

Understanding Stress in Multinational Companies in Thailand

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Received: June 18, 2011 Accepted: August 1, 2011 doi:10.5539/ibr.v4n4p153

The research is financed by Graduate School of Commerce (Sponsoring)

Abstract

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this research. A total of 513 questionnaires were returned. Structural Equation Modeling techniques were used for statistical data analysis. The results of the analysis were used as a guideline to interview six managers. This research reveals: first, positive stress is the key factor for enhance job satisfaction based on the principle that stress should be moderately stimulated while excessive stimulation is likely to cause physical, and mental illnesses. Second, increasing negative stress also significantly leads to physical and psychological illness. Finally, the study shows that those who have high negative stress will have low job satisfaction. The study suggest that “Managing Pressure” training or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) should be organized to search for training programs suitable for the employees or organization should discover the cause of the problems.

Keywords: Positive stress (Eustress), Negative stress (Distress), Job satisfaction, Illness, Management styles

1. Introduction

Stress is happens to anybody, any gender, and any profession career. It is a general phenomenon that can regularly develop in people’s daily life, and it is hard to avoid stress. Stress is a pressure which causes mental uneasiness, mental disturbance and loss of self balance in person and, as a result, also drives a change in people’s behavior. Causes that lead to daily life stress come from fundamental factors essential to earning a life. Causes leading to job stress usually consist of inappropriate work environment such as narrow and congested workplace, poor ventilation system, disturbing noise while working, job overload, unclear or vague job role and responsibilities, poor relationship among colleagues or boss, lots of rules and regulations, lack of career growth opportunity, including the nature of work itself which maybe too risky or tiresome. All of these can give the rising of stress.

For instance, management styles that appears to be effective with Japanese or US. employees but may not appropriate for Thai employees due to difference in their respective cultures. Consequently, this research will explore the difference among Thai, Japanese and US. Senior managers’ perceptions and their Thai middle managers’ perceptions of effective management styles. It is designed to discover what management styles are effective in reducing negative stress and increasing positive stress in order to increasing job satisfaction among Thai middle managers who work for foreign companies.

1.1 Purpose of study

The purpose of the study has two objectives: first, to investigate the effects of job related positive and negative stress on job satisfaction of Thai middle managers led by U.S., Japanese, and Thai senior management; second, to investigate what is different on job satisfaction and illness comparing between the three management styles.

1.2 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: negative occupational stress will be higher among Thai middle managers led by Japanese CEOs compared with Thai middle managers reporting by U.S. CEOs.

Hypothesis 2: Thai middle managers reporting to U.S. CEOs will display better psychological health compared with Thai middle managers reporting to Japanese CEOs.

Hypothesis 3: Thai middle managers reporting to U.S. CEOs will display better physical health compared with Thai middle managers reporting to Japanese CEOs.

Hypothesis 4: Thai middle managers reporting to Japanese CEOs will reveal greater job dissatisfaction than Thai middle managers reporting to U.S. CEOs.

Figure 1: Frame work

2. Review Literatures

2.1 Stress

Selye, the father of stress (1974) divided stress into two stressors as follows:

Negative stress or distress means the individual experiences negative emotions as anxiety or worry perhaps physical effects may follow such as headaches or diarrhea.

Positive stress or eustress pertains to an exciting event stimulating a person to feel glad or happy for example a bride, before the marriage ceremony. She is so stressful but she feels happy.

Negative stress also causes economic and social losses, especially for businesses. These losses come from ineffective work due to sickness which decreases both time at work and profit. Furthermore, people who suffer from negative stress often apply ineffective methods to seek release from stress such as drinking, smoking, taking drugs, and shopping. Some employees have indulged themselves in gambling, and some have committed suicide (Mehri, 2000)

Stress has a positive side called eustress that is less well-known and less frequently used in colloquial language. Eustress or “good stress” refers to a psychological response to a stressor that is interpreted as having positive implications for well-being, according to Selye (1983). Distress and eustress represent distinct constructs and are not at opposite ends of a continuum (i.e., the lack of distress does not indicate the presence of eustress; (Quick et al, 1997).

