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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK DESIGN AND JOB SATISFACTION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIAN COMPANIES

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to identify the work characteristics with the highest impact on job satisfaction across a wide range of occupations and positions within Romanian companies. The empirical research had been carried out within the Global Work Design Project initiated by the Academy of Management HR Division, based on the work design questionnaire (WDQ) developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006). The Romanian sample consists of 394 employees from 69 organizations. In our paper we construct the model of the typical Romanian job (with the average values of work characteristics) and identify the features which lead to high job satisfaction. Our findings have implications on companies' HR strategies.

Keywords: work design, job satisfaction, employee turnover, Romania

1. INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is often defined as a positive emotional state that is derived from an individual's experience at work. It is associated with a range of positive outcomes such as increased motivation, engagement, commitment, performance and productivity, and it is also a relevant factor of turnover intentions. As such, it is important for organizations to take measures to ensure that employees are satisfied with their job roles. Work design is one such measure, as it refers to the way tasks, roles, responsibilities and activities are created, organized and structured in the workplace to achieve an organization's goals.

In 2021, altogether 42% of workers across the EU27 reported a high level of engagement at work, while in high-involvement organisations, where employees had more control over their work and felt more involved in decision-making processes, this percentage increased to 51% (Eurofound, 2022). Evidence shows that poor-quality work designs (characterized by low discretion and task complexity, sometimes combined with high timing constraints) continue to be prevalent even when new jobs are introduced. Workload and physical load had intensified, while cognitive demands and job discretion declined. In 2021, almost half of the workforce in the EU27 worked always or often at high intensity (high speed and tight deadlines) and almost a fifth of workers experienced emotionally disturbing situations. At the same time, around half of workers had the autonomy to change the order of their tasks or the speed of their work, and to determine their work methods (Eurofound, 2022).

The aim of this paper is to identify the work characteristics with the highest impact on job satisfaction across a wide range of occupations and positions within Romanian companies, based on data collected within the Global Work Design Project initiated by the Academy of Management HR Division.

The paper consists of four parts. In the first part of the authors present some of the main theoretical findings related to the impact of work design on job satisfaction, the second part of the research presents the methodology, results and discussion are given in the third part, while conclusions are presented in the last chapter of the paper.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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The relationship between workers' happiness and productivity has been widely acknowledged (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000), and several studies focus on how organizations can ensure such happy and productive workers. Work design theory also hypothesizes a relationship between work design and job satisfaction (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

Work design, defined as "the content and organization of one's work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities" (Parker, 2014, p. 662), is a "key determinant of employee well-being, positive work attitudes, and job/organizational performance" (Parker, Van den Broeck & Holman, 2017, p. 267). Work design is created and sustained both by managers through formal decision-making processes, and by the employees themselves, through informal or social processes, but managerial choices have a key role (Parker, Morgeson & Johns et al., 2017).

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) of Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976) identifies five core job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback from the job itself) that can create three psychological states of employees (experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for the outcome of the work and knowledge of the actual results of the work activities) which lead to personal and work outcomes such as high internal work motivation, high satisfaction with the work, high quality work performance, low absenteeism and turnover.

Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) grouped work characteristics as follows: motivational work characteristics, including task characteristics (autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, feedback from job) and knowledge characteristics (job complexity, information processing, problem solving, skill variety, specialization), social characteristics (social support, interdependence, interaction outside the organization, feedback from others) and contextual characteristics (ergonomics, physical demands, work conditions and equipment use). Jobs within broad occupational categories would differ on certain work characteristics, i.e. knowledge characteristics and autonomy would be higher for jobs in professional occupations than jobs in nonprofessional occupations, while jobs in nonprofessional occupations would have higher levels of physical demands and less positive work conditions than jobs in professional occupations.

Individuals charged with designing or redesigning work may encounter several problems. If the jobs are already high on one of the motivational characteristics, additional increases are simply not feasible or will have negligible effects on satisfaction. The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) enables the assessment of different work characteristics, so a wide range of options can be considered to achieve different redesign goals. Other problems faced are the costs of increased training and compensation requirements, and the impossibility to change the task characteristics without producing job overload or too much complexity. The authors suggest that by enhancing social support, the work becomes more interesting to perform with lower training requirements.

