THE EFFECT OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE ON BURNOUT OF THAI CABIN CREW IN NON-NATIONAL AIRLINES MODERATED BY JOB TENURE

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Abstract

The job of cabin crew is considered to be a highly stressful job. In particular, cabin crew members who must deal with foreign passengers and a team of foreign coworkers are more prone to develop job burnout from their cross-cultural encounters. Therefore, having cross-cultural competence, which can help them to deal effectively with such situations, is crucial to preventing the problem of burnout. Cultural intelligence (CQ) was proposed in this research as a cross-cultural competence, essential for cabin crew members. The objective of the research was to examine the relationship between the CQ of the cabin crew members and the level of job burnout which they experience. Survey data were collected from a sample of 320 Thai cabin crew members, from seven non-Thai national airlines. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data. The results supported the negative relationship between the CQ of cabin crew members and their job burnout. The moderating effect analysis also showed that the negative effect of CQ on burnout was particularly strong for cabin crew members with greater job tenure than those with lower job tenure. The results not only provide additional insight regarding the contribution of CQ to employee wellbeing in the airline industry, but also suggest some moderating conditions that could make CQ particularly essential for cabin crew members. Lastly, this research also provides recommendations for airline companies regarding interventions to prevent the psychological stress of their cabin crew.

Keywords: cultural intelligence, cross-cultural competence, burnout, stress

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

The airline industry is large and growing continuously. According to the ATAG (2018), this industry supports 65.5 million jobs globally, and directly created 10.25 million jobs worldwide in 2016. However, the competition in this industry is very intense. Each airline must work hard to gain and retain as many passengers as possible. Many airlines have actively expanded their flights in a global scope and are motivated to hire foreign cabin crew members to join their native workforce, in order to provide better services to foreign passengers. The job of cabin crew has by nature been considered a stressful job as early as the last quarter of the 20th century when people began to travel more, due to globalization (Preston, 1974) and perhaps even more so in this modern technology ridden age where airline businesses have increased dramatically (Mengenci, 2014). In addition to the physical fatigue from long working hours, night shifts, and high pressure working environment (Chen & Chen, 2012), cabin crew must also face psychological tension from cross-cultural encounters with foreign passengers and foreign colleagues. For international flights, it is inevitable for the cabin crew to deal with foreign passengers from different cultures who tend to vary in their personality, behavior, and service expectations, thereby making the job of the cabin crew even more demanding (Suthatorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2018). The stress that cabin crew experience is particularly intense for those who work in a national airline in which the majority of the cabin crew team are foreigners. Basically, cultural differences between members of the cabin crew makes it difficult for crew members to develop favorable relationships with their colleagues. Cultural differences within the team can easily trigger relationship conflicts among members, generating another source of job stress (Sousa & Bradley, 2006). The high level of stress that these cabin crew members encounter when dealing with foreign passengers and foreign crew members can eventually lead to the development of job burnout. Job burnout is a negative psychological state which occurs in response to prolonged job stress (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Job burnout not only causes detrimental impacts on the cabin crew members but also the airlines they work for (Chen & Kao, 2012). It negatively affects the health of cabin crew members, both physically and psychologically (Chen & Chen, 2012; Chen & Kao, 2012). For example, Rosskam et al. (2009) showed that cabin crew members with high job burnout tended to exhibit low performance on safety and security-related duties, a low ability to interact with other crew members, a low quality of service, and high absenteeism. Thus, it is important to explore some characteristics of cabin crew members, which can help them to deal effectively with cross-cultural encounters in their job, and thus prevent burnout.

In this research, cultural intelligence (CQ) was proposed as a key characteristic of cabin crew members which can lessen the burnout which happens when they unavoidably work with foreign passengers and foreign colleagues in an international airline. CQ is the competence of individuals to function effectively in various cross-cultural situations. It is a cross-cultural competence that is essential for individuals to work well in a culturally diverse environment. In particular, CQ was found to help individuals engage better in psychological and sociocultural adaptation when moving to foreign countries (Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Presbitero, 2016). CQ can be particularly important for cabin crew members, to lessen stress in cross-cultural encounters, as it was found to help people deal effectively with stress when working in an unfamiliar cultural environment (Bolat, Seymen, Bolat, & Yuksel, 2017; Ramsey, Nassif Leonel, Zoccal Gomes, & Rafael Reis Monteiro, 2011; Tay, Westman, & Chia, 2008).

