

## **Job Characteristics as Correlates of Work Engagement among Health Workers in a Public Hospital in Makurdi**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated job characteristics as correlates of work engagement among workers of a public hospital in Makurdi, Benue State. Correlational research approach was used and a total of 196 (122 males and 74 females) respondents were randomly selected for the study. Their ages ranged from 21-56 years with the mean age of 36.44 years. One hundred and fifty four of the participants were senior staff members while forty two were junior staff members. Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) were used to assess job characteristics and work engagement of participants respectively. Results showed significant positive relationship between task variety ( $r_{(191)} = 0.15$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), task significance ( $r_{(191)} = 0.51$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), autonomy ( $r_{(191)} = 0.18$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), feedback ( $r_{(191)} = 0.19$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and work engagement. There was no significant relationship between task identity and work engagement. The implications of these findings to health institutions were discussed. It was recommended among other things that employees should be given opportunities to perform a variety of tasks on the job as this will make them demonstrate their unique skills thereby fostering work engagement.*

**Keywords:** Job characteristics, work engagement, health workers, Makurdi.

In studying workers well-being, attention has traditionally been focused on the construct of job satisfaction, a relatively passive job experience (Inceoglu & Warr, 2012). Presently attention has been shifted to a more explicitly expressed form of well-being called work engagement. Work engagement as introduced by Kahn (1990) is a technical term that refers to the physical and psychological attachment of workers to their work. Kahn (1990) argued that engaged workers apply themselves to their work physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance.

Engaged workers experience high levels of energy and strong identification towards their work (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), which translates to a more sustainable work place in terms of both individual health and organizational performance (Bakken & Trop, 2012). Employees' work engagement has been conceived by most scholars as a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002).

From the foregoing, it is clear that Nigeria health institutions need engaged employees; employees who are psychologically engrossed and connected to their work, who are willing and able to invest themselves fully in their roles, who are proactive and committed to high quality performance standards (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). This call is justifiable because of the quantum of health services desired by Nigerians all year round. The question now is how can the work engagement of health workers in Nigeria be harnessed?

It is widely agreed that engagement arises from both personal and environmental sources (Macey & Schneider, 2008). However, theoretical discussions and empirical review so far emphasized one of these that work engagement is a response to characteristics of the job.

Job characteristics model posits that when present, the job characteristics including job variety, tasks identity, task significance, feedback and job autonomy will lead to three psychological states such as experiencing the work as meaningful, experiencing personal responsibility, and having the knowledge of one's performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Faturochman (1997) asserts that all the three psychological states must be experienced by an individual if desirable outcome such as work engagement are to emerge. If any of the three psychological states is not present, several outcome variables including work engagement could be weakened.

Many studies have found a significant relationship between job characteristics and work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Shirom, 2010; Rich, Lepine, & Crowford, 2010). Result of a cross national study of work engagement as a mediator between job resources and proactive behaviour indicated that work engagement fully mediate the impact of job resources on work. That is, an increase in job resources (i.e job control feedback and task variety) translate to an increase in work engagement (Rich, Lepine, & Crowford, 2010; Shirom, 2010).

Further empirical studies have consistently shown that job characteristics such as performance feedback, skill variety, and autonomy are positively associated with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). The results suggest that the higher employees are on feedback, skill variety and autonomy, the higher they will be on work engagement.

A cross national study on work engagement by Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) showed a significant effect of job autonomy on work engagement. Dzepina (2011) conducted a research on the additive and interactive effects of job characteristics on work engagement at the University of Johannesburg. He hypothesized that job autonomy or control will independently and significantly predict work engagement. His result was statistically significant implying that the amount of freedom an individual have to accomplish his or her task has a great impact on how highly engaged he or she becomes on the job. In related studies, Mun, Suhaimi, Abdullah, Rahman, and Mat (2013) and Gözükarar and Şimşek, (2016) concluded that job autonomy positively correlated with work engagement significantly.

Some aspects of jobs such as the ability to make decisions regarding task scheduling and completion (task identity), and freedom to exercise capabilities (skill variety) are

particularly important for improving employee engagement (Breevaart, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2014). In a study, Shantz, Alfes, Truss, and Soane (2013) found that there was a significant relationship between task identity and work engagement. The result implies that workers who handle tasks that are well defined are more likely to be engaged in their work.

In his study on job characteristics and workers engagement, Isaken (2002) hypothesized that skills variety will affect worker engagement. From his findings skill variety was one of the several mechanisms through which individuals found meaning in their work. This according to Isaken (2002) was through a significant resulting effect of skill variety on engagement of individuals on their job. Morin (2008) found that task significance significantly influenced work engagement. The result shows that a worker who feels that his job has a substantial impact on him and the organization will be more engaged in work.

As shown above, much has been done on the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement; however, most of the empirical efforts are in other continents other than Africa. Considering cultural diversity and variation in work conditions of various continents and countries, it is imperative to also study the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement among health workers in Nigeria.

Based on the review it was hypothesized that:

- i. There will be a significant relationship between task identity and work engagement among health workers in a federal hospital in Makurdi.
- ii. There will be a significant relationship between skill variety and work engagement among health workers in a federal hospital in Makurdi.
- iii. There will be a significant relationship between task significance and work engagement among health workers in a federal hospital in Makurdi.

- iv. There will be a significant relationship between autonomy and work engagement among health workers in a federal hospital in Makurdi.
- v. There will be a significant relationship between feedback and work engagement among health workers in a federal hospital in Makurdi.