According to Simmons (2000), positive stress and negative stress cannot be definitely separated. They are mixed together like water in a bathtub. Positive stress is like cold water whereas negative stress is like hot water. When hot and cold water is filled into a bathtub it will be combined and the water temperature will be determined by the quantity of hot and cold water.

Eustress versus Distress

Figure 2: An Expanded Yerkes-Dodson Curve Law

Yerkes-Dodson suggests that eustress results from the intensity and frequency of the stress response. Expanded Yerkes-Dodson law represents eustress as the optimum level of exposure to a stressor (stimulator) for an individual (see Figure 2). According to the law, maximum performance results when individuals who are stressed to this optimum level.

2.2 Job Satisfaction

An employee satisfaction inventory (ESI) was found to be an important tool to measure job satisfaction and employee' health (Koustelios and Bagiatis, 1997)

Psychologist and management consultant Frederick Herzberg developed the two factor theory of motivation. The two factors are hygiene and motivator factors. Herzberg's study comes from a group of 200 accountants and engineers. Herzberg and Synderman (1959) concluded that,

Extrinsic conditions, hygiene factors, namely pay, status, job security, working conditions, fringe benefits, policies and interpersonal relations do not positively influence worker motivation, but enable the worker to avoid dissatisfaction with the work.

Intrinsic conditions, motivator factors, namely feelings of achievement, experiencing meaningful work, opportunities for advancement, recognition, and opportunities to grow, influence the motivation of employees to work hard because they bring satisfaction to the workers.

2.3 US. Management Style

US. management style has been called the International Organization Model. The key objective is to transfer knowledge and expertise to subsidiaries adapted to the cultural environments. The subsidiaries are usually less advanced in technology or market development. While the headquarters gives strategic plans to subsidiaries to coordinate and follow, these plans need to be in alignment with the culture within which subsidiaries exist. For this to happen, it is necessary for the corporate headquarters to learn about the organization culture from employees in the subsidiaries (Christopher et al, 2002).

According to Christopher and Sumantra U.S. Management style provides the channels for a flow of information between the subsidiaries and corporate officers. On the other hand, headquarters also give opportunities for subsidiaries to create new products and strategies for themselves. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: International Organization Model

2.4 Japanese management Style

The Japanese management style has been called a Global Organization Model. Its global strategies are based on a

centralization of assets, resources, and responsibilities in order to achieve economic of scale. The role of subsidiaries is to produce, assemble and sell, but headquarters determines the goals, roles, policies, and procedures with little adaptation from the subsidiaries (Christopher et al, 2002).

Christopher and Sumantra conclude that the overseas subsidiaries depend on the corporate office for resources and directions with tight control. So, Japanese subsidiaries have little independence. (See Figure 4)

Figure 4: Global Organization Model

2.5 Cross culture Management

One of the most widely referenced approaches for analyzing variables among cultures has been done by Greet Hofstede (1980, 1983, and 1984). He surveyed more than 116,000 IBM managers and employees in 40 countries and found they tend to vary on five value dimensions of national culture:

Power distance. The degree of people in a country accepts that power in institutions, organizations, and societies is unequal. It ranges from relatively equal (low power distance) to extremely unequal (high power distance).

Individualism versus Collectivism. Individualism is a cultural attribute with a loose social framework in which people look out for and care mostly themselves.

Masculine versus Feminine. Masculinity pertains to a cultural value in which social gender roles are clearly distinct. Men are expected to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success. Women are expected to be sweet, kind, and motherly.

Uncertainty avoidance. In cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance, people come across as busy, fidgety, emotional, aggressive, and active. In cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance, people give the impression of being quiet, easy-going, and patient.

Long-term versus Short-term. People in cultures with a long-term orientations look to the future and value thrift and persistence. A short-term orientation values the past and present. It emphasizes respect for tradition and tends to seek instant gratification.