The concept of CQ is among the areas to have gained research interest over recent years. Still, several gaps remain in the literature. Firstly, although the positive contribution of CQ has been verified in many occupational areas, the study of CQ among cabin crew is scant. Moreover, while CQ was extensively found to enhance cross-cultural adaptation and performance, there are few studies that have tested the contribution of CQ in the area of psychological well being. Moreover, research which investigates the moderating conditions that might influence the importance of CQ has not been adequately carried out.

The objective of this research is to fill these gaps. This research explores the link between the CQ of cabin crew members and their experiences of job burnout. The research focuses on Thai cabin crew members from various non-Thai national airlines, whereby the crew members of interest are part of a cabin crew in which the majority of team members are of the same nationality as the airline. This work situation is highly relevant for CQ research as it requires cabin crew members to deal extensively with foreign passengers and foreign coworkers, which can make them more prone to job burnout from cross-cultural encounters. In particular, this study analyzes whether the CQ of these cabin crew members can contribute to lower job burnout. This study adopts the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) as a theoretical framework to support the contribution of CQ. This model proposes that job demands and job resources are two work-related factors which can influence the development of job burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). The theory predicts that individuals will develop burnout when they do not have enough resources to cope with the job demands which they experience at work. Generally, the tasks of cabin crew are considered as highly stressful (Mengenci, 2014), especially

for Thai cabin crew members who work in non-Thai airlines, as they tend to be more susceptible to experience higher degrees of stress, arising from cultural differences between they and their foreign coworkers, as well as foreign passengers (Suthatorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2018). Thus, some cultural competence, that serves as a resource for Thai cabin crew members to deal effectively with foreign coworkers and foreign passengers, is required as a buffer from developing burnout. As CQ is regarded as a key cultural competence allowing individuals to function effectively in diverse cross-cultural interactions (Soon Ang, Van Dyne, & Tan, 2008), CQ could serve as an essential resource for Thai cabin crew members to deal with stressful situations which arise from cross-cultural encounters at work, thereby reducing the chances of job burnout**.** In addition to this direct linkage, the research explores the contribution of CQ as moderated by the job tenure of cabin crew members. Given that some prior research provides evidence that job burnout takes time to develop, this raises the question whether the effect of CQ on burnout could be more essential for cabin crew members with a longer period of job tenure. The results from this research not only provide an extra contribution to prior studies, expanding the understanding of the benefits of CQ, but also provide suggestions for the airline industry regarding interventions which can be implemented to prevent the burnout of their cabin crew members.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

K.-Y. Ng and Earley (2006, p. 4) defined CQ as "the capability to be effective across cultural settings". This definition is consistent with Soon Ang, Van Dyne, and Rockstuhl (2015, p. 282); who defined CQ as "malleable capabilities that determine what a person can do to be effective in intercultural environments". Similarity to other intelligences, CQ is a set of capabilities**,** but differs in some ways (Soon Ang et al., 2007; Soon Ang et al., 2015). Earley and Ang (2003) proposed that CQ consists of cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral elements. Firstly, cognitive CQ represents the quality of knowledge that individuals have regarding foreign culture. Individuals with high cognitive CQ have certain knowledge to realize and understand the similarities as well as the differences among cultures (Şahin & Gürbüz, 2014). Secondly, metacognitive CQ represents the ability to manage one's own thought processes, to support cultural learning. Individuals with high metacognitive CQ understand the processes and methods to enhancing their cultural understanding at the appropriate level (Hansen, Singh, Weilbaker, & Guesalaga, 2011). They realize each cultures' preferences before and during interactions, adjusting their mental models during and after each interaction (Soon Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Hansen et al., 2011; K.-Y. Ng,

