current study then aims to investigate the influence of cultural orientation, specifically within Thailand, on employees' perceptions of job autonomy, which in turn, may affect employees' susceptibility to job burnout.

### **Thailand Context**

Thailand is a country in Southeast Asia with approximately 66 million people, with Thai being the primary spoken language and Buddhism being the primary religious affiliation. The number of working age people in Thailand, aged 15-64, account for 72.61% of the Thai population. This number is a moderately higher than the average amount of working age people in the world, which is about 65.91% of world population (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2017).

**Thailand as a collectivistic country.** According to Hofstede (2003), the degree of the mutual dependence between people in Thai society (individualism score) was 20 out of 100. The score made Thailand be considered as a highly collectivistic country. Being a highly

collectivistic country indicates that Thais are more likely to promote relationships where everyone tends to behave in ways to gain favor with fellow members of their group. As opposed to individualistic society, Thais do not view only their direct family as a part of their group, but also extended family, friends, and even supervisors. To conserve in-group harmony, Thais tend to avoid disagreement with groups that they belong to, and also demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice their self-interest for their group (Hofstede, 2003; Yamaguchi, 1994). Comparatively, Thailand has been reported as one of the most collectivistic countries when considered against Singapore, the U.S., and Australia (Kongsompong et al., 2009). The result was consistent with the findings of Hughes (2011), who found that Thais demonstrated significantly higher collectivism scores than Australians.

**Job burnout in Thailand.** Regarding job burnout in Thailand, it was found that most burnout literature in Thailand has been conducted specifically within healthcare settings (e.g., the studies of Nantsupawat et al. (2011), Wisetborisut et al. (2014), and Peerayuth (2013). As an example, in the study of Nantsupawat et al., (2011), 41% of nurses (N = 5,247) reported high burnout scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory scale. This study followed up on a second sampling of 2,084 nurses in 2016, with 32% indicated high emotional exhaustion, 18% reporting high depersonalization, and 35% presented low personal accomplishment. Moreover, Wisetborisut et al. (2014), who conducted a study with almost 3,000 Thai shift and non-shift healthcare workers, revealed that shift workers were much more susceptible to burnout compared to non-shift workers.

Although few studies have examined job burnout outside of healthcare, job burnout also appears to be prevalent in the private sector. Sawetchaiwat and Pisitsungkagarn (2015) investigated predictors of job burnout amongst employees within private Thai companies, and

proposed that organizational support and adversity quotient were significant burnout predictors in Thailand. Furthermore, Peerayuth (2013) investigated the effects of meditation practice on job burnout in Thai employees, and found that the regular practice of meditation significantly decreased reported burnout.

**Job autonomy in Thailand.** Based on their characteristic collectivism, Thai employees are likely to be more comfortable with low autonomy situations when compared to most other countries. Furthermore, many empirical studies conducted in Thailand have consistently reported that job autonomy is likely not related to employees' well-being. For example, in 2015, Yiengprugsawan, Lazzarino, Steptoe, Seubsman, and Sleigh studied the differential effects of psychosocial job characteristics in the United Kingdom compared to Thailand. The results showed that job autonomy was a major factor for employee's well-being, at least in the U.K.. Yet, the same relationship between job autonomy and employee well-being was not found in the Thai sample.

In a study specifically on Thai tax auditors, Lohapan and Ussahawanitchakit (2016), found clear evidence that job autonomy did not have any significant effects on job involvement, job dedication, job excellence, or job success. This observation also held true for a study involving Thai healthcare professionals, in which low levels of job autonomy failed to predict increased work-family conflict in Thai healthcare professionals (Rittippant et al., 2011).

## **Conclusion**

In summary, low job autonomy is a major contributor to job burnout in employees, at least in individualist societies. However, according to cross-cultural literature, job autonomy may not be as highly valued for employees in collectivist cultures, potentially because collectivist and individualist societies place different cultural values on autonomy (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Reflecting their collectivistic society, the well-being of Thai employees does not appear to be related to their level of job autonomy (Lohapan & Ussahawanitchakit, 2016; Rittippant et al., 2011; Yiengprugsawan et al., 2015); however, the specific relationship between job autonomy and job burnout in Thailand is currently unknown. In addition, much of the research on job burnout fails to take into account important cultural aspects, such as collectivism, that may play a vital role in determining job burnout. As a result, this study aims to examine the specific combined effects of Thai employees' cultural orientation, need for job autonomy, and actual job autonomy on their reported levels of job burnout. More specifically, three hypotheses were proposed: 1) Thais who indicate an individualistic orientation will demonstrate higher levels of need for job autonomy compared to Thais showing a collectivistic orientation. 2) In relatively high job autonomy situations, Thais who indicate both individualistic and collectivistic orientations will report similar job burnout scores. 3) In relatively low job autonomy conditions, Thais who show a individualistic orientation are more likely to experience job burnout compared to Thais indicating a collectivistic orientation.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The purpose of the current study was to examine employees' need for job autonomy and cultural orientation as predictors of job burnout. The methods employed in this study are outlined below. A discussion regarding the subject selection, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis, as well as limitations of the study, is provided.

The following hypotheses will be tested:

1. Thais who indicate an individualistic orientation will demonstrate higher levels of need for job autonomy compared to Thais showing a collectivistic orientation.
2. In relatively high job autonomy situations, Thais who indicate both individualistic and collectivistic orientations will report similar job burnout scores.
3. In relatively low job autonomy conditions, Thais who show an individualistic orientation are more likely to experience job burnout compared to Thais indicating a collectivistic orientation.

