The Relationship Between Job Characteristics and Employee Performance: A Review

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ABSTRACT
The paper sought to review extant literature along its conceptualization regarding relationships between job characteristics and employee performance. It further highlights on the intervening role of employee wellbeing (health) and job satisfaction while assessing the moderating influences of employee growth need strength and employee competencies (individual knowledge and skills). Three theories inform conceptualization of the construct as Job Characteristics Model (JCM), Job Design Control and Support (JDCS) and Vitamin Theory/Model (VM). Theoretical and empirical literature reviewed has showed striking consistent findings on cause effect relationship between job characteristics and employee performance though not sufficiently backed by adequate empirical research. Results from empirical studies on these constructs are contradictory and therefore the need for further research to synchronize the divergent view. The paper has further laid bare knowledge gaps as there is no known empirical study that sought to investigate the mediating role of job satisfaction and employee wellbeing and the moderating effect of employee competence (individual knowledge and skills) on the above relationship. Most studies use less adequate measures of employee performance and it would be concluded that there is no consensus on measurement of the construct hence the need to further continue searching for a common standpoint. The collective effects of the core job characteristics on affective responses (satisfaction and motivation) have been largely supported, but those for behavior (i.e. work performance, turnover and absence) less consistently. There is limited research on the influence of job characteristics on employee performance and hence the compelling need to document literature on these relationships in various contextual backgrounds. The purpose of this review is therefore to lay bare gaps in knowledge and propose a model that can be used to guide future empirical research on the relationship between job characteristics and employee performance.

Keywords: Job characteristics, Employee wellbeing, Job satisfaction, Employee growth need strength, Employee competencies and Employee Performance

INTRODUCTION
In the past two decades, few topics in the field of organizational psychology and behavior have attracted as much research as work design (Oldham 1996). The design of work has an enormous impact on organizational success and individual well-being (Morgeson and Campion 2003). Work design has great practical significance to organizations as they try to attain such diverse outcomes as efficiency and satisfaction. Also, a major part of every manager’s job involves the design of employees’ work. The majority of research under the auspices of work design has centered on the model developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976). This has had a curiously narrowing effect (Morgeson and Campion 2003). Some topics have been investigated in great detail (e.g., the five-factor structure of the JDS model) whereas other topics have been all but neglected especially on the direct relationship between job characteristics.

In today’s turbulent business environment characterized with new technology, workforce age diversity and globalization, job design has become a critical study area towards employees’ performance
There is growing evidence that current trends in employment conditions may be eroding levels of job satisfaction. New work environment, working practices and rapid technological advances are changing the nature of many jobs. If employees can adapt mental or physical to their work environment, they will deliver the high performance to organizations, or else employees will not meet the standard performance, organizational goals hence a declined satisfaction and motivation on their work. Work practices are becoming more automated and inflexible, leaving employees with less and less control over their workload.

Many organizations are reducing their permanent workforce and are converting to a culture of short term contracts or out-sourcing, thereby increasing feelings of job insecurity (Faragher et al., 2005; Shannon et al., 2001). Ill-health and sickness absence due to stressors in the work environment are therefore a serious and increasing problem in contemporary working life (Puosette and Hanse, 2002). The concept of a healthy workplace has garnered increased interest in the last few years in scientific literature (Shannon et al., 2001). In this paper it is proposed that a well – defined job would enhance employees health and satisfaction and lead to good employee performance. Thus for both academicians and practitioners, job design takes on special importance in today’s human resource management. Of great concern is the high turn - over of employees in management level due to work stress from many firms to reflect that employee satisfaction in working for a given organization is wanting.

The critical concern of this paper is that there is a big gap between professional training and how jobs are designed i.e. do we have professionals in the firms designing tasks in line with the jobs professional requirements, are the employed employees the right people qualified to handle their given responsibilities and is employee wellbeing (health, social life career advancement etc) compromised in the working process resulting to employee job stress and burn-outs. Tasks should thus be designed with the employee in mind so that job stress and employee turnover are well managed, enhance employee satisfaction and motivation and enable organizations to effectively compete in the global market place (Kelloway and Barling, 1991). In the development of theory on work and health, psychological literature has focused on the psychological effects that certain job characteristics have on mental well-being (especially job dissatisfaction, job strain and burnout) and the possible interventions to counteract these negative outcomes.

This paper is underpinned by three theories to describe the various job characteristics which relates to employee performance. First is the Hackman and Oldham model (1976), which describe that five job characteristic (variety, identity, significance, autonomy and feedback) influence three key psychological states; experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work and knowledge of the results of the work activities. Second is Karasek's job demand control & support model (JDCS model), also known as the job strain model (De Croon, et al., 2000) which assumes that job strain especially results from the combination of high job demands, low decision latitude and low social support (Warren et al., 2002) and some job characteristics have a positive effect on mental health while other job characteristics have beyond a certain point negative effects (De Jonge et al., 1998). JDCS relates five job characteristics to have a direct relationship with work outcomes. Lastly is the vitamin model (Warr, 1987) which holds that, mental health/well-being (especially job dissatisfaction, job strain and burnout) is affected by environmental psychological features such as job characteristics in a way that is analogous to the non-linear effects that vitamins are supposed to have on our physical health. It relates nine job characteristics that relate differently with mental health outcomes according to the type of `vitamin' they represent.

1.2 Objective of the Paper

To review pertinent literature on the relationship between job characteristics and employee performance and identify other factors that may mediate and/or moderate the said relationship and also propose a framework of the emerging relationships.

JOB CHARACTERISTICS

Job characteristics being one of the job design approaches, this chapter starts with an overview of both empirical and theoretical studies on job design then it narrows to the review of the job characteristics
models; Job Characteristics Model (JCM), Job Demand Control and Support Model (JDCS) and Vitamin Model (VM) as discussed in literature.