Van Dyne, Ang, & Ryan, 2012). Thirdly, motivational CQ represents the ability of people to generate drive, as well as stimulate effort and energy for learning about and performing in new or unknown cultural settings. Individuals with a high motivational CQ, value unfamiliar cultural settings, and enjoy socializing with people from different cultures (Şahin & Gürbüz, 2014). Lastly, behavioral CQ reflects an individual's capability to exhibit and respond with proper verbal behaviors and nonverbal behaviors in any given cultural context (Soon Ang et al., 2007; Earley, 2002; Hansen et al., 2011). It encourages individuals to exhibit behavioral patterns which aim to minimize the differences between the cultures and gain acceptance (Hansen et al., 2011).

Fundamentally, CQ involves an individual's self-concept and their level of adaptability (Earley & Ang, 2003). Individuals with high CQ have "not only a well-differentiated concept of self, but also a high degree of adaptability" (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 73). They tend to adapt faster and interact more efficiently with people from different cultures (Soon Ang et al., 2007; K.-Y. Ng & Earley, 2006; Thomas, 2006). They know which practices are smart and appropriate for each culture (K.-Y. Ng & Earley, 2006) and are able to interpret unfamiliar behaviors as if they belong to that culture (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). They will not judge others until gathering all related information (K.-Y. Ng & Earley, 2006). Şahin and Gürbüz (2014, p. 399) indicate that "individuals with high CQ know when and how to apply their cultural knowledge, direct their attention and energy toward learning about appropriate responses and function, and exhibit situationally appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors" which lead to an effective performance in culturally diverse settings. Therefore, enriching CQ could lead to increasing the adaptive performance in cross-national assignments (Şahin & Gürbüz, 2014).

2.2 Burnout

Burnout is a negative psychological state of reaction to prolonged job stress (Maslach et al., 2001). It is an outcome of the inability to cope with chronic work stress (SESEN, CETIN, & BASIM, 2011; Singh, Goolsby, & Rhoads, 1994). Burnout appears when there is/are incompatible relationship(s) between an individual's role expectations and their work setting, for a prolonged period of time (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2006; Maslach, 2003). These excessive demands of the job tend to drain the employee's energy, in turn enhancing exhaustion. There are three determinants of burnout, which are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of self-accomplishment (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2006; Maslach, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001). First, emotional exhaustion is the feeling of being psychologically and mentally drained, such that one no longer wants to work (Alarcon, 2011; Angerer, 2003). Second, depersonalization occurs

when employees exhibit a negative attitude toward their work, such as tasks and coworkers, which causes them to develop separation from their work (Angerer, 2003; Lambert, Altheimer, & Hogan, 2010). Third, loss of self-accomplishment reflects a lower level of motivation and loss of self-confidence at work (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2006). Burnout is costly for both employees and organizations (Chen & Kao, 2012). Findings from previous research have shown that burnout negatively affects employee health (Chen & Chen, 2012), job satisfaction (Soler et al., 2008), job performance (Chen & Kao, 2012; Singh et al., 1994; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010), and organizational commitment (Muhammad & Hamdy, 2005; Singh et al., 1994). It potentially leads to sick leave (Soler et al., 2008), absenteeism (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010), and an intention to leave the company (Soler et al., 2008).

2.3 Effect of CQ on Job Burnout: The Job Demands-Resource Perspective

This research proposes that the CQ of cabin crew can help lower job burnout. Theoretically, this contribution of CQ can be supported by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. JD-R model proposes that there are two categorizations of work-related factors which play an important role in the development of job burnout; these are job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands refer to work-related factors which require employees' physical and/or mental efforts to accomplish the job, and therefore are concerned with both physical and mental costs (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004). On the other hand, job resources refer to work-related factors that facilitate employees to lower job demands, lessen the related physical and mental costs, and promote employees' growth and development (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007). Chen and Kao (2012); S. I. Ng, Sambasivan, and Zubaidah (2011) pointed out that burnout tends to happen when employees have insufficient job resources to overcome their job demands. For Thai cabin crew members working for non-Thai national airlines, their duty involves dealing with both foreign passengers and a team of foreign coworkers which can generate high job demands. Cultural differences can create communication barriers, misunderstandings, and conflicts in a relationship (Bolat et al., 2017). The inability to understand and to handle cultural differences will negatively affect cabin crew members' well-being, and finally enhance job burnout (Bolat et al., 2017). Because CQ is a cross-cultural competence which allows individuals to adapt effectively across cultural settings (Earley & Ang, 2003), it helps crew members to be equipped with the necessary capabilities to deal with cultural differences (Soon Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Thus, CQ can be regarded as an essential job resource for the cabin crew to handle cultural differences at work.

