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Examining the Influence of Job Characteristic on the Psychological Empowerment of Bank Managers in Malaysia

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of job characteristics on psychological empowerment using 151 questionnaires responded by bank managers in Peninsular Malaysia. The measurement scale employed in this study has met the acceptable levels of validity and reliability tests of the study. Furthermore, psychological empowerment and job characteristics are conceptualized as a second-order construct indicators. Regression result of SEM analysis indicated that psychological empowerment was influenced by job characteristics. Further, this study provided the discussions and implications from the findings.

1. INTRODUCTION

Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980) is the most influential model of self-report research on job characteristics. The model further states that the five core job characteristics can be combined into a single index of motivating potential score* (MPS) that reveals the overall potential of a job to influence an individual's feelings and behaviors (Fried & Farris, 1986). Job characteristics theory introduced by Hackman and Oldham (1976) explain conditions in which employees would be intrinsically motivated when performing a job. Internally motivated individuals are not reliant on external factors to be highly motivated to work effectively and efficiently. According to the theory, internal motivation is established by three psychological states, i.e. 'experienced meaningfulness' (i.e. the extent to which the work is considered as making a difference to others), 'felt responsibility' (i.e. the degree to which employees assume responsibility for their work), and 'knowledge of results' (i.e. the extent to which employees are conscious of the quality of their work).

Meanwhile, psychological empowerment is a motivational construct that comprises individual cognitions and perceptions that constitute feelings of behavioral and psychological investment in a work (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995, 1996). This would mean when individual experienced empowerment he or she feels the capacity to carry out the work and perform well. A strong sense of

personal efficacy is developed and this condition heightened the motivation to accomplish the task given. Therefore, Conger (1989) thinks of empowerment as the act of strengthening an individual's beliefs in his or her sense of effectiveness. The theory behind these ideas can be traced to the work of Alfred Bandura, who conceptualized the notion of self-efficacy. Based on the theory, it is believed that empowered employees are intrinsically motivated to take personal ownership of their jobs, to exercise self-determination, to satisfy their need for power and to reinforce their personal self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1986).

Psychological empowerment is seen as intrinsic motivation, it is belief that employee perception on job characteristic would correlates with psychological empowerment too. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is assumed that job characteristic will enhance psychological empowerment. Even though there are studies that examine the relationship between job characteristics and psychological empowerment, the area has remained under researched compared to studies in other countries. There is still a need to further explore the relationship using different setting to further enhance the relationship and also to validate the psychological empowerment construct (Jha & Nair, 2008; Chan, 2003).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Job Characteristics (JC)

According to the model, job characteristics are defined as consisting of five characteristics, such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. *Skill variety* refers to the degree to which a job requires an array of different activities in carrying out the work that involve the use of a number of different skills and talents of a person. *Task identity* is defined as the degree to which a job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work, which means doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome. *Task significance* is the degree to which a job has a significant impact on the lives or work of other people, whether people from within the organization or people from the external environment. *Autonomy* is defined as the degree to which a job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the person in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures and methods to be used in carrying it out. *Feedback* refers to the degree to which carrying out the activities needed by a job results in individual getting direct and clear information about the effectiveness of their performance.

To be more exact, these job characteristics have impact on employees attitudes and behaviors at work such as productivity, internal motivation, and satisfaction and effective work behavior, for example good performance and low absence and turnover (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Hackman & Lawler, 1971). In other words, the expected behavior outcomes discussed above will take place when workers experience three critical psychological states (such as experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility and knowledge of the result) that had been discussed before. Fried and Farris (1986), in their meta-analyses indicated a positive, moderately strong correlation between perceptual measures of intrinsic job characteristics and job satisfaction. Relationship between the core dimension of job characteristics and work motivation and job involvement also have been studied in the past and have been found to be consistently related to the core job dimensions (Hackman & Lawler 1971; Saal, 1978). Furthermore, empirical research about the effects of job characteristics and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has been explored in a few studies (for example Farr, Podsakoff, & Organ, 1990; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; Purvanova, Bono, & Dzieweczynski, 2006).