2.2 Overview of Job Design
Since, the pioneering research of Turner and Lawrence (1964), Hulin and Blood (1968), and Hackman and Lawler (1971), research in the area of job design has mushroomed. For the most part, these research efforts have focused on one or more of the following points: employee perceptions of their tasks, relationships among these perceptions and organizationally relevant outcome variables, or possible mediating variables between employee task perceptions and the outcome variables. This formulation of task design interrelationships is perhaps best represented by the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980). One particular aspect of the formulation that warrants critical attention is the predicted relationship between perceived task scope and employee performance. The rationale for such a relationship has been well argued by Richard Hackman and his associates. A paper by Hackman and Lawler (1971) laid the foundation by developing a task design framework from expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). This initial framework, which suggested that employees work harder to the extent that their individual needs and organizational goals are congruent, was more clearly explicated in 1976 by Hackman and Oldham. In their job characteristics theory, they stated that all outcome variables, including quality of work performance, “are expected to be more positive for jobs with high motivating potential” i.e., tasks with high scope.

This assertion is also found in Hackman (1977). The most recent presentation of the job characteristics model (Hackman and Oldham, 1980) also includes performance or work effectiveness as a specific outcome variable. Work effectiveness, in turn, consists of both quality and quantity of output. The rationale for assuming a quality relationship is that “when a job is high in motivating potential, people who work on that job tend to experience positive affect when they perform well”. The quantity prediction is based on three factors: (1) high-scope tasks are generally not routine and boring; hence, employees are not as likely to search for ways of avoiding work, (2) as a result of task changes aimed at increasing scope, hidden inefficiencies in the work system may be corrected, and (3) such changes may simplify and refine the total work system. Hence, the theoretical and conceptual arguments for predicting a task scope/employee performance relationship would seem to be both reasonable and logical.

2.3 The Theory of Job/Work Design
Work design theories draw heavily from motivational theories in organizational psychology. The thinking underpinning contemporary approaches to work design can be traced back to views that emerged in the United Kingdom around the time of the Industrial Revolution (Parker, Wall & Corderly, 2001). Adam Smith promoted the division of labour, or the breaking down of complex jobs into simpler jobs, as a way of enhancing performance. With respect to the design of individual jobs, the first major theory was that of Herzberg and colleagues (Parker et al. 2001). Their Two-factor Theory was superseded by Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model (1976). This identifies five ‘core job characteristics’: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. The five core job characteristics are specified as determinants of three ‘critical psychological states’: skill variety, task identity and task significance together contributing to ‘experienced meaningfulness’; autonomy to ‘experienced responsibility’; and feedback to ‘knowledge of results’. In turn, the critical psychological states are cast collectively as promoting work satisfaction, internal work motivation, performance and reduced absence and employee turnover.

The model assumes that autonomy and feedback are more important than the other work characteristics. It was hypothesized that there are three moderators of the job characteristics - critical psychological states outcomes relationship. The most commonly examined moderator has been growth need strength (GNS). It was suggested that individuals high in GNS (i.e. desire for challenge and personal development) will respond positively to enriched jobs than others. The two other moderators (individual knowledge and skill and context satisfaction) have been much less frequently studied. More than 200 studies conducted on job characteristics that are determinants of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes are the result of more than two decades of empirical research inspired by the JCM (Ambrose and Kulik 1999). Based on these researches, two main conclusions are proposed by Parker et al. (2001). First, the collective effects of the core job
characteristics on affective responses (satisfaction and motivation) have been largely supported, but those for behavior (i.e. work performance, turnover and absence) less consistently. Second, the more particular features of the model remain unproven. For example, the specified links between the job characteristics and the critical psychological states have not been confirmed as an open area to research. The JCM thinking remains the most common approach to work design research today. A challenge to the job characteristics approach came in the form of the social information processing perspective (Parker et al. 2001). Noting that employees’ perceptions of their work would be the most direct determinants of their attitudes and behavior, this approach suggested that perceptions arise much from social factors as from objective work characteristics, making how people see their work the focus rather than the design of work itself. Research has supported the idea that social influences affect perceptions of jobs, but suggests that these effects are weaker than those of objective job features (Parker et al. 2001). Basically there are four techniques used in the designing of jobs. These include: Job simplification where jobs are divided into smaller components and subsequently assigned to workers as whole jobs), Job enlargement where many tasks and duties are aggregated and assigned to a single job, Job enrichment which means making the job rich in its contents so that an employee will get more satisfaction while performing that job. It upgrades the responsibility, scope and challenge and lastly is Job rotation which implies systematic movement of employees from one job to the other for some hours / days / months. Job remains unchanged but employees performing them shift from one job to the other (Sharonet al, 1998).

2.4 Job Characteristics Models
Job characteristics refer to a set of environmental variables that are widely thought to be important causes of employee job affection and behavior (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). They are aspects specific to a job, such as knowledge and skills, mental and physical demands, and working conditions that can be recognized, defined, and assessed that are important causes of employee health. This paper will review three models critically to analyze the various job characteristics as follows;

2.4.1 Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model
The job characteristics model was originally developed by Turner and Lawrence and has been revised by Hackman and Lawler. The final version of the job characteristics model as used in many theoretical reviews have been done by Hackman and Oldham, 1976. They summarized the job characteristics into five core dimensions; Skill variety: the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, which involve the use of a number of different skills and talents of the person. How many different skills and talents does the job require of a person? Are they asked to do a lot of different things, or is it a monotonous, repetitive job? Task identity: the degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work; that is, doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome. Is there a clearly defined beginning, middle and end to a given task? Does a worker know what he or she is supposed to do, and when he or she is successfully completed the task? Task significance: the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, whether in the immediate organization or in the external environment. Does the job have “a substantial impact?” Will it matter to people, either within the organization or to society? Is this job/given task meaningful?

Autonomy: the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the worker in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out. How much freedom does an individual have to accomplish his or her tasks? This freedom includes the ability to schedule work as well as figuring out how to get the tasks done. Feedback: the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance (Sims et al., 1976; Fried and Ferris, 1987; Pounder, 1999; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Hogan and Martell, 1987). For example the job of an electrician who assembles iPods and then tests them to see whether they operate properly has a high feedback. The causal core of the job characteristics model is the psychological states necessary for the existence of positive work outcomes.

