

ENHANCING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE THROUGH TASK SIGNIFICANCE: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF JOB CHARACTERISTICS MODEL

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Abstract. This theoretical paper examines how employee performance in Nigeria's public sector can be strengthened through task significance, drawing on the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) as its primary theoretical lens. It argues that employees are more motivated, committed, and productive when they perceive their work as meaningful, socially relevant, and capable of influencing the lives of citizens and the broader community. Task significance, alongside other core job dimensions such as skill variety, autonomy, task identity, and feedback, creates psychological states that foster intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and enhanced performance. However, the Nigerian public sector often faces structural and contextual challenges, including bureaucratic rigidity, inadequate resources, limited decision-making authority, weak performance feedback systems, and socio-cultural influences, which can diminish employees' perception of their roles' significance. These constraints frequently result in low engagement, reduced accountability, and suboptimal service delivery. By applying JCM principles, public sector organizations can redesign jobs to enhance role clarity, employee ownership, and commitment to organizational goals. The paper further emphasizes the need for context-sensitive interventions that align job design with institutional realities and national development priorities. Ultimately, fostering task significance can improve employee effectiveness, strengthen public service delivery, and promote sustainable organizational and socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *employee performance, task significance, Job Characteristics Model, public sector organization, civil servants*

Introduction

Employee performance remains a central concern for public institutions across the globe due to its critical role in achieving organizational objectives, enhancing service delivery, and sustaining operational efficiency, in the public sector, where accountability, transparency, and responsiveness are paramount, employee performance is not merely an administrative outcome but a fundamental driver of governance effectiveness and national development (Jafri et al., 2025; Nor, 2025). In Nigeria, public institutions, particularly federal ministries, serve as the backbone of policy formulation and implementation, making employee performance a strategic imperative for institutional relevance and public trust, the Nigerian civil service functions as the administrative machinery through which government policies are executed and development goals pursued, its effectiveness directly influences socio-economic growth, service quality, and citizen satisfaction. However, despite its pivotal role, the Nigerian public sector continues to grapple with persistent challenges, including bureaucratic rigidity, inadequate resources, low employee engagement, skill mismatches, and declining motivation, all of which undermine employee performance (Abuh et al., 2025; Balewa et al., 2025; Kpurunee et al., 2024). These challenges have raised concerns

about how work is designed and how employees perceive the value and impact of their roles within public organizations (Frank et al., 2025).

Employee performance is widely recognized as a key determinant of organizational success, particularly in public institutions where efficiency and service delivery are central mandates (Ajobi et al., 2025; Claude, 2024; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Civil servants in federal ministries are expected to translate policies into actionable outcomes; however, their effectiveness is shaped by job-related factors such as task design, meaningfulness of work (Ajike, 2023; Hackman and Oldham, 1976). In this context, how employees perceive the significance of their tasks, especially the extent to which their work positively affects others, becomes a critical, yet often underexplored, determinant of performance. Nigeria's federal ministries are frequently characterized by low job fulfillment, weak motivation, and limited engagement, resulting in suboptimal performance outcomes and reduced effectiveness of government initiatives (Abdulkareem et al., 2025; Akuche and Akindoyin, 2024; Omar et al., 2022). While reforms have largely focused on structural adjustments and procedural efficiency, less attention has been paid to the intrinsic motivational properties of jobs themselves, this gap is particularly important in emerging economies like Nigeria, where motivating public sector employees has become increasingly complex amidst economic pressures and institutional constraints (Agbanero, 2023; Badmus, 2023).

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM), developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976), offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding how job design influences employee motivation and performance, central to this model is task significance, defined as the degree to which a job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, when employees perceive their tasks as meaningful and socially valuable, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, a sense of responsibility, and higher performance outcomes (Siddiqui, 2024). In public sector settings, where work inherently affects societal welfare, task significance holds particular relevance, yet remains insufficiently theorized within the Nigerian governance context, ongoing public sector reforms in Nigeria aim to enhance service delivery, transparency, and institutional responsiveness (Nwosu and Ananti, 2024). These reforms increasingly acknowledge that sustainable improvement depends not only on structural efficiency but also on the motivation and performance of employees. Scholars emphasize that effective service delivery is inseparable from a motivated and competent workforce, highlighting the need to redesign jobs in ways that foster meaning, engagement, and performance (Faliza et al., 2024; Agbanero, 2023; Siengthai and Pila-Ngarm, 2016).

