

Job Titles and Job Satisfaction: An Ethno-Phenomenological Inquiry with Reference to a Transportation and Utility Firm

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The current study aims to investigate the extent to which job titles and job characteristics contribute to the job satisfaction of employees at a Midwestern United States utility and transportation company using Hackman & Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (1976) and Katz and Van Maanen's (1977) Loci of Work Satisfaction. It assumes if job titles are designated based on these characteristics—then employees will be more satisfied and therefore more motivated and productive. The researchers undertook an ethno-phenomenological approach with a data of 25 full-time employees who were interviewed about their overall experience regarding their job and how they feel the five core dimensions of work satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) are related to their job titles using a semi-structured pattern following Kvale's (1996) framework. Results demonstrate that employees in this organization feel that job titles significantly impact their overall job satisfaction and responded positively to all five of the core job characteristic dimensions. However, employees who feel that their job title affects their external rapport perceived a need to alter their job titles. This study was restricted to self-report measures at a single organization.

Keywords: job titles, job characteristics model, job satisfaction, ethno-phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Subsidiaries often struggle with managing their human resources since most of the HR policies are put into place by their parent organization's corporate HR department (Dörrenbächer and Gammelgaard 2011). HR often lacks an understanding of the culture and complexity of the functions of the subsidiary. This can lead to employees of the subsidiary becoming disgruntled and lacking satisfaction with their jobs. In the company examined in this study, job titles are enforced on employees for the ease of payroll (which is done by corporate) regardless of whether it is an accurate representation of their actual role, simply because it is easier to hire an employee for a job with an existing description and pay grade than designing a new job. For the employees, the titles are symbols of their identity (Baron and Bielby 1986). As rightly pointed out, identity can be explained as 'people's subjectively construed understandings of who they were, are and desire to become' (Brown 2015, 20). As Reay *et al.* (2017) pointed out that key aspect of professional identity is the tight connection between professionals' views of themselves and the work they do. With this understanding, upper-level management at this subsidiary emphasizes having their in-house HR department, tuning accordingly and reworking the organization structure chart with more apt job titles

(Lazarova *et al.* 2017). Professional identity is an essential component of how professionals make meaning of their lives (Brown 2015; Kyratsis *et al.* 2017).

Organizations manage their human capital through the job titles it gives to their employees. However, the job titles are often not an accurate representation of the unique value that an employee contributes to his or her job and the organization. Job titles are the foundation of modern organizations, and they function as a concise description of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics required for that job (Grant *et al.* 2014). They are additionally helpful in assessing how and to what extent certain jobs and employees contribute to the organization and are also key to several HR functions such as recruitment and selection, performance appraisals, compensation, training and development, and the organization structure as a whole (Grant *et al.* 2014). The Occupational Information Network (O*Net) is a database sanctioned by the United States Department of Labor that relies largely on a job analysis and career exploration (Peterson *et al.* 2001), further exhibiting the importance of job titles in an organization. Job titles can also affect an individual's self-efficacy and self-esteem both on and off the job and is often a key aspect of an individual's identity (Grant *et al.* 2014). However, if an individual feels their job title comes with a stigma or inaccurate representation of their job, then the job title may be a source of stress and frustration (Ashforth *et al.* 2008). Job titles should be effective in communicating the competencies of the incumbent and the value they add to the organization. Job titles can be used to link employees wanting to express their identity but are also used in the organization to dictate control and coordination. Job titles are a pillar for job analysis and job design which in turn impact job satisfaction—the job characteristics *i.e.*, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback positively impact job satisfaction. However, when an organization has a strong HR department to develop and form job titles, employees identify with their job roles to a stronger degree, experience a stress reduction, and are more satisfied with their jobs.

It has been realized that business is not confined to economic exertion, but it is also having a human angle. Thus, neoclassical principles have replaced classical thinking. An anthropologic aspect of the organization is a prime focus of research. Critical management studies are understood as clusters of managerial and organizational thought that often encompass both critical and post-structural perspectives (Sementelli 2016). This is a qualitative research study to determine whether job titles are reflective of psychological safety, external rapport, and self-verification and whether they have an intervening effect on the 5 dimensions of job characteristics defined by Hackman & Oldham (1976), and if this will affect the job satisfaction of the employees, and whether subsidiaries would benefit from an in-house HR department with independent and more pertinent HR policies.

The objective of this study is to utilize this adapted research method is to validate the relationship between job titles, job characteristics, and job satisfaction through qualitative conversational interviews. In this qualitative study, interpretive phenomenology and an ethnographic approach were used as a combined methodology. These two approaches can be integrated into ways that both are exploratory, use interviews, and search for meaning in the individual's experiences. In ethnographic work, researchers often use both the mix of emic and etic perspectives. The former also called the "native's point of view" of a specific culture (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) pertains to looking at the culture under study from the inside, and through the meanings that the members of that culture live with. Therefore, it does not impose a single theoretical framework on the research process. The etic perspective gives the researcher the flexibility to bring multiple theories looking at the culture. A combination of emic and etic perspectives is inevitable in an ethno-phenomenological approach.