Morgeson, Garza and Campion (2012) concluded that work characteristics impact various attitudinal, cognitive, behavioral and well-being outcomes. Autonomy, task identity, task significance, task variety and feedback from the job were found related to subjective performance; in addition, autonomy, task identity, feedback from the job and social support were negatively related to absenteeism.

According to Nielsen et al. (2017) employee well-being and performance may successfully be improved through interventions focused on building resources at individual level (self-efficacy, competence, hope, optimism, resilience and job crafting), at group level (social support, good interpersonal relationships between employees, teamwork), at the leader's level (good quality relationship between leader and employees, transformational leadership) and at the organisational level (the way work is organised, designed, and managed, autonomy and HR practices).

Zaharie, Kerekes & Osoian (2019) found a rather strong negative relationship between burnout and the turnover intentions and a moderate negative relationship between job satisfaction and the turnover intentions of the employees in the healthcare sector, while job satisfaction weakly moderates the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions.

The Gallup's engagement survey demonstrated that the relationship between engagement and work performance is substantial and highly generalizable across organizations. To improve employees' productivity managers can meet the following needs: job clarity, proper equipment and resources, work that aligns with one's talents, consistent feedback, being cared about as a person, encouragement received for one's development, interest for one's progress, opportunities to learn and grow, opinions being asked for and considered, an organizational mission which makes the job important, coworkers commitment to quality work and having a best friend at work (Gallup, 2020).

At opposite, high job demands combined with low decision latitude (also called as job strain), had been associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and mental health issues. Other psychosocial work factors, such as long working hours, job insecurity, effort-reward imbalance, workplace bullying, organizational injustice, and work-family conflict also negatively influence employees' well-being (Niedhammer, Bertrais & Witt, 2021).

The Eurofound (2022) survey examined the following dimensions of job quality: physical and social environment (exposure to physical risks and demands, support from their colleagues and managers, intimidation, discrimination at work), job tasks (work intensity, emotionally disturbing situations, autonomy), organisational characteristics (ability to

influence decisions that were important for their work, involvement in improving work organisation, processes, and in setting work objectives), working time arrangements (flexibility, work at night, work in free time, short notice calls into work), job prospects (career advancement, opportunities for learning), and intrinsic job features (recognition, usefulness, opportunities to use one's knowledge and skills). An index of job quality was constructed by comparing the job demands (which affect workers negatively) and the job resources (which affect workers positively) of an individual. The results show that in 2021 around 30% of EU workers were in strained jobs, where they experienced more job demands than job resources. Despite the changes workers experienced in their work due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the global crisis emerging afterwards, the link between job quality and the core indicators of the quality of working life remained unbroken: job quality is positively associated with well-being, good work-life balance, fewer work-life conflicts, better ability to make ends meet, better work engagement and greater trust within the workplace. Working conditions and quality of jobs influence the engagement of employees with their work: workers satisfied with their experience at work are also more likely to engage with their work. Autonomy to work leads to learning at work, increases creativity in the workplace and supports organisational performance, as it encourages workers to increase their discretionary effort (Eurofound, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Questionnaire

The empirical research had been carried out within the Global Work Design Project initiated by the Academy of Management HR Division, based on the work design questionnaire (WDQ) developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006). There were four questionnaires developed altogether: respondent employees and their supervisors completed two questionnaires each, in two rounds. In the first round, employees had to complete a questionnaire referring to job autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, feedback from job, job complexity, information processing, problem solving, skill variety, skill specialization, social support, interdependence, interactions outside the organization, feedback from others, ergonomics, physical demands, work conditions and job satisfaction, while the supervisors completed a questionnaire related to the organization and to the performance of the respondent employees. The second round of questionnaires were administered two weeks after the first round. This time, the employees assessed items related to organizational culture, job satisfaction, turnover intentions and burnout, while the supervisors evaluated the employees' behavior and the organizational structure. Each construct was built of three items (statements) assessed on a 5-point scale (from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree).