Against this backdrop, this paper provides a theoretical exploration of task significance as a critical mechanism for enhancing employee performance, drawing on the Job Characteristics Model, by situating task significance within the realities of Nigeria's federal ministries, the study contributes to the understanding of how meaningful work design can serve as a strategic lever for improving employee performance in public institutions. Ultimately, emphasizing task significance offers a pathway for strengthening intrinsic motivation, improving performance outcomes, and building a more responsive and effective public service.

Background of the study

Employee performance is a central construct in organizational and public administration theories, reflecting the degree to which employees accomplish assigned tasks in ways that contribute to organizational goals and service delivery (Jafri et al.,

2025; Luitel and Poudel, 2024). Within the public sector, where the institutional mission involves public welfare and accountability, enhancing employee performance is widely viewed not only as a managerial objective but also as a theoretical problem requiring deeper conceptual understanding of the work itself, traditional approaches focusing exclusively on extrinsic motivators, such as rewards and bureaucratic controls, have been critiqued for overlooking intrinsic motivational mechanisms that drive sustained performance outcomes (Ahmad et al., 2026; Thusi et al., 2023). One well-established theoretical framework for conceptualizing how work design influences employee motivation and performance is the job characteristics model posits that jobs vary along five core characteristics, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, and those higher levels of these characteristics foster positive psychological states, which in turn influence work outcomes such as motivation and performance (Owunna et al., 2025; Holman et al., 2024; Raihan, 2020). Specifically, the model suggests that when employees experience their work as meaningful, feel personally responsible for outcomes, and understand how well they are performing, they are more likely to exhibit strong performance behaviors, this occurs through the psychological mechanisms of experienced meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of outcomes (Kambey et al., 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Research consistently shows among the five core dimensions of the JCM, task significance has emerged in the literatures as a particularly salient predictor of meaningful work experiences outcomes such as motivation, engagement, and performance (Meynhardt et al., 2024; Allan, 2017). Task significance refers to the degree to which a job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, whether within the organization or in the broader social environment, when employees perceive that their work makes a real difference to others, they are more likely to interpret their jobs as inherently meaningful, which then stimulates intrinsic motivation and effort directed toward performance outcomes (Cnossen and Nikolova, 2025; Adiarani, 2019). This conceptual linkage between task significance and employee performance has been affirmed across studies that emphasize how employees' awareness of social impact and job purpose enhances engagement and work effectiveness (Lesmana et al., 2024; Paudel and Sherm, 2024; Prasetyawan et al., 2024). Despite the recognized importance of job design for performance, empirical research specifically isolating task significance as a driver of performance remains limited, and theoretical discussions call for deeper exploration of this construct independent of other job characteristics.

Existing studies suggest that task significance plays a critical role in shaping meaningful work engagement and performance outcomes, indicating that employees who perceive their work as having a positive social impact are more likely to demonstrate heightened involvement and improved quality of output (Roberts et al., 2025; Au et al., 2024; Meynhardt et al., 2024). Despite this insight, the literature offers limited theoretical integration of task significance within public sector contexts, particularly in bureaucratic environments where work roles are structured around compliance, routines, and procedural mandates rather than social impact narratives. The Nigeria's federal ministries, job design is largely shaped by administrative routines and procedural compliance, often at the expense of emphasizing the broader societal impact of public service, despite the central role these institutions play in national development and citizen welfare, this misalignment reveals a largely underexplored opportunity for task significance to function as a motivational driver of employee performance, the prevailing bureaucratic orientation within federal ministries has been shown to constrain

employee autonomy, flexibility, and adaptive managerial practices, thereby limiting employees' ability to perceive their work as socially impactful beyond routine administrative tasks, as a result, opportunities to embed task significance within job roles, an essential component of meaningful work and enhanced performance, remain insufficiently leveraged in the public sector context (Erude et al., 2023; Ferdinand et al., 2021). By foregrounding task significance within the Job Characteristics Model, this theoretical study advances understanding of how job design can stimulate intrinsic motivation beyond reliance on extrinsic incentives or structural reforms, conceptualizing JCM as a strategic framework, the study demonstrates how public organizations can reframe civil servants' roles to enhance perceived task significance, strengthen motivational states, and support adaptive, high-level employee performance within contemporary public sector organizations.

