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## Motivation

Employees in charge: Why autonomy and job crafting boost motivation

### The Author:

#### Dr. Annette Towler

Annette Towler was born in England and now lives in the United States. She has a PhD in Industrial and Organizational Psychology and has taught at several institutions. Annette has published in several journals, including Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, Human Resource Development Quarterly, and Organizational Research Methods. She worked in the public and private sector for many years, primarily as a management trainer.

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## Executive summary

This CQ Dossier describes the Job Characteristics Model that provides recommendations on how best to design jobs to enrich employee motivation. The model focuses on the intrinsic motivation that employees gain through having control over their work. The model shows how autonomy, job crafting and feedback can enhance employee motivation and enrich the experience of work. The dossier describes how organizations can design jobs to enhance psychological meaning for employees that ultimately lead to individual and organizational effectiveness. Finally, the dossier also describes recent trends in the job characteristics model that focus on job crafting and team work design to enhance employee motivation and enrichment.

### The job characteristics model provides an explanation how to design jobs that motivate

The job characteristics model was designed by Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham to provide an explanation of how to motivate employees through job design. The model is based on the idea that it is the intrinsic motivation derived from the task that is essential for employee motivation. The model is based on the fundamental logic that boring and monotonous jobs tend to stifle motivation whereas challenging work enhances employee motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 2005). There are ways in which to add challenge to a job: variety, autonomy and decision authority. The two ways in which organizations can add variety and challenge to employee work is through job enrichment and job rotation. In order for organizations to enrich jobs there are five core job characteristics that impact employee motivation: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These five characteristics can impact employee cognition and affect, namely meaningfulness, a sense of responsibility for outcomes and knowledge of the actual results. These three psychological states then impact work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, absenteeism, and work motivation. The five characteristics are important because they can also be measures as a motivating potential score or MPS for a job. This allows organizations to assess the extent which a job has the potential to influence employees' attitudes and behaviors.

## Organizations should focus on the five core characteristics when designing jobs

Organizations can focus on the five core characteristics of job design to engage and motivate employees. First, skill variety is the extent to which a job involves a variety of activities so that employees can utilize a full range of knowledge, skills and abilities. The degree to which a job requires various activities, requiring the worker to develop a variety of skills and talents. Employees can experience more meaningfulness in their work through jobs that require a variety of skills and abilities compared to when jobs are routine and dull. Second, employees experience meaningfulness in their work through task identity. Task identity is the degree to which the job requires employees to complete work that has a tangible outcome. Employees gain more meaning in their work when they are involved in the entire process rather than just being responsible for one segment of the work. This allows employees to gain meaningfulness because they perceive how their work fits into the mission of the organization. Meaningfulness in work is also gained through task significance or the degree to which the work influences other people's lives. Employees tend to find meaning in work that improves their psychological or physical well-being such as work that allows them to show concern for others. The ability to influence others can be either in the immediate organization or in the external environment.

## Autonomy plays a crucial role in job design and motivation

One of the most important components of work enrichment is to provide employees with autonomy. When organizations design jobs that allow for employees to enjoy freedom, independence and discretion within their work, this autonomy leads to great job satisfaction. Employees experience greater personal responsibility for their own successes and failures at work when they rely on their own efforts rather than following management instructions. In order to enrich jobs, it is also important for organizations to provide feedback to employees. The feedback needs to be clear, specific and detailed so that employees gain information on their strengths and weaknesses. This

knowledge allows employees to gain better knowledge of their job duties and consider how to improve and refine their performance (Humphrey et al., 2007).

## **The job characteristics model–recent trends: job crafting and social support**

Since the introduction of The Job Characteristics Model there have been recent additions and revisions to the model, many of which have been suggested by Hackman and Oldham (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). Because of changes in the psychological contract, employees are now spending more time with clients and with other employees so social sources of motivation have become more important (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). A recent study found that when supervisors provide social support to their subordinates, employees who have a large number of responsibilities or job scope tend to perform better than those who do not receive supervisor social support (Mushtaq et al., 2017). Job crafting is another area in which employees can gain enrichment from their jobs. In job crafting, employees not only gain control over their jobs but they also have control over their role within the organization. This is an important area of research inquiry because it suggests that employees can gain enrichment through identifying the core competencies that they possess to gain control over their organization role. The area for potential is through team work design. Many organizations are now employing teams to work on tasks and so it is important to consider how to design team tasks to enrich the experience for team members.

In conclusion, the job characteristics model identifies key factors that organizations can utilize to enhance employee motivation. Recent trends show that the job characteristics model is still relevant yet can also be enlarged through considering how social factors and new organizational structures influence the role of the employee within the organization. In particular, job crafting is an important new trend because it suggests that organizations can enable employees to gain autonomy over their role within the organization as well as job. This new trend will enhance the experience of both employees and organizations. Job crafting can enable organizations to focus on core competencies that are required for individual and organizational effectiveness.

## Key take-aways

- The job characteristics model shows job design can enhance employee motivation
- Employees are most motivated when they are granted autonomy and flexibility
- Employees are most motivated when they perform jobs that have meaning
- Employees gain more meaning from their work when they are given specific feedback.

## References

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