To ensure international comparability of the Romanian data, the original English language questionnaires were adapted to Romanian in several steps. At first, members of the research team translated the questionnaire into Romanian, then other research team members checked the Romanian translation and sent the questionnaire to a professional translator to translate it back into English. Both the translated and back-translated questionnaires were sent for approval to the lead team and in the final step the issues raised by the lead team were resolved by a researcher who did not take part in the previous stages of translation.

3.2. Sample

The questionnaires were administered between November 2017 and September 2018. The sampling method used was convenience sampling. As data collection process implied a considerable effort from the respondent organizations, it was difficult to find organizations that would allow us to complete the whole procedure, so we used personal contacts in order to maximize response rate.

The Romanian sample consists of 394 employees from 69 organizations. Almost two third (64%) of respondents are women and 36% are men, and 70.2% are university graduates. Most of the respondents (39.5%) belong to the 20-29 years old age group, 27.9% are 30-39 years old, 18.5% are 40-49 years old and 14.1% are over 50 years of age. As regards the economic sector of the employing organization, 21.5% of the respondents work in healthcare and social assistance, 13.1% in professional, scientific and technical services, 11.0% in construction, 10.7% in manufacturing, 6.6%-6.6% in transportation and warehousing, retail trade and educational services, 18% in other services and 6.6% in other sectors.

3.2. Analysis strategy

In our paper we build up the model of the typical Romanian job (the average values of the work characteristics) and compare it with the ideal one (the average values of the work characteristics for the respondents with high job satisfaction, low turnover intention and low level of burnout). We also compare work characteristics of managerial and non-managerial positions. Furthermore, we test for the correlation between the level of job satisfaction (declared by the employees) and task performance (assessed by the supervisor).

4. RESULTS

To find out the characteristics of the typical Romanian job, we aggregated the items measuring the following constructs: job autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, feedback from job, job complexity, skill variety, social support, feedback from others and work conditions. Results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Values of different work characteristics and the level job satisfaction, turnover and burnout

Construct measured	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job autonomy	389	1,00	5,00	3,3973	0,79511
Task variety	392	1,00	5,00	3,8584	0,95990
Task significance	392	1,00	5,00	3,5306	1,00987
Task identity	393	1,50	5,00	4,0305	0,82299
Feedback from job	392	1,00	5,00	3,8503	0,90983
Job complexity	393	1,00	5,00	2,6113	1,01622
Skill variety	392	1,00	5,00	3,8514	0,81980
Social support	389	1,40	5,00	4,0478	0,63723
Feedback from others	390	1,00	5,00	3,3726	0,93529
Work conditions	387	1,20	5,00	3,6765	0,81485
Job satisfaction average	393	1,00	5,00	4,1433	0,72257
Task performance	394	1,50	5,00	3,9239	0,79493
Turnover intention	393	1,00	5,00	2,6431	0,65735
Burnout	393	1,00	6,00	2,8514	1,05478
Helping behavior	394	1,50	6,00	4,5082	1,06160
Organisational loyalty	391	1,00	6,00	4,4249	1,08647

Source: Own research.

The job satisfaction of each respondent was calculated by averaging the items related to the job satisfaction construct for both rounds. The overall value of job satisfaction for the whole sample was 4.14 (on a scale from 1 to 5), which can be considered rather high.

The average turnover intention of the respondents was 2.64 (on a scale from 1 to 5), 80.4% of the respondents did not consider leaving the organization (values up to 3.00) and only 3.8% were ready to leave (values 4.00 to 5.00)

The average level of burnout was 2.85 (on a scale from 1 to 6), 63.1% of the respondents were extenuated occasionally or even less frequently (values up to 3.00), while 17.6% felt extenuated often or very often at work.