#### **Research Design**

The current study employed a quantitative research design; specifically a quasi-experimental design. This study design was chosen to establish a correlation between the cultural orientations and need for job autonomy of respondents, along with the relationship between job autonomy and employees' levels of job burnout. The use of quasi-experimental design allowed the researcher to statistically control quasi-independent variables: such as cultural orientations when the relationship between job autonomy and job burnout was investigated.

#### **Participant Selection and Sample Size**

The purposive sample in this study was Thai employees. Participants were recruited through two separate channels. First, some participants were recruited from a social media

website (Facebook). The researcher's Facebook account was used to distribute the survey's link. By doing so, a snowball sampling technique was employed to obtain more participants from extended associations of researcher's social networks. Participants who completed the survey and shared the survey link were entered the raffle to win one of four \$8 Starbucks gift cards (300 Thai Baht) as an incentive. When participants entered the online survey, a single screening question was adopted to determine if they meet the eligibility criterion and could potentially contribute to the study. The question was "what is your status of employment?". Only participants who had been working or used to work in a company located in Thailand in the past three years were allowed to proceed to the survey. Self-employed people were also excluded from proceeding to the survey.

Second, some participants were acquired from the Department of Livestock Development in Thailand, which is a government organization of Thailand. In order to reach this group of participants, official letter invitations with a survey link were employed. The same questionnaires were applied for this group of participants.

Prior to data collection, a power analysis was conducted using the software G\*Power and a conservative effect size estimate of  $f^2 = .05$ , which was based on previous research on the Oldenburg Job Burnout Inventory (Demerouti et al., 2003). Using the Linear multiple regression option in G\*Power, an alpha of .05, and power of .80, it was estimated that a minimum of 220 participants were required for a regression analysis with three predictors of burnout (cultural orientation, job autonomy, and need for job autonomy).

A total of 925 Thai employees participated in this study. Most respondents (69%) were female ( $n = 641$ ), and only 284 respondents were male (31%). Their average age was 30.90 ( $SD$

= 8.06). Since the sample size in the study was more than adequate for the primary objective of the study, this amount of sample should allow for expected attrition and additional analysis.

### **Instrumentation**

An online survey using Qualtrics survey software was developed to collect data. There were a total of 39 items in the online survey. All questionnaire items were translated into the Thai language using a back-translation approach (Brislin, 1970). Five dimensions were measured through the surveys: 1) job autonomy, 2) need for autonomy 3) cultural orientation: individualistic and collectivistic, 4) job burnout, and 5) demographic information. The questions used for measuring these variables were adapted from the standard measures.

**Actual and desired job autonomy.** Items for assessing actual and desired job autonomy were selected from Brink et al.'s study (2016), who originally adapted measures from Hackman & Oldham (1980) and Adler (1993). There were eight items in total. The current study obtained .85 Cronbach's alpha for actual job autonomy and .86 for desired job autonomy. Each statement appeared to participants once, but participants provided eight ratings for actual job autonomy and eight ratings for desired job autonomy; responding to each item using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Some examples were: "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job," "I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job," and "I design important aspects of my own work and put my ideas into practice" (see Appendix A).

**Cultural orientation (individualism and collectivism).** An individualism and collectivism scale developed by Yamaguchi (1994) was employed in the current study. Differences in individualistic and collectivistic orientation were determined as reported by individuals' responses to 10 items. In the current study, the Cronbach's alphas obtained for this

measurement were .80. A 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *very likely*) was utilized for these items, and examples include: “I sacrifice self-interest for my group”, “I act as fellow group members would prefer”, and “I stick with my group even through difficulties” (see Appendix B).

**Job burnout.** The Oldenburg Job Burnout Inventory (OLBI) developed by Demerouti et al. (2003) was adapted to measure job burnout. Sixteen items aimed to assess two main dimensions of job burnout: Exhaustion and cynicism/disengagement. A sample item of each subscale was as follows: Exhaustion (“There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work”), and Disengagement (“I always find new and interesting aspects in my work”). The Cronbach’s alpha of each subscale was .79 and .84 respectively (Demerouti et al., 2010). A 7-point Likert scale was administered in this measure (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) (see Appendix C).

**Demographic information.** The survey asked for basic demographic information of the respondents. The questions were included gender, age, job type (desk job or non-desk job), and type of employers (a Thai private company, an international private company, a government organization, a non-profit organization; see Appendix D).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The online survey links were distributed through social media using Facebook and the official invitation letters. For the Facebook channel, the researcher distributed the survey link by herself through her personal Facebook account. In regard to participants in the Department of Livestock Development in Thailand, the official invitation letter was sent to the director general of the department to request cooperation. After the department had agreed to participate in the study, the human resource office of the department took responsibility for distributing the survey

link via internal office memo (paper-based). Unfortunately, due to the specific distribution methods, the follow-up reminder was not sent.

The surveys were available to complete for three weeks in July 2017. The participants were asked to complete a self-report survey in the Thai language. It was estimated that respondents would take 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaires. The survey included the informed consent form, the single screening question, and the survey questions. Once the respondents opened the survey link, the informed consent was shown first. To access to the survey questions, the respondents needed to click on “I accept” button of the informed consent form. After the inform consent, there was the screening question. If the respondents did not meet the qualifications for the survey, they would be skipped to the “Thank You” page and ended the survey. In contrast, respondents who met the qualifications were allowed to enter to the survey. Data collected from the survey was anonymous and electronically stored in encrypted format using a randomly assigned number.

## Chapter IV: Results

The primary goals of this study were to examine whether the cultural orientation (collectivistic and individualistic orientation) of Thais predicted their need for job autonomy and whether the influence of cultural orientation influenced employees' perceptions of job autonomy and job burnout levels. The study was conducted in Thailand in July 2017 and had a response window of three weeks.

