

Engaging employees: can job differentiation do the trick?

A qualitative study on job differentiation and its impact on work engagement



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Preface

Before you lies the thesis “Engaging employees: can job differentiation do the trick? I wrote this master thesis as part of my Master’s degree program at the Radboud University in Nijmegen.

From January 2017 until August 2017, I was involved in preparing, conducting and writing this study. When looking back, it was an extremely challenging period, where I was able to look into working in the healthcare sector. It showed me the importance of good care and motivated employees. Besides, this study helped me to improve my research competences and interview skills.

I would like to thank my supervisor Roel Schouteten for his excellent guidance and support during this process. Your involvement, quick responding, and willing to discuss my progress at all times, caused me to feel very satisfied with your guidance. I remember that during the first meeting, I assured you to be very critical and you definitely were! Although this sometimes challenged my perseverance, I am very happy that it enabled me to hand in this thesis of which I am proud of. I also want to thank the interviewees that were involved in this study for their time and participation. Without them, I would not be able to finish this study in a good way. I would also like to thank my little brother, Stefan, for helping me out with drawing all the models, diagrams and code trees. Margo, I would like to thank you for your critical view on my English writing.

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I hope you enjoy your reading.

Carolien Filippo

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Summary

Different ongoing trends challenge organizations to think ahead to remain viable in the future: the ageing issue, the increased complexity of the demands on healthcare and the threatening shortages on the labour market. Organizations are looking for both effective ways and efficiency improvements to respond to these trends. Job differentiation is one way in which organizations try to respond to these trends adequately. The goal of this study is to gather insight in the concept of job differentiation, its impact on jobs in terms of job demands and job resources and its impact on work engagement. Understanding the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement is important, because the employee outcome can lead to the achievement of organizational goals as well. In view of the lack of a clear, complete and delineated conceptualization of job differentiation, this study has an explorative character. The study took place in one healthcare organization, where eight employees have been interviewed whose jobs have been differentiated. The most important results refer to insight in the concept of job differentiation, an overview of job demands and resources that have been impacted the most by job differentiation, and the most important job demands and resources in relation to work engagement. The JD-R model therefore can be seen as an useful framework to gather insight in the relation between job differentiation and work engagement. However, the study also reveals different job demands and resources, and the importance of context-dependent factors such as personal character and employer-related factors. This study serves as a fruitful basis and enables future research to use these findings for the further delineation of the concept of job differentiation and test the findings more quantitatively.

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1. Introduction

Although international comparisons show that the Dutch healthcare is doing well qualitatively (Rijksoverheid, 2011; SER, 2012), ongoing trends in the Dutch healthcare sector could threaten the viability of the sector in the future. According to Dutch politics, the biggest challenge for the healthcare sector is the ageing population (Putters, Frissen, & Foekema, 2006; Valentijn, Schepman, Opheij, & Bruijnzeels, 2013), leading to a growing demand for care (Valentijn et al., 2013; Van Houdenhoven, 2007), an increased complexity of the demands on healthcare (Van Harten, 2017) and increasing healthcare expenses (Putters et al., 2006; SER, 2012; Valentijn et al., 2013).

Another challenge concerns the expected shortages on the labour market in the healthcare sector (Lopes de Leao Laguna, Tolman, & Meerman, 2013; Nyfer, 2012; Putters et al., 2006; SER, 2012; Van Vliet, Duyvendak, Boonstra, & Plemper, 2004). An additional source of the decrease in labour productivity, as well as the increased intensity of care, refers to the expanded attention for healthcare quality (Lopes de Leao Laguna et al., 2013). The Dutch healthcare system ideally needs more healthcare employees, but it is actually moving in the opposite direction. Nyfer (2012) predicted that by 2025, almost 500.000 employees are needed to cover the demands in the Dutch healthcare. However, as this number of people is not available because of the stagnated labour force, this issue is one of the key future healthcare challenges.

Simultaneously, the content of care is changing. With the goal of aiming for a better fit between supply and demand, healthcare is becoming more client oriented (Moerman, 2008; Van Vliet et al., 2004). The content of healthcare is also changing as a result of increased market mechanisms and competition between healthcare providers (Putters et al., 2006; Van Vliet et al., 2004). The underlying idea of the introduction of market mechanisms in the healthcare sector and the shift from supply-driven to demand-driven healthcare is to encourage healthcare providers to work more efficiently, and make care more affordable. The clients' expectations of service quality are also increasing (Van Houdenhoven, 2007) together with the freedom of choice due to increased mobility and facilitation of the internet (Putters et al., 2006).

All in all, these trends show that the healthcare sector is a fast changing environment that challenges organizations' future viability. In other words, the sustainability of healthcare

systems is at stake. To remain viable, the healthcare sector needs to be future-proof, implying that every Dutch citizen should be able to rely on 'good healthcare': affordable, accessible healthcare of high quality (Rijksoverheid, 2011; SER, 2012). Organizations try to respond to these trends in various ways.