Results and Discussion

The challenges constraining employee performance in Nigeria

Nigeria's federal ministries continue to operate within complex bureaucratic structures that pose significant constraints on employee performance and the effective delivery of public services (Erude et al., 2023; Oyedele, 2015). A systemic challenge confronting public organizations is bureaucratic inefficiency, commonly manifested through excessive procedural requirements, protracted decision-making processes, and reliance on outdated administrative systems, these conditions frequently delay policy implementation, weaken organizational responsiveness, and adversely affect productivity and performance outcomes (Amin et al., 2024; John, 2024; Paul, 2024; Asaju and Ayeni, 2021). From a job design perspective, such inefficiencies often result in fragmented work processes that obscure the broader purpose and societal impact of employees' tasks, thereby diminishing perceived task significance. In addition to procedural rigidity, nepotism and weak administrative governance persist as systemic challenges within several federal ministries, these practices undermine meritocratic principles, distort resource allocation, and erode institutional credibility and employee morale (Dontsi et al., 2024; Osinubi et al., 2024; Tawiah et al., 2024). Within this context, employees may experience reduced perceptions of fairness and diminished recognition of their contributions, which weakens intrinsic motivation and constrains performance, theoretical perspectives on work motivation suggest that when effort and competence are decoupled from meaningful outcomes, employees are less likely to perceive their roles as significant. Financial limitations further exacerbate performance challenges in Nigeria's federal ministries. Inadequate funding constrains program execution, delays project delivery, and impedes the maintenance of critical infrastructure, these constraints not only affect organizational effectiveness but also shape employees' work experiences by fostering role overload, resource scarcity, and task routinization (Osinubi et al., 2024; Tawiah et al., 2024; Owunna et al., 2023), such conditions can diminish employees' perceptions of the value and impact of their work, thereby weakening task significance and undermining performance-related behaviors. Moreover, overlapping institutional mandates and insufficient inter-ministerial coordination contribute to policy inconsistencies, operational conflicts, and duplication of effort, these challenges are compounded by limited technological capacity and shortages of skilled and adequately trained personnel, which restrict information sharing and collaborative task execution (Elimian et al., 2024; Hossain and Hossain, 2024).

From the standpoint of the job characteristics model, fragmented coordination disrupts task identity and task significance by obscuring how individual roles contribute to collective organizational and societal outcomes.

The slow adoption of digital governance and modern administrative technologies further constrains transparency, efficiency, and service delivery across federal ministries, when combined with low remuneration, unfavorable working conditions, and limited career advancement opportunities, these conditions hinder the attraction and retention of skilled professionals (Agbai and Okechukwu, 2024; Awotunde and Aregbeshola, 2024; Owunna et al., 2024; 2023). These systemic deficiencies weaken employees' engagement with their work and reduce opportunities for experiencing meaningfulness and purpose. Although institutional reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and enhanced accountability mechanisms are frequently advocated as remedies to these challenges, such approaches often emphasize structural and procedural change while paying insufficient attention to the motivational consequences of job design. From a theoretical standpoint, many of the challenges confronting Nigeria's federal ministries can be understood as factors that erode task significance, thereby limiting intrinsic motivation and employee performance. Consequently, improving performance in Nigeria's federal ministries requires a dual focus on administrative reform and the intentional design of work that emphasizes task significance. By strengthening employees' awareness of the societal relevance and impact of their roles, public sector organizations can enhance intrinsic motivation and performance outcomes, even within highly bureaucratic institutional environments.

