

**JOB CHARACTERISTICS AND
RETENTION OF SKILLED EMPLOYEES
AT REMOTE POWER STATIONS**

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V. ABSTRACT

Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), the government owned electrical utility of Sri Lanka, owns and operates all the major hydro electric power plants in the country, which are situated at remote areas. People working at these stations have less urban facilities and social life. Therefore, these stations are not popular among employees and they tend to go on transfers. This greatly affects the plant maintenance activities due to the lack of experienced staff. As a solution to this, CEB introduced a "Generation Allowance Scheme", to the categories above the skilled field service employees. But according to the popular motivational theories, the financial benefits are argued to be lacking motivational qualities. On the other hand, it is an extra cost to the organisation. Through a literature survey, it was conceptualised that, if the employees have higher variety, autonomy and other desirable job characteristics, they have higher satisfaction, work performance and motivation as well as lesser absenteeism and turnover. This theory known as Job Characteristics Model (JCM) proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) has been widely used as a job diagnostic tool for motivational job design. The objective of this study was to identify whether the increased job characteristics increase the desire for remaining with the organisation, so that, it can be used as a skilled employee retention strategy. Three CEB remote power stations were selected and a questionnaire was served to 60 skilled and semi-skilled employees to measure their attitudes related to job characteristics, satisfaction, commitment, leadership and retention. The data were analysed using SPSS software to identify the strengths and the relationships among these measures. The results suggested that the desirable job characteristics have been experienced by the employees and there is a significant correlation among job characteristics and employees desire for remaining with the organisation. Among the other characteristics of the job, the skill variety and autonomy have shown a greater contribution. This is a valuable finding which can be used for improving the employee's psychological attachment with the job and his organisation. Increasing of the skill variety, termed as *Job Enlargement* and increasing of the autonomy, termed as *Job Enrichment* will increase the commitment among employees according to the findings. These shop floor practices can be implemented in the hydropower stations as an employee retention strategy, which absolutely incurs a little or no cost. The existence of a transformational leadership is vital for accomplishing such benefits.