One way in which organizations try to make healthcare future-proof is job differentiation (Van Dam, Kraayvanger & Hövels, 2004). Job differentiation is a form of job redesign in which the job content changes. Many healthcare organizations implement job differentiation to cope with the increased and changing demand for care (Jansen, Kerkstra, Abu-saad, & Zee, 1997). As illustrated by De Veer, De Francke, and Poortvliet (2003), who distinguished four types of job differentiation, the definition of the concept is however broad and poorly delineated. It includes: (1) jobs with focus areas, (2) jobs with specializations, (3) new jobs for lower educated people, and (4) new jobs for higher educated people.

The constrained delineation of the concept of job differentiation implies that every change in the job composition can be seen as job differentiation. As a consequence of the limited delineation of the concept, job differentiation is also linked to many different goals. The most common reasons for implementing job differentiation are to improve healthcare efficiency (Putters et al., 2006), to improve the quality of healthcare (De Veer & Francke, 2003; De Veer et al., 2003; Raad voor de Volksgezondheid, 2002), to increase productivity (Goudswaard, 2009), to create more challenging and satisfying jobs (De Veer & Francke, 2003), and to improve employees' career prospects (Van Dam et al., 2004). These varying goals may be a result of the lack of a clear, complete and delineated definition of the concept, making job differentiation interpretable in multiple ways.

Besides, it is striking that only a few authors express their concern with respect to job differentiation in contrast to the attention paid to positive outcomes. However, when job differentiation is limited to the implementation of fragmented jobs, the quality of work is questioned (Beckers & Nijhuis, 2005; Van Dam et al., 2004). Together with the resulting coordination problems (De Veer & Francke, 2003; SER, 2012), this has important implications for employee well-being. An established model that has been successful in relating these (changing) work characteristics to well-being is the Job-Demand Resources Model (further: JD-R model) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). In contrast to the domination of models focusing on organizational outcomes in the literature on occupational health, the JD-R model lends itself to examine the relationship between job differentiation and employee outcomes.

The primary focus on performance suggesting little concern for employee well-being is one of the core concerns of critics in the literature over the past fifteen years (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a): researchers have neglected the interests of employees, showing insufficient concern for the well-being of the workforce (Guest, 2017). This neglected area can largely be attributed to the dominant approaches to HRM, which have focused mainly on performance instead of employee interests (Guest, 2017; Looise & Torcka, 2013). Despite interest in employee attitudes and behaviour in many of the established HRM models, employee well-being is seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself (Guest, 2017).

The concern links to the debate about whether HRM practices result in mutual benefits or conflicting outcomes and is elaborated upon by reviews of Van de Voorde, Paauwe, and Van Veldhoven (2012) and Peccei, Van de Voorde, and Van Veldhoven (2013). They studied the simultaneous impact of HRM on both performance and employee well-being and revealed that the outcomes for employee well-being are less clear-cut. Some work-related changes affect work related well-being positively, leading to automation of routine activities, opportunities to work from home and greater access to information, while other changes at work and in the conditions surrounding work risk eroding work-related well-being with harmful consequences for employees, and potentially for organizations (Guest, 2017). This is even more the case in service organizations like the healthcare sector, since the nature and quality of services provided to clients may largely depend on nurse performance (Simpson, 2009).

In response to the limited attention to employee well-being as an outcome and the risk that low well-being could lead to harmful consequences for the organizations, multiple approaches have been adopted to include the interests of employees in established models (e.g. Boselie & Paauwe, 2013). Central to many arguments of the importance of employee well-being is the emphasis on the positive effects of well-being on performance (Peccei et al., 2013; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). In many cases, the underlying idea is that when employees are satisfied with their jobs, are committed to the organization and enjoy high positive affect at work, they are more likely to repay the organization by working hard and by engaging in organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), which may enhance organizational effectiveness (Peccei et al., 2013).

In line with recent attempts to counterattack the domination of thinking in terms of organizational outcomes instead of employee outcomes, this study focuses on the consequences of implementing job differentiation for employee well-being. Because well-

being is a complex, generic term that consists of multiple factors, specifying the concept is necessary to tighten the study. According to Warr (1990), a distinction can be made between three axes: (1) displeased – pleased, (2) anxious – contented, and (3) depressed (i.e. burnout) – actively pleased (i.e. work engagement). This study focuses on the positive side of the third axis whereby work engagement is defined as: “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74).

The choice for the third axis is based on the finding that work engagement is predictive for client satisfaction (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008), which is important for service sectors like the healthcare sector. Work engagement has gained widespread interest among organizational members nowadays (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010), because engaged employees (and not just healthy employees) are expected to make the difference (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2013). Engaged employees feel vital and energetic, are committed to and absorbed by their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). Growing evidence supports the relationship between work engagement and organizational outcomes (Simpson, 2009), including lower turnover, positive job attitudes and higher levels of performance (Crawford et al., 2010; Saks, 2006). According to Schaufeli (2011), engagement is also related to employee related outcomes such as low levels of burnout, excellent perceived physical health, and a quick recovery after yesterday's effort.