The task performance of the respondents was appreciated by their supervisors at the first round of questionnaires. The overall performance of the respondents was 3.92 (on a scale from 1 to 5); over half of the employees (55.1%) performed well (values 4.00 to 5.00) and only 17.3% of the employees performed at a low level (values up to 3.00) according to their supervisors.

The supervisors also appreciated that the employees have a rather supportive behavior towards their colleagues (in average 4.51 on a scale from 1 to 6) and they also show loyalty towards the organization they work for (in average 4.42 on a scale from 1 to 6).

Job satisfaction correlates significantly (at the 0.01 level) and positively with the following work characteristics:

- Job autonomy (Pearson correlation = 0.378)
- Task variety (Pearson correlation = 0.517)
- Task significance (Pearson correlation = 0.456)
- Task identity (Pearson correlation = 0.403)
- Feedback from job (Pearson correlation = 0.379)
- Skill variety (Pearson correlation = 0.469)
- Social support (Pearson correlation = 0.354)
- Feedback from others (Pearson correlation = 0.385)
- Work conditions (Pearson correlation = 0.145)

On the other hand, job satisfaction correlates significantly (at the 0.01 level) and negatively with job complexity (Pearson correlation = -0.229).

Our results (see Table 2) confirm previous findings about the positive relationship between job satisfaction and task performance (Pearson correlation = 0.265), moreover the results show that job satisfaction significantly (at the 0.01 level) and positively correlates with the respondents' readiness to help out colleagues at work (Pearson correlation = 0.345) and with the loyalty towards the organization (Pearson correlation = 0.468). Another important result for HR management is that job satisfaction correlates significantly (at the 0.01 level) and negatively with turnover intention (Pearson correlation = -0.292) and burnout (Pearson correlation = -0.167).

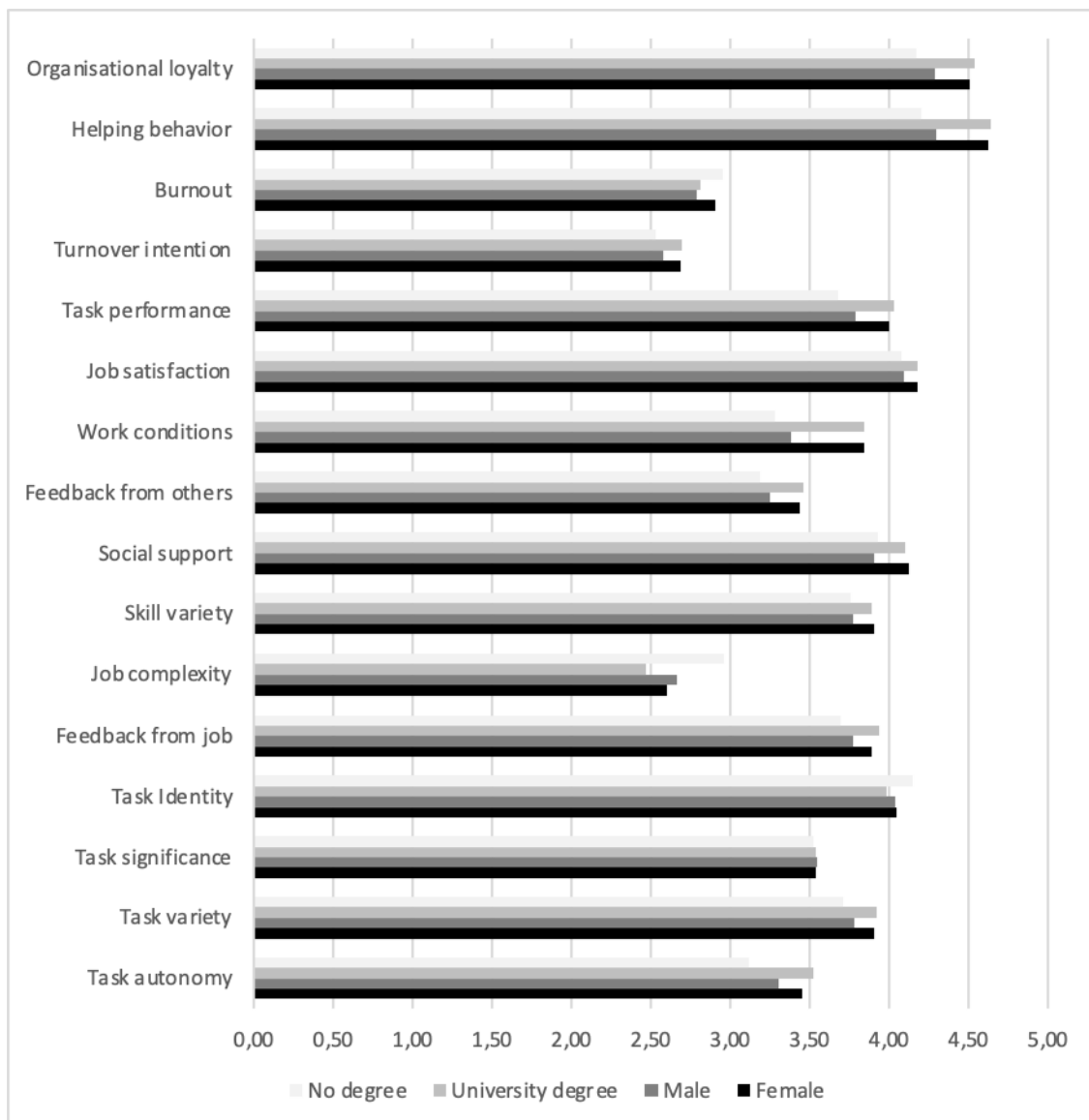
Table 2: Values and significance of the Pearson correlation coefficients of different work characteristics and job satisfaction

