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# What are the Key Drivers Used to Promote Employee Motivation and Engagement in a Manufacturing Environment?

## **Abstract**

Employee engagement is vital for company success. However, working in the manufacturing environment can often be repetitive and mind-numbing. Repetitive work, if not addressed correctly, can have negative impacts on individuals and society. It can cause stress-related mental and physical health problems, employee dissatisfaction and turnover, dysfunctional union/management relationships, and large social class differences in wealth. Managers must rely on human potential in order to improve their employees' overall performance. When an employee withdraws from his or her task, engagement levels decrease and this leads to burnout. Job Characteristics Theory, "provides a framework for a better implementation of the job by working through the interaction between the main aspects of the job with the mental- living states of a person."

## **Keywords**

motivation, key drivers, manufacturing, manufacturing environment, employee engagement, engagement, motivate, retention, HR, human resources

## **Comments**

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## INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is vital for company success.<sup>4</sup> However, working in the manufacturing environment can often be repetitive and mind-numbing. Repetitive work, if not addressed correctly, can have negative impacts on individuals and society.<sup>1</sup> It can cause stress-related mental and physical health problems, employee dissatisfaction and turnover, dysfunctional union/management relationships, and large social class differences in wealth.<sup>1</sup> Managers must rely on human potential in order to improve their employees' overall performance. When an employee withdraws from his or her task, engagement levels decrease and this leads to burnout.<sup>3</sup> Job Characteristics Theory, "provides a framework for a better implementation of the job by working through the interaction between the main aspects of the job with the mental- living states of a person."<sup>2</sup>

## JOB CHARACTERISTICS THEORY

The Job Characteristics Theory was developed to identify significant dimensions of a job and their effect on motivation. When employees find their tasks to be challenging and rewarding, they are more likely to have job satisfaction and be motivated which leads to increased productivity and decreased turnover.<sup>5</sup> The main ideas behind this theory are to help employees find meaning in their work, having responsibility for their work outcomes, and receive knowledge of the results of their work. Below are the 5 dimension of jobs related to employee motivation (Appendix 1).<sup>6</sup> All of these, when utilized correctly, lead to high internal work motivation, high quality work performance, high satisfaction with the work, and low absenteeism and turnover.<sup>6</sup>

### Dimensions:

***Skill Variety*** is the range of duties and tasks involving different skills that the employee performs in his or her job.<sup>5</sup> However, this may be difficult to achieve in a manufacturing setting when each task has to be similar and repetitive in order to get the job done. A suggestion to this could be combining tasks so it does not have to feel as repetitive.<sup>6</sup>

***Task Identity*** is the level of significance of a task in regards to the organization.<sup>5</sup> Along with combining tasks, work units could be formed in order for people to fully understand why they are performing this job for the organization.<sup>6</sup>

***Task Significance*** is the amount the job or task affects people either in the organization or in an external environment.<sup>6</sup> This could be very well utilized in the manufacturing industry. Even if someone is performing a repetitive task, showing him or her the finished product and how his or her small piece may connect to a larger picture has the employee more motivated to perform the task, even if it is tedious and boring.

***Autonomy*** is the amount of flexibility the job provides to the individual in regards to scheduling and determining the process of carrying out procedures.<sup>6</sup> Employees with autonomy are given the freedom to decide the way their work gets done. Autonomy is associated with high meaning and responsibility while performing tasks. It has been found that intrinsic motivation and job autonomy have a positive relationship.<sup>7</sup>

**Feedback** is the degree to which an individual receives direct and well-defined information about the success of his or her performance of a job activity.<sup>6</sup> A primary goal of feedback is to reshape behavior of employees. Employees need to have a clear concept of their performance for the organization in order for them to achieve it (Appendix 2).<sup>8</sup> It helps employees prioritize and manage behavior across their work. It is important to create a culture that allows employees to seek feedback because it helps with self-development and self-regulation.<sup>9</sup>

## CASE STUDIES

### **Automobile Parts Manufacturing Plant:**

This studied 150 automobile parts manufacturing workers (all men) chosen at random in 2012. There were questionnaires completed regarding the job characteristics theory and quality of work life. The quality of work life nowadays is associated with general quality of life. The findings showed there is a positive and significant relationship between job characteristics theory and quality of work life. Task significance and skill variety had the largest effect on the quality of work life. It was found that the higher the potential motivation was, the higher the quality of work life. “The questionnaire encompasses the five subscales: Skill variety (SV), Task identity (TI), Task significance (TS), Autonomy (AU), and Job-based Feedback (FB) (10), each subscale contains three questions... Job and career satisfaction (JCS), general wellbeing (GWB), work condition (WCS), home-work interface (HWI), stress at work (SAW), and control at work (CAW) were assessed by 23 questions of the questionnaire and question 24 specifically evaluated the satisfaction with quality of work life.” Some areas are also associated with low quality of work life: tasks that were not challenging, when management had no opportunities to recognize employee talents, and when employees were not given opportunities to make decisions. People who adopted tasks voluntarily were more satisfied.<sup>2</sup>