### Demographic

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to display characteristics of the respondents. Nine hundred and twenty-five participants completed the survey. All respondents were employees with Thai nationality. Five hundred and fifty-nine employees (60%) reported desk jobs, with the rest reporting ( $n = 366$ , 40%) non-desk jobs. The average job tenure of the participants was six years and five months. Regarding the respondents' employer type, there were 316 employees from miscellaneous private Thai companies, 172 employees from an international private company located in Thailand, 393 employees from government organizations, 13 from nonprofit organizations, and 31 from other types of companies or organizations. Demographic results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Information*

Characteristic/Variable	Value	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	641	69.0%
	Male	284	31.0%
Job Type	Desk job	559	60.0%
	Non-desk job	366	40.0%
Employer Type	Thai private company	316	34.2%
	International private company	172	18.6%
	Government organization	393	42.5%
	Non-profit organization	13	1.4%
	Other	31	3.4%

*Note.*  $N = 925$

**Statistical Description of the Variables**

After calculating all scale scores of respondents, the results showed that the average score of cultural orientation was 5.05 out of a total of 7.00 with the standard deviation of .84. Based on Royston (1995), Shapiro-Wilk test was recommended to be used to test for normality of the data with sample size in the range 3 to 5,000. Moreover, Razali and Wah (2011) discovered that Shapiro-Wilk test was the most powerful normality test. Therefore, the Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to examine the normality assumption in this study. The result from the Shapiro-Wilk test reported that cultural orientation scores were not normally distributed ( $p < .001$ ). According to respondents' summed score on the cultural orientation scales, the entire sample was divided into two groups; individualistic and collectivistic orientation. More specifically, those summed

scores were ranked from the lowest to highest. Then, the middle 10% of cases were excluded to enhance the contrast between individualistic and collectivistic groups. The group with the higher scores were represented collectivistic-orientated employees, whereas the lower score group were considered as individualist-orientated employees. Based on the study of Kongsompong et al. (2009), using these criteria to interpret respondents' cultural orientations was found to be successful to determine the effect of cultural orientations. Of all respondents in the current study, there were 405 individualistic employees and 422 collectivistic employees. The mean scores of individualistic and collectivistic respondents were 4.31 ( $SD = .56$ ), and 5.76 ( $SD = .46$ ) respectively. Further, a Mann-Whitney test was conducted to examine whether cultural orientation scores for those with individualistic and collectivistic differed. The results demonstrated scores on cultural orientation scales were significant different from each other ( $U = 82215.00, z = -24.91, p < .001, r = -.87$ ).

Regarding the burnout variable, the scores were summed for two dimensions; exhaustion and disengagement dimensions. Since there was no validated evidence to suggest a cut-off point of the measurement for the interpretation of the Oldenburg Job Burnout Inventory (OLBI) (Krookter Kogoj, Čebašek Travnik, & Zaletel Kragelj, 2014), the use of continuous scores was employed in this study. The lower scores indicated the greater levels of burnout. The respondents' average rating of exhaustion was 3.96 out of 7.00. The standard deviation of the exhaustion scores was 1.13. As for disengagement dimensions, the respondents reported the mean scores of 3.97 (out of 7.00) with the standard deviation of 1.26. For the data of both dimensions, the result from Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data departed from normality ( $p < .001$ ).

With respect to the perceived job autonomy and need for autonomy variables, the averages scores of participants 4.08 and 5.76 (out of 7) were reported respectively. The standard deviation was 1.31 for perceived job autonomy and .96 for the need for autonomy. For the perceived job autonomy scale, the greater scores of job autonomy scale referred to the greater levels of perceived autonomy in respondents' jobs. Similarly, for need for job autonomy scale, the higher scores on the need for autonomy scale demonstrated the higher needs for autonomy their jobs. Unsurprisingly, the data of both variables were not normally distributed ( $p < .001$ ) when the Shapiro-Wilk was conducted. To test the hypotheses, job autonomy scores that respondents perceived in their current jobs would be categorized into three situations using cut-off points criteria, which were low, moderate, and high job autonomy situation. Specifically, a score of perceived job autonomy ranked between 1.00 – 3.00 was considered as being low autonomy situation, a score more than three and less than four was moderate job autonomy situation, and a score above four was high job autonomy situation. In the current study, 218 respondents experienced a low job autonomy situation, 236 respondents were involved in a moderate job autonomy situation, and 471 respondents reported a high job autonomy situation. Descriptive statistics for the study variables and their summary of distribution were summarized in Table 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables*

Variable	Values	N	Range	Mean	SD
Cultural Orientations	All respondents	925	1.00-7.00	5.05	.84
	Individualist-orientated	405	1.00-4.90	4.31	.56
	Collectivist-orientated	422	5.20-7.00	5.76	.46
Burnout	Exhaustion dimension	925	1.13-7.00	3.96	1.13
	Disengagement dimension	925	1.00-7.00	3.97	1.26
Job autonomy	All respondents	925	1.00-7.00	4.08	1.31
	Low job autonomy situation	218	1.00-3.00	2.33	.55
	Moderate job autonomy situation	236	3.01-4.00	3.58	.29
	High job autonomy situation	471	4.01-7.00	5.13	.73
Need for job autonomy	All respondents	925	1.00-7.00	5.76	.96

Table 3

*Summary of Distribution of Variables*

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk values	P value	Interpretation
Cultural Orientations	.99	.00	Non-normal distribution
Exhaustion dimension	.99	.00	Non-normal distribution
Disengagement dimension	.99	.00	Non-normal distribution
Job autonomy	.99	.00	Non-normal distribution
Need for job autonomy	.92	.00	Non-normal distribution

## Hypothesis Testing

Since assumptions concerning normality of the dependent variables were not confirmed, Hypothesis 1, 2, and 3 were tested using nonparametric statistical methods. A Mann-Whitney and a Spearman's Rho were implemented with two tailed tests of significance set at the 0.01 level. The details and results are described below.