Studies also have been carried out to examine the relationship between work redesign (job characteristics) and psychological empowerment (Chen & Chen, 2007; Jha & Nair, 2008). Chen and Chen's (2007) study involved employees from Taiwan's state-owned enterprises that had undergone privatization or reorganization. This study adapted items from Hackman and Oldham's job characteristic model such as skill variety, work identity, work significance, autonomy and feedback. The predicted effect for work redesign on psychological empowerment is significant. However, only three dimensions contribute to support the hypothesis, i.e. skill variety, work identity and feedback. Meanwhile Jha and Nair (2008) did a survey on frontline employees of five star hotel in Mumbai using measures from Sims, Szilagyi and Keller's (1976). This Job Characteristics Inventory is an improved measure of perceived job characteristics developed by Hackman and Lawler (1971). The dimensions are skill variety, task identity, autonomy and feedback. The other two dimensions are interpersonal dimensions, such as dealing with others and friendship opportunities. The result also illustrates significant positive relationship between job characteristics and psychological empowerment, which mean if employees perceive the characteristics of their job as highly motivating, it will lead to higher perception of psychological empowerment. In other words, job characteristics influence intrinsic task motivation of an employee by providing meaningful job, making the employee more competent as well as determined to perform the job and also by creating a positive impact on the job environment. Study by Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) indicates that the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction is mediated by the meaning and competence dimensions of empowerment. This finding also confirms that there is a positive relationship between job characteristics and psychological empowerment.

As stated in Job Characteristics Model (JCM), job characteristics have important aspects which can influence managers' attitudes and behaviour at work. Feedback dimension helps managers in achieving high intrinsic motivation, satisfaction, and attendance to workplace (Hackman & Lawler 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Other specific job characteristics such as skill variety and task significance will lead to positive psychological states such as feelings of meaningfulness and responsibility, which in turn lead to satisfaction with the job. Conceptually, these critical psychological states are very similar to the cognitions reflecting employees' psychological empowerment identified by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), and Spreitzer (1995). Furthermore, the increase in task identity, autonomy, and feedback in work will bring employees confidence and make them feel that they are competent in achieving the work objectives and self-determined to choose their own ways to solve problems (Chen & Chen, 2008).

2.2. Psychological Empowerment (PE)

The concept of empowerment has been mentioned and discussed by both management researchers and practitioners. This interest is due to several factors, mostly related to organizational effectiveness. In order to understand how empowerment plays its role in management, some definitions of the concept is introduced. For example, according to Kanter (1977), empowerment results from decentralization, a flattening of the hierarchy, and increased employee participation. Ford and Fottler (1995) stated that empowerment usually means giving employees the autonomy to make decisions about how they go about their daily activities. Therefore empowered employees have a high sense of self- efficacy due to having significant responsibility and authority over their jobs (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) regard empowerment as consisting of four psychological states: meaningfulness, competence, choice, and impact. The first component, meaningfulness, relates to the

value of the task, involving intrinsic caring about a given task. The employees' perceptions of how meaningful their tasks are affect their feelings of empowerment. Competence, the second component, refers to the belief that individuals are able to perform the task activities skillfully when they try. The third component, choice, is the degree to which employees feel a causal responsibility for choosing or regulating task actions. The last component, impact, is the degree to which employees perceive their behaviors as 'making a difference' in terms of accomplishing the task. (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990, p 672–673).

Based on the work of Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Spreitzer (1995) defined psychological empowerment as intrinsic task motivation demonstrated in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role: meaning, competence, impact and self-determination. *Meaning* is defined as the value of work goal or purpose, based on individual's own standard. Employees will find meaning in their job when they perceived that the activity they take part and its objectives are compatible with their own value system (Brief & Nord, 1990). *Competence* is an individual's belief that he or she has the capability to produce favorable outcome. *Self-determination* is defined as autonomy in carrying out work behavior or work process. Self-determination also refers to the discretion given to employees to adopt to which types of behavior and actions that they think is best in influencing them in achieving organization's objectives. According to Deci (1975), self-determination is the expression of choice by the employees as how to perform their task. Finally, Spreitzer (1995) redefined *impact* as a "degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at work" (p.1443). Simply said, impact is the perception of the employees whether he or she can affect or influence organization outcome (Ashforth, 1989).

