

**The Relationship Between
Job Characteristics and Performance:
A Study of Saudi Women Employees**

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Abstract

The main objective of the study is to examine how job characteristics are related to job performance. It included 185 employees at an educational institution. Job characteristics included factors that are related to the work itself: employee's perceptions concerning clarity of job responsibilities, availability of learning opportunities on the job, job pressure, whether job is of value, whether she is doing an important task, and whether she is respected by others for the work she does. It was hypothesized that specific perceived job characteristics would affect particular aspects of job performance. This was found to be the case in a number of respects. The perceptions that one was doing an important task, that one's work was respected by others, that one's job responsibilities were clear, and that one's job was of value, as well as less experience of job pressure, were all significantly related to at least one dimension of job performance level.

Studies suggest that certain job characteristics influence whether or not an employee performs satisfactorily. These studies have focused primarily on populations in Western countries; how applicable the findings are cross-culturally requires continuing research.

Purpose of the Study

The present study examines a number of job characteristics, deemed important to performance by previous researchers, to see which might relate to the job performance of women administrative employees at a higher educational institution in Saudi Arabia.

Importance of the Study

The study provides baseline data for evaluation and reform. It identifies certain job characteristics that affect employee performance. The study also yields new insights into possibilities for further research on job performance.

Literature Review

Job Characteristics and Motivation

It has long been recognized that the content of the job or task assigned has considerable bearing on the strength of a worker's motivation to perform effectively (Vroom 1964: 236). Herzberg (1968: 53-62) concludes from several major studies that there seem to be two different sets of job characteristics, one set determining employee satisfaction and the other employee dissatisfaction with work. The primary determinant of employee satisfaction resides in a set of job-related factors intrinsic to the work itself. These characteristics of the work, which relate to the values and goals that individuals consider to be important in giving meaning to their lives, are achievement, recognition, advancement, the work itself (variety, autonomy, challenge), growth, and responsibility.

This set of job characteristics comprises what are called motivators because they are effective in motivating the individual to superior performance and effort. They are motivating because employees have a strong need to satisfy their esteem and self-actualization needs at work. Esteem needs require developing and maintaining self-respect, respect from others, status, and recognition. Self-actualization needs require fulfilling one's potential. Schoen and Durand (1979:58-60) indicate that studies by behavioral scientists, including Herzberg, conclude that a job is motivational when it offers six major opportunities. These are to feel personally responsible for performing meaningful work, to experience a feeling of achievement, to feel that the job is inherently useful and that the results are worthwhile, to experience feelings of autonomy while performing their work, to perform a variety of important tasks utilizing different skills, and to obtain feedback about what has been accomplished.

Lawler (1973:160) emphasizes that the major effect on employee performance is not from the objective state of the job characteristics but rather from how these are perceived by the employee. Yet Herzberg and Mausner (1992) claim that motivation to work can only springs from such characteristics as recognition and advancement, characteristics related to the job itself. According to Szilagy and Wallace (1990:183) current

thinking suggests that job characteristics affect the "intrinsic" motivation of the employee. Barrier (1996:30) indicates that employees may find their greatest reward in the work itself. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Zamel and Khatab (1983:57) found that both the work's nature and employees' perception of the importance of the jobs they did were the two most significant variables influencing employee performance.

Study Methods

The population of the study included 185 Saudi women engaged in administrative work. They were 104 permanent and 81 contract employees, at an educational institution in the Western Province of Saudi Arabia. Permanent employees are those hired on a permanent basis. They get paid according to the job grade level assigned to them. They are entitled to such government employment privileges as retirement pay, promotion, yearly bonus, ten days yearly emergency leave, thirty days yearly paid vacation, and paid sick leave for up to a year. Contract employees are those hired on a contract basis for six months. They get paid according to their qualifications. They are not usually entitled to such government employment privileges as retirement pay, promotion, yearly bonus, and emergency leave. However, they may receive social insurance for retirement. They are entitled to twenty days yearly of paid vacation and to paid sick leave for up to nine months. Years of work experience as a contract employees are not considered in calculating benefits if the employee later acquires a permanent position with the government. Job positions were general office workers, bookkeepers, counter clerks, file clerks, typists, librarian assistants, and secretaries. The population was subjected to other studies by the author Assad (2000, 2001).

Questionnaires were administered in Arabic, to the subjects at their work sites, during working hours, and in the presence of the research.

Part I of the questionnaire collected demographic data about the subjects in the following areas: marital status, education, major field of study, monthly income, age, and years of work experience.

