

Effect of Job Characteristics on Work Engagement: An Empirical Study of the Banking Sector in Bangladesh

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Abstract

An engaged workforce is considered indispensable for providing superior customer service and gaining a competitive advantage in any service firm. Despite the fact, there is scant research on the antecedents and consequences of work engagement in the context of the service sector in Bangladesh. In particular, the role of job characteristics in shaping work engagement is still undiscovered in the country's present literature. To fill this gap, this study aims to explore the effect of job characteristics on the work engagement of bankers in Bangladesh. Using the convenience sampling method with a structured questionnaire, the study collected 113 self-reported responses (response rate 34.77%) from the branch-level managerial employees serving in the private banks. Using SPSS, data were analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study suggest that all the five dimensions of job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) have a significant positive impact on work engagement. The findings indicate that jobs that are designed with favorable characteristics will drive the job holders towards greater engagement at work. Accordingly, the study suggested implications for bank administrators.

Keywords: Job characteristics, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback, work engagement.

1.0 Introduction

Recently, there has been a booming interest in how to promote employees' engagement at work (Elrehail et al., 2021; Han et al., 2021; Lesener et al., 2020; Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). This is because of the belief that the success of an organization, regardless of its size, nature and purpose, is largely determined by how much engaged its people at their work (Al-Amin et al., 2018). Work engagement is usually defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Engagement at work is increasingly being recognized as a key predictor of a variety of positive outcomes, including enhancing job satisfaction, proactivity, task performance, creative thinking,

organizational citizenship behavior, work behaviors, job outcomes, and client satisfaction (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Karim & Baset, 2020; Perera et al., 2018; Wan et al., 2018). However, it is estimated that only 13% of the world's workforce is actively engaged in their jobs (Islam et al., 2019; Islam & Tariq, 2018).

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In the year 2020, only 20% of employees are work-involved in their jobs worldwide, while only 37% are engaged in their jobs in Bangladesh (Gallup, 2021). As a result, managers are increasingly in search of strategies to increase their workers' work engagement. Employees with more energy, dedication, and absorption in their work are critical to increasing and maintaining an organization's performance, effectiveness, and competitiveness (Afsar et al., 2021; Van der Walt, 2018). Employee engagement at work is especially important for the service industry, where employees have direct contact with clients and the quality of service is dependent on employee competence (Bouranta et al., 2019). Moreover, engaged employees are more likely to carry out their duties and responsibilities honestly and go above and beyond in resolving customer problems and meeting customer needs, resulting in increased customer satisfaction (Al-dalalmeh et al., 2018). More specifically, engaged employees are indispensable for the banking sector which governs a country's economic growth and development by providing financial services. Since quality of service, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty are the top priorities in the banking sector, it is a prerequisite of a bank to have employees with greater work engagement for providing superior customer service (Karim & Baset, 2020).

Literature indicates that job design plays a key role in shaping employees' work engagement (De Spiegelaere et al., 2015; Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). In particular, designing jobs with desirable characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) suggested by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1980) can be a determining factor for work engagement (Adiarani, 2019; Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). Job characteristics tend to serve as intrinsic motivators towards promoting employees' engagement with their jobs (Wan et al., 2018). Moreover, job characteristics usually contribute to a thorough understanding of the job, an apprehension over the impact of one's efforts, a sense of accountability for job outcomes, and also development of positive courtesy norms among the employees, which in turn result in greater sense of engagement at work (Adiarani, 2019). Additionally, work that possesses a fundamental trait of work with unique characteristics creates an environment conducive to employee engagement (Adiarani, 2019).

Although there is a growing body of literature on work engagement and its predictors, present literature overlooked exploring the antecedent role of job characteristics in fostering work engagement of bankers with few exceptions (see Rai et al., 2017; Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). Moreover, no research is found to the best of the researchers' knowledge on the relationship between job characteristics and employee engagement in the context of Bangladesh including the banking sector, which is widely regarded as the lifeblood of any economy and a country's key service provider. This industry employs 1,82,610 people (Sarker, 2020). Clearly, this is a thriving area of the economy, and, like any other staff-intensive industry, this one will necessitate a high level of work engagement in relation to their job responsibilities. As a result, the study's goal is to investigate the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement in Bangladeshi banks.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Work Engagement