Many studies had been carried out to examine the impact or the outcomes of empowerment (Bhatnagar, 2005; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Laschinger et al., 2004; Savery & Luks, 2001; Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997). Laschinger *et al.* (2003) find that feelings of psychological empowerment had a negative influence on burnout. In addition, Hochwalder and Brucefors (2005) believe that psychological empowerment at work may be one of the possible factors that provide protection against ill health. Psychological empowerment also has an impact on job satisfaction and on job related stress (for example, Laschinger *et al.*, 2004; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Savery & Luks, 2001; Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997). On the other hand, study by Bhatnagar (2005) shows that affective commitment is a strong outcome of psychological empowerment, followed by normative commitment, and continuance commitment being the weakest outcome

According to the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), job characteristics (specifically the feedback dimension) have important aspects in the process for managers to achieve high intrinsic motivation, satisfaction and attendance level (Hackman & Lawler 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Since psychological empowerment is seen as intrinsic motivation, it is believed that employee perception on job characteristic would correlate with psychological empowerment too. Moreover, specific job characteristics (for example, skill variety, task significance) would lead to positive psychological states such as feelings of meaningfulness and responsibility, which in turn lead to satisfaction with the job.

These critical psychological states conceptually resemble very much the cognitions reflecting employees' psychological empowerment that were identified by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and further validated by Spreitzer (1995). Furthermore, the increase in task identity, autonomy, and feedback in work will bring employees confidence and make them feel that they are competent in achieving the work objectives and

self-determined to choose their own ways to solve problems (Chen & Chen, 2008). Therefore, the following hypothesis is raised:

H1: Managers' perception of job characteristics would be positively related to psychological empowerment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Population and Sample size

This study focused on the bank manager throughout Peninsular Malaysia. The population of this study covers all the conventional banks which had gone through the merging and acquisition process. The branch manager and the head of department from the various bank located in Peninsular Malaysia, were the respondents for this study. Only 164 respondents turned up a sample and 151 usable questionnaires were analyzed.

3.2. Instrument Development

The psychological empowerment measures that were used in this study are based from the instruments developed by Spreitzer (1992, 1995). The four-factored psychological empowerment construct is operationalized by twelve items. The four factors or dimensions are meaning, competency, self-determination and impact. Meanwhile, job characteristics are measured using the five Likert scale questionnaires with the value such very inaccurate (1) to (5) very accurate. Five dimensions of job characteristics of the respondents' current jobs are measured using the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980).

3.3. Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed using Smart PLS 3.0. Since the model consist of first and second order construct, assessing the measurement model included both constructs. The first order construct refers to the relationship between the indicators and its dimensions, while the second order construct refers to the relationship between the dimensions and the latent constructs. In evaluating the measurement model, elements of the model are individually evaluated based on certain quality criteria such as reflective measurement models, formative measurement models and structural model. The research model of this study is as Figure 1, which displays the loading for each item and beta values for this study.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Assessment of the measurement model

The reliability of each item/construct is assessed by examining the loadings of the respective items on their respective latent construct (Hulland, 1999) or internal composite reliability. Meanwhile, the construct validity can be measured through convergent (AVE) and discriminant validity (cross loadings). Table 4.1 exhibits the convergent validity, which revealed all the item loadings exceeded the recommended value of 0.4 (Hulland, 1999). The loadings range from 0.404 to 0.936 indicates that more than half of the variance in the observed variable is explained by the constructs. Any loadings below 0.4 were deleted, resulting in final AVE and CR above the cutoff value of 0.5 and 0.7 respectively.