These differences have been helpful in explaining and predicting behavior of employees from various countries.(see table 1 below) For example, in terms of Japanese and American and Thais citizens, Americans are socialized to be individualistic. In contrast, Japanese and Thai are indoctrinated with “team play” and to work in groups. American education is to learn to think, analyze and ask questions. Japanese and Thai, on the other hand, tend to prefer to listen, trust, receive orders and work as a team. The Thais tend to be even more passive than the Japanese. The average U.S. employees are more competitive and self -focused than the Japanese employees. Thais employees tend to take less initiative than the Japanese employees. Thais employees want to think for themselves and do not want to blindly follow orders. Japanese and Thai employees prefer not to stand out from the group and want to be rewarded as a group ordinarily. These differences in socialization practices have significantly different results in each country’s employees. (See table 1.)

3. Research Methodology

The multistage sampling was applied to this study. Stage one: the researcher random the companies which will serve this study are large international manufacturing organizations from various industrial segments from the board of investment of Thailand (BOI). Stage two: The companies must manage by US., Japanese and Thai senior managers. All of the participants of the study are at the middle level in the organization and these employees have been employed for at least one year. Stage three: The questionnaires were distributed as proportion sampling in every department in the organization.

This research uses quantitative analysis applying questionnaires as a tool and then follows by qualitative analysis applying in depth interview as data collection together. The objective in using both analysis methods (hybrid experimental analysis) is to obtain results with higher reliability and validity values. Thus, the results of the quantitative analysis were used as a guideline to interview. Interviewees were six middle managers working in different industries, two managers who were reporting to US. senior management, two managers who were reporting to Japanese senior management, and another two managers reporting Thai senior management. All middle managers worked in multinational corporations more than 5 years on average, these six managers expressed very similar ideas. Each interview took about one and a half hour to two hours then analysis and coding to network with qualitative data analysis (Atlas ti).

3.1 Sample

The quantitative data for this study was collected from 900 questionnaires distributed in three multinational companies operating in Thailand in order to receive a minimum sample of 400 valid questionnaires. In actuality, 513

valid questionnaires were returned. (see table 2.)

3.2 Instrument (Table 3: Summary of Variables)

3.3 Validity and Reliability

Because the positive, negative stress and job satisfaction questionnaire were developed in western countries then they were translated into Thai by professional translator, the questionnaire maybe not appropriate for Thai indeed the Thai version must considered adaptability and utility for Thai culture. The accuracy, clarity, and understandable of translation were examined by 5 specialists who are expert in this area. The Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was applied in this study. In the additional, pretest reliability check performed.

The questionnaires will be anonymous and returned directly to the researcher. A pilot test (30 samples) will be administrated to test Cronbach Alpha reliability before the actual collecting of data.

4. Research Finding

For hypothesis testing, ANOVA-test was undertaken which reflects the comparison among all variables of the US., Japanese and Thai management styles suggesting another dimension of view which are sequenced from high to low using a multiple comparison method of Tamhane's T2 because assuming that each group of data is unequal variance.

4.1 Positive Stress

The study's results show that Thai middle managers reporting to Thai senior management experience significantly more positive stress in all four categories (Positive affect, Meaningfulness, Manageability, and Hope) compared to those reporting to U.S. senior management and in three of the four categories, except for hope compared with Japanese senior management. (See figure 5 below) Those reporting to U.S. senior management, except for hope experience more positive stress than Thai middle managers reporting to Japanese senior management, but the difference is not significant.

Figure 5: Positive Stress

4.2 Negative Stress

The study shows in figure 6 below that Thai middle managers reporting to Thai senior management experience slightly less negative stress compared with their counterparts reporting to Japanese and US. senior management although the data is not significant except job alienation. Thais reporting to US. senior management, however, report significantly more anxiety than middle managers reporting to Thai and Japanese senior management.

Figure 6: Negative Stress

4.3 Job Satisfaction

The figure 7 indicates all middle managers are less satisfied with the pay, they receive no matter what senior management they work for. Thai middle managers who working for Japanese senior management report experiencing significantly more job satisfaction with the organization and the possibility of promotion than those reporting to both Thai and US. senior management. Those reporting to Japanese senior managers experience significantly greater possibility of promotion compared with those reporting to Thai senior management. No significant difference exists in job satisfaction overall.

