

RESEARCH ARTICLE



The Relationship between Job Characteristics and Job Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Private Sector Organizations in Riyadh

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Abstract

This research is aimed at figuring out the role of work engagement as a mediator in the relationship between different dimensions of job characteristics and job satisfaction in the private sector organizations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The respondents of this research were 321 employees working in the private sector. The data were collected using electronic questionnaires and analyzed in three phases: Descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis to test dimensionality, and path analysis. In the first phase, descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of all variables were examined. In the second phase, the confirmatory factor analysis and reliability consistencies were conducted to examine the uni-dimensionality of each variable. In the third phase, the path analysis was conducted using Amos. The research findings showed that there is a significant relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction. There is a greater relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction. As well as a significant relationship between most of job characteristics and work engagement. On the other side, the mediating role of work engagement could not be proven since there is a direct path between job characteristics and job satisfaction. The results of this research can be used as a reference for private sector organizations in Saudi Arabia to improve employees' satisfaction, and ultimately, support the achievement of organizational goals.

Key words: Job Characteristics, job satisfaction, work engagement, mediation, private sector, Saudi Arabia

1 | INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, job satisfaction is considered as a significant factor shaping organizations success. As it is becoming a hot topic among researchers, and practitioners due to realization of the fact that in order for the organization to grow and prosper, it is necessary to maintain the intellectual capital of its employees and create a work environment that fulfil their needs and expectations. Job satisfaction plays a vital role in performance of organization by providing their employees the best services (Robbins & Judge, 2003). On the con-

trary, job dissatisfaction might cause serious consequences on the organization including but not limited to absenteeism, loss of talents, and performance declines. According to (Mobley, 1997), job dissatisfaction has been observed to directly affect turnover intention. The mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between the five core job characteristics and job satisfaction has been investigated to draw the attention into work engagement and how it can contribute to the relationship. Some researchers have examined the link between job characteristics and job satisfaction. However, there is lack of evidence in the literature about work engagement as a

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mediator between JC and job satisfaction. This study contributes to the literature since it shades the light about the necessity of formulating a well-planned job designs to achieve satisfaction by considering work engagement as a mediator in the private sector organizations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Further, it focuses on the role of each job dimension separately (i.e. autonomy, task identity, task significance, skill variety and feedback) and their effects on the other variables. This will contribute to facilitate HR processes by harnessing efforts to the most effective dimensions and gaining better results.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | The Relationship between Job Characteristics and Job Satisfaction

Job characteristics theory is based on the assumption that certain characteristics determine whether or not jobs provide opportunity for motivation and how positively a person will respond to a complex and challenging job (Hackman, & Oldham, 1975). Hackman posited five core job characteristics (or dimensions): job variety (capacity to use a range of skills in doing a job), job identity (capacity to complete a whole piece of work rather than a sub-component), job significance (significance of the job for others), autonomy (the freedom and discretion afforded to an employee to make decisions regarding work), and feedback (reflecting whether the employee receives direct and clear information about effectiveness of performance) (Hackman, & Oldham, 1980). Previous studies have conceptualized job characteristics as the degree of variety, autonomy, task identity, task significance, and feedback that employees perceive in their jobs (Brief, Sell, & Aldag, 1978). While job satisfaction is defined as, “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” (Locke, 1969, p. 316). It stems from employees’ perception of certain aspects of the job and the relationship between their expectations or needs and the perceptions they have when carrying out the job. According to the job characteristics model developed by (Hackman and Oldham,