Challenges to task significance in Nigeria

Task significance, a core dimension of the Job Characteristics Model, refers to the degree to which employees perceive their work as having a meaningful impact on others and contributing to valuable outcomes (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). When task significance is high, employees are more likely to experience their work as purposeful and socially relevant, which enhances intrinsic motivation and performance (Yu et al., 2023). However, several structural and institutional challenges in Nigeria impede the realization of task significance among public sector employees, one considerable challenge relates to bureaucratic inefficiency and procedural rigidity (Erude et al., 2023; Oyedele, 2015). Nigeria's public service, historically shaped by colonial bureaucratic structures, is often criticized for excessive formalism, red tape, and slow administrative processes that delay policy implementation and service delivery performance management system and public service delivery in Nigeria (Yakubu, 2025; Asaju and Ayeni, 2021), these procedural fragmentation tends to reduce jobs to repetitive, narrowly defined tasks that are disconnected from meaningful outcomes, thereby diminishing employees' perceptions of the social impact of their work (George et al., 2020; Eneanya, 2018). Furthermore, the persistence of normative impediments such as nepotism, favoritism, and non-meritocratic practices, which undermine fairness and recognition within the public sector, these practices distort recruitment and reward systems and often prioritize personal or political affiliations over competence and contribution (Kuforiji, 2024; Arici et al., 2020). Organizational environments where remuneration and advancement are dissociated from effort and impact can weaken employees' sense of purpose and the perceived significance of their tasks, making it difficult for workers to view their roles as socially valuable (Asaju and Ayeni, 2021; Osawe, 2015). Ambiguous role definitions and overlapping institutional mandates also

challenge the development of task significance, weak coordination across ministries and duplicative functions obscure employees' understanding of how their individual tasks contribute to broader organizational or societal goals. Without clear task boundaries and outcome linkages, employees may struggle to see the importance of their work, undermining the psychological meaningfulness that underpins task significance in the JCM (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Although specific Nigerian literature on this dimension is limited, studies in public administration highlight that poorly coordinated bureaucratic systems reduce clarity of purpose and policy coherence, which in turn affect employee engagement (Yakubu, 2025; Asaju and Ayeni, 2021).

Another structural constraint is the limited feedback and outcome visibility within public service processes, many public sector roles in Nigeria lack effective mechanisms for employees to receive timely information about the impact of their work on service delivery or citizen outcomes, without clear feedback loops linking individual tasks to results that matter, employees may find it difficult to attribute meaning to their efforts, thereby weakening task significance, the Job Characteristics Model posits that task significance must be complemented by feedback for meaningful work experiences to emerge (Ma et al., 2022; Hackman et al., 2015). Further, inadequate training and professional development in Nigeria's public sector constrain employees' capacity to understand and enact the social value of their roles, limited investment in capacity building contributes to skill stagnation and reduces opportunities for employees to engage with more complex and impactful aspects of their work, thereby diminishing the motivational potential of task significance (Onyekwulunne, 2020). Finally, the slow adoption of digital governance and modern administrative technologies impedes transparency and outcome communication (Ayesha et al., 2025). The lack of effective digital platforms not only limits service efficiency but also restricts employees' ability to observe the real-world effects of their work, which is critical for the experience of task significance. Emerging scholarship on e-governance in Nigeria suggests that technological constraints remain a barrier to functional bureaucratization and effective service delivery (Egbara and Ayogu, 2024). These structural and institutional challenges in Nigeria, bureaucratic inefficiency, normative impediments, unclear role scopes, limited feedback mechanisms, inadequate training opportunities, and weak digital systems, collectively undermine task significance, by constraining employees' perceptions of the meaningfulness and social impact of their work, such challenges attenuate intrinsic motivation and performance, illustrating the need for job design reforms that enhance task significance within public sector roles.

Theoretical underpinning

This study is theoretically anchored in the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), remains one of the most influential frameworks within work design and organizational motivation theories (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). The model was formulated to explain how specific characteristics embedded within job roles shape employees' psychological experiences, motivation, and performance outcomes. By emphasizing the intrinsic properties of work rather than external controls or rewards, the JCM provides a robust theoretical lens for examining how meaningful job design can enhance employee performance, particularly in public sector contexts, the JCM identifies five core job characteristics, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, as fundamental attributes that determine the motivational potential of a job (Bukth and Fatima, 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1975). These characteristics influence how

employees perceive their roles and, consequently, how they engage with their work. Jobs designed to incorporate these attributes are more likely to foster intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and sustained performance. Skill variety refers to the extent to which a job requires the use of diverse skills, talents, and abilities, roles that involve a broad range of activities tend to reduce the monotony, promote continuous learning, and stimulate cognitive engagement, thereby enhancing employees' interest and commitment to their work (Lam et al., 2024). Task identity, in contrast, reflects the degree to which a job involves the completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work. When employees can clearly perceive the beginning, process, and outcome of their tasks, they are more likely to experience a sense of accomplishment and ownership, which strengthens their attachment to their roles, central to the present study is task significance, defined as the degree to which a job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, either within the organization or in the wider society (Moothery Joshy and Anjali, 2025; Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Task significance directly shapes employees' perceptions of the social value and importance of their work; when individuals recognize that their efforts contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives or societal well-being, their intrinsic motivation and work engagement are significantly enhanced (Siddiqui, 2024; Woods et al., 2023).