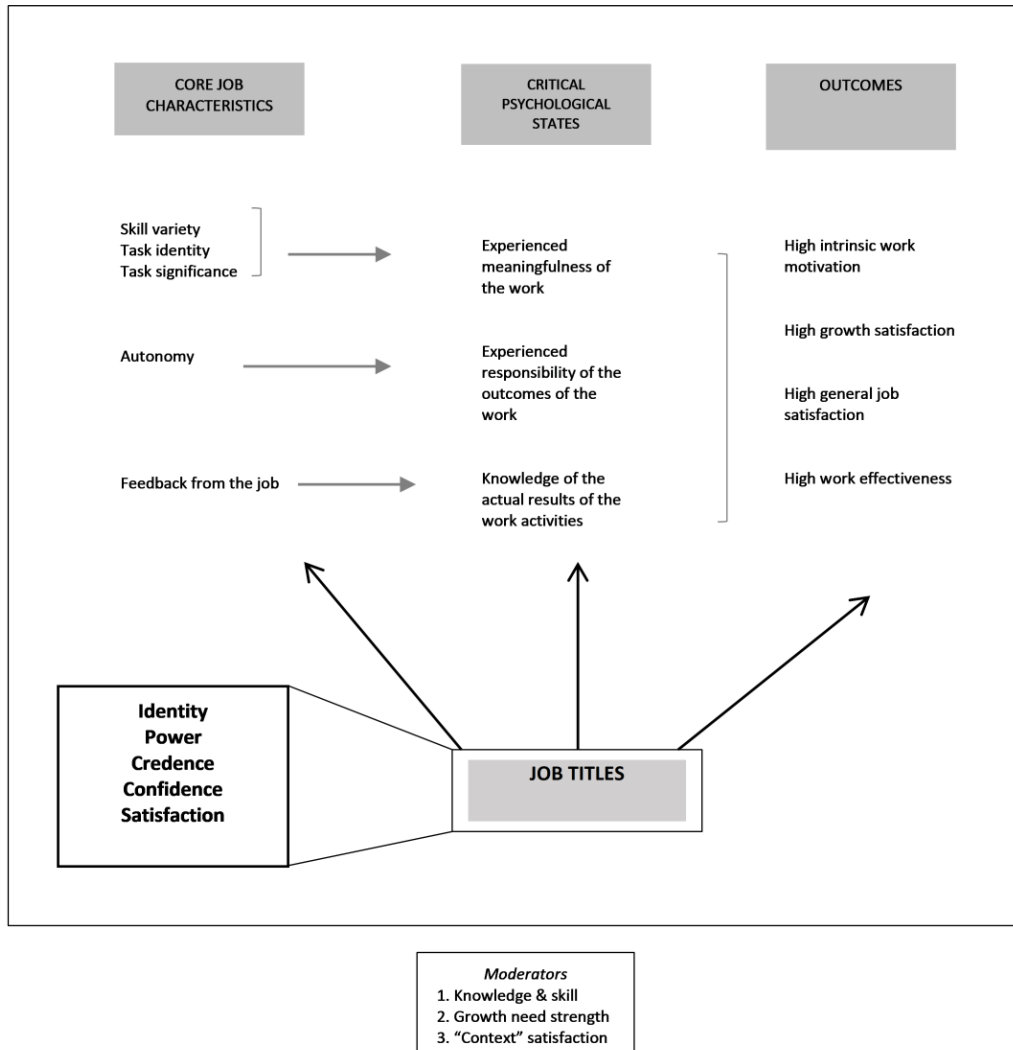
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Job Characteristics Theory

The Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) (Hackman *et al.* 1971) implies that an individual's job perception acts as a moderator between job characteristics and affective reactions such as job satisfaction (Mathieu *et al.* 1993). JCT attempts to explain how characteristics of the jobs people perform affect their work behavior and attitudes. Moreover, the theory identifies the conditions under which these effects are likely to be

strongest. The theory's central management insight is that employee effectiveness can be enhanced by designing jobs with high levels of key characteristics and ensuring that employees with appropriate personal qualities are assigned to these jobs (Oldham 1976).

FIGURE 1
JOB TITLE AND JOB CHARACTERISTICS MODEL



(Authors' compilation based on Hackman and Oldham's model).

Hackman and Oldham (1976) defined the different job characteristics, psychological states, outcomes, and moderator variables. According to this model (Fig. 1), internal work motivation is the extent to which the employee is self-motivated to perform effectively on the job, *i.e.*, employees experience positive internal feelings whilst performing well on the job, and negative internal feelings whilst performing poorly. Job satisfaction refers to the degree to which the employee is satisfied and happy with the job (Pearce *et al.* 1978). Experienced meaningfulness of the work refers to the degree to which the employee experiences the job as generally meaningful, valuable and worthwhile (Pearce *et al.* 1978). The degree to which the employee feels self-liable for the results of the work they do affects the degree to which they feel responsible and accountable for the outcomes of their work and the degree to which the employee is made aware of how effective their performance is on the job.

According to the model proposed by Hackman and Oldham, for workers to have a sense of meaningfulness towards their work, jobs must contain skill variety, task identity, and task significance (Hackman et. al. 1976). Skill variety describes the extent to which a job requires a variety of different activities in doing the job and how it requires an employee to utilize various skills and talents. Task identity refers to the degree to which a job requires the completion of an entire identifiable piece of work *i.e.*, completing a job from start to finish with a visible outcome. Task significance depicts the degree to which a job has a meaningful impact on the lives and/or jobs of people both inside the organization and in the external environment (Judge 2000). Similarly, employees appreciate responsibility for the outcome of their work when they are given substantial autonomy. Autonomy indicates the degree to which a job allows the employee significant freedom, independence, and discretion in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in doing the work (Thomas 2004). The concept of feedback should be brought in so that employees have the awareness of the results of their work. Feedback refers to the extent to which performing the work activities required by the job results in the employee obtaining direct and clear information from the job about the effectiveness of their performance (Boonzaier *et al.* 2001).

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

When engaging in discourse pertinent to motivation and self-satisfaction in the professional field, Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory is often invoked as a metric by which researchers have measured motivation and its role in the workplace. Whereas prior to the mid-twentieth century little formal inquiry had been conducted, the paradigmatic shift in organizational systems following the mid-twentieth century (with emphasis on mass production and bureaucracy) redefined the relationship between organizations and their employees, offering both stability and career development. *The Motivation to Work* stipulated two primary factors influencing workplace motivation—factors related to sustaining effort and “hygiene factors” that demotivate when invoked inappropriately (Herzberg *et al.* 1959). Importantly, his theory affirmed a feeble correlation between financial compensation and workplace fulfillment, challenging the prevailing theoretical conjecture that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction existed on a scale upon which the middle could be defined as a state of neutrality (neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction).