**Hypothesis 1: Thais who indicate an individualistic orientation will demonstrate higher levels of need for job autonomy compared to Thais showing a collectivistic orientation.** This study sought to first investigate the association between two types of cultural orientation (collectivistic vs. individualistic orientation) and individuals' need for job autonomy among Thai employees. It was hypothesized that Thai employees with individualist-orientations would demonstrate higher need for autonomy scores than those with collectivistic-orientations. However, a Mann-Whitney test with an alpha values of 0.01 showed that the needs for autonomy in individualistic employees ( $Mdn = 5.88, n = 405$ ) did not differ significantly from collectivistic employees ( $Mdn = 6.00, n = 422$ ),  $U = 77996.00, z = -2.175, p = .03, r = -.08$ . The results showed that the null hypothesis was accepted.

A Spearman's Rho, which is a nonparametric version of Pearson's correlation, was also run to determine the potential effects of demographic variables on participants' need for autonomy scores. The results suggested that only job type was found to have significant relationship with need for autonomy. Specifically, non-desk job participants correlated with higher scores of need for autonomy ( $r = .11, p < .001$ ). Based on this observation, separate post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests were conducted for each job type. It was found that for both desk job ( $U = 28631.00, z = -2.01, p = .04, r = -.09$ ) and non-desk job employees ( $U = 11921.50, z = -1.149, p = .25, r = -.06$ ), there was insufficient evidence, at the  $\alpha = 0.01$  level, to conclude that

individualistic employees have higher levels of need for job autonomy than collectivistic employees. Hence, no evidence to support Hypothesis 1 was observed, even when the additional factor of job type was considered.

**Hypothesis 2: In relatively high job autonomy situations, Thais who indicate both individualistic and collectivistic orientations will report similar job burnout scores.** This hypothesis was proposed to ascertain what the association was between types of cultural orientation and Thai employees' job burnout levels in a high job autonomy situation. It was hypothesized that individualistic and collectivistic employees would report similar levels of two job burnout dimensions when they had high levels of autonomy in their jobs. As the data of dependent variables (disengagement and exhaustion scores) were non-normally distributed, nonparametric methods were employed to test the hypothesis.

A Mann-Whitney was conducted using a two-tailed test and a significance level of 0.01. There were 421 employees who reported high job autonomy situations. The data showed that individualistic employees ( $Mdn = 4.25, n = 183$ ) and collectivistic employees ( $Mdn = 4.12, n = 238$ ) were not significantly different in levels of exhaustion ( $U = 21169.00, z = -.49, p = .62, r = -.02$ ). Along the same line, no difference was observed for levels of disengagement between individualistic employees ( $Mdn = 4.25, n = 183$ ) and collectivistic employees ( $Mdn = 4.31, n = 238; U = 20783.50, z = -.80, p = .42, r = -.04$ ). Thus, support was found for Hypothesis 2, in that both individualist and collectivist Thai employees with high levels of job autonomy reported similar levels of burnout in both burnout dimensions; exhaustion and disengagement.

**Hypothesis 3: In relatively low job autonomy situations, Thais who indicate an individualistic orientation will report higher levels of job burnout compared to Thais who indicate a collectivistic orientation.** This hypothesis also aimed to substantiate the proposed

relationship between types of cultural orientation and Thai employees' job burnout levels. However, this hypothesis focused on examining such relationship in a low job autonomy situation. It was hypothesized that individualistic employees would show higher levels of burnout for both the exhaustion and disengagement dimensions than those with a collectivist-oriented perspective when they reported low job autonomy.

A Mann-Whitney with two-tailed test and significance set at 0.01 was performed. Data used in this analysis was derived from 197 respondents. Results indicated that the exhaustion scores of individualistic participants ( $Mdn = 3.38, n = 105$ ) and collectivistic participants ( $M = 3.43, n = 92$ ) did not statistically differ in low autonomy situations ( $U = 4573.00, z = -.64, p = .52, r = -.05$ ). However, for the disengagement dimension of job burnout, it was observed that individualistic participants ( $M = 2.88, n = 105$ ) were more likely to disengage from their jobs compared to those who were collectivistic ( $M = 3.38, n = 92$ ),  $U = 3648.50, z = -2.96, p = .003, r = -.21$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partly supported. More specifically, employees with different cultural orientations indicated differences in levels of disengagement, but non-differences were found in levels of exhaustion.

In summary regarding all hypotheses, Hypothesis 1 was not supported, indicating that both individualistic and collectivistic employees reported similar levels of desired job autonomy. In contrast, Hypothesis 2 was fully supported, suggesting that in high autonomy situations, individualistic and collectivistic employees reported similar levels of exhaustion and disengagement scores. Finally, mixed evidence was obtained for Hypothesis 3, in that individualistic employees in low autonomy situations tended to report higher disengagement scores compared to collectivistic employees. However, these differences did not extend to exhaustion scores for either individualistic or collectivistic employees.