1975), these characteristics produce three psychological states in employees: Experience of meaningful work, experience of responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of the results of the work activities. The psychological states collectively influence employees’ personal and work outcomes, such as employees’ motivation, satisfaction, and work performance as well as low absenteeism and turnover rates. (Brief and Aldag, 1975) tested (Hackman and Lawler, 1971) model and found support for the findings of their study that higher degree of each job characteristic is positively associated with employees’ affective responses, such as internal work motivation, general job satisfaction, and employee job involvement. Originally, the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction is proposed in the JCM as well as corroborated in extant literature (Loher et al., 1985; Fried, 1991) asserting that the five core job characteristics carry the motivation potential and are likely to cause job satisfaction among employees. An employee’s job satisfaction is an internal reaction, stemming from a system of collective norms, values and expectations formed by the employee himself, to perceptions of the work and job conditions (Saygi, Tolon, & Tekogul, 2011). The previous studies have been reviewed to examine the relationship between each job characteristic and job satisfaction. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Job characteristics predicts job satisfaction.

H1a: Skill Variety predicts job satisfaction.

H1b: Task Identity predicts job satisfaction.

H1c: Task Significance predicts job satisfaction.

H1d: Autonomy predicts job satisfaction.

H1e: Feedback predicts job satisfaction.

2.2 | The Relationship between Job Characteristics and Work Engagement

The concept of employee engagement was first proposed by Kahn (1990) as the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; self-employment and self-expression of people physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their work lives. JC have a significant role in engaging employees because such employees put more efforts into their work if they are able to identify with it. There

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are theoretical and empirical bases for linking each job design facet to engagement. A study by Hackman and Lawler (1971) provides evidence that job characteristics can directly affect employee attitudes and behavior at work. JC feature among the most important work characteristic variables in predicting work engagement (Saks, 2006; Janjhua, 2011; Ram and Prabhakar, 2011). (Syahnaz, 2019) states that employees who have the freedom to do their jobs and manage their schedules will increase their motivation to achieve work goals, so they work with diligence, exert energy on their work, and feel enthusiastic about their work. Characteristics of jobs have featured in most models of work engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). We have reviewed the previous studies to examine the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Job characteristics predicts work engagement.

H2a: Skill Variety predicts work engagement.

H2b: Task Identity predicts work engagement.

H2c: Task Significance predicts work engagement.

H2d: Autonomy predicts work engagement.

H2e: Feedback predicts work engagement.

2.3 | The Relationship between Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Work engagement refers to the employee's emotional commitment to the company and its goals as per defined by (Abraham, 2012); as an engaged employee is characterized as enthusiastic, energetic, motivated and passionate about their work (Salanova, Agut & Peiro 2005). Whereas job satisfaction consists of an extrinsic and intrinsic component. Intrinsic job satisfaction is how people feel about the nature of the job tasks themselves, while extrinsic job satisfaction is how people feel about aspects of the work situation that are external to the job tasks (Hirschfeld, 2000). In this study, we hypothesize that there is a relationship between work engagement and Job satisfaction. According to Garg and Kumar (2012) they reported in their research paper that job satisfaction entails employee engagement. Meaning that job satisfaction increases when work engagement increases. Moreover, some practitioners have linked the correlation between these two

factors by employee's intention to turnover or being on job; as suggested by Gubman (2004) that employees who are not engaged in their work are more likely to quit their job. Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their job (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H3: Work engagement predicts job satisfaction.

2.4 | Work Engagement Role as a Mediator between Job Characteristics & Job Satisfaction

There are little empirical evidences in the extant literature supporting the mediating role of work engagement between the relationship of job characteristics and job satisfaction. Leading theorists in the employee engagement literature have emphasized the role of job design in fostering employee engagement. For instance, Kahn's theory of engagement (1990) is rooted in Hackman and Oldham's proposal (1980) that characteristics of jobs drive people's attitudes and behaviours. (Robbinson & Judge, 2017) defined work engagement as an extent to which an individual feels engaged, satisfied, and enthusiastic about his or her job. Work engagement is an umbrella covering various consequences in work as well as other variables that may support the organization to achieve its goals. In general, it is arguable that the idea of creating a positive attitude in an employee in working and maximizing what he or she has at the same time will open employee engagement. (Saks, 2006) proved that when work engagement arise, job satisfaction can result. The results by (Ramos & Almeida, 2017) showed that work engagement has a positive, significant effect on job satisfaction. The regression analysis results of the research by (Mache et al. , 2014) proved that work engagement has a positive, significant effect on job satisfaction and life quality of employees. By far the most influential theory relevant to work redesign has been the Herzberg two-factor theory of satisfaction and motivation (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Herzberg, 1966). It proposes that the primary determinants of employee satisfaction are factors intrinsic to the performed work including recognition, achievement, responsibility, advance-