Figure 7: Job Satisfaction

4.4 Illness

The figure 8 below indicates that Thai middle managers reporting to Japanese senior management experience significantly more physical and psychological illness than those reporting to Thai and US. senior management. With those report the employees who report to US. senior management found the least illness.

Figure 8: Illness

4.5 Implementations

A major finding from this research is that Thai middle managers reporting to Thai senior management experience significantly more positive stress in all four categories (Positive affect, Meaningfulness, Manageability, and Hope) than their counterparts in Japanese and US. companies. An employee who is experiencing positive affect on the job feels engaged, enthusiastic, and alert. When an employee experiences meaningfulness at work, he or she appreciates the significance and importance of what he or she doing and sees the work as worth his or her commitment and engagement. Manageability indicates that employees perceive they are in control of what they are doing because they have the information and the tools to be successful in achieving their work goals.

Furthermore, Thai middle managers reporting to Thai senior management report experiencing less negative stress than their counterparts reporting to Japanese and U.S. senior management. The qualitative data suggests that Thai middle managers feel more comfortable reporting to Thai senior management. This finding may indicate that being

from the same culture they know what to expect and they do not need to adapt their behaviors to a foreign culture. Moreover, the language may also be a barrier because the average Thai people are not fluent in English and Japanese.

Thai employees in the Japanese company experience job satisfaction significantly because of good organizational management system and belief in good policies for promotion. Studies by Chiu and Kosinski 1993, 1995; Hofstede, 1980; Redding, 1990 found that people in the Asian culture will not admit that they are feeling stressed or dissatisfied with their job since they have been cultured to be tolerant and to accept life's uncertainties. A similar admission might exist in this study with Thai middle managers unable to confess being dissatisfied in their jobs. The quantitative data indicate they do like Japanese senior management's organization policies and promotion opportunities, but not significant enough that they actually prefer Japanese leaders more than U.S. leaders.

The data indicates that Thai middle managers reporting to U.S. senior management are significantly healthier than those reporting to Japanese and Thai senior management. In the interviews Thai middle managers report that the difference explaining their better health is that they are afforded time and facilities for maintaining good health under US. senior management. The interviewee state that his company has fitness in the same building and sometimes there have yoka or aerobic class for anyone who want to attend.

Thai middle managers who report to Japanese senior management stated that "the Japanese management style is usually work very hard six days a week and a few days off traditionally."

On the other hand, Thai middle managers reporting to US. senior management express "I often go to fitness at my work place, it is fringe benefit. It helps employees feel healthy and reduce cost of medical care"

4.6 Implication of the study

Ting-Toomey (1998) defines Face as "the desired self-image an individual wants to present to others." He states a "Positive Face", "includes one's need to be liked, appreciated and admired;" "Negative Face refers to one's desire to act freely, without constraints or imposition from others." Awareness of others' face needs (both positive and negative) is known as having face concerns. Individuals typically seek to balance their own positive and negative face needs while also attending to the face needs of others. Ting-Toomey's research found differences between individualistic and collectivistic culture's face concerns especially in regard to conflict. Members of individualistic cultures, such as the US., are primarily concerned with negative face. They primarily seek to present themselves as confident, self-assured, and independent. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures' members, such as Japanese and Thais, their primary concern is positive face and they are more likely to present themselves as likeable, cooperative, and interested in building relationships.

High performance of employees is critical to the success of organizations. Too often Japanese Managers rely on punishment to manage poor performance and to correct mistakes because it produces a relative immediate response from Thai employees. This management approach of using punishment tends to result in negative stress caused by fear of further punishment from future mistakes. Worker dissatisfaction is a result. (Swierczed&Onishi, 2003).

Punishment can be defined as "a superior's application of a negative consequence or the removal of a positive consequence following an employee's undesirable behavior with the intention of decreasing the frequency of that behavior" (Trevino et al, 1998). The use of punishment often creates conflicts within the organization, which then leads to loss of trust and loyalty, loss of productivity, dissatisfaction and an increase in stress levels (Challagalla&Shervani, 1996); (Doby&Caplan, 1995).

It is noteworthy, punishment not only creates negative stress in recipients, but also its negative effects spread to other employees who observe the punishment.