The three job characteristics of skill variety, task identity, and task significance are hypothesized to combine additively to determine the psychological meaningfulness of the job. The job characteristic of
autonomy determines the experienced responsibility, while the job characteristic of feedback is hypothesized to foster knowledge of results (Hugh and House, 1980; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Hogan and Martell, 1987). Hackman and Oldham’s job characteristics theory proposes that high motivation and job satisfaction at work is related to experiencing three psychological states which are derived from certain characteristics of the job as follows: Experienced meaningfulness of the work - the degree to which the individual experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile. Does the work have any meaning to you, something that you can relate to, and does not occur just as a set of movements to be repeated? This is fundamental to intrinsic motivation. Meaningfulness of work is derived from: Skill Variety, Task Identity and Task Significance results (Hugh and House, 1980; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Hogan and Martell, 1987).

Experienced responsibility for work outcomes: the degree to which the individual feels personally accountable and responsible for the results of the work he or she does. The feeling that you have been given the opportunity to be a success or failure at your job. This would include the ability to make changes and incorporate the learning you gain whilst doing the job. Responsibility is derived from autonomy, as in the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out results (Hugh and House, 1980; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Hogan and Martell, 1987).

Knowledge of results: the degree to which the individual knows and understands, on a continuous basis, how effectively he or she is performing the job (Pounder, 1999; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Hogan and Martell, 1987). Knowledge of outcomes comes from feedback. It implies an employee awareness of how effective he/she is converting his/her effort into performance. This provides a person with knowledge on how successful their work has been, which in turn enables them to learn from mistakes. It also connects workers emotionally to the customer of their outputs, thus giving further purpose to the work. Feedback can come from other people or the job itself.

Knowing these critical job characteristics, it is then possible to derive the key components of the design of a job and redesign it to ensure employees satisfaction and employee performance. The Hackman and Oldham model was essentially developed to measure job satisfaction (Jansen et al., 1996), but it has been used to measure other outcomes like internal work motivation, growth satisfaction, work effectiveness, and absenteeism as well. This paper will use this model to relate it with employee performance which is an area that has not been directly researched. Hackman and Oldham identified three moderating variables (knowledge and skill growth, need strength, and context satisfaction) to moderate both the relationship between job characteristics and psychological states and between the psychological states and work outcomes (Fried and Ferris, 1987; Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Other researchers however have relaxed the hypothesis of the three-way interaction and have showed that the existence of one psychological state is sufficient for positive work outcomes (Hogan and Martell, 1987).

Several studies have tested Hackman and Oldman’s model on job characteristics on various dependent variables with different findings as reviewed from various research writings. For example, in the paper of Samad (2006) examining the job characteristics relationship between job satisfaction, the theory of Hezberg (1966), and the result indicated that job satisfaction was associated with a high statistically significant at the .05 level for all variables of job characteristics and was consistent with the research of Thomas, Buboltz, and Winkelspecht (2004) who have studied affection of job characteristics to work adjustment with a sample of new graduates the result showed that the job characteristic influence job satisfaction with statistically significant at the .05 level. Another review was done by Griffin (1981) on Perceived Task characteristics and employee performance and his finding were that there is a positive relationship between task design and performance both at individual and organization level.

The vitamin model stipulates a non-linear relationship between job characteristics and mental health outcomes, including employee well-being, a study on job characteristics and affective wellbeing of health workers (Warr, 1984). Khahan and Peerapong (2013) studied on the Influence of Job Characteristics and Job Satisfaction Effect on work adjustment for entering labor market and the results showed that the personality characteristics and job satisfaction factors showed direct effect to work adjustment factor and
then also showed that the personality characteristics had indirect effect to work adjustment though job satisfaction affected statistical significant.

2.4.2 Job Demand Control and Support Model
The job demand control and support model (JDCS) was developed by Karasek and his colleagues during the 1980s (Kristensen, 1995; Landsbergis, 1988) and resolved many of the difficulties associated with job stress research at the time. At first, Karasek’s model consisted of only two components, namely demand and control (also known as the job demand and control model, JDC model), in a later stage they added the dimension of social support (also known as the job demand control and support model, JDCS model). In the JDC model, demands are defined as psychological stressors present in the work situation and control is defined as the opportunities of the employee to use and develop his or her skills and authority over decisions. These definitions show that the JDC model has been originally developed from a psychological perspective as well. According to the JDC model two basic dimensions job demands and decision latitude (control) make it possible to distinguish between four main types of jobs: High strain jobs with high demands and low decision latitude, like: assemblers. Low strain jobs with low demands and high decision latitude, like: repairmen. Active jobs with high demands and high decision latitude, like: managers. Passive jobs with low demands and low decision latitude, like: janitors (Karasek et al., 1998; Kristensen, 1995; Pelfrene et al., 2002).

The job demand control and support model combines both dimensions in order to distinguish between jobs increasing in strain and jobs increasing in activity level. When job demands go up and decision latitude goes down, the strain an employee experiences increases. One might assume that demands and latitude are highly correlated, that is authority proportionally grows with responsibility. This is one dimension on which the job demand and control model is a better tool to investigate the relationship between job characteristics and health than the Hackman and Oldham model (1976). Besides the JDC model explicitly distinguishes control as a separate feature influencing work related outcomes employee performance. As Becherer et al (2009) pointed out; job stress researchers have generally ignored the decision-making or response selection process of employees leading to confusion in the literature. For example, (Ritti, 2005) found higher intellectual demands associated with greater satisfaction among engineers. In this case, intellectual demands were not simply stressors but included the ability to use a variety of skills and perform less routine and monotonous work.