### Job Autonomy as a Predictor of Job Burnout in Individualists and Collectivists

A simple regression analysis was conducted to examine the undisputable relationship between job autonomy and job burnout, which was repeatedly found by many researchers. Disengagement and exhaustion scores were regressed onto job autonomy, respectively, for both individualistic and collectivistic groups. The results from the regression revealed that among individualistic employees, job autonomy significant predicted both disengagement ( $\beta = .52, p < .001, R^2 = .26$ ) and exhaustion dimensions ( $\beta = .41, p < .001, R^2 = .17$ ). Similar results were discovered among collectivistic employees; job autonomy also played roles as a predictor of disengagement ( $\beta = .37, p < .001, R^2 = .13$ ) and exhaustion dimensions ( $\beta = .36, p < .001, R^2 = .13$ ). Summary of this simple regression analyses was shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Job Autonomy Predicting Job Burnout in Individualists and Collectivists*

Variable	Individualists						Collectivists					
	Exhaustion			Disengagement			Exhaustion			Disengagement		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Job Autonomy	.32	.04	.41**	.49	.04	.52**	.33	.04	.36**	.35	.04	.37**
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.17			.27			.13			.13		
<i>F</i>	82.68**			146.01**			63.60**			64.36**		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Demographic Variables, Need for Job Autonomy, and Job Autonomy as Predictors of Job Burnout

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to ascertain the extent to which gender, age, job tenure, job type, employer type, cultural orientation, need for job autonomy, and job autonomy can predict two dimensions of job burnout. For the disengagement dimension, the results of the regression indicated that the eight predictors explained 26% of the variance ( $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F(8, 777) = 33.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). It was found that age ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .01$ ), job type ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ), cultural orientation ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .01$ ), and job autonomy ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) significantly predicted disengagement. However, job tenure ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $p = .57$ ), gender ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $p = .54$ ), need for job autonomy ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p = .10$ ), and employment type ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $p = .02$ ) did not contribute to the multiple regression model at the alpha level of 0.01.

Regarding the exhaustion dimension, the regression analysis showed that eight predictors explained 21% of the variance ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F(8, 777) = 25.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Only job autonomy ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and employer type ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .001$ ) significantly predicted exhaustion. Other variables did not significantly predict exhaustion at the alpha level of 0.01. Those variables included job tenure ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p = .45$ ), age ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .12$ ), job type ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .14$ ), gender ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .13$ ), cultural orientation ( $\beta = -.04$ ,  $p = .21$ ), and need for autonomy ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $p = .03$ ). As can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for All Variable Predicting Job Burnout*

Variable	Exhaustion			Disengagement		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Job Tenure	.01	.01	.03	.01	.01	.02
Age	.01	.01	.06	.02	.01	.11**
Job Type (Coded 1=Desk job, 0=Non-Desk job)	-.11	.08	-.05	-.24	.08	-.09**
Gender (Coded 1=Female, 0=Male)	-.12	.08	-.05	.05	.09	.02
Cultural Orientation (Coded 1=Individualist, 0=Collectivist)	-.09	.07	-.04	-.22	.08	-.09**
Need for Job Autonomy	-.09	.04	-.07*	-.07	.04	-.06
Job Autonomy	.33	.03	.39***	.41	.03	.43***
Employer Type (coded 1=Government Organization, 0=Thai Private company, International Private company, Non-profit organization, and other)	.33	.08	.15***	.21	.09	.08*
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.21			.26	
<i>F</i>		25.24***			33.39***	

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . (The lower scores of Exhaustion and Disengagement indicated the greater levels of Exhaustion and Disengagement respectively)

## **The Influence of Cultural Orientation on the Relationship Between Job Autonomy and Job Burnout**

As was introduced previously, the research questions of this study were developed on the assumption that cultural orientation functioned as a moderator variable on the relationship between job autonomy and job burnout. Hence, moderation analysis was conducted by using Process Analysis (Hayes, 2013). The results obtained from the analysis showed that the interaction of job autonomy and cultural orientation was not found in explaining both disengagement ( $\beta = .13, p = .02$ ) and exhaustion ( $\beta = -.01, p = .90$ ). The R-squares increased due to the interaction were not significant for both disengagement ( $R^2$  change = .00,  $p = .02$ ) nor exhaustion ( $R^2$  change = .00,  $p = .90$ ). Based on Hayes (2013) and Jose (2013), these outcomes indicated the cultural orientation did not moderate the relationship between job autonomy and two dimensions of burnout.

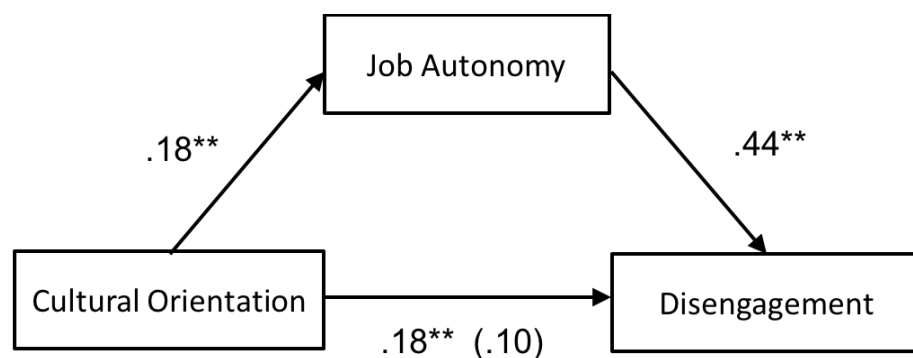
Since moderating effects were not discovered as expected, a mediation analysis was carried out as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, a multiple regression analysis with cultural orientation and job autonomy predicting burnout dimensions was conducted. The result illustrated that the effect of cultural orientation did not remain significant in predicting disengagement ( $\beta = .10, p = .02$ ) and exhausting ( $\beta = .03, p = .48$ ) after controlling for job autonomy. Thus far, it could be concluded that cultural orientation did not significantly moderate the relationship between job autonomy and two dimensions of burnout.