ment, and personal growth. Building on that theory, we propose that employee who are performing enriched jobs feel satisfied as a consequence of being engaged to his/her work. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

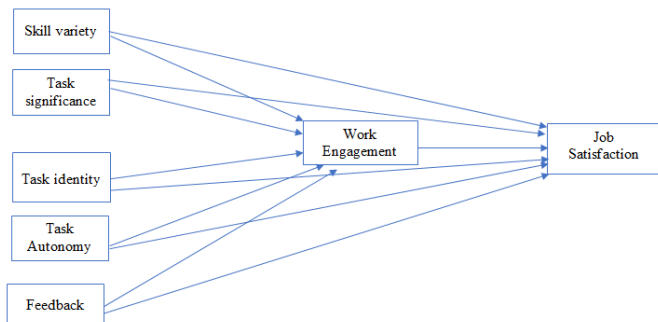


Fig. 1. Theoretical Model

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Sample and Procedure

This study aimed to empirically test a theoretical model on the mediating role of work engagement between the relationship of different dimensions of job characteristics with job satisfaction among employees working in the private sector in Riyadh. The population of this study involves entry, mid, and senior level employees in the private sector organizations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

A questionnaire was designed to collect responses required to attain the research objectives. It had two sections; the first dealt with demographic aspects of respondents, including gender, age, educational level, years of service with the current employer. While the second section included questions related to the study variables, that is, different dimensions of job characteristics, work engagement, and job satisfaction. A cover letter was appended with the questionnaire, describing the nature and objectives of our study. It also included statements on the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of responses, followed by a request for submission of accurate information to ensure realistic findings.

An internet-based format questionnaire was distributed addressing private sector employees in Riyadh city. The useable responses received were 321 responses. The data was collected at a single

point in time over a period of two weeks. The majority of respondents were female, mid-level career employees, bachelor’s degree holders, and in the age group of under 30 years old. Most of respondents work with the current employer for less than five years. Demographic and academic characteristics are reflected in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic and academic characteristics of respondents

Variable	N (%)
Gender	
Female	219(68%)
Male	102(32%)
Age	
Under 30 year	167(52%)
30-39	132(41.1%)
40-49	19(5.9%)
50 years or more	3(0.9%)
Educational level	
Bachelor’s Degree	245(76.3%)
Diploma or below	24(7.5%)
Master’s Degree or above	52(16.2%)
Job level	
Entry level	93(29%)
Mid-level	175(54.5%)
Senior level	53(16.5%)
Years of service in current organization	
10 – less than 15	14(4.4%)
15 and over	10(3.1%)
5 – less than 10	69(21.5%)
Less than 5	228(71%)

3.2 | Measures

A five-point Likert-type scale with anchors (1) strongly disagree and (5) strongly agree was used to seek responses on all the constructs. Description of the scales is given below:

Job Characteristics: The five-item scale given by Hackman and Oldham (1980) was adopted for measuring this construct. A total of 15 items were used to evaluate the job characteristics construct. Skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback were gauged by three items. These items included: “How much autonomy is there in your job?”; “To what extent does your job involve doing a whole and identifiable piece of work?”; “How much variety is there in your job?”; “In general, how significant or important is your job?”; and “To what extent does doing the job itself provide you with information about your work performance?”.