Part II of the questionnaire included a set of questions to measure the following variables:

1) Employees' perceptions of the adequacy of job characteristics which include factors that are related to the work itself. The variable was measured through questions on whether or not: a) workers perceive that their job responsibilities are well defined, b) they think that there are learning opportunities on the job, c) they experience job pressure, d) they think that their job is of value, e) they are asked to do important tasks, and f) they feel respected by others for the work they do.

2) Job performance. This variable measured employees' job performance. Four dimensions of adequate performance were used in the present study: punctuality, dependability, cooperativeness, and professionalism. The four dimensions were measured by using 16 items-questionnaire. Each item is rated on a 3-point rating scale.

Punctuality included the following variables: when late, how late the employee usually came to work; how frequently this happened; when the employee left work early, how early, and how frequently this happened.

Dependability included the following variables: whether or not the employee needed to be reminded to get things done, whether or not she called the office to notify her supervisor when she would be absent for one day, whether or not she stayed in the office when the boss was absent for a short period, and whether or not she needed to be told how to prioritize her job tasks.

Cooperativeness included whether or not the employee substituted for an absent colleague when the boss asked her to do so, whether or not the employee performed duties that were not part of her job responsibilities, whether or not she called other departments when necessary to help inquirers, and whether or not she worked over time when the boss asked her to do so.

Professionalism was measured by asking how frequently did the employee make personal phone calls at work, did not go to work for personal reasons, took snack and tea breaks, and visited socially in colleagues' offices.

Study Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that the adequacy of job characteristics (such as clarity of job responsibilities, availability of learning opportunities, experiencing job pressure, whether job is of value, employees doing important tasks, and feeling one's work is respected by others) would lead to better job performance. Those who perceived their job characteristics more favorably would be more likely than those who perceived them less favorably to perform better on the job.

Chi-squares were computed to test for relationships between variables, using the .05 level to determine statistical significance. Cramer's V was computed to determine degree of association among variables.

Findings

Demographic characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the study population:

Table 1. Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the study population

Factor		Contract Employees	%	Permanent Employees	%	Totals	%
Marital Status	Married	64	79.0	72	69.2	136	73.5
	Single	17	21.0	32	30.8	49	26.5
Educational Level	No College Degree	29	35.8	26	25.0	55	29.7
	College Degree	52	64.2	78	75.0	130	70.3
Major	Liberal Art	31	39.5	53	51.0	85	46.0
	No Major	2	3.0	26	25.0	28	14.7
	Administration	20	24.7	25	24.0	45	24.3
Monthly Income	Less than 6,000 Saudi riyah	81	100.0	40	38.5	121	63.4
	6,000 Saudi riyah and More	0	0	64	61.5	64	34.6
Age	Less than 35	63	77.8	42	40.4	105	56.8
	35 and More	18	22.2	62	59.6	80	43.2
Years of Work Experience	1-5	71	87.7	19	18.3	90	48.6
	6-10	5	6.2	21	20.0	26	14.1
	More than 10	5	6.2	64	61.5	69	37.3
Total Responses for Each Factor		81		104		185	

Job Characteristics by Employment Type

Respondents were asked for their perceptions of their job characteristics. They were asked if they agreed with the following statements: job responsibilities are well defined, there is

opportunity to learn on the job, I have lots of pressure on my job, my job is of value, I am doing important tasks, and I feel respected by others for the work I do.

The general findings for this cluster of variables are summarized in Table 2. As this table shows, large majorities of the respondents indicated that their job responsibilities were well defined (73.0 percent), that there were opportunities to learn on their job (70.3 percent), that their job was of value (74.1 percent), that they were asked to do important tasks (64.9 percent), and that they felt respected by others for the work they did (56.9 percent).

Contract employees did not differ from permanent employees in any of these respects except the last one. Permanent employees were more likely to feel respected for what they did (70.2 percent) than contract employees were (60.5 percent). This may result in part from the facts that permanent employees were offered more training opportunities, were promoted more often, and had higher educational levels.