According to Basset-Jones and Lloyd (2005) the complex and interconnected relationship between fundamental sources of satisfaction and “responses to external stimuli” made the categorizing of movement and motivation nearly impossible. Moreover, it is clear that the theoretical basis upon which motivation is measured is constantly in flux, moving “from a rational economic, socio-psychological perspective to a human relations view and back again” (Lloyd *et al.*, 2005). Herzberg's original theory contested the dominant Western idea of the “economic man”. The underlying assumption that employees are primarily incentivized by some form of compensation was largely disproven by this new model, which emphasizes that motivators related to “intrinsic drivers” are significantly more indicative of overall satisfaction than financial compensation, particularly when employees observed others who received appreciation and “extrinsic rewards” (Lloyd *et al.* 2005).

Therefore, while incentives may result in some employees' higher levels of involvement, the number of those doing so is considerably less than those who are motivated by a desire for recognition, to overcome unhappiness, or to make a meaningful contribution to their organization. In this regard, it bodes well for organizations to cultivate systems-thinking and emphasize processes that may facilitate collaborative learning by employees and management to serve the common interest.

Job Titles

As Grant et. al. (2014) have described, job titles are essential to an employee's identity. Certain organizations have introduced self-reflective titles. In this paper, the psychological ramifications are studied through a qualitative as well as a quantitative study. Employees displayed less burnout and emotional exhaustion when they had a job title that was an accurate reflection of their roles and responsibilities. There are three mechanisms through which self-reflective job titles function: self-verification, psychological

safety, and external rapport. Psychological safety is the ability to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status, or career and taking interpersonal risks. Self-verification means people want others to see them as they see themselves (Swann *et al.* 2009). External rapport is expressing and utilizing one's identity in initial interactions with people outside the organization (Grant *et al.* 2014). Job titles serve as vital tools for identity expression and stress reduction and provide consequential overtones that further explain employees' perception of their job titles and identity in addition to emotional exhaustion. Job titles are essential to the HR functions of an organization. Job titles also serve as the basis for job design and job analysis (Grant *et al.* 2014) and help define the organizational hierarchy (Klein *et al.* 2006). Organizations constrain the fundamental human impulse to self-express by imposing inadequate titles (Swann *et al.* 2009), therefore, job titles are a part of an employee's self-expression, shaping how they identify and express themselves within as well as outside of their organization since they are indicative of status and also used routinely (Ashforth *et al.* 1999). Moreover, an apt job title helps employees to better avail themselves of the unique skills they possess (Elsbach 2003). A self-reflective job title can also work as a compelling antecedent for job crafting and identity work, that is modifying one's behavior to be accepted and engaged with.

Barron (1986) and Ashforth (1999) argue that job titles are motifs of control, bureaucracy, and can be sources of stigma, but the proposition of the aforementioned study shows that self-reflective job titles and formal job titles can work in conjunction so that employees can express themselves and this will also lead to lower stress levels. The inductive qualitative study shows that self-reflective titles materialized as a visibly important theme among those interviewed, therefore job titles seem to aid individuals to engage in cognitive reappraisal and stress reduction by diverting attention to the more gratifying and meaningful aspects of their jobs which helps avert burnout among staff. Additionally, when organizations do succession planning, they focus on job titles as they appear in the organizational chart (Guinn 2000). A job title is intended to be a descriptive heading that reflects the nature of tasks performed in the job (Smith *et al.* 1989). Employees who are given more profound job titles possess equity perception concerning the outcomes they gain from employment. A job title that seems to be important may be perceived as an outcome of work and therefore offset lesser financial reward (Smith *et al.* 1989). The impact of job titles on employee identity and self-esteem is manifold. However, job titles are not necessarily consistent with the unique personal value that most employees possess, although they are able to communicate the specific characteristics employees in a respective role are likely to have. Therefore, job titles are associated with most HR functions (selection, appraisal, compensation, etc.), enable the comparison of various contributions to a company, and contribute to the collaborative effort and teamwork (through establishing trust and managing to distinguish between the skill sets of team participants). Importantly, job titles carry significant implications for the employees themselves, both inside and outside of the professional arena. Job titles not only clarify an employee's skills and qualifications, but they also are a premier method through which jobholders communicate about themselves to colleagues, clients, or other professional connections. In this regard, job titles are "important vehicles for identity expression and image construction," which function as a method through which employees present themselves to others (Grant *et al.* 2014).

In many instances, however, job titles can present a unique set of problems for jobholders, especially when stigma prevents employees from sharing their job titles due to feelings of shame associated with their job description. Additionally, it is often that job titles are not descriptive enough to illustrate the scope of responsibilities a position entails. Research suggests that employees may seek to deviate from standardized job descriptions in an effort to add personalized significance to their job identification. Research indicates that using a standardized method through which employers describe the duties or a job can hinder employee self-actualization because job titles have significant socio-cultural implications. Research indicates that job titles that carry self-reflective aspects enabled employees to better handle emotional exhaustion by facilitating cognitive reappraisal and alleviating stress. Not only were employees able to view their jobs as beneficial to others, but they were additionally able to affirm their role within their organization (task significance).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a specific job attitude relating to the reaction someone has to their work overall and/or specific facets of their job (Judge *et al.* 2012). Employee job satisfaction is shown to be an important outcome for organizations since it directly relates to job performance and other such variables (Judge *et al.* 2001) and the tendency of employees' turnover and attrition (Tett *et al.* 1993). Job satisfaction generally defined refers to a person's feelings of satisfaction on the job, which acts as a motivation to work (Ali *et al.* 2013). Job satisfaction is generally recognized as a multifaceted construct that includes employee feelings about a variety of both intrinsic and extrinsic job elements which define how satisfied an employee is with their job (Howard *et al.* 1996). It is the extent to which people are satisfied or unsatisfied with their jobs (Wayne 2006; Lyord 2000). Job satisfaction also displays the job holder's perception of the job which determines the level of satisfaction based upon physiological and psychological needs (Betts 2000). Job satisfaction describes how content an individual is with his or her job and is a technique used to make employees work harder (Locke 1969). Employees have more positive perceptions about the organization's products and services when they achieved satisfaction in their job and therefore deliver better service (Bontis *et al.*, 2011).