Kahn (1990) was the first to develop the notion of engagement and defines the term as the harnessing of employees' selves cognitively, physically, and emotionally to their work roles. According to Borst et al. (2018), work engagement refers to an individual's energetic and active

state of mind marked by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Specifically, vigor represents a high level of will, energy, effort and resilience at work; dedication describes greater feelings of enthusiasm, pride, and challenge at work; whereas absorption indicates the state of engrossment and concentration in the task, where time passes very quickly (Cortés-Denia et al., 2021; Schaufeli et al., 2002). It is generally assumed that work engagement is a strong determinant of job performance, overall wellbeing, and client satisfaction, whereas disengaged employees are usually more stressed, are less productive, less satisfied with their personal lives, more inclined to absenteeism, and are more likely to quit the jobs (Lee et al., 2019). Previous studies discovered that work engagement significantly contributes to job satisfaction (Rai & Maheshwari, 2021), employee well-being (Radic et al., 2020), organizational engagement (Kim & Kim, 2020), job performance (Gutermann et al., 2017), and organizational citizenship behavior (Ng et al., 2021). Moreover, work engagement has a negative association with turnover intention (Gutermann et al., 2017), occupational burnout (Villavicencio-Ayub et al., 2014), and deviant workplace behavior (Zheng et al., 2021).

2.2 Job Characteristics

The job characteristics model (JCM) developed by Hackman & Oldham (1975, 1976, 1980) is a pioneer model for analyzing and predicting work motivation (Österberg & Rydstedt, 2018). JCM proposes that any job designed with five job dimensions (i.e., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) can lead to favorable work-related outcomes through improving three psychological states (i.e., a greater sense of meaningfulness, a sense of personal responsibility for the work outcomes, and knowledge of results) (Blanz, 2017). Skill variety indicates the opportunity to use different talents and skills to perform his or her job; task identity represents the opportunity to perform a whole piece of work; task significance is a measure of the impacts a job has on the lives of others; autonomy refers to the freedom in scheduling and carrying out one's work; and feedback denotes the extent to which an employee receives clear and detailed information about his/her job performance (Österberg & Rydstedt, 2018; Yuen et al., 2018). Job characteristics are regarded as determining factors of employee attitude and behavior (Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Elanain et al., 2009).

2.3 Relationship between Job Characteristics and Work Engagement

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model is a theoretical framework which is commonly used for explaining the antecedents of work engagement (Lee et al., 2019). This model assumes that all occupations have job demands (i.e., job aspects that demand sustained physical and psychological effort, such as workload, long working hours, time pressure, problems with equipment, and interpersonal conflicts) (Salmela-Aro & Upadaya, 2018), as well as a variety of resources to tackle those demands (i.e., positive job aspects for achieving work goals) (Lesener et al., 2020). According to the JD-R model, job resources tend to foster employees' work engagement through stimulating both extrinsic as well as intrinsic motivation (Wan et al., 2018). When job resources are scarce, burnout develops, but when job resources are plentiful, work engagement ensues (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Hackman & Oldham (1975)'s job characteristics are generally considered to be job resources and thus may stimulate work engagement (Elrehail et al., 2021; Han et al., 2021). When a job is enriched with the five dimensions of job characteristics model, the incumbent is likely to experience a greater level of meaningfulness at work, increased intrinsic motivation and hence will be more engaged in his or her work (Han et al., 2021; Wan et al., 2018). In particular, *skill variety* allows people to experience a sense of competence, learning and growth opportunity, and meaningfulness of work; *task identity* promotes a clear sense of purpose, energy, and meaningfulness of their actions; *task significance* fuels the sense of importance and meaning of their work for others; *autonomy* stimulates a sense of ownership over the work; and finally, *feedback* reduces ambiguity and upholds one's effort (Sonnentag, 2017). Holistically, job characteristics contribute to motivation, dedication and engagement towards one's work (Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Sonnentag, 2017).

The social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) can also be used to explain the link between job characteristics and work engagement. Based on the norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), the SET argues that people feel obligated to repay others from whom they received something in the past (Karim, 2021). Accordingly, if an organization treats employees in a positive manner, they will try to reciprocate this treatment with good behavior and vice versa (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Therefore, it is justified that if an organization designs jobs with favorable features, its employees are likely to perceive them as favorable treatments from their organization and thus will reciprocate with greater engagement at work (Rai & Maheshwari, 2021).

