Job Characteristics Theory

The Job Characteristics Theory studies the factors that make a particular job satisfying. The theory was developed by J Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham in 1976 and refined again in 1980. Faturochman (1997) defined the Job Characteristics Theory as describing “the relationship between job characteristics and individual responses to work. The theory specifies the task condition in which individuals are predicted to prosper in their work” (p. 1).

A primary component of the Job Characteristics Theory are five job characteristics that can be studied to help predict job satisfaction. Here are the five characteristics, listed in the order as presented by Faturochman (1997). To my knowledge, the list is not rank-ordered.

1. Skill variety: 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?
2. Task identity: 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?
3. Task significance: Does the job have “a substantial impact?” (Faturochman, p. 1)? Will it matter to people, either within the organization or to society? Is this job/given task meaningful?
4. Autonomy: 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.
5. Job feedback: Is an employee kept in the loop about their performance Are the being told when they are doing well and when they are not?

When present, those five characteristics will lead to three psychological states:

1. Experiencing the work as meaningful - which Faturochman defined as feeling the work he or she does is "generally worthwhile, valuable or important by some system of values he or she finds acceptable."
2. Experiencing personal responsibility - where a worker is accountable for the results of the work done.
3. Knowledge of the results - a worker must know and understand how well he or she is doing the job.

As Faturochman writes, "all three psychological states must be experienced by an individual if desirable outcomes are to emerge. If any of the three psychological states is not present, several outcome variables such as motivation and satisfaction will be weakened." (p. 2).

When the five characteristics lead to the three psychological states in a positive manner, an employee will feel satisfied. When any are lacking, job satisfaction becomes lower.

Hackman, Oldham and Lawler (2000) came up with a series of action principles based on the five core characteristics. "If enriched jobs and increased motivating potential are to be achieved, then:

1. Natural work units should be formed, in order to increase task identity and task significance.
2. Tasks should be combined, in order to increase skill variety and task identity.
3. Client relationships with the ultimate user should be established, in order to increase skill variety, autonomy and feedback.
4. The job should be vertically loaded with responsibilities and controls formerly reserved for management, in order to \_\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**REFERENCES ~**Coding Spreadsheet - Web View

Fried, Y. and Ferris, G. R. (1987), The Validity of the Job Characteristics Model: A Review and Meta-Analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 40: 287–322. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6570.1987.tb00605.x

Abstract: The validity of Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model was assessed by conducting a comprehensive review of nearly 200 relevant studies on the model as well as by applying meta-analytic procedures to a large portion of the data. The evidence indicated that the available correlational results are reasonably valid in light of the issues examined. Results tended to support the multidimensionality of job characteristics, but there was less agreement on the exact number of dimensions. The corrected correlational results of the meta-analysis indicated that job characteristics related both to psychological and behavioral outcomes. Concerning psychological states, the results tended to support their mediating (e.g., intervening) role between job characteristics and personal outcomes. The pattern of correlations between the job characteristics and psychological states was less supportive of the model. Meta-analytic results demonstrated that most of the cross-study variance was due to statistical artifacts. True variance across studies was found for the job characteristics-performance relationship, however, and subsequent analyses suggested that growth-need strength moderates this relationship. Implications for potential revisions of the model and for practice are discussed.

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Hackman, J. and Oldham, G. Motivation through the design of work: test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16, 2, August 1976, Pp. 250-279, ISSN 0030-5073, 10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7.

Abstract: A model is proposed that specifies the conditions under which individuals will become internally motivated to perform effectively on their jobs. The model focuses on the interaction among three classes of variables: (a) the psychological states of employees that must be present for internally motivated work behavior to develop; (b) the characteristics of jobs that can create these psychological states; and (c) the attributes of individuals that determine how positively a person will respond to a complex and challenging job. The model was tested for 658 employees who work on 62 different jobs in seven organizations, and results support its validity. A number of special features of the model are discussed (including its use as a basis for the diagnosis of jobs and the evaluation of job redesign projects), and the model is compared to other theories of job design.

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