This finding is in line with predictions of the Hackman and Oldham model, however, the model does not attribute the outcome to the control an employee has. However, this distinction is vital in order to understand the impact of job characteristics on employee health (Landsbergis, 1988). For example, a doctor has a very responsible job and responsibility is often defined as a stressor, but the amount of stress experienced highly depends on the amount of decision-making authority the doctor has. So a concept like responsibility contains both aspects of job demands and decision-making authority. There are several authors that have resolved this deficiency in the Hackman and Oldham model, by stating that the dimensions of autonomy and skill variety actually represent the control dimension an employee has in his job (Pousette and Hanse, 2002; Hellerstedt and Jeffery, 1997; Pelfrene et al., 2002). The dimension of job demands is, however not present in the Hackman and Oldham model and is a vital dimension to explain the development of strain.

The job demand and control model has been further developed in different directions. One important step was to include social support as a dimension of the psychosocial work environment (also known as the job demand control and support model). The social support addition acknowledges the need of any theory of job stress and behavior development to assess social relations at the workplace (Karasek et al., 1988; Pelfrene et al., 2002). Two other job characteristics have been added to the model, physical job demands and job insecurity, but in the majority of theoretical reviews they are excluded (de Lange et al., 2003). The theory described above has a very important implication for this paper that it is important to acknowledge job demands and control as distinct job characteristics which include job demands, job control, social support, physical demands and job insecurity to explain employee health outcomes.
2.4.3 The Vitamin Model

Many attempts have been made to develop theories, perspectives, and conceptual models that relate job characteristics with employee well-being (Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). During the past decades, two theoretical frameworks have been particularly successful in generating and guiding empirical research: the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1980) and the Demand-Control-Support Model (Johnson and Hall, 1988; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Although both models differ in scope and complexity, they assume linear relationships between job characteristics and indices of employee well-being. For instance, as hypothesized by both models, autonomy on the job is linearly associated with job satisfaction: the more autonomy a worker experiences the more satisfied (s) he is with the job (Warr, 1987). Vitamin Model (VM) challenges this popular belief of linear relationships. Instead, the VM stipulates non-linear relationships between job characteristics and mental health outcomes, including overall employee well-being. To date a comprehensive empirical test of the VM still stands out, indicating that little can be said about the validity of the model. Essentially, the VM holds that mental health is affected by environmental psychological features such as job characteristics in a way that is analogous to the non-linear effects that vitamins are supposed to have on our physical health. In addition to this central assumption of non-linearity, the VM builds on two other main features. First, job characteristics are grouped into nine categories that relate differently with mental health outcomes according to the type of ‘vitamin’ they represent. Second, a complex three-axial model of affective well-being, a core aspect of mental health, is postulated. Warr (1987) argues that the effects of job characteristics upon mental health parallel the ways in which vitamins act upon the human body.

According to Warr (1987), the presence of job characteristics initially has a beneficial effect on employee mental health, whereas their absence impairs mental health. After a thorough review of the literature (Warr, 1987, 1994) came up with features of jobs that act as potential determinants of job-related mental health. Not surprisingly, these characteristics include, amongst others, those that are featured in the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1980) and the Demand-Control-Support Model (Johnson and Hall, 1988; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Warr (1987, 1994) assumes that six job characteristics (i.e. job autonomy, job demands, social support, skill utilization, skill variety, and task feedback) have effects similar to vitamins A and D. The remaining three job characteristics (i.e. salary, safety, and task significance) have effects similar to vitamins C and E. Job autonomy, for instance, is assumed to follow the inverted U-shape or AD pattern: very high levels of job autonomy are potentially harmful for the employee's level of mental health since it implies uncertainty, difficulty in decision making, and high responsibility on the job (Warr, 1987). However, these suggested causal patterns have yet to be empirically confirmed or disconfirmed.

In his research, (Warr, 1987, 1994) distinguishes five components of mental health as: affective well-being; competence; autonomy; aspiration; integrated functioning Psychological research mainly focuses on affective well-being as an indicator of job-related mental health. Following similar frameworks of Russell (1980) and Watson and Tellegen (1985), this job-related affective well-being is made up of two orthogonal dimensions of pleasure and arousal. In order to measure affective well-being empirically one needs to evaluate whether the employee is discontented-contented through measures of job satisfaction, job attachment and organizational commitment; anxious-comfortable through measures of job-related anxiety, job-related tension, and job-related strain; depressed-actively pleased through measures of occupational burnout, job-related depression, job boredom, and fatigue (Warr, 1987). Despite the fact that research finds different strengths in relationships, there seems to be general agreement among researchers that job characteristics have an influence on both employee well-being and performance (Vahtera et al., 2000).

In presenting a sound summary of empirical evidence with respect to several aspects of the VM, (Warr, 1987, 1994) showed that his nine job characteristics do act in isolation as predicted by the model. In recent years, a few cross-sectional studies have investigated the proposed patterns of the VM (e.g. Fletcher and Jones, 1993; De Jonge, Schaufeli and Furda, 1995; Parkes, 1991; Warr, 1990b; Xie and Johns, 1995). Most notably Warr's own study among nearly 1900 employees confirmed the postulated curvilinear relationships (Warr, 1990b). Significant curvilinear relationships were found between job
demands on the one hand, and job satisfaction, job-related anxiety, and job-related depression on the other. Parkes (1991), however, did not find any curvilinear relationship in her sample of almost 600 civil servants. Contrarily, De Jonge et al. (1995) found four out of 12 curvilinear relationships in their study among about 250 health care professionals. Firstly, they demonstrated a similar curvilinear relationship between job demands and job satisfaction as reported by Warr (1990b). Secondly, a curvilinear association was found between job autonomy and emotional exhaustion, an occupational burnout component. Finally, two curvilinear relationships were found between social support and particular aspects of job-related burnout (i.e. emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment). Xie and Johns (1995) examined curvilinear relationships between job scope and several strains in their study among more than 400 full-time employees. They found a U-shaped curvilinear relationship between self-reported job scope and burnout (i.e. emotional exhaustion). Taken together, the results of the few studies that have-partially-tested the VM are mixed and inconclusive. Job demands and job autonomy seem to be related curvilinear to some aspects of employee mental health in a way as predicted by the model, whereas the effect of workplace social support does not follow the model. Most importantly, however, all studies have failed to take account of the possible multifaceted ways in which job characteristics may affect job-related well-being (Fletcher, 1991; Warr, 1987, 1994).