		Task performance	Turnover intention	Burnout	Helping behavior	Organisational loyalty
Job satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.265(**)	-.292(**)	-.167(**)	.345(**)	.468(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,001	0,000	0,000
Task performance	Pearson Correlation	1	-0,009	0,016	.557(**)	.605(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,858	0,751	0,000	0,000
Turnover intention	Pearson Correlation		1	.339(**)	-.140(**)	-.159(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0,000	0,006	0,002
Burnout	Pearson Correlation			1	-0,022	-0,013
	Sig. (2-tailed)				0,657	0,800
Helping behavior	Pearson Correlation				1	.748(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)					0,000
Organisational loyalty	Pearson Correlation					1
	Sig. (2-tailed)					

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own research.

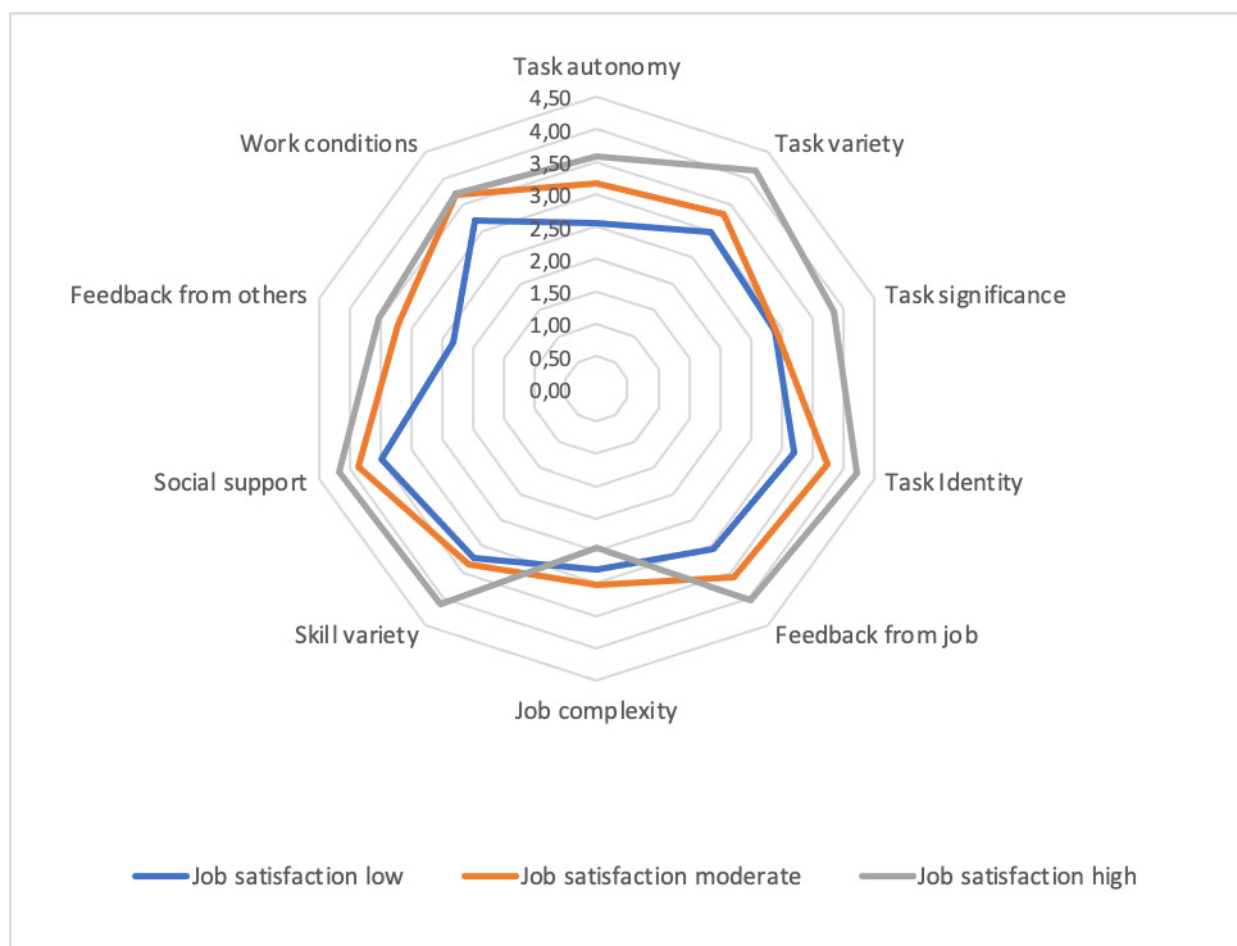


Picture 1: Values of work characteristics and elements of employee behavior, by gender and education
Source: Own research

For most of the studied constructs (Picture 1), gender differences are not significant, except that women perceive more social support (at the 0.01 level) and better work conditions (at the 0.01 level). Supervisors consider that women perform better (at the 0.05 level) and are more ready to help their colleagues (at the 0.01 level).