Work Engagement: The revised version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli et al. and Bakker (2003) measuring the three dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption has been applied for this construct using 17 items. Sample item of the construct is “At my work, I feel bursting with energy.” ; “I find the work that I do full

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of meaning and purpose.”; and “When I am working, I forget everything else around me”.

Job Satisfaction: This construct has been measured with the popular short scale developed by Cammann et al. (1979). One of the three items of this scale is “I feel high level of satisfaction working with this organization.”

Table 2

Questionnaire items

Job Characteristics	
Task Identity	
1.	My job involves a whole and identifiable piece of work. Meaning that the job is a complete piece of work that has an obvious beginning and end.
2.	My job is arranged so I have the chance to do an entire piece of work from beginning to end.
3.	The job provides me with a chance to finish the pieces of work I begin.
Task Significance	
1.	My job is significant. That is, the results of my work likely to significantly affect the lives or well-being of other people.
2.	My job is one where a lot of other people can be affected by how well the work gets done.
3.	My job itself is very significant or important in the broader scheme of things.
Skill Variety	
1.	My job involves a huge amount of variety. That is, the job requires me to do many different things at work, using a variety of skills and talents.
2.	My job requires me to use several complex or high-level skills.
3.	My job is not quite simple or repetitive.
Autonomy	
1.	My job involves a high level of autonomy. That is, the job permits me to decide on my own how to go about doing the work.
2.	My job allows me to make initiatives and judgments in carrying out the work.
3.	My job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work.
Feedback	
1.	My job itself provides me with information about my work performance. That is, the actual work provides clues about how well I am doing—aside from any “feedback” coworkers and supervisors may provide.
2.	Just doing the work required by the job provides many chances for me to figure out how well I am doing.
3.	My job itself provides very many clues about whether I am performing well.
Work Engagement	
1.	At my work, I feel bursting with my energy.
2.	Time flies when I am at work.
3.	I find the work that I do full of meaning & purpose.
4.	At my work, I feel strong & vigorous.
5.	I am enthusiastic about my job.
6.	When I am working, I forget everything else around me.
7.	My job inspires me.
8.	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
9.	I feel happy when I am working intensely.
10.	I am proud of the work I do.
11.	I am immersed in my work.
12.	I can continue working for very long periods at a time.
13.	To me, my job is challenging.
14.	I get carried away when I am working.
15.	At my job, I am very resilient, mentally.
16.	It is difficult to detach myself from my job.
17.	At my work, I always persevere, even when things do not go well.
Job Satisfaction	
1.	I enjoy working with this organization.
2.	Time flies when I am at work.
3.	I feel high level of satisfaction working with this organization.

Table 3
Means, standard deviation and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	TI	TS	SV	AUT	FED	WE	JS
Task Identity	3.46	0.87							
Task Significance	3.78	0.93	.192**						
Skill Variety	3.67	0.86	.136*	.432**					
Autonomy	3.09	1.022	.296**	.281**	.430**				
Feedback	3.55	0.89	.406**	.338**	.379**	.477**			
Work Engagement	3.53	0.73	.470**	.321**	.475**	.412**	.565**		
Job Satisfaction	3.28	0.98	.497**	.200**	.295**	.389**	.527**	.756**	

Correlations of 0.06 or higher are significant at $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Correlations of 0.07 or higher are significant at $p \leq 0.01$ level.

Correlations of 0.08 or higher are significant at $p \leq 0.001$ level.

Abbreviation: Standard deviation (SD); task identity (TI); task significance (TS); skill variety (SV); Autonomy

(AUT); feedback (FED); work engagement (WE); job satisfaction (JS).