Table 2. Perceived Job Characteristics by Employment Type

Job Characteristics		Employment Type					
		Contract Employees		Permanent Employees		Totals	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Job responsibilities are well defined	F	60	74.1	75	72.1	135	73.0
	I	21	25.9	29	27.9	50	27.0
There is opportunity to learn on the job	F	59	72.8	71	68.3	130	70.3
	I	22	27.2	33	31.7	55	29.7
I have lots of pressure on my job	F	59	72.84	90	85.7	149	81.0
	I	22	27.16	14	13.3	36	19.0
My job is of value	F	59	72.8	78	75.0	137	74.1
	I	22	27.2	26	25.0	48	25.9
I am asked to do important tasks	F	54	66.7	66	63.5	120	64.9
	I	27	33.3	38	36.5	65	35.1
I am respected by others for the work I do	F	49	60	73	70.2	122	56.9
	I	32	39.5	31	29.8	63	34.1
Total responses for each factor		81		104		185	

* Frequency column F = Frequently I = Infrequently

Job Characteristics and Job Performance

Based on previous study findings, it was hypothesized that specific perceived job characteristics would affect particular aspects of job performance. Table 3 shows, indeed this was found to be the case in a number of respects. Employees who found their job responsibilities well defined and who perceived their jobs as valuable appeared to be more cooperative. Employees who

experienced less job pressure, who felt that they were asked to do important tasks, and who felt respected by others for what they did were more likely to be more dependable. Employees who perceived that they were asked to do important tasks were more likely to be punctual to work. Those who felt respected by others for what they did were also more likely to demonstrate professionalism. All of these relationships were statistically significant at the .05 level or less and of moderate strength. The only job characteristic which showed no significant relationship with any aspect of job performance was perceived availability of learning opportunities on the job.

Each of the significant relationships found between job characteristics and job performance will be examined in turn.

Table 3. Summary of Relationships Between Perceived Job Characteristics and Job Performance Levels

Job Characteristics	.Job Performance Level															
	Punctuality				Dependability				Cooperativeness				Work Orientation			
	X ²	df	α	V	X ²	Df	α	V	X ²	df	α	V	X ²	df	α	V
Defined Clarity of Job Responsibilities	5.25	2	.07	.16	7.05	2	.20	.19	6.44*	2	.04	.19	4.30	2	.11	.15
Learning Opportunities on the Job	1.98	2	.37	.10	3.23	2	.19	.13	4.45	2	.10	.15	0.98	2	.61	.07
Experience of Job Pressure	2.19	2	.31	.10	8.01*	2	.02	.21	1.33	2	.15	.08	0.12	2	.94	.02
Job Perceived as Valuable	4.53	2	.10	.15	1.78	2	.41	.10	8.52*	2	.01	.21	5.49	2	.06	.17
Asked to Do Important Tasks	8.48*	2	.01	.21	7.64*	2	.02	.20	2.35	2	.30	.11	2.54	2	.27	.11
Respected by Others	3.12	2	.21	.13	7.22*	2	.03	.19	5.57	2	.06	.17	8.20*	2	.02	.21

Significant at the .05 level

Perceived Clarity of Job Responsibilities and Cooperativeness. Table 4 shows, 53.3 percent of the respondents who perceived their job responsibilities as well defined where often cooperative. Table 4 also reflects that 34.0 percent of the respondents who did not perceive their job responsibilities as well defined where often not as cooperative.

Table 4. Perceived Clarity of Job Responsibilities and Cooperativeness

Frequency of Perception of Job Responsibilities	Frequency of Cooperativeness			Totals
	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	
Infrequent %	9 18.0	24 48.0	17 34.0	50 27.0
Frequent %	12 8.9	51 37.8	72 53.3	135 73.0
Totals	21 11.4	75 40.5	89 48.1	185 100.0

$$X^2 = 6.44$$

$$df = 2$$

$$\text{Level of Significance} = .04$$

$$\text{Cramer's } V = .19$$

Perceived Job Pressure and Dependability. Employees who experienced less job pressure were often dependable. Table 5 shows, among those perceiving the least pressure, 58.3 percent were highly dependable as compared with only 32.9 percent of those perceiving more pressure.

Table 5. Perceived Job Pressure and Dependability

Perceived Frequency of Job Pressure	Dependability Level			Totals
	Low	Medium	High	
Infrequent %	5 13.9	10 27.8	21 58.3	36 19.5
Frequent %	31 20.8	69 46.3	49 32.9	149 80.5
Totals	36 19.5	79 42.7	70 37.8	185 100.0

$$X^2 = 8.01$$

$$df = 2$$

$$\text{Level of Significance} = .02$$

$$\text{Cramer's } V = .21$$

Perception that Job is of Value and Cooperativeness. Table 6 indicates that 53.3 percent of the respondents who frequently perceived their job as valuable cooperated often with their colleagues, while only 33.3 percent of the respondents who

infrequently perceived their job as valuable cooperated often with their colleagues.