Cabin crew members with high CQ not only have good knowledge of other cultures but also value cultural differences (Şahin & Gürbüz, 2014). Their good understanding of foreign cultures provides knowledge about the appropriate behaviors which they should express in each culture, and thus allows them to adapt effectively when dealing with cultural differences (Nguyen, Barrett, & Nguyen, 2004). In addition, cabin crew members with high CQ are highly motivated to interact with foreigners and do not feel discouraged when facing difficulties in cross-cultural interactions (Şahin & Gürbüz, 2014). These abilities facilitate the development of good relationships with foreign passengers and foreign colleagues (Nguyen et al., 2004), thereby reducing the possibility to develop job burnout due to cross-cultural interactions (Bolat et al., 2017). The contribution of CQ to lower job burnout is supported by the study of Suthatorn and Charoensukmongkol (2018) which showed that cabin crew members with high CQ tended to develop less anxiety when working in international flight assignments. It is also consistent with the study of Tay et al. (2008) which found that CQ helped alleviate burnout in international business travelers. Based on all the supporting evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: the CQ of cabin crew members will be negatively associated with job burnout

2.4 The Moderating Effect of Cabin Crews' Job Tenure

This research predicts that cabin crew members with longer job tenure will experience higher levels of job burnout. Longer job tenure is also expected to enhance the negative effect of CQ on the job burnout of cabin crew members. Job tenure reflects the number of years that cabin crew members have worked in an airline. Morgan, Van Haveren, and Pearson (2002) pointed out that the level of job burnout experienced by employees tends to depend on how long they have been exposed to stressors in their career. Comerchero (2008) further argued that employees with long tenure may feel more pressure due to higher responsibilities, which could also lead to the development of job burnout. Particularly for employees whose work involves high levels of job demands, the longer they have been in their career the more likely they are to develop burnout, thus any worker could eventually suffer from job burnout (Bradley, 2007). This circumstance seems to be common for individuals who work as cabin crew, a job that is highly stressful by nature. The longer cabin crew members remain in their job, the higher the chance they will experience a high level of burnout.

Job tenure is not only hypothesized to increase job burnout, but it can also enhance the negative effect of CQ on job burnout. For Thai cabin crew members with a short tenure who have recently started their career

in a non-Thai airline, the propensity to suffer from job burnout caused by cross-cultural encounters when working with foreign coworkers and foreign passengers could still be lower as compared to those who have worked in the career for a longer period. Thus, the role of CQ in reducing job burnout for cabin crew with lower job tenure may be less strong. On the other hand, cabin crew members with longer tenure who have worked with foreign coworkers and foreign passengers in the airline for many years, the prolonged period of cross-cultural encounters may cause them to develop job burnout easily. The role of CQ for this group of cabin crew members is likely to be more important for them to be able to deal effectively with their foreign coworkers and foreign passengers, thereby lessening the chance of job burnout caused by cross-cultural encounters.

Overall, considering the influence of job tenure on job burnout, along with the potential role of job tenure in influencing the effect of CQ on job burnout, the following hypotheses are presented:

Hypothesis 2: Job tenure is positively associated with job burnout

Hypothesis 3: The negative association between CQ and job burnout is moderated by the job tenure of cabin crew members. For cabin crew members with higher job tenure, the negative relationship between CQ and job burnout will be greater than that of cabin crew members with lower job tenure.