A qualitative study demonstrated both recipients and observers of punishment lost respect for the punishers and developed negative attitudes toward the organizations. In observing the punishing to be unfair, the observers felt stressed and worried they would be punished also in the future.

US managers are learning to practice positive reinforcement to shape employee behavior in an effort to improve performance, remove stress and increase job satisfaction. Positive reinforcement is the application of something pleasant following a good or improved performance of a particular task (Robbins & Judge, 2007) For example, a promotion is given to an employee to reward her excellent performance or a bonus is granted to a salesperson for his increased sales. Multiple field and laboratory experiments have shown that the use of positive reinforcement is a most effective behavior modifier (Challagalla & Shervan, 1996);(Appelbaum, Bregman, & Moroz, 1998).

US. managers learn to shape employee behavior by systematically reinforcing each successive step that moves a person closer to the desired behavior because very little reinforcement takes place if managers wait to reward employees only when they show an absolutely perfect response (Robbins & Judge, 2007) For example, it will take a long time for an employee who frequently achieves 90% accuracy to meet his department's target rate of 99% if the manager rewards the employee only when employees finally reaches the target rate. Employees may

never get the reward because he or she may believe the target is unachievable and, hence, he or she experiences negative stress. But, if instead, the manager provides positive reinforcement every time the employee makes an improvement toward the 99% target, thus giving him credit for achieving 92 or 93% accuracy, the employee will experience positive stress, not be discouraged and continue to work harder to achieve his goal.

US managers tend to use positive reinforcement rather than punishment. For example, retailers apply positive awards for reducing employee theft. In the retail industry about 26 billion dollars or 2% of gross industry sales is lost due to employee theft each year. For every one item stolen by shoplifters, eleven are stolen by employees. Fewer US firms use punishment such as threatened dismissal or prosecution. Instead, they use rewards to encourage honest behavior which has proven to be quite effective.

5. Conclusion

In US companies, managers experience work flexibility without strict rules but with a focus on individual performance resulting in the less negative stress while Thai managers' stress is at an intermediate level. Under the flexible US management style, it was discovered from the interviews that rules and regulations cause less deeply felt negative stress. They are clearly established, but not strictly observed. A merit system is adopted for performance appraisals and promotions result irrespective of work length or age. Managers experience a high level of positive stress and as a consequence, the organization's focus is placed on employee's competency in order to steer the organization ahead. This can be witnessed by young managers with high salaries. Managers are thus greatly motivated with a desire to succeed in a shorter time. The organizational vision, mission, and strategy are the administrative principles to be complied by all.

In the Japanese management style the administration is centralized and the management team and specialists (Expatriate Managers) are dispatched from Japan headquarters. Japanese people are hard work, devoted, and committed to the organization. So it may be quite difficult to adjust themselves to the culture of Thai middle managers who place a high priority on relationships. The analysis on the sample group revealed that positive stress is a stimulator that enhances job satisfaction in Thai middle manager at a significant level. The managers in Japanese companies put pressure on Thai managers causing a high level of negative effects on employee's health. Moreover, according to Japanese organizational culture, promotion is done by seniority. Juniors are required to pay respect to seniors in all circumstances e.g. In a conversation (Note 1) or a meeting (Note 2), or when expressing opinions (Note 3).

Consequently, positive and negative stress under Japanese management may be the cause of considerable illness of their Thai reports.

In respect to the Thai group, Thai senior management tends to use acquaintance or personal relationships in dealing with business and forming business alliances, thanks to their mutual trust and close friendship in which they can share interests. This may explain why Thai managers reporting to Thai senior management feel healthier than their counterparts who report to Japanese senior management. However, the quantitative data indicates that they are significantly less healthy than their counterpart report to US. senior management despite experiencing more positive stress. The interview data suggests that the illness may be done to the same cause namely being the recipients of top management dislike or even wrath.

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Notes

Note1. The junior should be a good listener.

Note2. The junior should attend in meeting before the meeting start.

Note3. The senior is dominant in group.