Skill variety is the degree to which a job requires different activities to carry out the work utilizing various skills and talents of a person. The five job characteristics and these three aforementioned factors are mechanisms by which the job title can affect job satisfaction (Steyn and Vawda 2014). Task identity is the degree to which the job requires completion of a whole, identifiable piece of work and doing it completely from start to finish with a visible outcome. Task significance is the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives of other people both inside the organization and in the world as a whole. Autonomy is the degree to which the job provides significant independence and discretion to a person in scheduling the work and in determining the procedure to be used in carrying it out with an absence of micromanagement. Feedback is the degree to which an individual receives clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance. These factors then affect the meaningfulness of work, responsibility for work outcomes, and knowledge of the results of work activities that an individual experience. These psychological states can be associated with certain outcome variables like motivation, job satisfaction, absenteeism, and turnover (Loher *et al.* 1985). In this study, we are going to focus on job satisfaction since if an individual is highly satisfied with their job, the other outcome variables will be positively impacted.

METHODOLOGY

As already mentioned, this study adopts a mix of phenomenology and ethnography as a method of research. By integrating these two perspectives into one inquiry, the phenomenological lens will enable the researchers to explore the meaning of experience while the ethnographic perspective allows them to reveal the cultural beliefs and behaviors involved in shaping this experience. This approach, most often used by psychologists, seeks to explain the "structure and essence of the experiences" of a group of people (Banning 1995). In phenomenology, as participants share their own experiences through reflective behaviors, the experiences themselves begin to adopt specific meanings (Moustakas 1994), which lead to knowledge foundations of certain phenomena (Berger & Luckmann 1966). A phenomenologist is concerned with understanding certain group behaviors from that group's point of view. Phenomenological inquiry requires that researchers go through a series of steps in which they try to eliminate their assumptions and biases, and examine the phenomenon without presuppositions. Phenomenology does greatly overlap with ethnography, but as Bruyn (1970) points out, some phenomenologists assert that they "study symbolic meanings as they constitute themselves in human consciousness". A tenet of phenomenology is to recruit participants who have a personal and intimate experience with the phenomenon (Daymon & Holloway 2010), which in this case was employees' perception of job title. The objective of analyzing the interview script for an institutional ethnography is to "make visible the ways the institutional order creates the conditions of individual experience" (McCoy 2006, 109). All interview data were analyzed using a categorical analysis and coded according to the texts that direct the researcher's attention to particular aspects of a phenomenon.

This was an indicative qualitative study that employed exploratory research due to the nature of the project as the problem had not been previously studied and priorities needed to be established. Questionnaire surveys based on semi-structured interviews were conducted with non-exempt employees across all functions of the organization. Non-exempt refers to employees who have to be paid for every hour of overtime they work, whereas exempt employees are exempt from minimum wage and overtime laws. Most employees classified as exempt work in upper-level positions within their organizations. In this context, responses from these employees do not make any sense as the phenomenon of interest is in the context of non-exempt employees. Kvale’s (1996) framework was used for conversational qualitative interviews to assure that the interviews obtained pertinent information. A standardized open-ended interview style was used since it adhered to a meticulous script and yielded open-ended responses from the interviewees. A group of 25 exempt employees from the marketing, operations, and finance functions of the subsidiary was interviewed using a semi-structured interview design. Primary data was collected by interviewing the employees. Secondary data was accessed through the organization’s ERP system. Qualitative data analysis (QDA) was performed to analyze the results of the semi-structured interviews to measure the degree to which each factor influences job satisfaction and whether it was linked to job titles. QDA also examined if there was a significant difference between the variables: job titles, job characteristics, and job satisfaction.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Responses for each question asked in the semi-structured interviews are as follows:

TABLE 1
INTERVIEW RESPONSES COLLECTED REGARDING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Question 1:→ Respondents↓	How would you describe the work environment here?
1:	“It’s a good place to work. It’s an environment where we work hard. There are good people. It’s stable and we are flexible with our time, thoughts, and ideas.”
2:	“Enjoyable. Environment to me means more in terms of the attitudes of the people. Everyone is welcome to new ideas and are good, honest worker. Everyone knows how to do their jobs and get questions answered.”
3:	“It’s a good company to work for; they take care of their employees, very safety conscious.”
4:	“At the transportation level, we are all very close. We get along. We spend many hours together. We lean on each other for help. Overall, it’s very good—it’s a fun place to work. ”
5:	“I think it’s really good. It’s open and people communicate. You can say whatever you need to say. They promote you communicating and saying your opinion. They want you to do that whether it’s right, wrong... there’s no wrong answer.”
6:	“Generally positive.”
7:	“Casual yet professional. Team effort. I always strive to make things comfortable, so I hope comfortable.”
8:	“Like a family. Reminds me of my days at ConocoPhillips.”
9:	“Flexible, challenging, and fun.”
10:	“Very diverse [with regards to the types of personalities that work together.]”
11:	“Good culture. The people are nice and helpful.”

