

Examining Job Characteristics Model in an Oriental Culture

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Abstract

Survival in today's competitive marketplace requires constant attentions to acquiring, motivating and satisfying professional employees, as they are the cornerstone of customer satisfaction and loyalty. The proliferation of educational institutions in all areas of learning has made the education and training sector of the economy profitable and highly competitive. The success of these centers of learning depends to a large extent on the knowledge, experience and professionalism of their teaching staff. This study examines the relationship between job characteristics model, satisfaction and internal motivation, using the moderating role of growth need strength on teachers of English Language Institutes in Mashhad, a large city in the northeast of Iran. A questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of English language teachers working at English language Institutes. Statistical tests were performed on a total of 128 useable questionnaires. The findings suggest that critical psychological state variables have mediating role in personal/work outcomes (satisfaction, motivation) and core job dimensions relationships with the moderating role of growth need strength. While growth need strength has a direct impact on critical psychological states and core job dimensions, it has an opposite effect on personal/work outcomes and critical psychological states.

Keywords: General Satisfaction, Internal Motivation, Core Job Characteristics, Critical Psychological States, Growth Need Strength.

Introduction

In today's hypercompetitive marketplace, organizations make relentless efforts to discover new ways to maximize their efficiency and performance. One of the key effects of globalization, technological progress and competitive forces in a knowledge economy has been to recognize the key roles that employees play in confronting challenges and improving organizational performance. Over the past half a century numerous scholars and practitioners have found a direct relationship between employee's motivation and satisfaction level and performance (Herzberg, 1961, Vroom, 1963, McClelland, 1961, Porter and Lawler, 1969). Further, personal satisfaction is believed to be the basic requirements for employees' desire to actively participate in organization activities, improve efficiency and make commitment to colleagues and organization. Another key research finding in organizational studies has been the role of job enrichment, i.e. expanding the scope of employees' task and activities, on improved performance and employee's motivation and satisfaction. The theoretical basis for job enrichment is essentially based on Hackman and Oldham job Characteristics Model (JCM hereinafter). This model, as suggested by Behson, (2010) is one of the most influential theories in the field of

organizational behavior and has been the main base of research studies since it was proposed in 1970's. However, as Abu Elanain (2009) who investigated job characteristics in the Western environment acknowledged, since the previous studies about JCM was mainly in western countries, more empirical evidence to understand the importance of this model and its results in non-western countries is needed. This research aims to examine this theory framework in an oriental culture.

Study background

As the result of unprecedented increase in the number of public and private higher educational institutions in Iran over the last several years, it is now quite feasible that any person, young or old, male or female, high or low academic achiever with at least high school diploma, obtains a college degree. In addition, the new policy adopted by Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology to increase the number of postgraduates, particularly at doctorate level, has given hope to many recent graduates and working men and women that it is now possible to obtain a higher degree and hence improve their employability and career advancement. However, there is a catch in both cases: passing grueling entrance exams. One of the key subject matters in written phase of these exams and if passed, in interview phase, is English language. It is believed that an application with competency in English language has a clear edge to succeed in exams compared to less competent applicants. As the result of importance placed upon English language competencies, English language Centers or institutes have proliferated throughout the country, each with varying degree of quality and professionalism. It is clear that teachers of any educational institution, including language centers, play a key role in quality of services provided, learners' satisfaction and organizational performance. Thus, to hire and keep the best teachers is crucial for the success of these educational establishments. To achieve this, management should know what motivates their teachers, how tasks should be organized and managed and what work conditions are motivating or de-motivating. It must be highlighted here that these teachers differ from school teachers and academics in that they are almost invariably part-time, low paid and are not protected by employment laws. The purpose of this study is to use job characteristics model and provides empirical evidence on key aspects of the relationship between model variables.