Table 1. Cultural Dimension table

Country	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculine	Uncertainly Avoidance	Long-term Orientation
Japan (Rank)	Moderate (33)	Moderate (22/23)	High (1)	High (7)	Moderate (4)
USA (Rank)	Low (38)	High (1)	High (15)	Low (43)	Low (17)
Thailand (Rank)	Moderate (21/23)	Low (39/41)	Low (44)	Moderate (30)	Moderate (8)

Source: Adapted from G. Hofstede, "Cultural Constraints in Management Theories" Academy of Management Executive, February 1993, p 91.

Table 2. Return questionnaires table

Type of company	Distributed	Return	Response Rate
Japanese Company	300	183	61.3%
U.S. Company	300	163	54.3%
Thai Company	300	166	55.3%
Total	900	513	57.0%

Table 3. Summary of Variables

Survey Construct	Definition	Item Numbers	Source	Number of Indicators
<u>Positive Stress Indicators</u>				
Positive Affect	Positive Affect (PA) the stress made result as positive states	Section 3, Items 1,3,5, 9,10,12,14, 16,17,19	Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; (PANAS)	10
Meaningfulness	The Extent to which a situation makes sense to be emotionally; and worth to investing the energy in worthy of commitment and engagement, and are welcome as a challenges	Section 4, Items 1,3,5, 7	Artinian, 1997; Subscale of Situational Sense of Coherence Scale	4
Manageability	The extent to which one perceives that he or she can manage the balance between work and life	Section 4, Items 2,4,6, 8,9	Artinian, 1997; Situational Sense of Coherence Scale	5
Hope	A cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of goal pathways	Section 5, Items 1,6,8, 14,18,20	Snyder et al., 1996; State Hope Scale	6
<u>Negative Stress Indicators</u>				
Negative Affect	Negative Affect (NA) made result as negative state	Section 3, Items 2,4,6, 7,8,11,13, 15,18,20	Watson et al., 1988 PANAS	10
Job Alienation	One's generalized state of psychological separation from one's job, distance as the job is perceived to lack the potential for satisfying themselves.	Section 6, Items 1-2	Kanungo, 1982	2
Anxiety	Transitory sense of danger and threat of loss (job)	Section 7, Items 1-6	6 of 12 Beck et al., 1987 items from the Anxiety Subscale of CCL	6
<u>Other Variables</u>				
Survey Construct	Definition	Item Numbers	Source	Number of Indicators
Anger/Hostility	Dimension of neuroticism Result to emotional expression	Section 8, Items 3, 5, 9	Derogatis et al., 1970; Sub-scale of Symptom of Distress Checklist (SCL)	3
Job Satisfaction	An attitude that individuals have about their jobs. It results from their perception	Section 9, Item 1-15	Satisfaction Inventory(1997)	15
Physical Health	The physical appearance symptoms	Section 2, Item 1-10	Department of Mental Health	10
SPST 20 (1995) Psychological Health	The mental appearance symptoms	Section 2, Item 11-20	Department of Mental Health	10
SPST 20 (1995)				
Total number of Questions				81

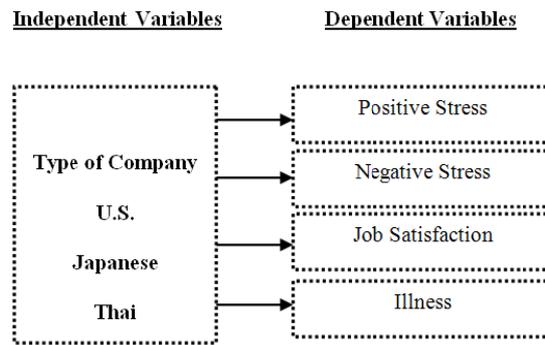
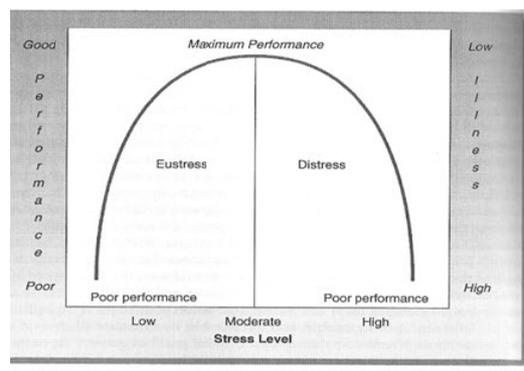