The respondents answered highly positively about the work environment at this organization (see Table 1). None of the responses pertained to the parent corporation, and therefore it can be inferred that these

employees view themselves as independent from the parent corporation and are not disgruntled in their current workspace.

TABLE 2
INTERVIEW RESPONSES COLLECTED REGARDING JOB TITLES AND JOB SATISFACTION

Question 2: → Respondents & Code↓	Do you feel like there is a link between your job title and your job satisfaction?
1:Credence	“For me, no, but for some, yes. Depends on the title and what you’re doing. Accurate representation – I like what I do, and my title makes sense. Sometimes it can make a difference in conferences, etc. A proper title provides credence.”
2:Confidence	“In my case, yes. It would only take a slight tweak to change this. The term “temporary” doesn’t make me feel over- secure as the primary revenue stream in my family. It is sometimes a source of anxiety.”
3:Satisfaction	“For me, I kind of do a little of everything. I do accounts receivable, accounts payable, billing, payroll functions, union agreements, etc. I do a lot of accounting functions but also a lot of HR functions.”
4:Satisfaction	To some extent Yes but No if there is a job responsibility and salary
5:Identity	“I think titles are important for possibly communicating with other people in your field of business to get you where you need to go or the respect you need with other people you’re communicating with, not necessarily internally, but externally. I don’t feel it’s necessary for the actual satisfaction with the actual job. I think you can be happy with the job you’re doing, and it really doesn’t matter what your title is.”
6:Power	“In this type of environment, it can. I am the type of person who will enjoy my job regardless of the title. Opportunities to influence sometimes come with the title.”
7:Power	“Mine is a new role, so we’re still trying to pave the road for what I’m doing. It’s hard to explain what I do as a “program manager” before my prior title was eliminated. Personally, I don’t care what you call me. I do the job I don’t care too much about titles.”

Fewer respondents responded positively that they believe job titles have a strong influence on job satisfaction. As displayed in Table 2, respondents have immensely stated that they do not care about their job titles, but some respondents have also acknowledged that they do not feel that their job titles are particularly pertinent to them, and others may feel that their job title is of great importance with regards to the job they are performing. Salaries and job responsibilities are prioritized before the titles. Thus five different factors are identified based on the responses of respondents. These are Credence, Confidence, Satisfaction, Power, and Identity. The credence indicates job titles also are important for coordination in teams because they can facilitate the development of trust (Bechky 2006). The factor “Identity” explained in terms of employees offers a way to manage the differentiation of skills between team members, which supports the work of Hollenbeck, Beersma, &Schouten(2012). Titles are often the first information that we communicate about ourselves to new colleagues, clients, and other key acquaintances. Power and confidence explain that job titles enable employees to self-express, and they may help employees channel their attention and energy more effectively, which begets power and boost confidence in them, thus helping them to better utilize their unique capabilities (Kahn 1990). The dimension of satisfaction as supported by

Baron and Bielby (1986, 568) claims that “specialized job titles often serve as ‘hedonic wages,’” as they send external signals that are psychologically rewarding to employees.

TABLE 3
INTERVIEW RESPONSES COLLECTED REGARDING SKILL VARIETY

Question 3: → Respondents↓	Do you think your job requires a variety of different activities so that you can utilize all your skills and talents?
1:	“Yes and no. Other jobs might require more skills to be effective. You need a variety [of skills] in your arsenal to do any job around here. There aren’t borders to stay within especially in marketing. Sometimes you just have to run with it whether it’s within your lines or not.”
2:	“Sometimes I feel like we aren’t utilized to our potential, we are left out at crucial points.”
3:	“Oh yeah, I mean there’s a lot of different things. You come into work and you want to do this and then you’re getting pulled into a lot of different directions, so I think it takes a lot of different skills and balance to adjust to those demands daily.”
4:	“Personally, yes. My position is all about shifting gears and taking care of responsibilities. So, I wouldn’t be good at my job if I wasn’t fulfilling those responsibilities.”
5	“Definitely a lot of activities, whether it’s utilizing my skills, that’s a different question.”

Respondents unanimously responded that their jobs have skill variety and that they are utilized to their full potential (see Table 3).

TABLE 4
INTERVIEW RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED REGARDING TASK IDENTITY

Question 4:→ Respondents↓	Do you feel like your job involves doing a complete from beginning to end and an identifiable piece of work with a visible outcome?
1:	“Yes. Especially with project operations; day-to-day is perpetually ongoing, it never ends. It won’t finish in one workday. I like variety and challenge.”
2:	“No—but yes in the long run. There are larger goals: to add value, earn your salary, save expenses, bring revenue... but more short-term goals too.”
3:	“Yes, but I’m often interrupted. So, when I start, I get pulled into different things but can come back and complete it, but I do get pulled in different directions. I may not start the day doing the same task. I don’t have the same routine every day.”

5:	“With the rates process, there is a complete start and end. There are times with sales or business opportunities you start it and it never really comes to completion. There are times where it is the case and times where it’s not the case because the opportunity didn’t work but it’s not necessarily anything you did; it just didn’t work.”
6:	“Generally, yes.”
10:	“Yes and no, mine is very perpetual. You could be done with a program and new rules/instances come. Not as much completion as a normal job.”

Responses varied (see Table 4) depending on the type of job. Since this subsidiary is a smaller organization, there are fewer people doing various jobs, hence the distinction in responses.