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE
This section presents the concept of employee performance as the dependent variable of the study. The outline of the chapter includes the general concept of performance, levels of performance, employee performance, measures of employee performance and challenges of measuring employee performance.

3.2 The Concept of Performance
Performance is generally discussed within the contexts of motivation, leader behavior, task design, goal setting, and most other primary areas of organizational research (Griffin, 1981). Yet, empirical tests involving performance and the various areas of study are generally disappointing or inconclusive. The performance variable, however, should maintain its position of primacy in organizational research for at least two reasons. Productivity growth is an important factor in stabilizing our economy through improved living standards, higher wages, an increase in goods available for consumption, and so forth. Hence, increased study of the determinants of individual employee performance is important to society in general. A second justification for continued interest in performance is more pragmatic (Griffin 1981). For obvious reasons, many managers are interested in improving employee productivity within their organizations. Hence, a contribution that organizational researchers could make to practicing managers would be increased understanding of the causes and consequences of employee performance. Further research efforts are needed to discover if we can, in fact, make a contribution.

Performance is the accomplishment of a given task measured against pre-set known standards of accuracy, completeness, cost, and speed. Within corporate organizations, there are three primary outcomes analysed: financial performance, market performance and shareholder value performance (in some cases, production capacity performance may be analysed). Organizational performance involves the recurring activities to establish organizational goals, monitor progress toward the goals, and make adjustments to achieve those goals more effectively and efficiently (Richard, 2009). Organizational Performance has been defined as the ability of an organization to fulfil its mission through sound management, strong governance and a persistent rededication to achieving results.

3.3 Levels of Performance
Traditionally, performance management in an organisational context has been divided into three levels: strategic/organizational level, operational/process level and individual performance management level (Brudan, 2010). Rummler and Brache (2008) maintain that you can’t do any improving until you’re clear on what level of the organization the performance involves. The three main performance levels are discussed below:

The organization level - this deal with the organization as a whole in terms of its strategy(s), its overall goals and measures. At strategic level, performance management deals with the achievement of the overall organisational objectives. Practitioners refer to it as corporate, business, organisational or
enterprise performance management, this being the highest and most complete level of usage of performance management principles in organizations. Strategic management is a key driver of performance management at this level, as the key processes related to performance management systems are strategy formulation and implementation (de Waal, 2007). Performance management at this levels aims to answer questions like; is the strategy being implemented in order to achieve the organisational objectives? Is the organisation delivering the expected results? among others.

The process level - this is where the main work of the organization takes place and it involves more than one functional area of the organization. Performance management at operational/process level is linked to operational management, as its focus is on the achievement of operational objectives (Brudan, 2010). Although aligned with corporate strategy, the focus here is more functional / tactical. Operational performance was evaluated in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. The process level answers question like; is each department and project meeting the targets? How are operational activities supporting the organizational strategy? Are activities and projects efficient enough or is optimization necessary?

The job/performer level – this is where the individuals performs. An individual’s job is like a cell of the organization. The individual works in relation to other individuals, and often finds himself part of more than one process. The traditional level at which performance management is used in organizations is the individual level, looking at the performance of individuals in an organizational context. It is perhaps the level with the longest evolution in history, as it mirrors the level of organisational maturity (Brudan, 2009). At individual level, performance management is represented by an integrated and planned system for continuously improving the performance of all employees. It involves defining work goals and standards, reviewing performance against these standards, actively managing all levels of performance, and maximising learning and development. Performance management questions at this level are; how are individuals performing? How can individuals improve their own performance?

3.4 Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to job related activities expected of a worker and how well those activities were executed (Hakala, 2008). Many business personnel directors assess the employee performance of each staff member on an annual or quarterly basis in order to help them identify suggested areas for improvement. Many factors contribute to employee performance, including: Capability, Job fit, Goals and accountabilities, Relationship with manager, Relationship with coworkers, Health and wellness issues, Physical and environmental factors.

3.4.1 Measures of Employee Performance

Performance appraisal has become a continuous process by which an employee’s understanding of a company’s goals and his or her progress toward contributing to them are measured (Hakala, 2008). Performance measurement is an on-going activity for all employees and the common indicators of performance include:

Quantity: The number of units produced, processed or sold is a good objective indicator of performance. Be careful of placing too much emphasis on quantity, lest quality suffer. Quality: The quality of work performed can be measured by several means. The percentage of work output that must be redone or is rejected is one such indicator. In a sales environment, the percentage of inquiries converted to sales is an indicator of salesmanship quality. Timeliness: How fast work is performed is another performance indicator that should be used with caution. In field service, the average customer’s downtime is a good indicator of timeliness. In manufacturing, it might be the number of units produced per hour. Cost-Effectiveness: The cost of work performed should be used as a measure of performance only if the employee has some degree of control over costs. For example, a customer-service representative’s performance is indicated by the percentage of calls that he or she must escalate to more experienced and expensive representatives (Hakala, 2008).

Creativity: It can be difficult to quantify creativity as a performance indicator, but in many white-collar jobs, it is vitally important. Supervisors and employees should keep track of creative work examples and attempt to quantify them. Adherence to Policy: This may seem to be the opposite of creativity, but it is
merely a boundary on creativity. Deviations from policy indicate an employee whose performance goals are not well aligned with those of the company.