Additionally, in public sector settings such as Nigeria's federal ministries, where work outcomes directly affect citizens and national development, task significance holds particular theoretical relevance. However, as highlighted in the preceding discussion, bureaucratic fragmentation, weak feedback systems, and institutional inefficiencies often obscure this sense of significance, thereby weakening motivation and performance, autonomy represents the degree of discretion, independence, and control employees have over how they perform their tasks, autonomy empowers employees to make decisions, exercise judgment, and take responsibility for work outcomes, which enhances motivation and job satisfaction. Conversely, highly centralized and rigid administrative systems, common in many public institutions, restrict autonomy and limit employees' sense of responsibility for outcomes, feedback, the final core job characteristic, refers to the extent to which employees receive clear, direct, and timely information about the effectiveness of their performance, effective feedback mechanisms enable employees to evaluate their progress, learn from experience, and continuously improve, reinforcing engagement and motivation (Kohli and Priyadarshi, 2025; Bhatti et al., 2024; Casey, 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1975). According to the JCM, the presence of these five job characteristics gives rise to three critical psychological states: experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, and knowledge of results (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Experienced meaningfulness reflects the extent to which employees perceive their work as valuable and worthwhile; experienced responsibility denotes the degree to which employees feel accountable for work outcomes; and knowledge of results refers to employees' awareness of how well they are performing, these psychological states serve as the immediate antecedents of key work outcomes, including intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance. Existing literature provides substantial empirical support for the JCM, demonstrating that jobs characterized by high levels of skill variety, task identity, and task significance are consistently associated with stronger motivation and improved performance outcomes (Adhika, 2024; Ali and Naz, 2024; Ismail et al., 2024; Sami and Iqbal, 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Crucially, task significance has been shown to exert a particularly strong influence on

experienced meaningfulness a core psychological state that drives sustained employee performance.

Within the context of Nigeria's federal ministries, the JCM offers a compelling theoretical framework for understanding how structural and institutional challenges, such as bureaucratic rigidity, limited autonomy, inadequate feedback, and weak outcome visibility, undermine task significance and, by extension, employee performance, while reforms often prioritize administrative restructuring and procedural efficiency, the JCM underscores the importance of redesigning work itself to enhance intrinsic motivation through meaningful job characteristics, with the focus of this study, the JCM is therefore employed as a conceptual foundation for theorizing task significance as a central mechanism for enhancing employee performance (Hackman and Oldham, 1975), by foregrounding task significance within the broader job design framework, this study contributes to theoretical discourse by illustrating how meaningful work design can serve as a strategic lever for improving performance in public sector organizations, particularly within bureaucratic and resource-constrained environments.

Theoretical contribution of the job characteristics model

The job characteristics model (JCM), represents a foundational contribution to organizational and work design theory by systematically explaining how intrinsic features of a job influence employee motivation, psychological experiences, and performance outcomes (Woods et al., 2023; Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Unlike earlier motivational approaches that emphasized external rewards and supervisory control, the JCM shifted theoretical attention toward the nature of work itself as a primary determinant of employee behavior, this reconceptualization marked a significant theoretical advancement by positioning job design as a central mechanism through which organizations can enhance meaningfulness, motivation, and performance, one of the most enduring theoretical contributions of the JCM lies in its articulation of the link between job characteristics and psychological states, the model proposes that five core job characteristics, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, give rise to three critical psychological states: experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, and knowledge of results (Bukth and Fatima, 2024; Lam et al., 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1975). These psychological states function as mediating mechanisms through which job design influences employee outcomes such as intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and performance, this mediation logic has significantly shaped subsequent theoretical models in organizational behavior by emphasizing employees' subjective interpretations of work rather than objective task features alone. In the context of the present study, the JCM contributes theoretically by providing a conceptual foundation for understanding task significance as a central driver of employee performance, task significance, defined as the extent to which a job has a substantial impact on others, occupies a unique position within the model because it directly informs experienced meaningfulness of work (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Theoretical extensions of the JCM suggest that when employees perceive their work as socially impactful and consequential, they are more likely to internalize organizational goals and demonstrate sustained performance behaviors (Paudel and Sherm, 2024). By foregrounding task significance, this study builds on the JCM's explanatory power and advances its application to public sector contexts where societal impact is a defining feature of work, another key theoretical