Another explanation for focusing on work engagement is that it is considered to be affected by changes in the composition of work in terms of job resources and demands (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009), which are likely to be impacted as a result of job differentiation. Thus, given (a) the increasing usage of job differentiation in organizations to pursue various goals, (b) the absenteeism of a clear, complete and delineated definition of job differentiation, (c) the lack of insight in its consequences for the job composition, and (d) the increased attention for employee outcomes like work engagement, the general purpose of this study is to gain insight in employees' perceptions of job differentiation and how it impacts their jobs and work engagement levels. The focus is on individual-level perceptions of job demands and resources and their relationships with individual perceptions of engagement. The research question is formulated as follows: *How do healthcare employees perceive job differentiation and how does this impact their jobs and their work engagement?*

Answering the main question of this study contributes to literature in several ways. First of all, it improves the insight in the concept of job differentiation. By zooming in on the intervention itself, the study initiates and supports the specification of the concept of job differentiation. Secondly, the study explores how employees perceive the impact of job differentiation on their jobs. Because there is a structural lack of knowledge about job differentiation and its consequences with respect to the job composition, gathering insight in the phenomenon serves as an important contribution. Thirdly, this study has a distinctive feature in contrast to other work engagement studies, since it explores the relationship between the intervention of job differentiation and work engagement levels. Because engaged employees are expected to make the difference (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2013), literature would benefit from having insight in the role of interventions like job differentiation to improve work engagement. The focus on job differentiation stems from the increasing use of job differentiation to respond to the increasing complexity of clients' needs and improve healthcare quality. Since the service quality within healthcare sector largely depend on employee performance (Simpson, 2009) and employees' engagement levels (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010), improving work engagement may serve as an interesting way to improve the quality of care. Because the theoretical contributions mainly focus on exploring concepts and relations, the study will be qualitative.

Practical implications refer to the identification of the most important job demands and resources and how these affect the engagement levels of employees. The results of the most important job demands and resources in relation to engagement will help the case organization to figure out what aspects of work employees perceive as important for experiencing work engagement. In addition, the organization can be informed about the role of job differentiation on their work engagement levels.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. In the next section, the theoretical framework of the study is outlined. We then set out the methodology of the study. This is followed by the presentation of the results of the study. The study concludes by summarizing and discussing the results, describing the limitations of the study and making recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Work engagement

In this study, the focus is on job differentiation and its impact on the job composition in terms of job demands and job resources and work engagement levels. Because of the generality of the concept of well-being, the study is limited to focusing on employee well-being in terms of work engagement. The field of work and organizational psychology has been criticized for focusing mainly on unhealthy and unsatisfying aspects of work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). Work engagement was an under-researched area since many studies focused on burnout, which is assumed to be the negative antipode of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). The negative bias of psychology is illustrated by the number of articles on burnout, in contrast to studies on engagement (Bakker et al., 2008). However, since this era, the field has become increasingly interested in employees' optimal functioning and positive experiences at work (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008). Consequently, the interest in work engagement, as the opposite of burnout, has expanded.

Macey and Schneider (2008) argued that most of the engagement measures they analysed failed to get the conceptualization correct. The meaning of work engagement is still ambiguous among academic researchers and practitioners, but what most scholars agree upon is that engaged employees have high levels of energy and identify strongly with their work (Bakker et al., 2008). Therefore, this study adopts the seminal definition of Schaufeli et al. (2002) on work engagement, since it is used by many scholars and there is evidence for the psychometric quality of the engagement construct (Bakker & Schaufeli, 1999). According to these authors, work engagement can be defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Vigour is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort into one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties (Bakker et al., 2008). Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a). Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a).

2.2 Job differentiation

Job differentiation can be defined as the rearrangement of tasks in new and/or renewed jobs (Van Dam et al., 2004). It involves jobs with focus areas and specializations (i.e. horizontal job differentiation), or new jobs for lower/higher educated people (i.e. vertical job differentiation). From the perspective of the management, applying job differentiation refers to offering new tasks within employees' current jobs (Woutters, 2014). To date, this definition is still very broad and represents the limited attention that has been paid to the conceptualization and specification of job differentiation. Based on the description of the concept, however, job differentiation seems a revamped term of concepts that already exist in the organizational literature for a long time: job enlargement and job enrichment as formulated by Hackman and Oldham (1980).

Job enlargement involves increasing the number of tasks an employee performs while all of the tasks are kept at the same level of difficulty and responsibility, whereas job enrichment involves (re)designing jobs to provide opportunities for employee growth by giving employees more responsibility and control over their work. Both job enlargement and job enrichment are aimed at increasing the intrinsic motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). However, research evidence on the effects of job enlargement and job enrichment have been mixed: it is not clear whether employees with enlarged or/and enriched jobs perform at higher levels (George & Jones, 2012). This is interesting, since many organizations implement job differentiation to pursuit higher organizational performance levels. Detailed insights in job enlargement and job enrichment interventions in organizations would therefore be required to explain the mixed results that have been found so far. Moreover, Herzberg (1968) argued that not all jobs can be enriched, nor do all jobs need to be enriched: not all employees want additional tasks and responsibilities. This suggests that organizations should consider carefully which jobs they want to differentiate. These two arguments show that job differentiation may not always lead to improved organizational performance and form the basis of this study to start by gathering insight in the intervention itself.

2.3 Using JD-R to explain the relationship between job characteristics and engagement

Since the positive outcomes of engaged employees have been shown in literature, many studies have focused on the antecedents of engagement (Crawford et al., 2010). Based on a variety of studies, it appears that both job resources (e.g. job autonomy, social support and

coaching, performance feedback, opportunities to learn, task variety and responsibility) and job demands affect engagement (Schaufeli, 2011).