### **Raising Performance in Operations (RPO) Program:**

This plant was one of 67 for a multimillion-pound United Kingdom manufacturing plant that spanned 24 countries and 11,000 employees in 2012. It was home to poor employee engagement and morale, team leaders not taking on enough responsibility, and a lack of communication. The RPO Program was used to understand the issues and dynamics on the shop floor. This plant went through a 24 month program in order to improve performance. High performance comes from people who feel appreciated in their jobs. This program boosted morale by having more one-on-one meetings to motivate employees. More feedback than ever was given by the team leaders, which enabled higher levels of engagement. There is a link between employee engagement and performance over time. There was a 45% increase in employee engagement. This program generated a 400% return on investment via employee engagement driving performance.<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

According to the Job Characteristics Theory, implementing concepts for each dimension is possible to create specific psychological meanings (Appendix 3).<sup>6</sup> There are several steps that can be taken in order to increase worker motivation in a manufacturing environment. Skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback are all important aspects to keep employees engaged and motivated to work for a company.<sup>6</sup> The manufacturing industry often has tasks that are repetitive and generally could have employees losing motivation to perform to the best of their abilities. Increasing all of the aspects of the Job Characteristics Theory should allow employees to feel more useful to the company and want to strive for greatness. There should be ongoing training and development in order to get the most out of employees.<sup>11</sup> Employers should always be making sure that they are aiding their employees to feel good about their work in order to optimize performance.<sup>1</sup>

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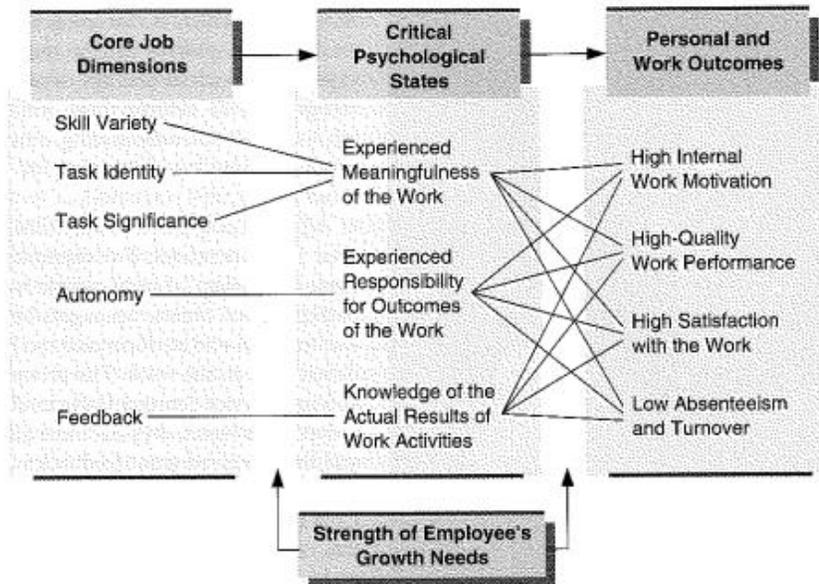
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**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1:**



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**Appendix 2.**

**Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework Of The Study**



### Appendix 3:

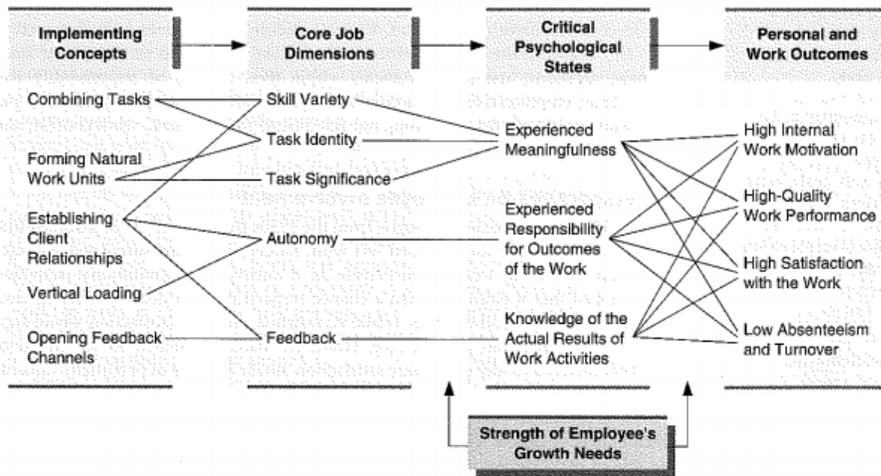


FIGURE 6.3

#### Implementing the Job Characteristics Theory

Managers should use a set of implementation guidelines if they want to apply the job characteristics theory in their organization. This figure shows some of these guidelines. For example, managers can combine tasks, form natural work units, establish client relationships, vertically load jobs, and open feedback channels.

Reference: From J. R. Hackman, G. R. Oldham, R. Janson, and K. Purdy, "A New Stage for Job Enrichment." Copyright © 1975 by The Regents of the University of California. Reprinted from *California Management Review*, vol. 17, no. 4. By permission of The Regents.