3. METHODS

3.1 Sample and Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from Thai cabin crew members working in one of seven non-Thai national airlines using a self-administered questionnaire. The data collection survey was conducted at Suvarnabhumi Airport where Thai crew members must sign in and sign off for their duty. Prior to data collection, a letter was given asking for permission from the airport authority. A convenience sampling method was used in collecting the data. The questionnaires were distributed directly to cabin crew at the airport. A cover letter was attached to each questionnaire, and participation was voluntary. The respondents were informed about the objectives of the study and were ensured that the collected data would be treated confidentially. A postage-paid envelope enclosing the questionnaire and cover letter was handed to each respondent. This allowed them to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. Completed questionnaires were then sent back to the researcher by post. Data collection was conducted from August to October 2018. Of the 1,000 questionnaires distributed, 320 questionnaires were deemed usable for the analysis, yielding a 32 percent response rate. The characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Variables	Descriptive statistics
Gender	Female: 278 (86.88%)
	Male: 42 (13.12%)
Marital status	Single: 266 (83.13%)
	Married: 54 (16.88%)
Education Level	Below Bachelors' degree: 2 (0.63%)
	Bachelors' degree: 266 (83.13%)
	Master's degree: 51 (15.94%)
	Not specified: 1 (0.31%)
Airline class of working	Economy class: 189 (59.06%)
	Business/first class: 128 (40.00%)
	Not specified: 3 (0.94%)
Job tenure (years)	Min: 1
	Max: 26
	Mean: 8.29
	Standard deviation: 6.46

3.2 Measurement

CQ was measured by adopting the scale developed by Soon Ang et al. (2007), which consists of 20 items determining the 4 aspects of CQ: 6 items for cognitive CQ, 4 items for metacognitive CQ, 5 items for motivational CQ, and 5 items for behavioral CQ. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Aggregate scores of CQ were calculated from all four CQ components. An aggregate measure of CQ was used as prior research showed that scores from each of the four CQ components were highly correlated when they were analyzed separately (Soon Ang et al., 2007; K.-Y. Ng & Earley, 2006; Puyod & Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Thomas, 2006). An aggregated measure of CQ was also widely adopted in previous CQ studies (Bolat et al., 2017; Bücker, Furrer, Poutsma, & Buyens, 2014; Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Tay et al., 2008).

Job burnout was measured using the scale developed by Malach-Pines (2005), which consists of 10 items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1=never; 5=always).

The moderating variable which is *job tenure* was measured by the number of years that respondents had worked as cabin crew members in their current airline.

3.3 Control Variables

Certain personal and work characteristics which were considered to have the potential to influence

burnout were incorporated as control variables. These variables included job demands, airline class, job tenure, gender, and the education level of respondents. Job demand was measured using the scale of Karasek et al. (1998), which includes five questions each measured on a five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). Airline class of work, was measured as a dummy variable (first and business class=1; economy class=0). Gender was measured as a dummy variable (male=1; female=0). Education level was measured as an ordinal variable.

3.4 Estimation Method

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS) was used to analyze the data. PLS-SEM is the analytical method that is more effective when handling non-normally distributed data (Garson, 2016). PLS-SEM is the appropriate technique for this study as the results from the Jarque-Bera and robust Jarque-Bera tests showed that the majority of the variables have non-normally distributed data. WarpPLS version 6.0 was used to perform the PLS-SEM analysis.

4. RESULTS

Validity and reliability tests were performed, before estimation of the model. Both convergent and discriminant validity were tested. First, the convergent validity was tested using factor loadings. The result showed that all variables except for one question belonging to job demands had loadings greater than 0.5, which indicates an acceptable level as recommended by Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, and Mena (2012). The question regarding job demands which had a low loading was removed. Discriminant validity was tested by comparing the square of average variance extracted (AVE) with its correlation with any other variables. The result showed that the square root of AVE for each variable is higher than its correlation with other variables, which was satisfactory as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The results are reported in Table 2. Regarding the reliability test, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability were assessed. The results showed that the value of all Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability scores were higher than 0.8, and therefore above the minimum requirement of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). Therefore, the measures in this study had a good level of reliability. The results are presented in Table 2.