Currently, a frequently used model to gain insight in the relationship between work characteristics and job outcomes is the JD-R model (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). The model of Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) was originally developed to gain insight in the antecedents of burnout (i.e. the health impairment process). Later on, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004a) extended the JD-R model by including work engagement. As a consequence, the JD-R model adopts a more positive view whereby positive job characteristics and their health-enhancing effects (i.e. engagement) are examined (Van den Broeck et al., 2008). In contrast to previous models, the JD-R model does not assume specific negative and positive work characteristics, but assumes that every work characteristic can be included in the model as a stressor or a resource (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013).

The JD-R model assumes that every occupation has its own specific risk factors associated with motivation and job stress, and these factors can be classified into two general categories: job demands and job resources (Crawford et al., 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a). Job demands refer to “the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312), implying that job demands could lead to disengagement. Job resources refer to the physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may reduce job demands and the associated costs. These are functional in achieving work goals, and stimulate personal growth, learning and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2008). Longitudinal empirical research has generally confirmed the positive relationship between job resources and work engagement (Bakker et al., 2008, Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009).

The JD-R model assumes that two underlying psychological processes play a role in the development of engagement. The first process is the health impairment process; poorly designed jobs or constant demands exhaust employees’ mental and physical resources, potentially leading to health problems (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a). The second process proposed by the JD-R model is a motivational process, assuming that job resources have motivational potential and lead to high work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Van den Broeck et al., 2008). This is in line with the job characteristics theory which emphasizes the motivational potential of job resources at the task level (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Research has demonstrated the main effects of job demands and burnout on the one hand and job resources and work engagement on the other (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). According to Janssen (2001), there is an U-shaped relationship between job demands and engagement, meaning that an increase in job demands is assumed to be beneficial to work engagement, but not beyond a certain level. Except for separate effects, the interaction of job demands and resources (the dotted lines in Figure 1) also affect burnout and engagement (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013), meaning that job resources do not only affect engagement directly, but they are also useful in dealing with the demands and help employees to stay engaged (Hakanen, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2005).

In sum, the JD-R model suggests the following effects of job demands and resources on burnout and engagement:

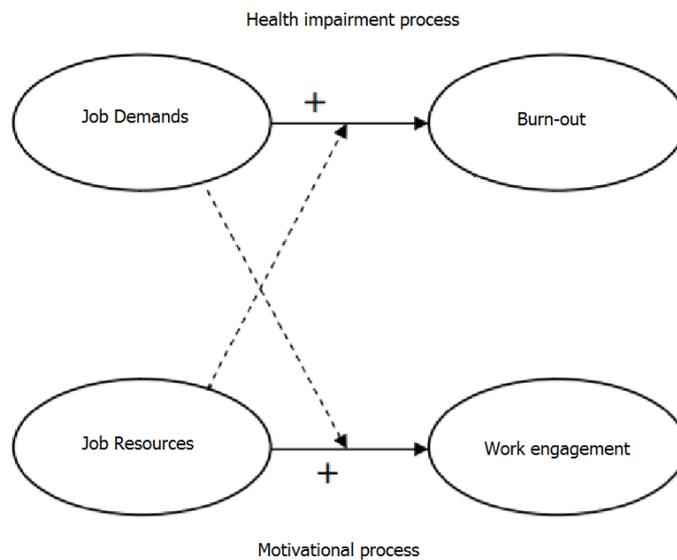


Figure 1: the JD-R model summarized (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a)

According to the JD-R model, the balance between resources and demands is critical for experiencing work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Janssen, 2001). Hence, job demands are not necessarily stressful: this is only the case when the efforts to meet the job demands are too high or when too little recovery takes place. Job resources become more salient and gain their motivational potential when employees are confronted with high job demands (Bakker et al., 2008). In other words, work engagement is most likely when job resources are high in the face of high job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Van den

Broeck et al., 2008). Since the balance is critical, it is important for the present study to gather insight in how employees perceive the balance between job demands and job resources.

Hu, Schaufeli, and Taris (2011) also found that the odds to engagement decreases when there is a combination of high job demands and low job resources. This is confirmed by a longitudinal study conducted by Schaufeli et al. (2009), who concluded that future burnout scores increase when job demands increase and job resources decrease (Schaufeli et al., 2009). In other words, through the presence of job demands and the absence of job resources, the mental energy decreases which leads to disengagement (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013).

The present study thus adopts the JD-R model since it enables research to gain insight in the way in which job differentiation impacts employees' work engagement via changes in the job composition in terms of job demands and resources. Since the present study focuses only on the positive outcome (i.e. work engagement) and burnout is excluded, the model of the present study, however, differs from the entire JD-R model as illustrated in Figure 1 and developed by Demerouti et al. (2001) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004a). In sum, the present study focuses on the following mechanism (Figure 2):



Figure 2: the mechanism under study

In the next section, attention is paid to theoretical job demands and resources that may play an important role in explaining the impact of job differentiation on work engagement.