TABLE 5
INTERVIEW RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED REGARDING TASK SIGNIFICANCE

Question 5→ Respondents↓	Do you feel like your job affects, or is important to, others both within and outside the organization?
1:	“Yes. There is a direct impact on internal stakeholders. Talking with external customers has its own level of impacts.”
2:	“Not as much as it was, but it depends on the project.”
3:	“More of the billing side of things. I do miscellaneous bills which we call job slips and I bill those out to our clients who will come back with questions, so I have to communicate with them as well. Get information from within and communicate it.”
4:	“Definitely, my main focus is on pricing. I put together rates for our customers along with for other railroads and their customers; it affects the business for our customers and the revenue for our company. It affects every department within our organization and also our customers and everyone they deal with... it affects everybody.”
5:	“Yes, it has to be both. I have the responsibility to make sure there’s cohesiveness. Representative to external customers, pleasing them...”
6:	“Yes. A lot of times. I’m the first face of the railroad for our department.”
7:	“Safety and training... so it’s good for all aspects I suppose. Keeping employees and the public safe. Also, work with other railroads, share ideas to better the whole industry.”
8:	“Yes. I do the financial statements for a couple of the companies that AET acquired.”

From the total surveyed, employees unanimously answered that they feel their job is critical to and an important part of the organization (see Table 5). This feeling leads them to perform their job with utmost sincerity and dedication. These employees also display less absenteeism and dissatisfaction with their jobs and maintain strong interpersonal relationships with their coworkers.

TABLE 6
INTERVIEW RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED REGARDING AUTONOMY

Question 6:	Do you feel like you have autonomy with your job?
1:	“Yes. I’m not micromanaged; I’ve never felt that way.”

2:	“Definitely, more so than I have had with any other job.”
3:	“I’ve worked with [my boss] for years and he knows what I need, and I know what he needs. There’s always something I’m not sure how to handle like with customers, I’ll ask him a couple times, most of the time he lets handle things. Obviously, he keeps checking in.”
4:	“Absolutely.”
5:	“Most of the time.”
6:	“100% I do. I have never been told to do things and not questioned about how I do things.”
7:	“Yes, it’s very entrepreneurial.”
8:	“Yes. A lot of times. I’m the first face of the railroad for our department.”

Preponderantly, respondents showed that they feel they have autonomy with their work and are not micromanaged by their superiors, who leave them to their discretion as seen in Table 6.

TABLE 7
INTERVIEW RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED REGARDING FEEDBACK

Question 7: →	Are you provided with ample feedback regarding your job performance?
Respondents↓	
1:	“Yes. The monthly one on ones are a little excessive; I’d rather hear it as it is happening.”
2:	“I like feedback, I feel like it’s a generational thing. It can be up and down with momentum; it’s not required to sit down quarterly. I talk to [my boss] on a daily basis to see if I’m in line with expectations.”
3:	“Constructive criticism is always good in my book because you want to do the best at your job and there are always instances where you could’ve done something better. Everyone needs feedback whether it’s good or bad, for sure.”
4:	“We are always encouraged to better ourselves.”
5:	“We have a really good balance. We meet quarterly. [My boss] and I talk every single day. We meet at the quarterly meetings and I certainly hope there’s nothing I bring into that meeting that happened two months ago. We have an open dialogue and always communicate on things. It’s nice to sit and see how I’m doing, if I’m on track for everything I’m doing, if there’s anything I should be doing differently, just have the opportunity if there’s any potential for growth.”
6:	“I wouldn’t call it ample (specifically related to performance reviews.) Feedback can be lacking depending on who is providing it.”
7:	“Yeah [my boss] is the best about that. We have monthly one on ones. I get a lot of appreciation and praise. That motivates me.”
8:	“Yes. I go seek it out. I’m always asking. I’m a very feedback-oriented guy.”
9:	“Yes, depends on who is giving it. Some are structured. Some are based on the situation. Some you can understand immediately based on the response you get.”
10:	“Yes and no. New role, boss change. Once it’s structured out there will be actual things to be accounted for. Beginning stages can only do as good as you think you’ve done.”
11:	“Yes, it’s ad hoc as I’ve only been on board for 60 days.”

The variable feedback provided the greatest variety as there was variation with regards to the frequency, amount, and individual providing the feedback (see Table 7). Furthermore, there was a difference between people spanning across generations' perceived feedback. Millennials prefer perpetual feedback—as soon as they complete a task, they immediately seek validation. Millennials also like to have more detailed feedback and know exactly what they've done well and where they should improve. Baby Boomers and Generation X are less feedback-oriented. Though depending on the job, some individuals have answered that they do like feedback and it serves as a motivator for them.

TABLE 8
INTERVIEW RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED REGARDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Question 8: → Respondents↓	Do you feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks?
1:	“Very, [my boss] lets me do what I think is best and learn from experience.”
2:	“I have to. That’s what they hired me for. I have the confidence to make decisions and know they have my back.”
3:	“Yes. I’m all about optimization and efficiency. As long as it reaches the end goal, is safe, ethical, and efficient.”
4:	“Everyone is open-eared and minded to see your point of view whether they agree or not. For the most part, people listen but this doesn’t pertain to me.”
5:	“Yes, I was hired under the premise of being a self-starter.”

Overall, employees display a strong sense of psychological safety, barring one respondent who was interviewed which is apparent in Table 8.

TABLE 9
INTERVIEW RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED REGARDING EXTERNAL RAPPOR

Question 9: → Respondents↓	Do you think your job title is important in establishing smoother, stronger, and more pleasant relationships with others?
1:	“Yeah, the more established you are. People always ask, “what do you do?” Your title makes a difference and reflects what you are doing.”
2:	“Yes. The world is exterior... façade type interactions. If a customer looks at a business card and sees a title, they think is inadequate, they may not follow up. Internally, it may not matter that much. At Corporate it matters more.”
3:	“Once people work with me, they know what I’m about, so I don’t know if my job title is a huge factor with that.”
4:	“The reason why I think the title comes into play is; it needs to clearly define what your job actually is, I play a lot of different roles, a lot of people I deal with are “pricing manager” or higher up and there have been times where they are like “I need to talk to the person who actually has authority over this”, well I am that person but maybe they didn’t take that level since my title says I’m a specialist. I do think titles come into play when you’re going to conferences. I do think it’s important, not as far as job satisfaction goes but is necessary when you need to show you have more authority than a lower-level employee.”
5:	“Yes, it’s important.”
6:	“I do, it helps me get priority access. I’m not kept on the backburner. My title helps me that way so I can get stuff done faster. A lot of trusts...”
7:	“It is for the outside. Helps break the ice since it’s a title of authority.”