contribution of the JCM is its integration of individual motivation and organizational outcomes within a single coherent framework, the model bridges micro-level psychological processes and macro-level performance outcomes, demonstrating how individual perceptions of work design translate into organizational effectiveness, this integrative logic remains highly relevant for contemporary public sector research, where performance challenges are often examined through structural or institutional lenses with limited attention to intrinsic motivational mechanisms (Lesmana et al., 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

Furthermore, the JCM contributes theoretically by offering a normative framework for job redesign, rather than treating performance deficits solely as problems of employee attitudes or managerial inefficiency, the model suggests that performance can be enhanced by intentionally structuring jobs to maximize motivational potential, this perspective aligns closely with the present study's argument that performance challenges in Nigeria's federal ministries are not only administrative or resource-based but are also rooted in work designs that obscure task significance, limit autonomy, and weaken feedback mechanisms (Fan et al., 2024). The continued relevance of the JCM is evidenced by extensive empirical validation and theoretical refinement across diverse organizational contexts, studies confirm that the core job characteristics, particular task significance are consistently associated with higher motivation and performance outcomes (Sankaran et al., 2024; Song et al., 2024). More recent scholarship has extended the model to contemporary work settings, reaffirming its utility for understanding employee performance in complex and bureaucratic environments (Moothery Joshy and Anjali, 2025; Lam et al., 2024). The JCM contributes theoretically by serving as a lens for reinterpreting employee performance in public sector organizations through the concept of meaningful work, by emphasizing task significance, the study extends the model's application to developing country contexts and highlights its capacity to explain how institutional constraints and bureaucratic structures may weaken the psychological conditions necessary for high performance (Kuforiji, 2024), in doing so, the study reinforces the JCM's relevance as a dynamic theoretical framework capable of informing both scholarly inquiry and practical reform efforts, the theoretical contribution of the job characteristics model to this study lies in its ability to explain why and how job design, particularly task significance, shapes employee performance, by anchoring the analysis in the JCM (Paudel and Sherm, 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1976), this study advances theoretical understanding of employee performance in public organizations and underscores the enduring value of work design theories in addressing contemporary governance and performance challenges.

Challenges of Job Characteristics Model (JCM)

Although the job characteristics model (JCM), provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding how job design enhances motivation and employee performance, its practical applicability in Nigeria's public sector organizations is constrained by several contextual and institutional factors, these challenges limit the full realization of the model's core assumptions, particularly in bureaucratic and resource-constrained environments such as federal ministries (Erude et al., 2023; Oyedele, 2015). One major challenge relates to the highly bureaucratic and rule-driven nature of public sector organizations in Nigeria, the JCM assumes a degree of flexibility in job design that allows managers to restructure tasks to enhance skill variety, autonomy, and task

significance. However, Nigeria's public sector is characterized by rigid hierarchies, standardized procedures, and strict adherence to administrative rules, which restrict managerial discretion in job redesign (Amin et al., 2024; Kuforiji, 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1976), such rigidity limits employees' autonomy and constrains opportunities to redesign tasks in ways that promote meaningfulness and intrinsic motivation, thereby weakening the motivational pathways proposed by the JCM. Another challenge involves the restricted autonomy and limited decision-making power available to employees, within the job characteristics model, autonomy is critical as it cultivates a sense of responsibility for one's work outcomes (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Yet, in many Nigerian public sector organizations, decision-making processes are heavily centralized, leaving lower-level staff with little influence over how their tasks are carried out, evidence from studies on Nigerian public administration indicates that this high degree of centralization suppresses initiative and innovation, diminishing employees' ownership of their work and accountability for results (Nwosu and Ananti, 2024). This structural limitation undermines one of the key psychological states required for the effective functioning of the job characteristics model, moreover, the weak feedback culture prevalent in Nigeria's public sector further constrains the model's applicability. Feedback is a central component of JCM, providing employees with knowledge of results and guiding performance improvement. Yet, in many public organizations, performance appraisal systems are often irregular, procedural, or poorly aligned with actual job performance. Consequently, employees receive limited information about the impact and effectiveness of their work, diminishing the motivational benefits of feedback and weakening the relationship between job characteristics and performance outcomes.