JCM

One significant approach to job design as a way to altering jobs to increase both the quality of employees' work experience and their productivity (Daft, et al., 2009. p. 421). JCM was developed after the design of hundreds of jobs which can be used by individual managers or members of a team to improve employees' motivation, performance, and job satisfaction, and to reduce absenteeism and job turnover. These studies also support the idea that the use of this model increases performance by meeting employees' needs to grow and develop on the job. Although JCM is the most widely cited model in the work design literature, there is a number of branches of theoretical work that put this model under scrutiny. Early influential work that precedes the JCM includes Socio-technical Systems Theory, the Two Factor Theory, and the notion of job enrichment. The evidence has generally been consistent with a positive correlation between the core job characteristics and critical psychological states as predicted by the Hackman and Oldham model. JCM proposes the relationship between three classes of variables: core job dimensions, critical psychological states and personal and work outcomes. According to Lee-Ross (1998), JCM deals with "internal work motivation", whereby the presence of certain job attributes motivates workers. In a research done by Moideenkutty and his colleagues (2006), it is explicitly stated that in some jobs, when employees are given more autonomy, job performance increases. However, as Morgeson and his colleagues (2006) found, several relevant aspects of the job characteristics related to job performance have not been well studied. Despite this, what is important is that the job characteristics are an important reference in determining job performance (Organ, et al., 2006).

Core Job Dimensions

The core job dimensions include variety, identity, significance, autonomy and job feedback (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). However, there are two alternative specifications of the model, depending on whether or not significance is included. Significance was not initially present in Turner and Lawrence's (1965) seminal work on the model or in Hackman and Lawler's (1971) early formulation. More recently, however, significance has been included in Hackman and Oldham's work (1976, 1980). However, significance continues to be excluded by Stone and Porter (1975, 1979).

In this study, we have evaluated five dimensions suggested by Hackman and Oldham to determine a job's motivational potential. The first dimension is skill variety which is defined as the number of diverse activities that compose a job and the number of skill used to perform it. The second is task identity which is the degree to which an employee performs a total job with a recognizable beginning and ending. The third is task significance, the degree to which the job is perceived as important and having impact on the organization or consumers. Autonomy is another aspect of core job dimensions and is the degree to which the worker has freedom, discretion, and self-determination in planning and carrying out tasks. Feedback is the last aspect of core job dimensions which is the extent to which doing the job provides information back to the employee about his or her performance. These variables will give an opportunity to enhance one's activities in the core job dimensions. Expected effects on the workers are higher intrinsic motivation, better performance, greater work satisfaction, little absenteeism, and lower employees' turnover (Johari, et al. 2009).

Critical Psychological State

Critical psychological states refer to the experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, and the knowledge of work results. Boonzaier, Ficker and Rust (2001), like Hackman and Oldham, have considered experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of the results as critical psychological states variables in their research. Likewise, Hackman and Lawler (1971) and Rungtusanatham and Anderson (1996) identified three "critical psychological states" that a job should enhance, if it is to be internally motivating. They are the experienced meaningfulness of the work, the experienced responsibility for work outcomes, and the knowledge of results Tolman and Maiers (1991). Meaningfulness of work is a degree, to which a person experiences work in general as meaningful, valuable, worthwhile (Salvendy, 2012). Employees need to have knowledge of the results of their work so as to feel good or unhappy about the results. They must feel responsible for these results believing that they personally are accountable for work outcomes. They do not perceive the quality of their work as dependent on factors external to their performance. Hackman and Oldham (1976) stated that these intervening variables are 'the causal core of the model'. Experienced meaningfulness of the work is enhanced primarily by skill variety, task identity and task significance. Experienced responsibility for work outcomes is linked to the presence of autonomy in a job, and knowledge of results is increased, when a job elicits a high level of job feedback, agent feedback and dealing with others. Thus, our first hypothesis is:
H1. There is a significant and positive relationship between core job dimensions and critical psychological states.

H1a. There is a significant and positive relationship among skill variety, task identity, job significance and the experienced meaningfulness of work.

H1b. There is a significant and positive relationship between autonomy and experienced responsibility.