3.4.2 Challenges of measuring Employee performance

In today’s economy, it is critical to get the most productivity from every employee through quality employee performance management, a process for establishing a shared workforce understanding about what is to be achieved at an organisation level (Brudan, 2009, 2010). It involves a great challenge to align the organisational objectives with the employees' agreed measures, skills, competency requirements, development plans and the delivery of results. Companies must be certain that every employee performs to the best of their ability and delivers significant value to the organization. One major issue that virtually every business struggles with is the challenge of dealing with employee performance reviews. Employee performance reviews is very vital to both managers and employees. The most effective way for managers to increase productivity is through employee coaching. The main employee performance challenges also include:

Motivating Employees - Motivating employees can be one of your biggest challenges as an employer. Constant pressure to increase productivity, profitability, and revenue growth can often overshadow the importance of how an unengaged workforce can negatively affect corporate performance. Manager – effective communication between managers and their employees is of great concern in most organization for it can significantly impact workforce development and employee performance positively or negatively. Workforce - Our labour force is changing, and working people are less motivated, want less responsibility, are less educated, and are widely diverse in age, background, and lifestyle. At the same time, organizations are struggling with hiring and retaining qualified workers. Reduced - Employers are always on the lookout for the very best people they can find, regardless of whether they are internal or external recruits for high-quality outside hires who can work with zeal and motivation (Brudan, 2009, 2010).

JOB CHARACTERISTICS AND EMPLOYEE JOB PERFORMANCE

This section relates the two main variables of study, job characteristics the independent variable and employee performance the dependent variable. It also discusses the identified intervening variables; job satisfaction and employee wellbeing and two moderating variables, employee growth need strength and employee competencies.

4.2 The link between Job Characteristics and Employee Job Performance

Recent reviews have examined in general terms the relationship between task design variables and employee performance postulated by Hackman and Oldham. Pierce and Dunham (1979) summarized 10 studies involving main effects between task design and performance and 5 additional studies dealing with interactions among task design and individual differences and performance. Also included in their view were studies dealing with other outcome variables, such as satisfaction and motivation. Pierce and Dunham (1979) concluded that: The evidence emerging for the main effects investigations suggests that task designs are more frequently associated with positive affective, behavioral, and motivational responses than are narrowly defined tasks Affective and motivational responses appear to be more strongly related to, task design than are behavioral responses. Satisfaction with work is more strongly related to task design than are other affective, behavioral, or motivational variables (Hackman, 1976).

Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) job characteristics theory proposes that high motivation and job satisfaction at work is related to experiencing three psychological states which are derived from certain characteristics of the job which are not empirically independent but intercorrelated. This means that in order to determine the effect of a job characteristic on the final work outcome, one has to ensure control for the existing intercorrelations. This short coming resulted to reviewing other models where the different job characteristics are “independent” of one another and have a more direct assessment of the relationship between job characteristics and employee health towards quality employee performance.

The Job demand control and Support model was developed by Karasek and his colleagues during the 1980s highly resolves many of the difficulties associated with job stress and with the Hackman and Oldham model effects of job characteristics on employee health. According to the JDC model two basic
dimensions job demands and decision latitude (control) make it possible to distinguish between four main
types of jobs (Kristensen, 1995; Landsbergis, 1988): High strain jobs with high demands and low decision
latitude, Low strain jobs with low demands and high decision latitude, Active jobs with high demands and
high decision latitude and passive jobs with low demands and low decision latitude.
The third model used is the vitamin Model that holds that mental health is affected by environmental
psychological features such as job characteristics in a way that is analogous to the non-linear effects that
vitamins are supposed to have on our physical health. It relates nine job characteristics that relate
differently with mental health outcomes according to the type of `vitamin' they represent. Generally,
vitamin intake initially improves health and physical functioning. Warr (1987) argues that the effects of
job characteristics upon mental health parallel the ways in which vitamins act upon the human body and
also the presence of job characteristics initially has a beneficial effect on employee mental health,
whereas their absence impairs mental health. For example, very high levels of job autonomy are
potentially harmful for the employee’s level of mental health since it implies uncertainty, difficulty in
decision making, and high responsibility on the job. Warr (1987, 1994) assumes nine job characteristics
(i.e. job autonomy, job demands, social support, skill utilization, skill variety, task feedback, salary,
safety, and task significance) which influence mental health and satisfaction to work. The vitamin model
sums up all the job characteristics of Hackman and Oldman’s model and the JDCS model and their effect
to employee health and satisfaction towards work performance.
However, from what has been done there seems to be no single model which comprehensively describes
all the job characteristics that relate to employee performance in a direct relationship hence the big
challenge to human resource managers as far as job design and relating job characteristics to job
specifications during recruitment stage. This dissatisfaction according to the researcher has led to poor
employee selection, job dissatisfaction, job stress and poor employee performance making performance
management a great challenge. Very little has been done on job characteristics and employee wellbeing
and employee performance hence an open area to research on.

4.2.1 Intervening and Moderating Variables in the Relationship between Job Characteristics and
Employee Performance
In order to improve the knowledge regarding the relationship between job characteristics and a more
precise insight into the relationship between these classes of variables is needed. The formulation of more
specific relationships will improve existing theoretical models of job characteristics and may result in
refined guidelines for investigating and improving work settings employee performance (Morgeson and
Campion, 2003). Therefore, the present review introduces two factors mediating between the above
variables namely employee wellbeing/health and job satisfaction an approach to investigate
systematically whether or not specific relationships exist between the different characteristics of the work
setting and theoretically different outcome variables. Two moderating factors, employees’ growth need
strength and employee competencies/ individual knowledge and skills have also been introduced to
formulate a more specific relationship between the independent, intervening and the dependent variables
coming up with a unique and holistic conceptual model that can guide empirical research to close the
knowledge gaps identified from the reviewed study.