In addition, a full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) was performed to ensure that multicollinearity was not a serious problem in the model. A full-VIF greater than 3.3 is a sign of serious multicollinearity (Kock, 2017). However, the result showed that the VIF values of all variables in the model ranged from 1.064 to 1.305, none of which exceeded the maximum threshold.

Table 2: Correlation among variables and square root of average variance extracted

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	Composite Reliability coefficient	CQ	JBO	JD	GEN	STA	JT	EDU	CLS
CQ	.835	.890	(.818)							
JBO	.916	.930	-.339***	(.756)						
JD	.855	.902	.148**	.246***	(.836)					
GEN	n/a	n/a	.045	-.113*	-.136	(1)				
STA	n/a	n/a	.050	-.034	.127	-.108	(1)			
JT	n/a	n/a	-.044	-.061	.054	.167**	.244***	(1)		
EDU	n/a	n/a	.022	.177	.029	-.009	.085	.195***	(1)	
CLS	n/a	n/a	.043	.019	.155*	.017	.219	.364***	.143**	(1)

Notes:
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** < .001
Square roots of average variance extracted of latent variables are shown in the parentheses
CQ = cultural intelligence, JBO = burnout, JD = job demand, GEN = gender dummy variable (male=1; female=0), JT = job tenure,
EDU = education level, CLS = working class (first and business class=1; economy class=0).

The results from the PLS analysis are reported in Figure 1.

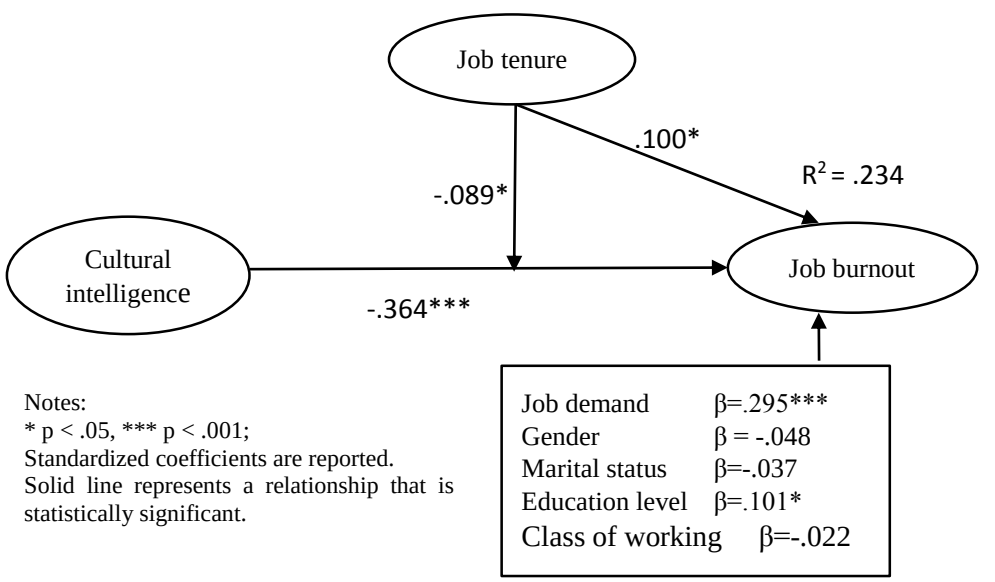

Figure 1

Hypothesis 1 proposed that CQ was negatively associated with job burnout. The results confirmed that there is a significantly negative relationship between these two variables (β=-.364; p<.001). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that job tenure was positively associated with job burnout. The results confirmed that there is a significantly positive relationship between these two variables (β=.100; p=.019). Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that the relationship between CQ and job burnout was negatively moderated by job tenure. The moderating effect was tested by including the interaction between CQ and job tenure in the analysis. The results supported the negative moderation of job tenure (β=-.089, p=.031). This result suggested that the negative relationship between CQ and job burnout was significantly stronger for the Thai crew members with greater tenure than those with less. Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported. Figure 2 presents the results of this moderating effect by showing the regression lines of both high and low tenure groups for comparison. It shows that although CQ was negatively associated with job burnout for both groups, the slope of the high tenure group was steeper than that of the low tenure group, confirming that the negative contribution of CQ to lowering burnout was more important for cabin crew members with longer job tenure than those with fewer years of job tenure.