Surprising results emerged when assessing the mediating effects of job autonomy on the relationship between cultural orientation and both burnout dimensions. A four-step mediation test method suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) were performed using Process Analysis (Hayes, 2013). First, in step 1, a simple regression indicated that cultural orientation explained

1.39% of the disengagement variance ( $R=.12$ ,  $F(1, 923) = 12.97$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Cultural orientation significantly predicted disengagement ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In step 2: in the second regression, cultural orientation explained 1.3% of the variance ( $R=.11$ ,  $F(1, 923) = 11.99$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and it significantly predicted job autonomy ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Next, in the third regression, job autonomy was found to be a significant predictor of disengagement ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Job autonomy explained 19.4% of the variance ( $R=.44$ ,  $F(1, 923) = 222.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, a multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether job autonomy and cultural orientation together could predict the disengagement. A statistically significant relationship was found between job autonomy and disengagement when cultural orientation was controlled ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, cultural orientation was no longer significant in predicting disengagement after controlling for job autonomy ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p = .02$ ). The model explained 19.88% of the variance ( $R=.45$ ,  $F(2, 922) = 114.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Also, an indirect effect was examined if its existence was due to the influence of mediator using a Sobel test. A significant effect was found for this test ( $Z = 3.36$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $r = .07$ ). Therefore, the findings from these four steps and Sobel test of significance supported full mediation of job autonomy on the relationship between cultural orientation and disengagement dimension.

The mediating effects of job autonomy on the relationship between cultural orientation and exhaustion dimension were also tested using the same steps as above. The first regression showed that cultural orientation did not significantly predict exhaustion ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $F(1, 923) = 3.94$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $r = .07$ ). Since there was at least one relationship that was nonsignificant, it could be concluded that the mediation of job autonomy was not found on the relationship between cultural orientation and exhaustion dimension.

To sum up, job autonomy was reported to be a significant predictor of two burnout dimensions in all cases, regardless of cultural orientation. Besides job autonomy, it was discovered that age, job type, and cultural orientation contributed to the disengagement dimension. Whereas, in addition to job autonomy, only employer type contributed to the exhaustion dimension. On the question of moderation and mediation analysis, the moderation effects of cultural orientation were not found on the relationship between job autonomy and two dimensions of burnout as expected. Interestingly, results indicated that job autonomy fully mediated the relationship between cultural orientation and disengagement dimensions. In other words, cultural orientation influenced disengagement through job autonomy. A mediation model found in the current study was shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* A mediation model found in the current study. The standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between cultural orientation and disengagement, controlling for job autonomy, is in parentheses. \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The findings of the current research are interpreted and explained in this chapter.

Conclusions, recommendations, and limitation of the study are also considered.

### Discussion

This research addressed questions associated with job autonomy, job burnout, and cultural orientation within a specifically Thai sample. The findings of the study provide some further understanding of job burnout in Thai employees, while also provides additional information regarding cross-cultural comparisons of collectivist and individualist societies. The study was conducted to explore how individualistic and collectivistic orientations of Thai employees predicted their need for job autonomy, and how those cultural orientations influenced the relationship between employees' perceptions of job autonomy and job burnout levels.

On average, respondents tended toward collectivistic orientations ( $M = 5.05$  on a 7-point Likert scale), suggesting that Thai employees tended toward collectivistic orientations overall. This result was comparable to the results found in the study of Kongsompong et al. (2009). Using a similar measure, their Thai sample reflected a cultural orientation mean score of 5.06, while American participants provided mean scores of 4.68. In addition to this study, several other lines of evidence also corroborate the fact that Thais tend to report higher collectivism scores (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1988). Therefore, the data obtained from 925 respondents in this study helped to reaffirm previously observed findings regarding the cultural orientation of Thai employees.

As this study aimed to investigate cultural differences within the country of Thailand, the respondents were assigned into individualistic and collectivistic groups based on their cultural orientation scale. The low scoring sub-group represents individualistic-orientated respondents,

whereas the high group represents collectivistic-orientated respondents. Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>) was developed to compare desired job autonomy scores between individualistic and collectivistic groups. It was hypothesized that individualistic employees would require more job autonomy than collectivistic employees. However, the findings illustrated that there was no difference between levels of need for autonomy between these two groups of respondents. This was an interesting outcome that an individual's cultural orientation within Thailand did not make significant differences in the levels of need for job autonomy.

Unlike the findings from cross-country studies, several researchers have consistently established that employees in individualistic countries reported a higher need for job autonomy compared to those in collectivistic countries. A notable example of this effect was reported by Hahn (2006), who compared levels of psychological needs in emotional well-being in the US and South Korea. The results suggested that American employees, who rated themselves as strongly individualist, viewed autonomy as much more important to their employment than Koreans, who rated themselves as strongly collectivist. In the same way, the differences in needs for job autonomy due to cultural differences were found in the study of Yiengprugsawan et al.'s study (2015), which compared the U.K. and Thailand.

Although Dawar and Parker (1994) claimed that investigating an individual's cultural orientation within countries can provide greater explanatory power to many psychological effects, significant differences in needs for job autonomy between individualistic or collectivistic Thai employees were not observed in the current study. A possible explanation for this might be the fact, overall, that Thailand is a strongly collectivistic cultural society, in that the majority of Thai people may tend to view themselves only along a collectivist continuum. Thus, an individualist in Thailand might not adequately demonstrate all characteristics associated with an

individualist from strongly individualistic societies. Furthermore, there might be other unexplored variables that more strongly influenced desired job autonomy in Thai employees, such as a social or organizational hierarchy. As Thais strongly value social hierarchies (Qingxue, 2003), both individualists and collectivists in Thailand might be much more subservient to their managers compared to other individualistic cultures. Thus, they might accept much less autonomy in their jobs as a result of social pressure.