Indeed, several studies have already examined the effect of the dimensions of job characteristics model on work engagement in various work settings (Adiarani, 2019; Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Christian et al., 2011; Othman & Nasurdin, 2019; Rai & Maheshwari, 2021; Sulistyo and Suhartini, 2019; Wan et al., 2018). The findings of these studies explored that job characteristics are significant determinants of work engagement. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are compatible with the existing literature.

- H1:** There is a positive effect of skill variety on work engagement.
- H2:** There is a positive effect of task identity on work engagement.
- H3:** There is a positive effect of task significance on work engagement.
- H4:** There is a positive effect of job autonomy on work engagement.
- H5:** There is a positive effect of job feedback on work engagement.

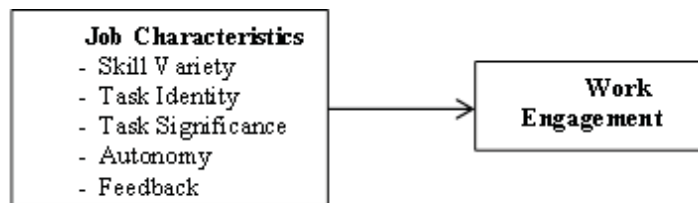


Figure 1: The Research Model

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Population, Sample, and Data Collection

The population of the study comprises all the branch-level managerial employees serving in the private commercial banks in the Dhaka City of Bangladesh. Using Google form, a structured questionnaire was sent to the potential respondents' email addresses collected from the known bankers. Each email had a forwarding message that explained the overall objective of the study, necessary instructions, and a request to participate in the survey and to return it within four weeks. Following a convenience sampling method, a total of 113 usable responses representing a response rate of 34.77% were found from the distribution of 325 questionnaires. Since all items and demographic information were obligatory to be answered in order to submit a questionnaire, all responses were found usable for the study, without any missing value. As a result, the sample size for the study is 113.

3.2 Profile of the Respondents

As presented in Table 1, the sample of this study was made up of 113 branch-level managerial employees representing 65.5% male and 34.5% female employees. Of the respondents, 96.5 had master's degree, while only 3.5% had bachelor's degree. The lion share of respondents (42.5%) were below 30 years old, whereas 34.5% and 17.7% belonged to the age group of 20-30 and 31-40 years respectively. Only 5.3% were above 50 years. In terms of marital status, 82.3% were married and the rest were unmarried. The majority (i.e., 41.6%) of the participants had experience in the banking sector for less than 5 years, while 20.4%, 15.9%, and 15.0% had experience in the ranges of 6-10, 11-15, 16-20 years. Only 2.7% reported their experience of more than 25 years.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Demographics	Description	Frequency (N = 113)	Percentage (%)
Year of Experience in Banking Sector	Less than 05 Years	47	41.6
	06-10 Years	23	20.4
	11-15 Years	18	15.9
	16-20 Years	17	15.0
	21-25 Years	5	4.4
	Above 25 Years	3	2.7
Gender	Male	74	65.5
	Female	39	34.5

Demographics	Description	Frequency (N = 113)	Percentage (%)
Age	20-30 years	48	42.5
	31-40 years	39	34.5
	41-50 Years	20	17.7
	Above 50	6	5.3
Marital Status	Married	93	82.3
	Unmarried	20	17.7
Level of Education	Bachelor's	4	3.5
	Master's	109	96.5

3.3 Measures

The measures of task significance (3 items), autonomy (3 items), and feedback (3 items) were adopted from the study of Hwang & Jang(2020).The remaining two sub-scales of job characteristics model, namely skill variety and task identity were assessed with three items each absorbed from Iqbal et al. (2018)'s study. Work engagement is measured using the nine-item scale (shorter version) taken from the study of Schaufeli et al. (2006). A 5-point Likert scale was employed, with 1 indicating "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicating "Strongly Agree."

3.4 Data Analysis Method

SPSS version 25.0 was employed for data entry and statistical analysis. At first, we reported means, standard deviations, and correlations representing the descriptive statistics of the study's constructs. For the purpose of validating the hypotheses, we conducted inferential analysis employing regression analysis.