Figure 1. Frame Work



Source: adapted from Quick et al., 1997

Figure 2. An Expanded Yerkes-Dodson Curve Law



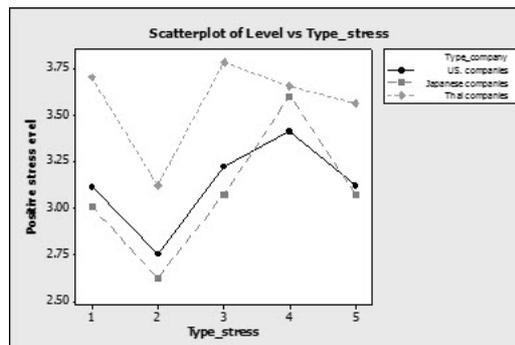
Source: Christopher, B., Sumantra, G. "Managing across borders", 2003

Figure 3. International Organization Model



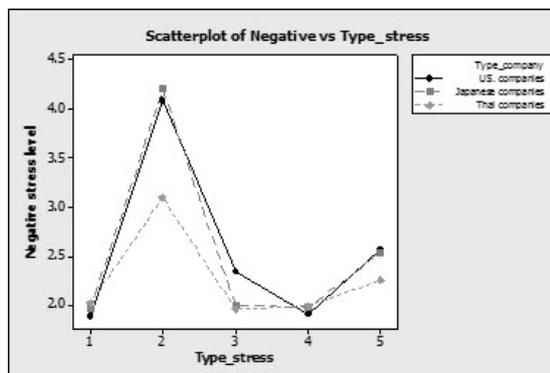
Source: Christopher, B., Sumantra, G. “Managing across borders”, 2003

Figure 4. Global Organization Model



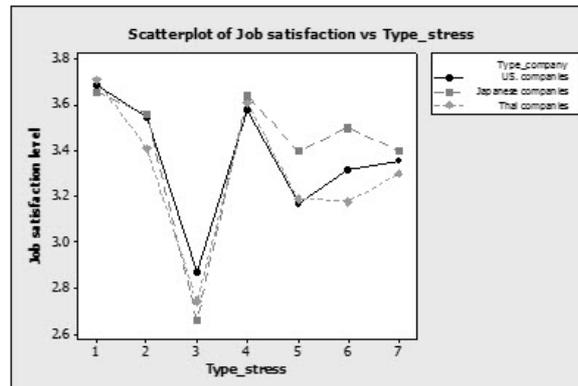
1=Positive Affect* 2=Meaningfulness* 3=Manageability* 4=Hope* 5=Average positive stress
 * means significant at the level of 0.05

Figure 5. Positive Stress

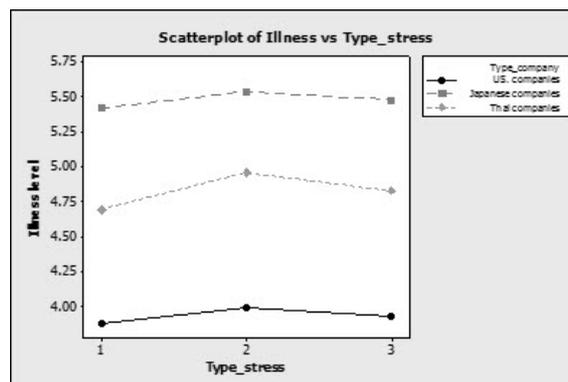


1=Negative Affect 2=Job Alienation* 3=Anxiety 4=Anger 5=Average negative stress
 * means significant at the level of 0.05

Figure 6. Negative Stress



1=Work condition 2=Manager 3=Pay 4=Job itself 5=Organization
 6=Promotion* 7=Average job satisfaction
 * means significant at the level of 0.05
 Figure 7. Job Satisfaction



1=Physical illness* 2=Psychological illness* 3=Average illness*
 * means significant at the level of 0.05
 Figure 8. Illness