Another significant aspect of the findings was that job autonomy significantly predicted job burnout among both individualistic and collectivistic employees. In particular, low autonomy tended to cause disengagement and exhaustion in all employees regardless of their cultural orientation. This finding substantiated a great deal of previous research that has indicated the relationship between job autonomy and burnout (Bakker et al., 2004; Fernet et al., 2014; Madathil et al., 2014; Shi et al., 2011; Shirom, 2010).

Moreover, demographic variables, as well as cultural orientation and need for autonomy, were also tested as predictors of disengagement and exhaustion. The results showed that besides job autonomy, age was one of the significant factors of job burnout. That was, younger Thai employees indicated higher disengagement scores. These observed results aligned and supported other empirical findings, such as Diehl and Hay (2010), Haley, Mostert and Els (2013), Jeffrey Hill et al. (2008), as well as Rath, Huffman, Phillips, Carpenter, and Fowler (2015). However, note that the present study showed the role of age only on one dimension of burnout-disengagement. Regarding the disengagement of young employees, Pines and Aronson (1988) explained that employees in the beginning of their careers invest all their energy in order to reach their initial goals, while they have to cope with limited resources. Their disappointment from trying to balance job demands and resources probably lead them to disengage from their jobs. In

addition, the present study found that desk job workers reported higher degrees of disengagement. Although there is very little research that has been conducted to examine the effects of desk jobs vs. non-desk jobs, it could be assumed that desk jobs allows employees to built closer relationships with their peers. Also, desk jobs tends to offer less flexible environment then non-desk jobs. Therefore, when desk job employees confront are with interpersonal conflicts or problems at work, they tend to disengage from their work more than non-desk job employees. The other factor influencing disengagement was cultural orientation. Those who reported being more individualistically oriented were more likely to disengage from jobs and colleagues, as will be discussed later. Whereas a few variables contributed to the disengagement dimension, only employer type affected the exhaustion dimension. Specifically, Thai government employees tended to experience lower levels of exhaustion than those who had worked for Thai private companies, international private companies located in Thailand, and non-profit organizations. The finding was in line with the study of Sungkhawan et al. (2012), which revealed that employees working in Thai government were likely to experience less stress than those working in private companies.

Hypothesis 2 (H<sub>2</sub>) and Hypothesis 3 (H<sub>3</sub>) compared job burnout amongst individualistic and collectivistic groups in high (H<sub>2</sub>) and low job autonomy situations (H<sub>3</sub>). The results from the current study indicated that, for a job with a high degree of autonomy, the tendency to report job burnout among individualistic and collectivistic employees was not significantly different. By contrast, for jobs low in autonomy, individualistic employees were more likely to demonstrate disengagement at their jobs and with their co-workers more than collectivistic employees. These findings met expectations as stated in the hypotheses, and were in line with the study proposed by Shi (2011). Shi (2011) indicated that low autonomy situations tended to cause adverse

impacts on individualistic people rather than collectivistic people. The potential reason why individualists have more likelihood of disengagement is that individualists hold the characteristics that defined themselves independently of others, as opposed to collectivists who are characterized by a sense of connectedness with others (Guzley, Araki, & Chalmers, 1998). The prominent characteristics of individualists seem unaligned with a low job autonomy situation, which might prevent them from having satisfactory freedom in their jobs. As a result, individualists associated with this situation disengage themselves from work and colleague as a mechanism of protecting themselves from further stress (Demerouti et al., 2003; Maslach, 2003). The findings of H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>3</sub> testing are also consistent with the examination of the relationship between cultural orientation, job autonomy, and job burnout obtained from this study. That is, job autonomy fully mediated the relationship between cultural orientation and one dimension of burnout: disengagement. In other words, cultural orientation affected job autonomy which, in turn, affected employees' disengagement.

Interestingly, cultural orientation seems to have significance only in one dimension of burnout-disengagement. This fact suggests that, although employees feel exhausted similarly when they perceive a lack of autonomy in their jobs (regardless of cultural orientation), employees with individualistic orientations have a greater tendency to disengage from their jobs and colleagues. These results shed more light on the particular types of cultural orientation that can allow employers to deal effectively with employees.

In spite of the fact that individualistic and collectivistic employees did not show a significant difference in their need for job autonomy (as presented in H<sub>1</sub> results), they were still likely to disengage differently when involved in low job autonomy situation. This contradictory result may be explained by the fact that employees with an individualistic orientation might have

less tolerance for a lack of job autonomy than collectivists. Therefore, this group of employees tends to disengage from their jobs and their co-workers more than employees with collectivistic orientations. Although very little was known about the relationship between need for job autonomy and tolerance for low job autonomy, it could be assumed that these two variables were not related to each other. That is, rating high or low on need for job autonomy scales do not represent the tolerance of low job autonomy. Such information provides additional understanding of the effects of cultural orientation, as well as the influence of job autonomy, which could transmit the effects of cultural orientation on job burnout.

## **Conclusions**

The present study has achieved its purposes of extending knowledge of the relationship among cultural orientation, job autonomy, and job burnout. The major finding of this study was that cultural orientation could predict the disengagement dimension of burnout through job autonomy. That is, employees with an individualistic orientation were more likely to be disengaged from their employment in low autonomy situations, compared to employees with collectivistic orientations. This is probably because individualists and collectivists have different tolerances for low job autonomy. Moreover, the study indicated that age, job type, job autonomy, and cultural orientation contributed to the disengagement dimension of burnout, whereas only employer type and job autonomy contributed to exhaustion dimension.