8:	“I don’t use my title socially. Within the industry, it is necessary (for some more than others.)”
9:	“That stuff doesn’t really do anything for me. The program manager is so vague; people might not understand what you do as opposed to safety & training (conductor engineer).”

The responses for external rapport were split and differed based on the type of job. For jobs that require a lot of client interaction, it is an important variable, and industrially it can make a difference. But with regard to personal or social lives, it is not important (see Table 9). Respondents who indicated that job titles were important reported that the sense of importance was extrinsic and not intrinsic, *i.e.*, it did not impact their job satisfaction but was important in a professional setting when interacting with external stakeholders and clients. The responses were scattered across the level of experience and position of the candidates—there were no apparent trends between employees in similar positions or with similar titles. The majority of those interviewed responded that they do their jobs for the sake of the work itself and they are not attached to their job titles

TABLE 10
INTERVIEW RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED REGARDING SELF-VERIFICATION

Question 10:→ Respondents↓	Do you feel like your job title helps people perceive you the same way you perceive yourself?
1:	“Internally, yes and for customers with close relationships. Externally I’m not sure if they even know what [my title] does for the railroad.”
2:	“Yes and no. I rarely have issues with customers but there have been times where people think I’m not the decision-maker, but [my boss] says he’ll always back me up in the case. Internally, everyone knows what I do [for the company].”
3:	“I perceive myself as not being very special, I just love doing what I do—making people happy. But I learn from feedback that people value me, and I get special treatment because of my position.”
4:	“I’m somewhat insecure, doubtful, want to make sure I’m doing the right thing.”
5:	“I don’t think my job defines me. I perform my job with the values that define me.”

As seen in Table 10, respondents for the most part do not feel their job titles affect their self-verification. Responses were scattered based on experience and position. Most people responded that they do their job for the sake of the work itself—they are not attached to their job titles.

TABLE 11
INTERVIEW RESPONSES COLLECTED REGARDING THE IMPACT OF HR ON THE FIRM

Question 11: Respondents↓	How do you feel human resource management could impact the organization?
1:	“HR is through Corporate. They don’t understand our business [railroads] it’s different than the utility. It’s needed for the gambit of HR issues. We should have a dedicated onsite HR.”
2:	“Continue a broad array of training classes, skill development, etc. Faster hiring process (onboarding organized better) and more connection with Alliant Energy (less confinement) since they are quick to regulate and control.”
3:	“An in-house HR can help speed up processes like onboarding. With the companies growing, that person could help be the link between corporate and all the subsidiaries.”

4:	“In general, I think it would be positive as long as that person works within the existing culture.”
5:	“I think it would have a great impact. We face a lot of roadblocks since they see us as a separate entity. I don’t think there’s a clear understanding about [the organization].
6:	“If they understand what we do they can be very beneficial and helpful, but if they use a generic approach and compartmentalize it may not be helpful.”
7:	“HR is the conduit that helps. The ability to have insight into emotional intelligence or catch red flags should help to hire managers. People are more often than not hired based on tactical knowledge instead of emotional intelligence. Our HR is not successful in this since you can’t provide what you don’t know.”
8:	“If we had someone here who actually understood what we do it would be beneficial instead of someone hours away. Easier with hiring, drug testing, pretty much everything.”
9:	“Culture, training, recruiting, terminating, etc.”

Employees feel that this is a rapidly expanding subsidiary and requires its own HR department. This HR should serve as a liaison between the parent corporation and the subsidiary (see Table 11). This organization should ideally have someone who has clout and repertoire with the parent corporation but also understands the culture of their organization and has knowledge of the industry.

TABLE 12
MECHANISMS TESTED TO REFLECT JOB SATISFACTION AND SUPPORTING
QUOTATIONS FROM EMPLOYEE INTERVIEWS

Mechanism	Quotation(s)
Skill variety	“Yes and no. Other jobs might require more skills to be effective. You need a variety [of skills] in your arsenal to do any job around here. There aren’t borders to stay within especially in marketing. Sometimes you just have to run with it whether it’s within your lines or not.” “Oh yeah, I mean there’s a lot of different things. You come into work and you want to do this and then you’re getting pulled into a lot of different directions, so I think it takes a lot of different skills and balances to adjust to those demands daily.”
Task identity	“Yes. Especially with project operations; day-to-day is perpetually ongoing, it never ends. It won’t finish in one workday. I like variety and challenge.” “Yes, but I’m often interrupted. So, when I start, I get pulled into different things but can come back and complete it, but I do get pulled in different directions. I may not start the day doing the same task. I don’t have the same routine every day.”
Task significance	“Yes. There is a direct impact on internal stakeholders. Talking with external customers has its own level of impact.” “Yes, it has to be both. I have the responsibility to make sure there’s cohesiveness. Representative to external customers, pleasing them...”
Autonomy	“Definitely, more so than I have had with any other job.” “I’ve worked with [my boss] for years and he knows what I need, and I know what he needs. There’s always something I’m not sure how to handle like with customers, I’ll ask him a couple of times, and most of the time he lets me handle things. Obviously, he keeps checking in.”