Also, the significant challenge is the misalignment between job design and reward systems, the JCM presumes that enhanced motivation resulting from enriched job characteristics will be reinforced through recognition and performance-related outcomes, in Nigeria's public sector, however, remuneration and promotion systems are frequently influenced by tenure, political considerations, or informal networks rather than merit or performance (Dontsi and Marielle, 2024; Tawiah et al., 2024). This misalignment diminishes the motivational value of enriched job characteristics, as employees may fail to perceive a connection between meaningful work, performance, and organizational rewards, resource constraints and capacity limitations also impede the effective implementation of the JCM many public sector organizations in Nigeria operate under conditions of inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and limited access to modern technologies, these constraints restrict opportunities for skill variety, learning, and task enrichment, as employees are often required to perform repetitive tasks with limited tools and support (Osinubi et al., 2024), therefore, the potential of job characteristics to stimulate motivation and performance is significantly reduced. Furthermore, the JCM's emphasis on intrinsic motivation may be challenged by prevailing socio-economic conditions in Nigeria, in contexts where employees face economic insecurity, inflationary pressures, and relatively low wages, extrinsic rewards may exert a stronger influence on motivation than job design factors (Badmus, 2023). This reality does not invalidate the JCM but suggests that its motivational assumptions may require contextual adaptation when applied in developing country settings. Finally, limited managerial capacity for job redesign poses an additional constraint. Effective implementation of the JCM requires managers who possess the skills and awareness necessary to redesign jobs, communicate task significance, and establish meaningful

feedback systems (Nwosu and Ananti, 2024; Hackman and Oldham, 1976). However, leadership development and human resource capacity in Nigeria's public sector remain uneven, limiting the strategic use of job design as a performance-enhancing tool (Ajobi and Owunna, 2022). While the job characteristics model offers a powerful theoretical explanation for how job design influences motivation and employee performance, its application in Nigeria's public sector organizations is constrained by bureaucratic rigidity, limited autonomy, weak feedback systems, misaligned rewards, resource limitations, and contextual socio-economic factors, these challenges underscore the need for contextualized adaptations of the JCM that account for institutional realities while preserving its core theoretical insights, addressing these constraints is essential for leveraging task significance and other job characteristics as mechanisms for enhancing employee performance in Nigeria's public sector.

Conclusion

The application of the job characteristics model (JCM) within Nigeria's public sector underscores the critical role of meaningful job design in driving employee motivation, engagement, and performance, by emphasizing core job characteristics, particularly task significance, organizations can foster intrinsic motivation and a sense of purpose among employees, which is essential for effective service delivery in federal ministries, the Nigerian public sector, with its bureaucratic structures, resource constraints, and socio-cultural diversity, presents both opportunities and challenges for implementing the principles of the JCM. To enhance employee performance, public organizations must adopt context-sensitive strategies that align job roles with broader organizational and societal outcomes. Strengthening task significance through clear communication of the social impact of employees' work, increasing autonomy where feasible, providing timely and constructive feedback, and designing roles that allow for skill variety and task identity are pivotal interventions. Such approaches not only improve employees' psychological experiences at work but also contribute to higher engagement, organizational commitment, and overall performance outcomes. Ultimately, sustained performance in Nigeria's federal ministries depends on the strategic integration of JCM principles into organizational processes, by creating meaningful and socially relevant work, public organizations can address intrinsic motivational deficits, foster a culture of accountability and ownership, and establish long-term reciprocal relationships between employees and the organization, in this way, the JCM provides a valuable conceptual lens for enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of Nigeria's public sector workforce.

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Conflict of interest

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