2.3.1 Health-care specific job demands and resources

The JD-R model acknowledges that individuals in different occupations may encounter various kinds of job demands and job resources (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003). The relative contribution of specific job demands and job resources may vary across organizations and jobs because the prevalence of the demands and the access to resources differ (Bakker et al., 2003). However, many studies have shown interest in the job demands and resources in the healthcare sector (and their association with work engagement) before (e.g. Bakker et al., 2003; Mache, Vitzthum, Klapp, & Danzer, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a; Van der Heijden, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2008; Vander Elst, Cavents, Daneels, Johannik, Baillien, Van den Broeck, & Godderis, 2016). Because of the large number of studies focusing on this relationship, certain patterns in job demands and resources in healthcare organizations that appear frequently in literature are identified. It would be highly regrettable to exclude the findings of these frequently cited articles from the present study, because they may definitely help to explore the impact of job differentiation on work engagement. The study avoids, however, focusing too much on these potentially important job demands and resources, because of the fact that these studies did not focus on the JD-R model and work engagement as consequences of an intervention like job differentiation. Potential links between job differentiation and theoretical job demands and resources are outlined, but whether job differentiation really impacts these job demands and resources, will be explored in this study.

2.3.1.1 Job demands of interest

The first job demand that has been examined frequently in the healthcare sector is *emotional demands*. Emotional demands require individuals to express or suppress certain emotions to get the job done well (De Jonge, Dollard, Dormann, Le Blanc, & Houtman, 2000).

Particularly as a result of the direct and complex demands of clients, emotional demands are becoming increasingly important within the healthcare sector (De Jonge et al., 2000).

Emotional demands may be of increased importance when job differentiation is implemented, because meeting the complex clients' needs is generally one of the reasons for organizations to implement job differentiation (De Veer & Francke, 2003).

The second job demand that appears to be important for employees within the healthcare sector is the *quantitative demands* or *workload* (Van der Heijden et al., 2008), which is an important theme for many organizations. It refers to the degree in which employees are required to work fast and hard, or permanently have to do much work in a short time (Janssen, 2001). In 2006, Houtman, Smulders and Van den Berg reported that sixty-eight percent of the Dutch employees suffered from a high workload at least half of their working time. Maurits, De Veer, and Francke (2012) found that forty percent of their respondents (nurses and caregivers) think the workload is too high to work until their retirement age. Job differentiation may affect the workload, since the jobs are probably impacted such that there is an increase or decrease in the number of tasks employees need to perform.

The third job demand that healthcare employees are frequently exposed to is *physical demands*. An important antecedent of sickness absence in the Dutch healthcare is physical work overload (“Fysieke belasting in de zorg”, n.d.). Jobs in the healthcare sector often involve a lot of lifting and prolonged standing (Van der Heijden et al., 2008). More than eighty-five percent of the Dutch healthcare employees state that they experience problems with their human musculoskeletal system (Stichting IZZ, n.d.). Physical demands are even more harmful for the health among older employees compared to younger employees (Burr, Pohrt, Rugulies, Holtermann, & Hasselhorn, 2017). Since one of the reasons for implementing job differentiation is linked to the increased complexity of client demands (Van Harten, 2017), possibly making clients more physically infirm, job differentiation may also impact the physical demands of the job.

The fourth job demand concerns *qualitative job demands*. According to Janssen (2001), qualitative job demands refer to dealing with role ambiguity and/or with conflicting role demand. Role conflict is the struggle that occurs when the behaviour or tasks a person is expected to perform are at odds with each other, while role ambiguity refers to the struggle that occurs when employees are not sure what is expected of them and how they should perform their work (George & Jones, 2012). Since job differentiation refers to the rearrangement of tasks in new and/or renewed jobs, employees may be exposed to role ambiguity and role conflict. In this study, the complexity of the jobs is also part of the qualitative demands. The complexity of the jobs may increase because of the trends with respect to the ageing society (Putters et al., 2006), an increased complexity of client demands (Van Harten, 2017) and the tendency for healthcare organizations to become more client

oriented (Van Vliet et al., 2004). Since job differentiation is a way to respond to these trends, an association between job differentiation and job complexity seems logical.

Problems that have often been referred to in studies with regard to job differentiation in (healthcare) organizations refer to the required coordination (De Veer & Francke, 2003; SER, 2012). Fragmented jobs and the resulting coordination problems that come from implementing job differentiation, can lead to negative engagement outcomes for healthcare employees (Nieuwkamp & Achterbergh, 2017). They classify the coordination problems in: fragmentation, doubling and (knowledge) gaps. Next to the association with engagement, coordination problems could also harm the organizational efficiency. Besides, it may also occur that job differentiation leads to more fragmented jobs, which would pressure the mutual coordination and the quality of healthcare. *Coordination demands* therefore need to be taken into account.

2.3.1.2 Job resources of interest

After a thorough literature study of job resources that have been used to examine the relationship with work engagement in the healthcare sector, five job resources have been identified: *task variety*, *job autonomy*, *social support*, *learning opportunities* and *performance feedback* (e.g. Bakker et al., 2003; Mache et al., 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2013; Vander Elst et al., 2016).

Task variety is one of the predictors of work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2013). It is defined as the range of abilities needed to perform a specific job. It is an important resource in this study, since job differentiation may lead to a greater task variety but it might also occur that job differentiation implies that jobs become more fragmented (Van Dam et al., 2004), and the variety of skills needed to perform the job decreases.