University graduates have jobs which provide significantly higher task autonomy (at the 0.01 level) and more feedback (at the 0.05 level); they also perceive more feedback from others (at the 0.01 level) and more social support (at the 0.05 level), while those without university degree have to face significantly more complex jobs (at the 0.01 level). The supervisors appreciated that university graduates have significantly higher (at the 0.01 level) task performance, helping behavior and organizational loyalty than those without a degree. However, there is no significant difference between the job satisfaction averages of these two groups, and the turnover intention of university graduates is significantly higher (at the 0.05 level).

To identify the work characteristics which lead to high job satisfaction, we grouped the respondents into three groups: 263 respondents (67.0%) belong to the group of employees with high job satisfaction (at least 4.00, mean value 4.55), 104 respondents (26.4%) to the group of employees with moderate job satisfaction (3.00 to 3.99, mean value 3.56) and 26 respondents (6.6%) to the group of employees with low job satisfaction (1.00 to 2.99, mean value 2.38). The ANOVA test shows that all differences between the means are significant (at the 0.01 level), except the one regarding work conditions. We can see from Picture 2, that jobs which ensure high satisfaction have values over 4 (on a 1 to 5 scale) for task variety, task identity, feedback from job, skill variety and social support, and values over 3.5 for task autonomy, task significance and feedback from others, with job complexity is only 2.44.