Table 6. Job Is of Value and Cooperativeness

Frequency of Perception that Job Is of Value	Frequency of Cooperativeness			Totals
	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	
Infrequent	10	22	16	48
%	20.8	45.8	33.3	25.9
Frequent	11	53	73	137
%	8.0	38.7	53.3	74.1
Totals	21	75	89	185
	11.4	40.5	48.1	100.0

$$X^2 = 8.52$$

$$df = 2$$

Level of Significance = .01

Cramer's V = .21

Perceived Frequency of Doing Important Tasks, Punctuality and Dependability. As Table 7 shows in more detail, 49.6 percent of the respondents who felt that they were asked frequently to do important tasks were highly punctual, as compared with only 37.5 percent of the respondents who felt that they were asked infrequently to do important tasks. As perceived frequency of doing important tasks declined, so too did punctuality.

Table 7. Perceived Frequency of Doing Important Tasks and Punctuality

Frequency of Doing Important Tasks	Punctuality			Totals
	Low	Medium	High	
Infrequent	16	24	24	64
%	25.0	37.5	37.5	35.0
Frequent	11	49	59	119
%	9.2	41.2	49.6	65.0
Totals	27	73	83	183
	14.8	39.9	45.4	100.0

$$X^2 = 8.48$$

$$df = 2$$

Level of Significance = .01

Cramer's V = .21

Respondent's perception that the tasks she was doing were important also affected her dependability. Table 8 shows, 43.7 percent of the respondents who felt that they were frequently asked to do important tasks were highly dependable as compared with only 27.7 percent of the respondents who felt that they were infrequently asked to do important tasks.

Table 8. Perceived Frequency of Doing Important Tasks and Dependability

Frequency of Doing Important Tasks	Dependability Level			Totals
	Low	Medium	High	
Infrequent	19	28	18	65
%	29.2	43.1	27.7	35.3
Frequent	17	50	52	119
%	14.3	42.0	43.7	64.7
Totals	36	78	70	184
	19.6	42.4	38.0	100.0

$$X^2 = 7.64$$

$$df = 2$$

Level of Significance = .02

Cramer's V = .20

Perception that One's Work is Respected by Others, Dependability and Professionalism. Data concerning this subhypothesis indicate that there is a positive relationship between feeling one's work is respected by others and dependability. Table 9 shows, 44.3 percent of the respondents who perceived their work as frequently respected by others were highly dependable as compared with only 25.4 percent of the respondents who perceived their work to be infrequently respected by others. Conversely 27.0% of the respondents who perceived their work as infrequently respected by others showed low dependability, while only 15.6% of the respondents who perceived their work as frequently respected by others reflected low dependability.

Table 9. Frequency of Perception that One's Work Is Respected by Others and Dependability

Respected by Others	Dependability Level			Totals
	Low	Medium	High	
Infrequent	17	30	16	63
%	27.0	47.6	25.4	34.1
Frequent	19	49	54	122
%	15.6	40.2	44.3	65.9
Totals	36	79	70	185
	19.6	42.7	37.8	100.0

$$X^2 = 7.22$$

$$df = 2$$

Level of Significance = .03

Cramer's V = .19

As Table 10 shows, 47.1 percent of the respondents who believed that others frequently respected them for their work often showed professionalism, while only 28.6 percent of those who

believed that they rarely received respect often showed professionalism.

Table 10. Frequency of Perceptions that One's Work Is Respected by Others and Professionalism

Respected by Others	Showing Professionalism			Totals
	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	
Infrequent	21	24	18	63
%	33.3	38.1	28.6	34.2
Frequent	21	43	57	121
%	17.4	35.5	47.1	65.8
Totals	42	67	75	184
	22.8	36.4	40.8	100.0

$$X^2 = 8.20$$

$$df = 2$$

$$\text{Level of Significance} = .02$$

$$\text{Cramer's } V = .21$$

Summary and Recommendation

To sum up, with regard to employee perception of job characteristics, the majority of the respondents in the study population indicated that their job responsibilities were well defined, that they had opportunities to learn on the job, that their job was of value, that they were asked to do important tasks, and that they felt respected by others for the work they did. All of these job characteristics except learning opportunities, were significantly related to at least one dimension of job performance level. The more highly respondent estimated her job, the more likely she was to perform well in it.

The implications are clear managers seeking to optimize employee performance should take care to define job responsibilities clearly and ascertain that these are understood by the job holder as well. Managers must also make employees feel valued and let them know how their work is important to the organization. Employees should be entrusted with the highest level of responsibility commensurate with their demonstrated capabilities. A reward system for top performers should confirm their value. Managers who show respect for and reward good work will have good workers.



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