Job autonomy is an important antecedent of work engagement: it refers to being autonomous and being able to organize your work yourself. In the healthcare sector, the autonomy is relatively low. Only 46 percent of the healthcare employees mention that they can determine their work pace, which is significantly lower than all employees taken together: 57 percent (CBS, 2016a). These employees also argue that they often cannot take decisions themselves and they are not able to decide the sequence of their work activities. If job differentiation in the case organization refers to the enrichment of jobs, it may contribute to a higher level of autonomy.

The third job resource that has proven to be an important antecedent of work engagement is *social support* (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2013). Social support implies that supervisors pay attention to employees' well-being and colleagues show interest. According to a Dutch survey that investigates the working conditions of different occupational groups annually, social support (i.e. support from both colleagues and the manager) was found important for healthcare employees in order to cope with the job demands (CBS, 2016b). Support can enhance employees' belief that they can cope with the situation by increasing their perception that others will provide the necessary support (Cordes & Dougerthy, 1993). It is however difficult to assess in advance whether and how job differentiation may impact social support.

Development opportunities create a challenging work environment that boosts work engagement. The resource is not only important because of its motivational quality but also because a lack of this resource has been associated with stress (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Moreover, opportunities to learn are deemed important because healthcare employees have a particularly strong need for learning, development, and career advancement in comparison to other occupations (CBS, 2016b). According to De Veer and Francke (2003), creating challenging jobs is one of the reasons organizations implement job differentiation. Therefore, it is likely that job differentiation is associated with development opportunities.

Performance feedback serves an important job resource since proper feedback fosters learning, thereby increasing job competence (Schaufeli et al., 2009). It impacts work engagement positively via the motivational process. Because job differentiation refers to the rearrangement of tasks in new and/or renewed jobs, it is important that employees are informed extensively about the purpose of their jobs and receive regular feedback on their work performance in order to assess whether they are doing the right thing. Although the relationship between job differentiation and performance feedback is not obvious beforehand, performance feedback might be at risk when job differentiation leads to fragmented jobs: others are less able then to provide the employee with feedback.

2.4 Summary and conceptual model

Altogether, the present study focuses on work engagement, since it is predictive for client satisfaction, which is important for service organizations like the healthcare sector. The field of work and organizational psychology has been criticized for focusing mainly on unhealthy and unsatisfying aspects of work. Work engagement was an under-researched area since many studies focused on burnout. However, since this era, the field has become increasingly

interested in employees' optimal functioning and positive experiences at work. Consequently, the interest in work engagement has expanded.

The intervention under study is job differentiation. Job differentiation refers to the rearrangement of tasks in new and/or renewed jobs. The description of the concept does not differ greatly from the better known concepts of job enlargement and job enrichment, as formulated by Hackman and Oldham (1980). Since the lack of a clear, complete and delineated definition of the concept and the mixed results with interventions aimed at enlarging/enriching jobs, the first aim of the present study is to gain insight in the intervention itself. Next, several job demands and job resources have already been added to the conceptual model of the present study, since these have been examined frequently in relationship to engagement in healthcare organizations. These job demands and resources should, however, not be seen as permanent: caution must be taken since the articles from which these demands and resources were derived, did not focus on the JD-R model and work engagement as consequences of an intervention like job differentiation. Based on the adoption of the JD-R model by focusing on work engagement and the identification of potentially important job demands and job resources in the healthcare sector, the following model can be derived (Figure 3):

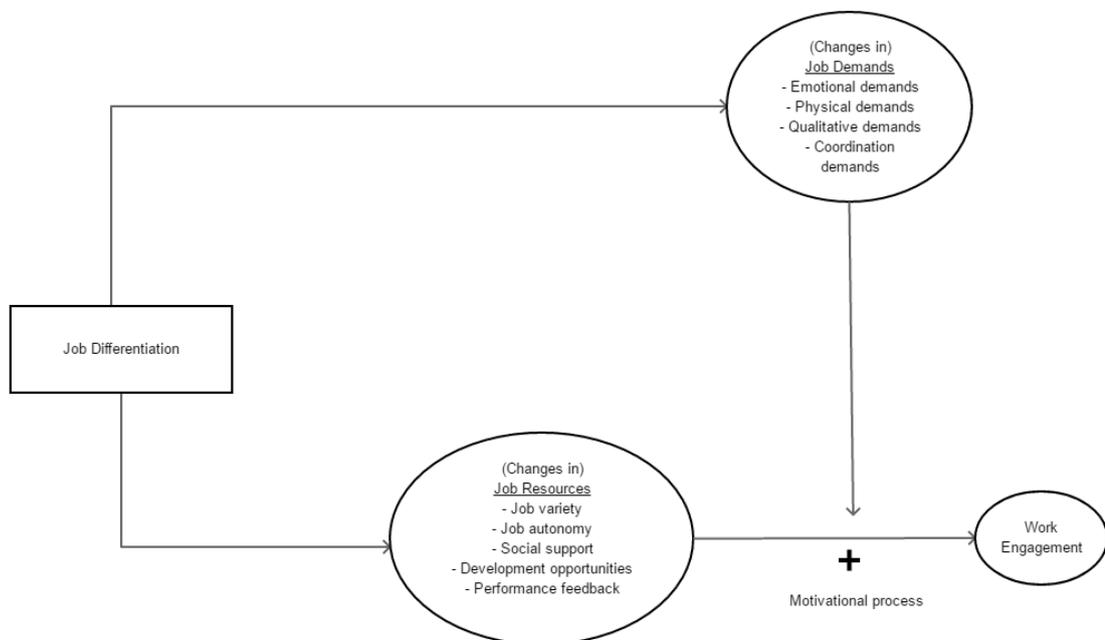


Figure 3: the theoretical framework for studying job differentiation and its impact on work characteristics in terms of job demands and resources, and work engagement.