H1c. There is a significant and positive relationship between Job feedback and knowledge of the results.

Personal Work/Outcomes

Personal Work/Outcomes refer to the personal, affective reactions or feelings a person obtains from performing a job which includes internal work motivation and general satisfaction. Internal work motivation refers to the degree to which the employee is self-motivated to perform effectively on the job and general satisfaction refers to the overall measure of the degree to which the employee is satisfied and happy with the job (Brown and Lent, 2005). (Hashemi et al. (2012) considered actors that affect job satisfaction including policies and procedures as related to the nature of reward and decision making, the core job dimensions and personal aspects such as self-knowledge and ability to deal with stress and general satisfaction. The impact of the five core job dimensions on the psychological state of experienced meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of actual results leads to the high work motivation and performance and low absenteeism and turnover. Research carried out by Mohamed (2004) has shown that there is a positive meaningful relationship between core job dimensions and personal/work outcomes. Our next two hypotheses are:

H2. Psychological states have a mediating role between the core job dimensions and personal/work outcomes.

H3. In the presence of all three psychological states variables, personal/work outcomes maximize.

Growth-Need Strength

Growth-need strength (GNS hereinafter) is the extent to which a person needs personal growth and development. Positive outcomes are expected when people high in growth need strength are in jobs designed to be high in core job dimensions. However, low growth need strength individuals respond poorly to enriched job. GNS as a moderator influences the above relationships and is conceptualized as the propensity of someone responding favorably (or not) to undertaking jobs which are challenging and offer a chance to learn and grow. Other studies using Hackman and Oldham's construct as a basis, report that additional variables such as work context (Ferris and Gilmore, 1984), work and locus of control (Lim and Tao, 1998), affinity for informal group formation (Lee-Ross, 1999) are also important moderators (Darren Lee-Ross, 2005). In addition, other investigations have sought alternative moderator variables with mixed results. Such variables included: (a) the finding of Turner and Lawrence (1965) that location of work place (city vs. town) moderated job characteristic satisfaction relationships (positive in towns, negative in cities), (b) Hulin and Blood's (1968) notions of alienation from middle class norms, (c) Robey's (1974) experiment using intrinsic and extrinsic values with a moderating effect, (d) Stone's (1976) use of the Protestant Work Ethic Scale in which no moderator effect was found, (e) Wanous' (1974) comparison of the city/town, Protestant Work Ethic, and growth need strength variables in which he found the strongest moderating effect for the latter Variable and (f) Steers and Spencer's (1977) use of a measure of need for achievement (Steers and Braunstein, 1976) in which some moderator effects were uncovered. Thus our last two hypotheses are:

H4. GNS has a moderating role in the relationship between the core job dimensions and critical psychological states.

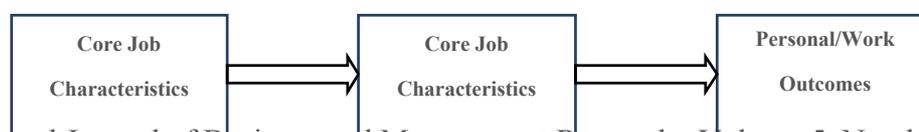
H4a. GNS has a moderating role in the relationship between skill variety, task identity, task significance and meaningfulness of work.