Moreover, the study confirmed the non-presence of common method variance (CMV) using Harman's single factor test that demonstrated maximum 45.468% (< the cut-off value of 50%) of variance explained by a single factor. In addition, the study calculated VIF values (1.282 to 2.388), which are within the threshold 3.3 (Kock, 2015), thereby confirming the non-existence of multicollinearity problem among the explanatory variables.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and demonstrates that all the dimensions of job characteristics have significant positive correlation with work engagement. Table 2 also presents the Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.729 to 0.918 as shown within brackets. Since the alpha values are above 0.70, the scales had adequate reliability.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for the Variables

SL	Latent Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Skill Variety	3.35	.66	(.820)					
2.	Task Identity	3.58	.58	.509**	(.776)				
3.	Task Significance	3.59	.59	.533**	.651**	(.830)			
4.	Autonomy	3.36	.72	.309**	.456**	.365**	(.832)		
5.	Feedback	3.66	.64	.572**	.646**	.696**	.484**	(.729)	
6.	Work Engagement	3.64	.51	.608**	.701**	.733**	.507**	.745**	(.918)

Table 3 demonstrates that $R^2 = 0.71$, which indicates the variance in work engagement explained by the job characteristics is 71.0%, thereby confirming a strong predictive capacity of independent variables.

Table 3: R Square and Adjusted R Square

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.843	.711	.698	.28021

Note: Predictors: (Constant), FB, AU, SV, TI, TS.

The ANOVA result as displayed in Table 4 shows that $F(5, 107) = 52.718$ and $p < 0.001$, indicating the significance of the regression model.

Table 4: Results of ANOVA Analysis

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	20.696	5	4.139	52.718	.000
Residual	8.401	107	.079		
Total	29.097	112			

Note: Dependent Variable: WE; Predictors: (Constant), FB, AU, SV, TI, TS.

Results of the regression analysis as shown in Table 5 demonstrate that task significance ($H2: \beta = .207, t = 2.732, p < 0.01$), task significance ($H3: \beta = .284, t = 3.604, p < 0.01$), and feedback ($H5: \beta = .255, t = 3.075, p < 0.01$) had a significant positive effect on work engagement. Moreover, Regression analysis also shows that skill variety ($H1: \beta = .164, t = 2.483, p < 0.05$), autonomy ($H4: \beta = .135, t = 2.217, p < 0.05$) had positive effect on work engagement.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model	B	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T-values	Sig.
		Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.612	.191	-	3.206	.002
	SV	.126	.051	.164	2.483	.015
	TI	.183	.067	.207	2.732	.007
	TS	.247	.068	.284	3.604	.000
	AU	.095	.043	.135	2.217	.029
	FB	.203	.066	.255	3.075	.003

Note: Dependent Variable: WE

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Results of the study showed that all hypotheses are well-supported, indicating that all the five dimensions of job characteristics have a significant positive role in stimulating work engagement. The findings of the study are congruent with the reciprocal norms of social exchange theory. That means, employees tend to accept and recognize the presence of the job characteristics in a favorable sense and thus reciprocate with a desirable attitude like work engagement. Moreover, the findings are in line with previous empirical studies conducted in other countries in various settings (Adiarani, 2019; Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Christian et al., 2011; Othman & Nasuridin, 2019; Sulistyono and Suhartini, 2019; Wan et al., 2018) including banking sector (Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). The study results support the basic notion of job characteristics model that the five job characteristics can uplift favorable job attitudes (e.g., work engagement) by fostering three important psychological states (a feeling of meaningfulness, a sense of responsibility for work outcomes, and awareness of work results) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

The study contributes to the literature of work engagement by showing job characteristics as important antecedents in the context of the banking sector of a developing country. In fact, previous literature overlooked exploring the impact of job characteristics on the work engagement of bankers, with few exceptions (Rai et al., 2017; Rai & Maheshwari, 2021). Moreover, the study produces further evidence that employees tend to perceive job characteristics as job resources as described in the JD-R model. From the practical point of view, bank administrators are recommended to design jobs of banks enriching with skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy in decision-making and feedback.

Like any other social science research, this study has a few important limitations that should be overcome in future studies. The important limitations of the study are the small sample size and use of the non-probability sampling technique. It is suggested that future studies will proceed with a large sample size with a probability sampling method. Moreover, it is suggested to examine the potential mediating role of intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being

in the studied relationship in the future. In conclusion, banks should redesign their jobs around the job characteristics in order to promote an engaged workforce which may result in gaining competitive advantage and sustainability.

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