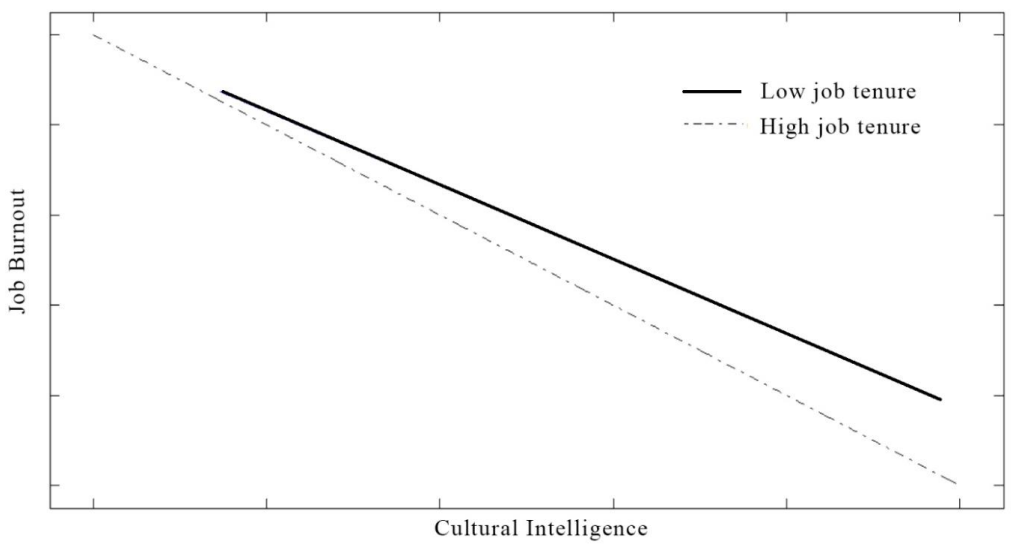

Figure 2

In addition to the relationships of the main hypotheses proposed, the relationships of the control variables were found as follows. Job burnout was positively related to job demands (β=.295; p<.001) and education level (β=.101; p=.018), but negatively related to gender (β=-.048; p=.156), marital status (β=-.037; p=.217) and working class (β=-.022; p=.319). However, only job demands, job tenure, and education level were significantly related to job burnout.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion of Findings

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the CQ of Thai cabin crew members and the level of job burnout that they experience when working with foreign crew members and foreign passengers in non-Thai airlines. Regarding the direct relationship between CQ and job burnout, the results showed that Thai cabin crew members who had high CQ tended to experience lower levels of job burnout. This finding corresponds to previous research which showed that CQ plays an important role in lowering stress and burnout when faced with cross-cultural encounters (Bolat et al., 2017; Bücker et al., 2014; Suthatorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2018; Tay et al., 2008). From a theoretical perspective, the findings from this research are consistent with the JD-R model of job stress which suggests that the propensity to develop stress will be lower if employees have sufficient job resources to handle their job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Because CQ allows cabin crew members to adapt effectively when dealing with people from diverse cultures, it is a job resource that facilitates them to cope with the job demands caused by their cross-cultural encounters while working in the airline (Bolat et al., 2017). In addition, the results showed that Thai cabin crew members with longer job tenure tend to experience higher levels of job burnout. In particular, this finding is consistent with the nature of burnout, in that it takes some time to develop (Comerchero, 2008). This finding is also in line with previous research which showed that employees with greater tenure, exposed to a prolonged period of stressful work are more prone to suffer from job burnout (Comerchero, 2008; Morgan et al., 2002). As cabin crew members who have worked for the airline for a long period of time are generally assigned more responsibilities than new cabin crew members, they could feel more pressure, leading to a greater chance of suffering from burnout, in comparison to new cabin crew members. The prolonged period of prior stress which happens when they must deal frequently with foreign coworkers and foreign passengers is also a possible reason for cabin crew members with longer tenure to be more prone to experience higher