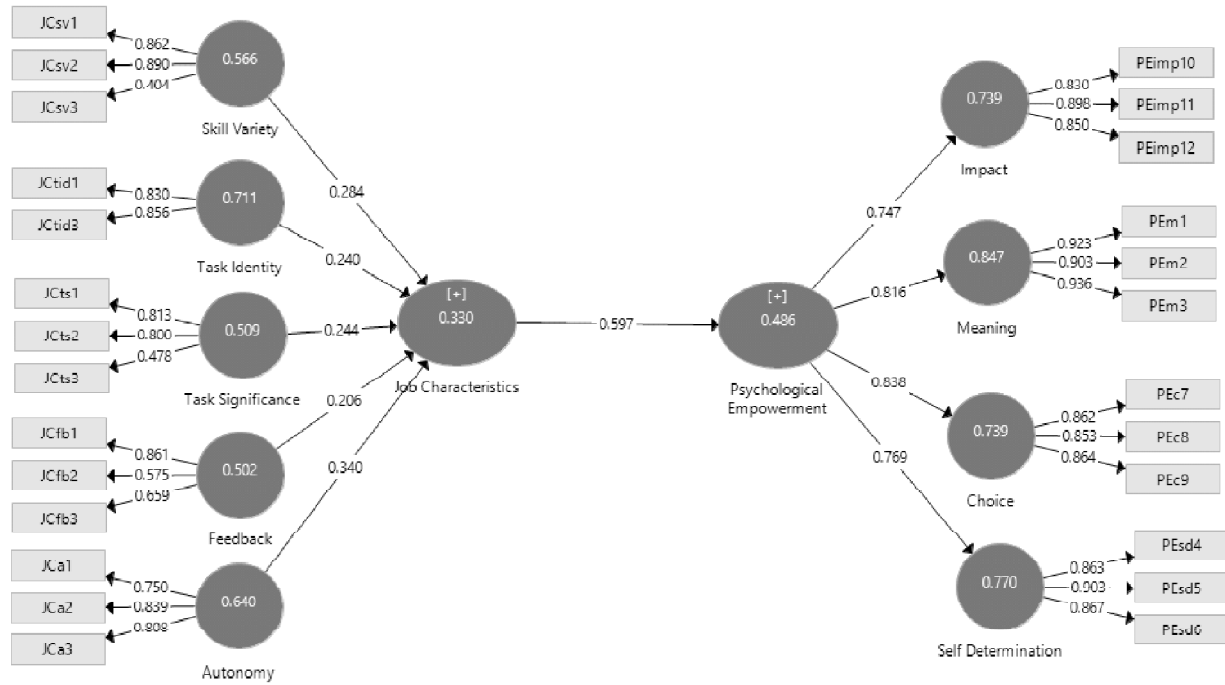


Figure 1: Research model of the study

Table 4.1
Results Summary for Reliability and Validity of Constructs

First Order Construct	Second Order Construct	Scale type	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	Items deleted
Autonomy		Reflective	JCa1	0.750	0.64	0.842	
			JCa2	0.839			
			JCa3	0.808			
Feedback			JCfb1	0.861	0.502	0.746	
			JCfb2	0.575			
			JCfb3	0.659			
Skill Variety		Reflective	JCsv1	0.862	0.566	0.781	
			JCsv2	0.89			
			JCsv3	0.404			
Task Significance			JCts1	0.813	0.509	0.748	
			JCts2	0.800			
			JCts3	0.478			
Task Identity		Reflective	JCtid1	0.830	0.711	0.831	JCtid2
			JCtid3	0.856			
Meaning		Reflective	PEm1	0.923	0.847	0.943	
			PEm2	0.903			
			PEm3	0.936			

contd. table 4.1

First Order Construct	Second Order Construct	Scale type	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	Items deleted
Self Determination		Reflective	PEsd4	0.863	0.77	0.91	
			PEsd5	0.903			
			PEsd6	0.867			
Competence			PEc7	0.862	0.739	0.895	
			PEc8	0.853			
			PEc9	0.864			
Impact			PEimp10	0.830	0.739	0.895	
			PEimp11	0.898			
			PEimp12	0.850			
First Order Construct	Second Order Construct	Scale Type	Items	Weight	VIF	T-value	Items deleted
	Job Characteristics	Formative	Autonomy	0.340	1.597	10.457	
			Feedback	0.206	1.564	10.457	
			Skill Variety	0.284	1.605	10.098	
			Task Significance	0.206	1.769	8.36	
			Task Identity	0.240	1.768	10.678	