4.2.1.1 Employee Wellbeing/Health
Employee health refers to the overall well being of the worker in the work place. Many attempts have
been made to develop theories, perspectives, and conceptual models that relate job characteristics with
employee well-being (Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). During the past decades, two theoretical frameworks
have been particularly successful in generating and guiding empirical research: the Job Characteristics
Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1980) and the Demand Control Support Model (Johnson and Hall, 1988;
Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Although both models differ in scope and complexity, they assume linear
relationships between job characteristics and indices of employee well-being. For instance, as
hypothesized by both models, autonomy on the job is linearly associated with job satisfaction: the more
autonomy a worker experiences the more satisfied (s)he is with the job. However, Vitamin Model (VM)
challenges this popular belief of linear relationships and stipulates non-linear relationships between job
characteristics and mental health outcomes, including employee well-being. To date a comprehensive empirical test of the VM still stands out, indicating that little can be said about the validity of the model. Employee wellbeing as reviewed is implied that employees have no job stress factors emerging from the workplace that may hinder their job concentration and performance. A stress free workplace environment is motivating to work on and employees can be highly held accountable for their work outcomes. Wilmar et al (1998) did an empirical study on three job characteristics (i.e. job demands, job autonomy, and workplace social support) and employee well-being three key indicators (i.e. job satisfaction, job-related anxiety, and emotional exhaustion) and the results showed that a fit of a non-linear model was superior to that of the linear model. It appeared that the three job characteristics are differentially related with various indicators of employee well-being. In conclusion, this study partially supported the assertion of the Vitamin Model that non-linear relationship exists between job characteristics and employee well-being. Further research can therefore be done to investigate a linear relationship between various job characteristics indicators and employee wellbeing.

4.2.1.2 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an inner feeling that affects physiological, psychological and social wellbeing of every employee irrespective of the sectors and the nations. Therefore it is considered as the important determinant of the success of every organization. According to management literature the lower level of job satisfaction creates many problems in the organization. Feinstein (2000), quoted by Ishfaq Ahamad and others, says job satisfaction is an important element from organizational perspective, as it leads to higher organizational commitment of employees and high commitment leads to overall organizational success and development. Beside of this statement, Atchison (1999) states that many organizations are spending much time on employee satisfaction initiatives in an effort to reduce turnover, improve productivity and to help organizations succeed. Job satisfaction also refers to the attitude of personnel concern with job which is the result of perception of job performing and the level of cohesion between individual and organization (Ivancevich, Olelelns and Matterson, 1997). In addition, Odom, Box, and Dunn (1990) stated that job satisfaction is a context of employees feeling that can be positive or negative to their responsibilities.

Job satisfaction theory involves two aspects; first, job content satisfaction refers to a factor that makes personnel satisfied and the motivation to perform such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advance, and work itself. Second, the job context which refers to factors external components preventing job dissatisfaction, such as company policy and administration, supervision, relationship with peers, salary and benefit, security, and working condition (Faragher, 2005). It is proved by several empirical researchers that there is a positive relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction. Hackman and Oldham, (1976), Panzano and Seffrin, (2003), Lawrence (2001) Samad (2006), Jansen and others (1995), Dore (2005), Hoonakker and others, Corneliben (2006), Voydan off (1980), Ünuvar (2006) have examined the impact of job characteristics on job satisfaction and also there has been much discussion about moderating effect of employees’ growth need strength to explain job satisfaction. According to George, Scandur and others, relationship between growth opportunity and productivity is moderated by employees’ growth need strength. Wang and Pierre (2005) also studied the relationship between work design and job satisfaction with the Philipinos who migrated to work in Canada, the research found that job satisfaction was positively related to work design with statistical significance.

4.2.1.3 Employee’s Growth Need Strength

Growth-need strength refers to an individual’s desire to be challenged and to grow on the job or one’s need for personal accomplishment, learning, and development on the job (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Hackman and Oldham believe that individuals with strong growth needs will respond more positively to jobs that are high on the core job dimensions because such jobs provide opportunities for professional advancement. On the other hand, individuals with weak growth needs will experience little internal motivation from complex jobs, either because they do not recognize or value, the opportunities present for professional development (Lawrence, 2001). Growth need strength is the extent to which a person desires to advance, to be in a challenging position and generally to achieve (L. Tosi, Rizzo and Carroll, 1986). Psychologists who emphasis human potential argues that everyone has within him at least a spark of the
need to grow and develop personally. Steadily accumulating evidence shows, however, that unless the spark is pretty strong, chances are it will get snuffed out by one’s experience in typical organization. Influence of Employees’ growth need strength has been analyzed, as a moderator in between different variables, by many researchers. Shanthakumary (1998) found strong positive relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction among school teachers in Colombo district when growth need strength was high. Graen and others (1986) found in their study that the employees’ growth need strength works as moderator in between growth opportunity and productivity. Tetrick and Yitzhak (2004) did a study on growth need strength and context satisfactions as moderators of the relations of the job characteristics model using the sample of 6405 employees from variety of jobs and found both of the moderators have no influence on the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction. Likewise, Robert (1976) found in his study that employee growth needs strength as a moderator of relationships between job attributes and job satisfaction. However, there is a contextual gap hence the need for a study which will give a value addition to the existing knowledge base and be a guide to the HR policy makers to understand the level of employees’ growth need strength and then to capitalize it towards quality human resource management and organization performance.

4.2.1.4 Employee Competencies (Individual Knowledge and Skills)
Competence is a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive skills, behavior and values used to improve performance; or the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified, having the ability to perform a specific role (White, 1959). Employee Competencies include all the related knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes that employees need to perform their jobs most effectively. Clearly, these competencies will vary by job and position, but there are some commonalities that apply to just about any job in just about any organization. Companies can hire employees with basic foundational competencies and then teach more specific competencies directly related to the employees' job descriptions. For an employee to perform well, (Mulder, 2001) identified key competencies that employee should possess; Intellectual competencies - what the employee needs to know to perform the functions of the job like industry knowledge, background and expertise, Interpersonal competencies - skills required to get along and work effectively with others, Leadership competencies - skills required to lead others or influence their coworkers or to work effectively as part of a team, organizational competencies - the ability to effectively organize and manage work and work-related activities. Employees with strong organizational competencies are efficient and effective in the work that they do.

Employees must also be competent in self-management and able to direct themselves toward the accomplishment of goals and specific work assignments (Mulder, 2001). Self-management competencies include the making of effective judgments, the ability to adapt and be flexible as new requirements emerge, and the ability to effectively plan and organize their work to achieve required results. This set of context-specific qualities is correlated with superior job performance and can be used as a standard against which to measure job performance (Gilbert, 1978) hence the reason why the researcher has used this variable to moderate employee performance. The human element has grown in importance because employee knowledge and skills has become a critical ingredient for gaining a competitive advantage, particularly in the new economy landscape (Grant, 1996).