## **Method**

### **Design**

This study used a correlational design. The approach was adopted because the phenomena of interest had occurred among the participants prior to conducting the study. Moreover, because the variables examined were naturally occurring, manipulation was not carried out rather the relationship between the variables was sought. The variables of the study were job characteristics (task identity, skill variety, task significance, feedback and autonomy) and work engagement.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study consisted of 196 health workers randomly selected from a federal hospital in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. The participants comprised of 122 (62.24%) males and 74 (37.76%) females. The age of the participants ranged from 21–56 years with the mean age of 36.44 years. One hundred and forty four (73.47%) of the participants were married, 40 (20.41%) were single while 12 (6.12%) were separated from their spouses either by death or divorce. In respect to job position, 154(78.57%) of the participants were categorized as senior staff members while 42 (21.43%) were categorized as junior staff members.

### **Instruments**

A questionnaire was used for data collection. It consisted of three (3) parts. Part one comprised questions eliciting demographic information. The second part contained the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) developed by Hackman and Oldman (1975). It assessed the five basic characteristics of a job which include task identity, task significance, skill variety, feedback and autonomy. The response format for the scale ranged from 1 to 5 representing very not descriptive, mostly not descriptive, somewhat descriptive, mostly descriptive and very descriptive respectively. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale for the present study was .82. Sample items include "I have almost complete responsibility for deciding how and when work is to be done" and "I get to use a number of complex skills on this job".

The third part of the instrument was Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The 17 item instrument was developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2002) with the response scale of 1 to 6 representing almost never, never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often, and always respectively. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale for the present study was .92. Sample items of UWES include "at my work, I feel bursting with energy" and "I am enthusiastic about my job"

## **Procedure**

Formal permission was taken from the authorities of the federal hospital of study through its Research and Ethics Committee. After the permission was obtained, questionnaires were administered to the participants in their respective offices. In total, two hundred and four (204) copies of the research instrument were administered to participants, however, only one hundred and ninety six (196) representing 96% response rate were filled and returned for analysis.

## Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 for the purpose of accuracy. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to assess the relationship of job characteristics and work engagement.

## Results

The hypotheses of the study were tested using Pearson correlational analysis and the results are shown in table one.

*Table 1: Pearson's Correlation showing Relationship between Job Characteristics and Work Engagement*

S/No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Task identity	-					
2	Skill variety	.29**	-				
3	Task significance	.36**	.16**	-			
4	Autonomy	.41**	.15**	.39**	-		
5	Feedback	.39**	.25**	.42**	.37**	-	
6	Work engagement	.00	.15*	.14*	.18*	.19**	-

Key: \* =  $P < 0.05$ , \*\* =  $P < 0.01$

The results presented in table 1 show that there was no significant relationship between task identity and work engagement of health workers. However, skill variety ( $r = .15$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), task significance ( $r = .14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), autonomy ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and job feedback ( $r = .19$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) were significantly and positively related to work engagement of health workers. This means that increase in health workers skill variety, task significance, job autonomy and feedback will bring about increase in work engagement.

## Discussion

The study investigated the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement among health workers of a federal hospital in Makurdi, Benue State. The study found that there is no significant relationship between task identity and work engagement among health workers. This result agreed with that of Shantz, Alfes, Truss and Soane, (2013) who found that task identity was not a significant of work engagement of employees. The result however contradicted the result of Walsh and Gordon (2008) who reported a significant relationship between task identity and work engagement. This disagreement may be due to differences in the type of sample employed in the study. The federal hospital where participants were sampled operate shift work, therefore staff do not necessarily expect to start and complete any treatment on a patient and because of this task identity does not affect the work engagement of health workers.

The study revealed that skill variety was significantly and positively related to work engagement of health workers. The result indicates that the different talent and skills a job requires of a person does relate to how engaged a worker will be on a job. This implies that a health worker who possesses and applies a variety of skills on the job is more likely to be engaged on the job. This finding upheld the earlier submission by Salanova and Schaufeli (2002) that skill variety was one of the several mechanism through which individuals find meaning in their work. This result however did not corroborate the finding of Saks (2006) who revealed that skill variety is very much distinct from work engagement of workers.

The study also pointed out that there is a significant relationship between task significance and work engagement of health workers. This result implies that the substantial impact of the job to the people within the organization and to the society does relate to how committed, dedicated and engaged a person is to his work. The importance of a given task to



the health institution and to the community encourages a health worker to be focused and engaged to the job. This finding is in line with the finding of Morin (2008) who reported that task significance has a significant effect on work engagement.

There is a significant relationship between job autonomy and work engagement among health workers. The relationship means that work engagement is also influenced by the amount of freedom or autonomy an individual have to handle a task. This follows that when a health worker has high control over his job, it will translate to high level of work engagement. This conclusion is consistent with that of Saks (2006), Society for Human Resource Management (2012) and AON (2016) who all concluded that work engagement is driven by job characteristics such as autonomy.

This research equally revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between feedback and work engagement among health workers. This means that a health worker will show higher levels of work engagement when he or she knows about his or her performance on the job. Job feedback can come from patients, colleagues or supervisor in the organization. This result corroborates the finding of Bremer and Carrier (2011) whose result showed a significant positive relationship between feedback and work engagement.

## **Recommendations**

The findings of this study have implications for health institutions. Engagement of workers to their work needs to be viewed as a broad organizational and cultural strategy that involves a comprehensive approach. This is necessary owing to the fact that work engagement is an important factor to organisational success.

The study recommends that health institutions should consciously ensure that employees do a variety of tasks on their jobs to make them use variety of skills. This is

important because skill variety has significant positive relationship with employees' work engagement.

Health organisations should also ensure that employees have some level of freedom on how they do their work. Job autonomy brings about positive work behavior particularly employee' work engagement. Institutions should make employees know the importance of their jobs in relation to that of others in the organisational system and the general society. This is necessary as employees will become more engaged if they are aware that their task is significant.

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