Feedback	<p>“I like feedback, I feel like it’s a generational thing. It can be up and down with momentum; it’s not required to sit down quarterly. I talk to [my boss] on a daily basis to see if I’m in line with expectations.”</p> <p>“We have a really good balance. We meet quarterly. [My boss] and I talk every single day. We meet at the quarterly meetings and I certainly hope there’s nothing I bring into that meeting that happened two months ago. We have an open dialogue and always communicate on things. It’s nice to sit and see how I’m doing, if I’m on track for everything I’m doing, if there’s anything I should be doing differently, just have the opportunity if there’s any potential for growth.”</p>
Self-verification	<p>“I don’t think my job defines me. I perform my job with the values that define me.”</p> <p>“I perceive myself as not being very special, I just love doing what I do—making people happy. But I learn from feedback that people value me, and I get special treatment because of my position.”</p>
Psychological safety	<p>“Yes. I’m all about optimization and efficiency. As long as it reaches the end goal, is safe, ethical, and efficient.”</p> <p>“Yes, I was hired under the premise of being a self-starter.”</p>
External rapport	<p>“I don’t use my title socially. Within the industry, it is necessary (for some more than others.)”</p> <p>“The reason why I think the title comes into play is; it needs to clearly define what your job actually is, I play a lot of different roles, a lot of people I deal with are “pricing manager” or higher up and there have been times where they are like “I need to talk to the person who actually has authority over this”, well I am that person but maybe they didn’t take that level since my title says I’m a specialist. I do think titles come into play when you’re going to conferences. I do think it’s important, not as far as job satisfaction goes but is necessary when you need to show you have more authority than a lower-level employee.”</p>

Tactical skills can always be taught through on-the-job and workshops. However, intrapersonal skills and EQ (emotional quotient) are found inherently in an individual, these characteristics should be given more importance—the presence of an HR that possesses these qualities themselves can ensure that. Employees who felt their job fulfilled their need for personal growth and development displayed high levels of the five core dimensions based on the responses collected from the questionnaires and interviews. Through the interviews it can be seen that job titles do not necessarily impact the job characteristics; however, job characteristics are impacting the overall job satisfaction of employees, and job titles and their subsequent job descriptions are constructed using the job characteristics model at this organization. The job characteristics are further moderated by self-verification, psychological safety, and external rapport. As one respondent stated (see Table 12), some titles foster credibility in roles for external interactions but do not have any value internally.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

The result shows that job characteristics do have a significant impact on job satisfaction supporting research by Hackman and Oldman (1980), Katz and Van Maanen (1977), and Price (1986). This relates to Maslow’s hierarchy as self-verification relates to self-esteem, as employees feel their job increases their self-verification, their overall job satisfaction and feelings of safety and importance increase, and their social needs with external rapport are satisfied. This qualitative research study attempts to determine whether job titles are reflective of psychological safety, whether external rapport, and self-verification have a moderating effect on the 5 dimensions of job characteristics defined by Hackman & Oldham (1976), and

whether this will affect the job satisfaction of the employees, and whether subsidiaries would benefit from an in-house HR department with independent and more pertinent HR policies.

Based on the responses collected from the employees and the findings of previous work done by Grant (2014) and Judge (2000), it is visible that job titles don't affect job satisfaction directly, but allude to job characteristics (Hackman and Oldham 1976) which affect job satisfaction. Based on the framework of Hackman & Oldham's (1976) Job Characteristics Model and Katz & Van Maanen's (1977) Loci of Work Satisfaction which suggests that the job itself, interactional context, and organizational policies impact the satisfaction employees experience, it can be seen that the first proposition that job satisfaction impacts job characteristics which influence job. Based on the interviews, the first proposition can be refuted since the job titles do not directly affect the job characteristics. The responses unanimously show that the job titles are unlinked to the job characteristics. As for the second proposition, job titles do affect job satisfaction directly (without the influence of job characteristics) in some cases, especially for employees whose jobs involve heavy interaction with people outside the organization. Similarly, the third proposition is not supported since the job characteristics are part and parcel of the job role and description regardless of the job title the employee possesses. Finally, job characteristics affect job satisfaction as supported by previous research was done by Grant *et al.* (2014) and Loher *et al.* (1985). Through the responses collected from the interviews, it can be seen that job titles do not necessarily impact the job characteristics. However, job characteristics are impacting the overall job satisfaction of employees, and job titles and their subsequent job descriptions are constructed using the job characteristics model at this organization. Implications are explored in terms of attempts to increase the work satisfaction of workers by considering the position of job titles and the moderating impact of job characteristics, as well as the self-verification, psychological health, and external relations faced by the employee. Strategic reorganization and self-reflective work descriptions to be adopted require organizational improvement strategies that consider the workers they are trying to support.

This study relied heavily on self-reported data. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether the job titles have a meaningful impact on the employees' behavior which can be studied in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall job satisfaction is contingent on the job itself, interaction context, and organizational policies (Katz & Van Maanen 1977). Employees who feel their jobs are rich in positive behavioral elements, *i.e.*, self-verification, psychological safety, external rapport skill variety, task identity, task significance, and feedback do not feel strongly about their job titles. These variables influence job satisfaction, but employees at the organization studied largely feel motivated by the work itself and not external factors—this motivates them to choose and retain their jobs. Employees feel strongly that this organization needs its own HR.

Job titles – some titles foster credibility in roles for external interactions but do not have any value internally. Job characteristics – work should be productive, deliver a fair income with security and social protection, safeguard basic rights, ensure equality (opportunities and treatment), offer prospects for personal development, offer the chance for recognition, and have one's voice heard. Job satisfaction – when the desired job characteristics are incorporated into the work itself, employees appreciate job satisfaction. This research supports the validity of the Job Characteristics Model (Price *et al.*, 1986).

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