The results from this study potentially allows organizations that employ Thais or work in Thailand to better understand the relationships between job autonomy and job burnout. It suggests the importance of sociocultural context when dealing with job autonomy and employee burnout, since the findings indicated that the culture may play an important role in how an employee responds to their job autonomy. Thus, organizations might be able to generate strategic

interventions specifically focused on job autonomy to address employee issues before they suffer job burnout. As mentioned in Chapter 1, employees who have job burnout are less likely to recover from burnout and return to a normal state of mental health (Hancock & Desmond, 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Because job burnout is associated with a great deal of damage to organizations (Campbell et al., 2013; Chen & Kao 2012, 2013; Hancock & Desmond, 2001; Leiter et al., 2009; McKenna, 2000), it is important to address job burnout before it occurs.

This study also provides some evidence to the fact that employers should evaluate degrees of autonomy for each position in the organization. Potentially starting with the recruitment and selection process, if a given position is believed to involve low job autonomy, employers within a collectivist society may choose to consider a candidate who tends toward collectivism, to avoid potential disengagement. Furthermore, these findings may also provide some direction on managing existing employees, in that those with individualistic orientations may more quickly disengage from their work when they lack autonomy.

The current study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, this is one of the few studies on job burnout in Thai employees conducted outside the healthcare industry. Second, this study considered the important contribution of cultural orientation within Thailand, which previous studies had not included. In addition, the study provides notable contributions to cross-cultural Industrial/Organizational Psychology research. Specifically, that cultural differences can potentially emerge at within-country levels in the form of important individual differences (Moorman & Blakely, 1995).

The current study also had a number of limitations. First, the study failed to account for subtle degrees of job autonomy that were specifically required due to the job characteristics. The effects of specific job characteristics might lead respondents to rate their levels of actual and

desired job autonomy using different standards, which probably affected the reliability of the study. Second, since the survey was open to the public using a snowball sampling and offered incentives, selection error might have occurred in the study. Although there was a screening question used to filter respondents, by providing incentives to take a survey, respondents might misrepresent themselves just to collect an incentive. Consequently, the sample might not be representative of the population of concern. In addition, some respondents might have rushed through the survey when completing it, and as a result, data quality could have been negatively affected by response bias. Third, according to Breugh's study (1985), it was suggested that there should be three facets to measure perceived job autonomy, which are job method, job schedule, and job criteria. The job autonomy scale chosen in the current study captured only job method and job schedule, but does not capture the job criteria. Job criteria refers to the discretion of employees in choosing the indicators criteria dimension used to assess their performance (Breugh, 1985). Substantial evidence was found to support the significance of this job autonomy facet (Breugh, 1989). Also, Sadler-Smith, El-Kot, and Leat (2003) indicated that the job criterion dimension was related to job satisfaction. As a result, it is still unclear whether this facet would make a significant change in the results.

### **Recommendations**

According to the findings and the limitations of the current study, further research is required to design a study that can evaluate perceived job autonomy while controlling for job characteristics effectively. This could be done by conducting qualitative research that would allow a researcher to assess employee work environment and overall culture in order to gain a clearer understanding about employees' perceived job autonomy. Moreover, alternative scales of individualism and collectivism, or comparisons between Americans working in Thailand and

Thais working in America, should be considered in future studies to confirm the results. For the job autonomy scale, it is suggested that future work should be undertaken to also include a job criteria facet into job autonomy scale.

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## Appendix A: Job Autonomy and Need for Job Autonomy Questionnaire

Direction: Please indicate your level of agreement and level of desirability with each item.

Items	Please select the scale below that best represents how you feel about your current job						Please select the scale below that best represents what you want to see on your current job					
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Slightly Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)	Very Undesirable (1)	Undesirable (2)	Slightly undesirable (3)	Slightly desirable (4)	desirable (5)	Very desirable (6)
1. I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.												
2. I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.												
3. I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.												
4. I design important aspects of my own work and put my ideas into practice.												
5. I can decide when to come to work and leave work, either officially or unofficially.												
6. I can take a day off from work without losing pay or having to claim vacation time, sick leave, or put in compensatory time on my job, either officially or unofficially.												
7. I can considerably slow down my pace of work for a day when I want to.												
8. I can decide on my own to introduce a new task or work assignment that I will do on my job.												

### Appendix B: Individualism and Collectivism Questionnaire

Direction: Using 1-7 scales below, please indicate your agreement with each item.

Items	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Undecided (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
1. I sacrifice self-interest for my group.							
2. I act as fellow group members would prefer.							
3. I stick with my group even through difficulties.							
4. I maintain harmony in my group.							
5. I respect the majority's wish.							
6. I support my group, whether they are right or wrong.							
7. I respect decisions made by my group.							
8. I remain in my group if they need me, even if I am dissatisfied with them.							
9. I avoid arguments with my group, even when I strongly disagree with other members.							
10. I make an effort to avoid disagreement with my group members.							

### Appendix C: Job Burnout Questionnaire

**Direction:** Using 1-7 scales below, please indicate your agreement with each item.

Items	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Undecided (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
1.I always find new and interesting aspects in my work.							
2.There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.							
3.It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way.							
4.After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.							
5.I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well.							
6.Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically.							
7.I find my work to be a positive challenge.							
8.During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.							
9.Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work.							
10.After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities.							
11.Sometimes I feel sickened by my work tasks.							
12.After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.							
13.This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing.							
14.Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well.							
15.I feel more and more engaged in my work.							

16. When I work, I usually feel energized.							
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## **Appendix D: Demographic Information Questionnaire**

1. What is your job's type?

- Desk job

- Non-desk job

2. What is your organization's type?

-Thai private company

-International private company

-Government organization

-Non-profit organization

-Work-at-home (Freelance job)

3. Gender

-Female

-Male

4. What is your age? (fill-in-the-blank questions)

5. How long have you stayed in the current job? (fill-in-the-blank questions)