Picture 2: Work characteristics of respondents with different levels of job satisfaction
Source: Own research

The benefits of high job satisfaction can be observed on Picture 3. Respondents belonging to the high job satisfaction group perform better, are more helpful and more loyal to the organization they work for, according to their supervisors. Moreover, the burnout level and turnover intention of those with high job satisfaction is lower. The ANOVA test demonstrates that all these differences are significant at the 0.01 level.



Picture 3: Performance and behavior of respondents with different levels of job satisfaction

Source: Own research

5. CONCLUSION

It is essential for organizations to understand the link between job satisfaction and work design in order to ensure that their employees are satisfied with their jobs. Studies have shown that work design plays an important role in job satisfaction, with aspects such as autonomy and job design having a strong influence on employees' satisfaction levels. Our results confirm previous findings that job satisfaction correlates positively with job autonomy, task variety, significance and identity, feedback from the job, skill variety, social support, feedback from others, and work conditions. On the other hand, job satisfaction correlates negatively with job complexity.

Although there is no significant difference between the job satisfaction of the female and male respondents, women perceive more social support, benefit from better work conditions, but also perform better and are more ready to help their colleagues.

There is no significant difference between the job satisfactions of those with and without a university degree either, but the jobs of university graduates provide higher task autonomy, more feedback, and more social support, while those without university have to face complex jobs. Despite university graduates perform better, have higher levels of helping behavior and organizational loyalty, their turnover intention is significantly higher than of those without a degree.

An important result for HR management is that employees with high job satisfaction perform better, are more helpful and are more loyal to the organization they work for. Furthermore, the burnout level and turnover intention of those with high job satisfaction is lower. By taking measures to ensure that employees have control over their work and that their jobs are designed in a manner that offers a high degree of task variety and identity, organizations can increase the likelihood of job satisfaction and improved performance.

The limitation of the study is that women, university graduates and employees from healthcare are over-represented in our sample, therefore the job characterized by the mean values of the constructs can't be considered the "typical Romanian job". Still, the relationship between the work characteristics and job satisfaction, as well as between job satisfaction and performance, burnout and turnover are clearly demonstrated by our data and the managerial implications are valid. To reveal the implications of the COVID-19 pandemics, the research should be repeated in the coming years, but with a simplified methodology (only one round of questionnaires).

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Appendix: Values and significance of the Pearson correlation coefficients of different work characteristics and job satisfaction

		Variety	Significance	Identity	Feedback from job	Job complexity	Skill variety	Social support	Feedback from others	Work conditions	Job satisfaction
Autonomy	Pearson Corr.	.425(**)	.250(**)	.170(**)	.313(**)	-0,070	.302(**)	.260(**)	.334(**)	.229(**)	.378(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,001	0,000	0,166	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
Variety	Pearson Corr.	1	.492(**)	.163(**)	.301(**)	-.452(**)	.558(**)	.164(**)	.209(**)	-0,038	.517(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,001	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,001	0,000	0,453	0,000
Significance	Pearson Corr.		1	.418(**)	.335(**)	-.180(**)	.536(**)	.283(**)	.258(**)	0,032	.456(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,526	0,000
Identity	Pearson Corr.			1	.456(**)	.142(**)	.324(**)	.309(**)	.297(**)	.156(**)	.403(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)				0,000	0,005	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,002	0,000
Feedback from job	Pearson Corr.				1	-.108(*)	.250(**)	.304(**)	.513(**)	.207(**)	.379(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)					0,034	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
Job complexity	Pearson Corr.					1	-.307(**)	0,074	0,084	0,095	-.229(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)						0,000	0,146	0,098	0,063	0,000
Skill variety	Pearson Corr.						1	.221(**)	.190(**)	0,012	.469(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)							0,000	0,000	0,816	0,000
Social support	Pearson Corr.							1	.450(**)	.213(**)	.354(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)								0,000	0,000	0,000
Feedback from others	Pearson Corr.								1	.250(**)	.385(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)									0,000	0,000
Work conditions	Pearson Corr.									1	.145(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)										0,004

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own research.