Based on the assumptions of the JD-R model, the present study assumes that job differentiation impacts work engagement via changing work characteristics in terms of job demands and job resources. Given the lack of a clear, complete and delineated definition of the concept of job differentiation and the absence of studies who researched the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement earlier, it is hard to formulate expectations of the possible effects of job differentiation on engagement (via job demands and resources) beforehand. This relationship depends largely on the interpretation of job differentiation and the relative contribution of specific job demands and job resources; these may vary across organizations and jobs because the prevalence of the demands and the access to resources differ. Besides, enlarging and/or enriching approaches (i.e. similar concepts to job differentiation) that have been done in organizations, have shown mixed results.

The present study therefore needs a deeper insight in the organization and collect employees' perceptions to gain a better understanding of job differentiation and its impact on their jobs and work engagement levels. For these aforementioned reasons, an explorative design suits the present study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

Based on the conclusions drawn in the second chapter, an exploratory design is adopted to gather insight in the concept of job differentiation and how it impacts employees' jobs and their work engagement in a single case organization. By adopting this design, the present study responds to the limited literature available on the phenomenon of job differentiation and how this intervention impacts employee outcomes like work engagement. The present study therefore contributes to obtaining a better understanding of the phenomenon and the impact on jobs and work engagement levels by studying it explorative. Consequently, it will increase the visibility of the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement.

The research question will be answered based on qualitative methods. The choice for qualitative methods has multiple reasons. First of all, as already put forward throughout the first two chapters, little is known about the concept of job differentiation. The definition of job differentiation is far from clear, complete and delineated and seems like a modern term for the concepts of job enlargement and job enrichment, which already exist since long. Before looking at the impact of job differentiation on the jobs and engagement levels, gaining insight in the intervention specifically is important. Even more so because various job enlargement and job enrichment approaches in organizations have led to mixed results (George & Jones, 2012), which raises the question why it does not always lead to successful outcomes. In order to answer this question, it is important to find out what job differentiation actually means to the organization. Qualitative methods are important to unravel this, since they enable the researcher to gain insight in the deeper layers of the organization, the motivations underlying the intervention and the subsequent processes to achieve this. This information can be used not only to try to conceptualize job differentiation, but also to make claims about how job differentiation is actually perceived by the employees.

Secondly, the JD-R model is adopted because of the suitability of the model to examine the relationship between job demands and job resources and work engagement. However, this model has not been studied in relation to an intervention like job differentiation. The present study therefore wants to avoid drawing premature conclusions and examine quantitatively the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement. This study aims to make the first steps in deeply understanding the impact of job differentiation on jobs and work engagement levels. Qualitative methods fit the aim of the present study, as they encourage

respondents to speak up and describe extensively how they perceive the impact of job differentiation on their jobs and work engagement levels.

The third reason for doing a qualitative research has already been explained in the previous chapter: according to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), the balance between job demands and job resources determines whether or not an employee feels engaged. Qualitative methods, in the form of conversations, are more suitable for gaining insight in the balance and how employees perceive this balance. Patterns in the conversations with employees (f.e. predominant job demands/resources and the number of job demands and job resources mentioned) could indicate how employees perceive and interpret the balance in job demands and resources.

The last reason for using qualitative methods is based on an assumption of the JD-R model. The JD-R model states that employees working in different jobs may encounter various kinds of jobs and job resources and that the relative contribution of the demands and resources may vary across organizations and jobs because the prevalence of the demands and the access to resources differ (Bakker et al., 2003). In other words, the specific job demands and job resources differ among jobs. These claims make it possible that the job demands and job resources that have been derived from literature, might not be as important for employees working at the case organization as it was for employees in other studies. These job demands and job resources are therefore mainly intended to serve as a guide during the data collection. Attention should be paid to alternative job demands and resources that are not incorporated in the framework, which is one of the strengths of using qualitative methods. Qualitative methods leave more room to uncover unknown factors that may play an important role in the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement. Most certainly also because of the fact that the job demands and job resources that have been derived from literature, are not studied in relation to job differentiation. This may even increase the odds that different results, with respect to important job demands and job resources, will be found, which is why qualitative methods are important for the present study.

3.2 Research unit

The data are derived from a single healthcare organization in the Netherlands. Over 2000 employees are employed at the organization, spread over several units. This study focuses on a specific, self-managing unit of the organization, which is called the Multidisciplinary

Treatment Center (further: MTC). The MTC consists of a team of 200 employees, including around 60 therapists of all kinds (e.g. physical therapists, nurses, creative therapists and geriatric specialists) to provide clients with the best possible healthcare. The team specializes in care for the elderly, the chronically ill and rehabilitants. Because clients often suffer from several disorders, the members of the team have a multidisciplinary view and are able to ask help from other disciplines.