3.3 | Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in three phases: 1) descriptive statistics; 2) confirmatory factor analysis to test dimensionality; and 3) path analysis. In the first phase, descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of all variables were examined. In the second phase, the confirmatory factor analysis and reliability consistencies were conducted to examine the unidimensionality of each variable. CFI value ≥ 0.95 and Cohens' $d r \geq .80$. In the third phase, the path analysis was conducted using AMOS. Kline (2016) suggested the following goodness-of-fit indices to test the theoretical model: chi-square (χ^2), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), non-normed fit index (NFI), and comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI). The following cut-off criteria were used as guidelines for the goodness-of-fit indices in the context of the target model and observed data (Byrne, 2013; Kline, 2016): (a) RMSEA $\leq .05$ signify an acceptable fit; (b) NFI, TLI and CFI values ≥ 0.95 signify an excellent fit.

4 | RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations among the study variables have been presented in Table 3. Skill variety has a significant positive correlation with task significance ($r=0.432, p<0.01$). Autonomy has a significant positive correlation with task identity ($r=0.296, p<0.01$), task significance ($r=0.281, p<0.01$), and skill variety ($r=0.430, p<0.01$). Feedback has a significant positive correlation with task identity ($r=0.406, p<0.01$), task significance ($r=0.338, p<0.01$), skill variety ($r=0.379, p<0.01$) and autonomy ($r=0.477, p<0.01$). Work engagement has significant positive correlation with task identity ($r=0.470, p<0.01$), task significance ($r=0.321, p<0.01$), skill variety ($r=0.475, p<0.01$), autonomy ($r=0.412, p<0.01$) and feedback ($r=0.565, p<0.01$). The variable job satisfaction is found to be signifi-

cantly correlated to task identity ($r= 0.497, p < 0.01$), task significance ($r= 0.200, p<0.01$), skill variety ($r= 0.295, p<0.01$), autonomy ($r= 0.389$ at $p<0.01$), feedback ($r= 0.527, p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($r= 0.756, p<0.01$).

Table 4
Result of confirmatory factor analysis: Uni-dimensionality and reliability coefficients for job characteristic, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

SI.No	Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha
1	Task identity	3	0.796
2	Task significance	2	0.709
3	Skill variety	3	0.778
4	Autonomy	3	0.875
5	feedback	3	0.837
6	work engagement	16	0.907
7	job satisfaction	3	0.824

4.1 | Testing Research Model Using Path Analysis

Table 5
Model specification and fit indices

Model	Feature	X 2	Df	P	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA
1	Model fit	.26	1	.61	1	1	1	.000

Abbreviation: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Bentler-Bonnett Fit index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

We conducted a path analysis using the (AMOS) version 26 to test the hypotheses advanced. The theoretical model shown in Fig.1 was tested. The present study used a set of different types of fit measures such as, Chi-square value, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Bentler-Bonnett Fit index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), to determine the goodness of fit a model. The recommended value for CFI, NFI and TLI are higher than 0.9, while RMSEA value is less than or equal to 0.06 for a good model fit. A non-significant Chi-square indicates that the model fit adequately consistent with the data.

Table No.5 shows the indices of model fit. As shown, the indirect relationships of the five job characteristics on job satisfaction were tested. The result shows that work engagement predicts job satisfaction. Further, task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy, feedback have indirect relationship with job satisfaction; mediated by work engagement. The results of testing hypotheses are as follows:

1) The model fit (Fig.2) shows that Job Characteristics: Task identity ($\beta= 0.145, p<0.05$), skill variety ($\beta= -0.083, p=0.06$), autonomy ($\beta= 0.075, p=0.073$),

feedback ($\beta= 0.117, p=0.010$), task significance ($\beta= -0.061, p=0.120$) predict job satisfaction. Hence, first hypothesis is supported.

2) Out of five Job Characteristics, only task identity ($\beta= 0.288, p<0.05$), skill variety ($\beta= 0.295, p<0.05$), autonomy($\beta= 0.051, p=0.294$), and feedback ($\beta= 0.312, p<0.05$), predicts work Engagement. Hence, second hypothesis is partially supported.

3) Work Engagement predicts Job Satisfaction ($\beta= 0.649, p<0.05$). Hence, third hypothesis is supported.