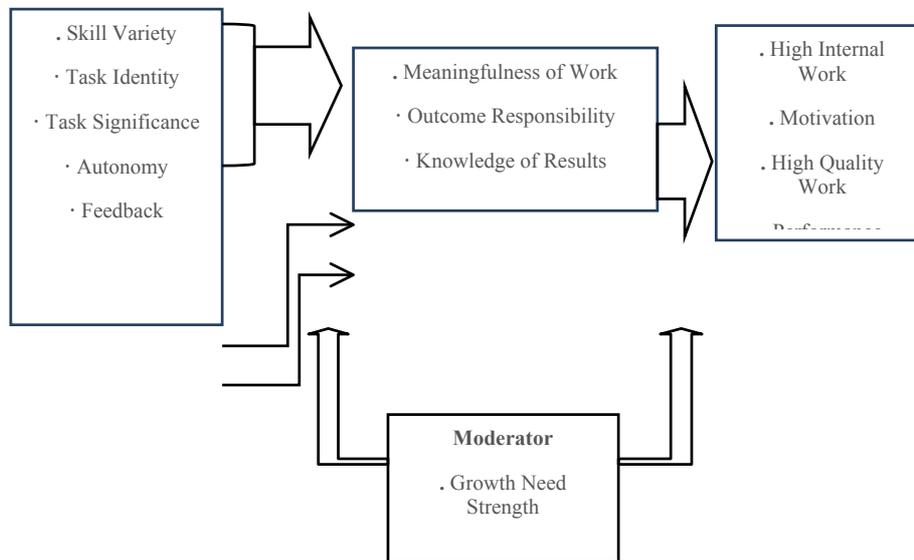
H4b. GNS has a moderating role in the relationship between autonomy and experienced responsibility.

H4c. GNS has a moderating role in the relationship between feedback and knowledge of results.

H5. GNS has a moderating role in the relationship between critical psychological states and personal/work outcomes.

Figure 1 shows the research conceptual model, as suggested by Hackman and Oldham (1980)





Methodology

The main purpose of the research is to investigate the relationship between job characteristics model, satisfaction and internal motivation, using the moderating role of growth need strength on teachers of English Language Institutes in Mashhad. To assess and evaluate the relationship between job characteristics model, satisfaction and internal motivation teachers of English Language Institutes in Mashhad, a large city in the northeast of Iran, were chosen. Data for the research were collected through a questionnaire adopted by Lawrence (2001). We verified its validity using confirmatory factor analysis and reliability in a pilot study ($\alpha = 0.7$). In order to estimate the sample size, a prototype of the target population i.e. English language teachers working in language centers, including 30 teachers completed the questionnaire. The Cochran formula using the standard deviation obtained from the responses (0.25) yielded 128 as the research sample size. A total 150 questionnaires was distributed among the target population of which 128 useable questionnaires were used for further analysis. During the actual study, the questionnaires were distributed at various English Institute in Mashhad. Various tests were performed to analyze the data.

Findings

Descriptive statistics revealed that on average the respondents' age were 27.3 with the work experience of 5.1 years, suggesting that relatively young and less experienced teachers work in the language institutes. Further, two-third of respondents had a bachelor degree and the other one-third had completed a master degree, which highlights the fact that well-educated employees are attracted to the sector.

To assess the significant relationship between the variables, Chi-square tests were performed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary Results of Chi-square tests

Relationship/results	Alpha	Sig.	Test
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			results
Core job dimensions-critical psychological states	0.05	0.046	accepted
Variety-identity-significance-meaningfulness	0.05	0.039	accepted
Autonomy-responsibility	0.05	0.018	accepted
Feedback-knowledge of results	0.05	0	accepted
Critical psychological states-personal/work outcomes	0.05	0	accepted

As table 1 indicates, there is a significant relationship between core job dimensions and critical psychological states and between psychological states and personal/work outcomes. The intensity of the relationship between psychological states and personal/work outcomes was assessed by Gamma statistics. Further analysis of data revealed that the relationship between these two variables is extremely high in intensity at about 0.891. Therefore, the most important findings of research is that at the presence of all three psychological states variables, the personal/work outcomes maximizes. To examine the mediating role of psychological states between core job dimensions and personal/work outcomes, linear regression of critical psychological states was fitted to core job dimensions, the fixed value and SD were 3.57 and 0.235 respectively. Then the linear regression of personal/work outcomes was fitted to that of critical psychological states and core job dimensions, and values for critical psychological states, using the Sobel test, was 0.45 with standard deviation of 0.08. These findings uphold the mediating role of psychological states in the model. Moreover, to examine the moderating role of growth need strength variable in the model, the relationship between the two variables have been calculated with and without the presence of moderating variable, using a Gamma test. Again, as shown in Table 2, the moderating role of GNS is confirmed.