Table 4.x
Fornell I-Larcker Criterion Analysis for Checking Discriminant Validity of First-order Constructs

	Autonomy	Competence	Feedback	Impact	Meaning	Self Deter- mination	Skill Variety	Task Identity	Task Significance
Autonomy	0.800								
Competence	0.366	0.860							
Feedback	0.421	0.162	0.708						
Impact	0.372	0.529	0.218	0.860					
Meaning	0.394	0.583	0.279	0.468	0.921				
Self Determination	0.532	0.546	0.278	0.428	0.479	0.878			
Skill Variety	0.427	0.388	0.388	0.349	0.482	0.327	0.752		
Task Identity	0.56	0.299	0.451	0.313	0.43	0.379	0.506	0.843	
Task Significance	0.431	0.355	0.543	0.391	0.394	0.230	0.529	0.463	0.714

In this study, psychological empowerment and job characteristics are conceptualized as a second-order construct indicators. The second-order constructs were assessed using the repeated indicator in which all the first-order constructs are taken out together as a reflective measure for psychological empowerment and formative measure for job characteristics of second order constructs in PLS model. Hence, the second-order construct were measured directly by all indicators of first-order constructs (Becker, Klien, & Wetzels, 2012; Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003; Wetzels, Ordekerhen-Schroder, & van Oppen,

2009). The same number of indicators of each construct in the first-order model was then used to make a better operationalization of the model (Chin *et. al.*, 2003).

Psychological empowerment is measured as reflective indicator. Table 4.2 shows that all first-order constructs for PE namely competence, impact, meaning and self-determination with reflective indicators were modelled to the second-order construct as reflective indicators. This model is referred to as reflective-reflective type (Becker *et al.*, 2012). The first-order construct was explained well by the second-order construct of PE as indicated by R square value of 0.739, 0.739, 0.847, and 0.770 (see Table 4.2) respectively. Furthermore, all of the path coefficients from PE to its dimensions are significant at $P < 0.01$ (see Table 4.1). High correlation between all four dimensions of PE in the first-order construct as illustrated in Table 4.1 also shows the existence of second-order construct (Byrne, 2001). Thus, all four dimensions of PE were measured to second-order construct procedure (Wetzels *et. al.* 2009).

Unlike PE, job Characteristics (JC) are considered as second-order formative construct with first-order reflective construct which are referred to as reflective-formative type II model (Becker *et al.*, 2012). Job characteristics are also conceptualized as a second-order formative construct with five first-order reflective constructs. The five first-order constructs are autonomy, feedback, task significance, task identity, and skill variety. All path coefficients from dimension of JC to JC are significant at $P < 0.01$ (see Table 4.2). The weight values of the five first-order constructs are 0.340 for autonomy, 0.206 for feedback, 0.244 for task significance, 0.240 for task identity, and 0.284 for skill variety.

Table 4.2 (4.7)
Second-order of PE and JC construct and its relationship with first-order constructs

<i>Second Order Construct</i>	<i>First Order Construct</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>T-value</i>
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	Competence (PEc)	0.739	0.838	$P < 0.01$
	Impact (PEimp)	0.739	0.747	$P < 0.01$
	Meaning (PEm)	0.847	0.816	$P < 0.01$
	Self- determination (PEsd)	0.770	0.769	$P < 0.01$
<i>Second Order Construct</i>	<i>First Order Construct</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>T-value</i>
Job Characteristics (JC)		1.000	-	-
	Autonomy (JCa)		0.340	$P < 0.01$
	Feedback (JCfb)		0.206	$P < 0.01$
	Task Significance (JCts)		0.244	$P < 0.01$
	Task Identity (JCtid)		0.240	$P < 0.01$
	Skill Variety (JCsv)		0.284	$P < 0.01$

Hypothesis Testing

Structural model assessment was performed to test the developed hypotheses relationships. The results from the output of the bootstrapping PLS-SEM confirmed that there is a positive significant relationships between job characteristics and psychological empowerment ($\hat{\alpha} = 0.597$, $t = 10.08$, $p < 0.01$), as shown in Table 1. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported.