levels of burnout. Apart from the direct relationship between the level of CQ and job burnout, the analysis of the moderating effect also showed that the influence of CQ on job burnout depended on the job tenure of the Thai cabin crew. The results suggest that the effect of CQ on burnout reduction tends to be more crucial for Thai cabin crew members who have worked longer in the non-Thai airline. Given that a prolonged period of working with foreign coworkers and foreign passengers makes cabin crew members who are unable to cope with such situations develop burnout easily, CQ, the competency to deal with such challenges, matters more for this group of cabin crew members in preventing burnout.

This research provides academic contributions as follows. Firstly, the findings from this research offer extra evidence to existing CQ studies which still lack empirical support regarding the benefits of CQ in relation to the psychological wellbeing of individuals in the cabin crew occupation. The finding regarding the effect of CQ on lowering burnout in cabin crew members of non-Thai airlines confirms that CQ significantly matters for individuals whose job requires a high level of cross-cultural interaction in lowering the psychological strain from these encounters. This research also provides additional evidence to prior research by revealing that the job tenure of cabin crew members is also related to greater job burnout. This adds more support to prior research regarding the possibility of work-related characteristics being able to explain the burnout of employees who work as cabin crew. Moreover, the finding regarding the moderating effect of job tenure in influencing the contribution of CQ in lowering burnout, provides new evidence to CQ research by showing that different groups of individuals may benefit from CQ to a different degree. The finding implies that CQ seems to be more important for Thai cabin crew members who work longer in non-Thai airlines, as they tend to encounter foreign team members and foreign passengers more frequently. This finding suggests that some personal or job characteristics of individuals will need to be considered as conditions that might make CQ become more or less relevant for individuals in lowering the stress from cross-cultural interactions.

5.2 Practical Contributions

The findings from this study provide some suggestions for the airline industry. Given that the inability to adjust to the cultural diversity of foreign coworkers and foreign passengers can lead to cabin crew experiencing stress and burnout, it is important for airlines to ensure that their cabin crew have sufficient cross-cultural competence to deal with such challenges. As CQ is a competency that was found in this study to reduce the problem of burnout, it is suggested that airlines may need to provide CQ training to their cabin crew, so that they may use the cultural knowledge and skills

developed in training to facilitate them in dealing effectively with foreign colleagues and passengers. In fact, CQ training is a practice that has been adopted by many multinational companies to enhance the cross-cultural effectiveness of employees (Livermore, 2017). In particular, because the results showed that cabin crew members with longer tenure tend to experience higher levels of burnout, it is necessary that CQ training should be offered to Thai cabin crew members who have worked in non-Thai airlines for a long period of time. This will allow cabin crew members with longer tenure to have sufficient competence to deal effectively with cross-cultural encounters at work and to help them prevent the chance of job burnout which can otherwise easily happen. The benefits of CQ development in the airline industry do not only help cabin crew to reduce their psychological stress in working with a diverse group of foreigners, but also enhances their ability to understand and interact effectively with foreigners. Accordingly, cabin crew members can improve their service performance and this can in turn create a good image for the airline for which they are working.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. Firstly, data were collected from a small sample of Thai cabin crew members from a few non-Thai airlines. This small sample size could limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research will be needed to broaden the scope and size of data collection. Secondly, this study used a self-evaluated questionnaire for data collection, which could be susceptible to a subjective bias. Thirdly, the survey data were collected based on a cross-sectional basis; therefore, the interpretation of the results could be due to association rather than causation. Future research may implement an experimental method to confirm if CQ training can lead to the improvement of the outcome variable. Lastly, there could be some confounding factors that might contribute to burnout in addition to the control variables used in this research. Other conditions that might moderate the contribution of CQ to burnout may need to be explored in future research.

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