Table 2. Summary of gamma test

Results/relationship with the moderating	Without moderating variable	With moderating variable	Test	moderating
Core job dimensions-critical psychological states	0.406	0.581	accepted	direct
Variety-identity-significance-meaningfulness	0.39	0.93	accepted	direct
Autonomy-responsibility	0.067	0.74	accepted	direct
Feedback-knowledge of result	0.232	0.533	accepted	direct
critical psychological states-personal/work outcomes	0.891	0.625	accepted	indirect

The results from the analysis are presented in Table 2; the significant difference of Gamma Test with and without the presence of moderating variable is given so that the least difference in the table is that of core job dimensions. The value of critical psychological states in the presence and absence of growth need strength is about 0.175, Which has a direct influence on the model, it means with the presence of growth need variable the relationship between the variables are stronger. On the other hand, the greatest difference in the table 2 was that of autonomy and meaningfulness of work at about 0.673 which has a direct influence, indicating the strong moderating role of growth need strength. Interestingly, the moderating role of growth need strength was negative between critical psychological states and personal/work outcomes at about -0.266. Finally we can conclude that the moderating role of growth need strength has been confirmed. In fact, those teachers with a high core job dimensions of variety, identity and significance, have a higher growth need strength and higher satisfaction and

higher internal motivation respectively. Nevertheless, those teachers with higher critical psychological states and higher growth need strength have a lower satisfaction and lower internal motivation.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to assess the relationship between core job dimensions, critical psychological states and growth need strength with satisfaction and internal motivation among Mashhad English institutes' teachers. The findings of this study suggest that there is a positive and significant relationship between core job dimensions and critical psychological states which confirm the results of other research such as Lee-Ross, 1998; Boonzaier et al., 2001; Liye, 2009. Further, this study corroborates the earlier findings of Lee-Ross (2005), Walsh and Taber (1980), and Wall et.al, (1978) about the significant relationship between psychological states variables. The moderating role of GNS in the model was in line with the findings of Evans et.al (1979), Streat and Braman (2000) and Rungtusanana and Anderson (1996). The analysis also shows that GNS has an indirect role between critical psychological states and personal/work outcomes. In case of high critical psychological states among teachers with high growth need strength, satisfaction and internal motivation will be low, which is incompatible with other researches findings. Teachers with high responsibility in their job and high growth need strength have lower internal motivation perhaps because we are dealing with very young (average age 27.3), inexperienced (average experience year 5.1) teachers. As these findings are derived from a specific organizational context, it is difficult to generalize it to other contexts, thus needs further investigations. Furthermore, these findings support the idea raised in other research that teachers with high task variety, identity and significance with high growth need strength feel higher responsibility towards their job compare to those who have lower growth need strength. In fact, it is noteworthy that based on the findings of this study, growth need strength has a considerable influence on the severity and weakness of the relationships of task variety, identity, and significance with meaningfulness of the work. Therefore, we can increase the meaningfulness of the work among teachers by enhancing this factor through understanding the individual characteristics of teachers and recognizing each teachers' challenge tolerance by evaluating the level in which they respond positively to a challenging task which in turns leads to higher satisfaction and higher internal motivation. Likewise if growth need strength accompanies with experienced responsibility for work outcomes, teachers' satisfaction and internal motivation will decrease.

This study is subject to common restrictions. While limiting the statistical sample to a specific organization could give profound data, generalizing the results will be troublesome. Further, this study has been restricted to teachers of a specific major (English) of a specific educational environment of a specific city so different characteristics of other environments have not been included. Finally, despite much theoretical evidence in support of H5 hypothesis – the moderating role of growth need strength-its indirect relationship has been proven in this study due to transient conditions of the learning environment. Thus, further research is needed to re-examine the moderating role of growth need strength in the model in other research settings.

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