4) Hypothesis predict that work engagement mediates the relationship between job characteristics; (task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy, feedback) and job Satisfaction but, the default model reveals that job satisfaction is predicted by work engagement and work engagement is predicted by task identity, skill variety, autonomy, feedback. Since there is a direct path connecting each item to job satisfaction. Hence, fourth hypothesis is rejected.

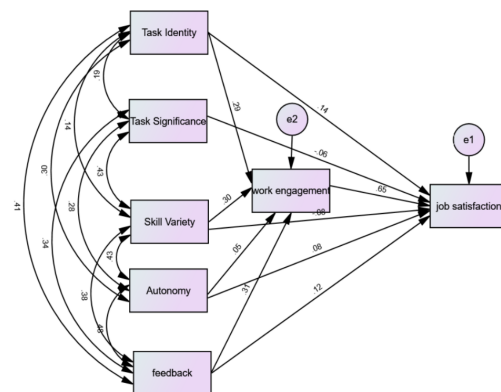


Fig. 2. Standard Estimation Model in AMOS

5 | DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the role of work engagement as a mediator in the relationship between different dimensions of job characteristics and job satisfaction among employees in the private sector in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy, and feedback are found to be linked to job satisfaction; this explains why the first hypotheses is supported. According to the JCM developed by Hackman and

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Oldham (1975), job characteristics produce different psychological states in individuals: Experience of meaningful work, experience of responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of the results of the work activities. The study results are consistent with the model in which each dimension contributes to produce different psychological state, since the JCM had originally considered job satisfaction, and motivation as positive consequences of job design. Most of job characteristics are correlated significantly with work engagement except task significance where the relationship indicates weak correlation. These findings support the second hypothesis which is also consistent with Hackman and Lawler's study that job characteristics can directly affect individuals' attitudes and behavior at work. The relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction reveals that there is a significant correlation between the two variables which support the third hypothesis. (Garg and Kumar, 2012), have concluded that job satisfaction and work engagement are positively linked to each other.

The study found that the mediating role of work engagement is not significant in the relationship to achieve job satisfaction since there is a direct path between job characteristics' dimensions and job satisfaction. This might explain lack of evidence and resources in the literature about the role of work engagement as a mediator between the variables. However, the notion that job characteristics have an significant influence on job satisfaction is well established in numerous researches (e.g., Ang and Slaughter 2001; Igbaria and Guimaraes 1993; Igbaria et al. 1994; Goldstein 1989; Thatcher et al. 2002; Wong et al. 1998). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is rejected. It is worth mentioning that feedback is strongly related to job satisfaction and work engagement; meaning that providing effective feedback will affect the organization's performance positively. The study findings clearly suggest that job design is a possible method to generate job satisfaction. Private sector organizations in Saudi Arabia should hence, focus on developing job designs to increase employees' levels of job satisfaction which will be reflected positively on the organization's success.

6 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATION

Job characteristics are considered important at the individual level because each of its dimensions has an influence on various attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Regarding the generalizability of the study findings, the vast majority of respondents were mid-level employees working in the private sector organizations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This might limit the generalizability of the findings to other groups working in the private sector, such as management and entry level staff. Also, we believe that it is difficult to generalize these results to other countries since each country has its unique work culture. This study has also paved several directions for future research by gathering sufficient responses from employees with different levels and work natures to increase the generalizability of results.

7 | CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight the need of designing jobs in a way that fulfill and satisfy different needs and expectations of individuals. In this research, the relationship between job characteristics, job satisfaction, and work engagement were investigated. There is a greater relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction whereas the mediating role of work engagement could not be proven since there is a direct path between job characteristics and job satisfaction. The findings have also included that feedback has the strongest relationship to job satisfaction and work engagement; meaning that providing effective feedback will affect the organization's performance positively. These findings will provide valuable guidance for researchers and practitioners for identifying the mechanisms by which they can improve job satisfaction levels which will be reflected on organization's performance accordingly.

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