Table 1
Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>T Statistic</i>	<i>Decision</i>
H1	JC-PE	0.597	0.059	10.08	Supported

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present study's finding implies that there is a positively significant relationship between job characteristics and psychological empowerment. This result is consistent with the previous studies carried out by Jha and Nair (2008) and Chen and Chen's (2007). The positive relationship between job characteristics and psychological empowerment, in other words mean that if employees perceive the characteristics of their job as highly motivating, it will lead to higher perception of psychological empowerment. As such, job characteristics would influence intrinsic task motivation of an employee by providing meaningful job, making the employee more competent as well as determined to do the job and also by making a positive impact on the job environment. Hackman and Oldham (1976) had pointed that enhanced perception of job characteristics increases intrinsic motivation by creating, challenging important, and autonomous jobs. The result of this study therefore supports this assertion.

Another point is that since psychological empowerment is seen as intrinsic motivation, it is believed that employee perception on job characteristic would correlate with psychological empowerment too. Moreover, specific job characteristics (for example, skill variety, task significance) would lead to positive psychological states such as feelings of meaningfulness and responsibility, which in turn would lead to satisfaction with the job. These critical psychological states conceptually resemble very much the cognitions reflecting employees' psychological empowerment that were identified by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and further validated by Spreitzer (1995). Furthermore, the increase in task identity, autonomy, and feedback in work, will bring employees confidence and make them feel that they are competent in achieving the work objectives and self-determination to choose their own ways to solve problems (Chen & Chen, 2008).

Specifically in the present study, the level of psychological empowerment among bank manager was seemed to be mostly affected by how they perceived their job characteristics. Since job characteristics were regarded as second-order construct, the relationship between the five dimensions and level of psychological empowerment cannot be drawn. However, some general assumptions can still be made. Firstly, skill variety indicates that employees are able to use different skills at work in order to perform different kind of tasks. Secondly, the opportunity to use variety of skills would influence the level of competence and therefore, increases their perception of psychological empowerment. Thirdly, task identity and task significance reflects the importance of a job, thus, enable employees to experience meaningfulness and impact dimension of psychological empowerment. Meanwhile, autonomy allows employees to exercise choices about how and when to get things done. As managers, having substantial amount of freedom in carrying out their job is essential and would definitely improve their intrinsic motivation. Finally, feedback received from the work being done would also allow them to monitor their progress. These characteristics are both important as they could affect their level of self-determination dimension in psychological empowerment. The relationship between job characteristic and psychological empowerment is thus consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The theory stresses that besides relatedness, individuals have strong need for autonomy

and competence too. This is further supported by Hackman and Oldham's (1975), where they suggested that job characteristics that have five core job dimensions would affect certain personal and work-related outcomes, including work motivation and job satisfaction. In other words, job characteristics influence intrinsic task motivation of an employee by providing meaningful job, making the employee more competent as well as determined to do the job and also by making a positive impact on the job environment.

This study also supported the job characteristics model by Oldham and Hackman (1976). The five core dimensions of a job are combined to determine the job's motivating potential score (MPS). Thus, the greater the job's MPS score, the greater would be the satisfaction and motivation of the employees. In other words, the theory posits that enriched and motivating job characteristics develop positive cognitive states. This would in turn result in desirable workplace attitudinal conditions. The significant result of the relationships between job characteristic and psychological empowerment in this study has confirmed that job characteristics develop positive cognitive states. Thirdly, the five dimensions of job characteristics have an influence on the feeling of psychological empowerment. The findings of the present study provided additional empirical evidence on the relationships of these two variables. Therefore, it is crucial for the management to incorporate these five elements of job characteristics (task significance, skill variety, task identity, autonomy, and feedback) into the managers' role.

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