4.2.1.6 Propositions
From the above emerging conceptual framework, it is basically proposed that the relevant job characteristics to a given task can strongly lead to good employee performance. However, this paper identifies that there are intervening variables that surface in between the direct relationship between job characteristics and employee performance as employee wellbeing and job satisfaction to perfect the original relationship. Two moderating variables, growth need strength and employee competencies have also been identified to strengthen the relationship between the independent, the intervening and the dependent variables respectively. The above identified relationships have then been narrowed to the following propositions to be tested later as this study advances.

Proposition 1: Firms are more likely to boost employee job satisfaction and the overall wellbeing through well designed jobs in relation to the relevant job characteristics.
Proposition 2: Firms with job satisfied employees free from workplace health hazards are more likely to improve their performance index through the input of job motivated employees.

Proposition 3: Employees with high growth need strength are more likely to experience high job satisfaction through their need of higher knowledge and skill to handle challenging job and hence less mental health issues like job stress and burn outs.

Proposition 4: Quality employee performance is also dependent on the individual employee’s competencies in terms of knowledge, skills and talents to handle a particular job as assigned to perform.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study review literature on the relationship between job characteristics and employee performance as well as identifying factors that may mediate or moderate the said relationship. In recent years there has been a change in the relationship between organizations and their employees but traditional job redesign programs have yet not been able to counteract the effect of increased stress levels employees’ experience. Due to the increased demands of working life and stress, employees are experiencing difficulty in balancing their social life with their working life. Even though new initiatives are developed by companies (partially inspired by legislation), to get to more family friendly policies, balancing social life and working life in general is still seen as the major responsibility of the employee and not of the organization. If research would indicate that employees that are more satisfied with their social life are healthier, then organizations can no longer ignore employee needs to balance their working and social life (Brudan, 2009).

To achieve my study objective, three models where critically reviewed (JCM, JDCS and VM). Theoretical and empirical research on the relationship between job characteristics employee health and job satisfaction identified two models capable of explaining such relationships, that is the job demand control and support model and the vitamin model all linked to job characteristic model by Hackman and Oldham 1976. The models postulate that job characteristics have strong effects on employee health and work performance. The JDCS model assumes that this relationship is linear but the vitamin model assumes a curvilinear relationship. The models were combined for the identification of the job characteristics related to employee wellbeing and performance. For example, increasing amounts of job autonomy, social support, skill utilization and salary were hypothesized to have positive effects on employee health and job satisfaction. While increasing amounts of job demands, physical demands and job insecurity were hypothesized to have a detrimental effect on the same. The amount of satisfaction with social life was hypothesized to influence the relationship between job characteristics and health.

A review of the stated three models helped to identify the various job characteristics related to employee work performance (Jasper, 2011). More important for this review is employee wellbeing and job satisfaction emerged to mediate/intervene this relationship as discussed earlier. Hackman and Oldman (1976) hypothesized that there are three moderators of the job characteristics – critical psychological states outcomes relationship. This paper has examined two moderators, first growth need strength (GNS) and to moderate the relationship between job characteristics and employee wellbeing and job satisfaction then employee competencies(individual knowledge and skills) to moderate employee wellbeing and job satisfaction with employee performance. It was suggested that individuals high in GNS (i.e. desire for challenge and personal development) will respond positively to enriched jobs than others (Hackman and Oldman, 1976). On individual knowledge and skill it is implied that it also depends on the employees competencies to perform a given job other than its clarity and the motivation to do it. The stated objective of this review was achieved resulting to emerging conceptual framework to clearly relate the identified variables for further research.

5.2 Research Gaps

Over the past two decades, several studies within work design have been conducted, especially those based on Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) Job Characteristics Model. A closer inspection of the literature reveals that there are many important missing components to an adequate general theory. Existing approaches do not make an effort in recognizing additional work characteristics or outcomes that are of potentially increasing importance (Parker et al, 2001). There has also been insufficient attention to the
mechanisms or processes that underpin the link between work characteristics and outcomes, as well as limited consideration of the contingencies likely to moderate those links. Existing approaches also do little to explicate the antecedents of work content. As Parker et al. (2001) states, the existing theory by Hackman and Oldham’s is under-specified and relatively context-insensitive, hence the identified need that diverse set of job characteristics need to be investigated. Job complexity measures such as skill variety and autonomy are well established, but more work is needed with respect to the social environment (Morgeson and Campion, 2003). Also, a wider range of moderators of the work design – outcomes relationship should be investigated. I therefore conclude that there is a need for further improvement and refinement of the existing work design models in relation to job characteristics and work performance variables. Such a refined insight could contribute to the improvement of existing theoretical models of job characteristics. The researcher noted that a more precise formulation of job design and performance interrelationships is needed. The performance variable itself needs to be more fully explicated in terms of its various components (quantity, quality, effort, etc.) and appropriate techniques for measuring these components described (Jansen, 1996). Each component should then be tied to specific job characteristics from a theoretical point of view.

A useful distinction can be made between substantive research and construct validation research. The researcher noted that substantive research relative to construct validation research has been overemphasized in job design literature. Much of what is reviewed fall into the substantive category; few construct validation studies are available. Yet, construct validation must clearly precede substantive research if knowledge is to be advanced. The researcher identified that not much has been done directly on the relationship between job characteristics, employee health and work performance. Most of the research focuses only on limited portions of the job characteristics (Hogan and Martell, 1987) towards employee health and job performance hence a rich area to research. A large amount of intervening variables have been found that affect the results between job characteristics and health as well as between job characteristics and job satisfaction towards work outcomes hence an open area to research on. A contextual research gap is worth noting for no other study has been done locally on the relationship between job characteristics and employee performance to improve the management of human resource in our firms and reduce employee turnover for the overall competitive organization performance.

REFERENCES