“At our organization, everything is about you and your recovery. Our therapists are at your disposal directly and when necessary, all at the same time. To save your time and energy. We are experienced in being aware of the multidisciplinary approach.” – (Opella, n.d.)

3.3 Population and sample

Goal oriented sampling has been used to select participants: choices with respect to participants have been made based on the criterion whether the employee’s job has been subject to job differentiation. The sample was made up of eight professionals working at the MTC who had been subject to job differentiation. Although the MTC was not able to provide an overview of all jobs that have been differentiated recently, the number of differentiated jobs is estimated at 25. Participants were contacted via e-mail. The first interviewees were acquired via the manager, the following participants have been invited after the first interviewees mentioned their names. However, not everyone responded or answered that they had no time because they were too busy. This might lead to biased results, since workload, according to literature, may have a large impact on the level of work engagement. In the end, however, many interviewed employees mentioned that their workload is (too) high, making it unlikely that the effect of exclusion of too busy employees is very big.

The study asked respondents to describe how they perceive job differentiation, and how it has affected their job and work engagement levels. It is important to note here that not all jobs were differentiated at the same time: a few jobs were differentiated months ago, while other jobs were differentiated two to three years ago. Since it required respondents to look back on the intervention itself, indicate how it has impacted their jobs, with all of their experiences, perceptions and interpretations, it provides another argument for the importance of using qualitative methods.

The employees that have participated in the study were all women as a result of the large proportion of women in the MTC and they are occupied in different jobs. Collecting data

from multiple occupational groups is based on several reasons. First of all, interviewees have been selected based on whether their jobs underwent job differentiation or not. Since the study is aimed at studying job differentiation and its impact on employees' jobs and work engagement levels, interviewees should have experience with job differentiation to be able to participate in the study. Secondly, since job demands and resources are very job-dependent (Bakker et al., 2003), collecting data from one occupational group could have led to biased results, since their perceptions might not be representative for all the employees of the MTC whose jobs have been differentiated. Including multiple occupational groups enables the researcher to make a comparison between jobs and draw more general patterns which mainly have a practical relevance: this study also aims to enable the MTC to use the results in decisions whether and how to implement job differentiation in such a manner that the work engagement levels are not threatened. For that reason, the MTC would benefit more from having insight in the general patterns with respect to job differentiation in their entire department than having an in-depth understanding of what it means to the employees of one occupational group. In the following, a table provides insight in interviewees' current jobs. Based on confidentiality agreements, further personal information is not provided.

Respondent	Job
1	Specialized nurse
2	Nurse specialist
3	Physiotherapist
4	Physiotherapist
5	Specialized nurse
6	Occupational therapist
7	Music therapist
8	Specialized nurse

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Interviews

Open interviews were conducted to gather the necessary information to be able to understand the concept of job differentiation and its impact on employees' jobs and their work engagement. In line with the arguments for conducting a qualitative research, this section argues the importance of conducting interviews. A few questions have been determined in advance, while the main part of the interview guide consists of topics. The underlying motivation for this approach will also be discussed in this section.

The first argument for conducting interviews refers to the unfamiliarity with the concept of job differentiation. Specifying the concept is important since the specific meaning of the intervention may have consequences for the way in which jobs and work engagement levels are impacted. Besides, looking at the broad definition of job differentiation, specifying the concept could contribute to the literature on job differentiation. Interviews are suitable to unravel the phenomenon and provide necessary depth to be able to delineate the concept and its meaning for the case organization. Since interviews enable interviewees to speak in their own words, it is also easier to interpret the meaning of job differentiation for the case organization. It also gives the researcher the opportunity to find differences in employees' perceptions with respect to the intervention.

Second, to be able to achieve the goals of the study, insight is needed in the impact of job differentiation on employees' jobs and their work engagement. In some cases, the intervention took place more than a year ago, making it difficult to describe thoughts and perceptions of a longer time ago and indicate cause-consequence relationships. Open interviews are helpful in dealing with the retrospective nature of the study, because it encourages employees to talk about their experiences, from the time before the implementation of job differentiation until now. These narratives could help to organize the events into a meaningful whole that conveys interpretations and reveals the consequences of job differentiation on these events and experiences over time (Maitlis, 2012). Besides, narratives could be a way to socially construct reality, and to establish what the connections with work engagement are. To collect the necessary information (i.e. employees' perceptions), conducting open interviews are thus important. Besides, open interviews leave more room for collecting data to uncover unexpected events and factors that may be impacted by job differentiation. This information,

which has a qualitative richer nature, is necessary to explore the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement.

The third reason for conducting interviews has to do with the balance argument. Since the balance between job demands and resources is critical for experiencing work engagement, attention is paid to this. Because interviews give interviewees the opportunity to formulate their experiences in their own words, the researcher is enabled to gain insight into the world as experienced by the individual employees. This is important to find out how job demands and job resources are balanced and how employees perceive this balance. Important to note here is that interviewees have not been asked directly how they perceived the balance between job demands and resources: it is unravelled by doing an interpretative analysis, which will be discussed later on.

In June 2017, eight professionals were interviewed at the organization. The interviews were carried out in the following way: first, interviewees were asked to tell about their jobs and the background of job differentiation: the motivations underlying the implementation of job differentiation, the way in which the organization and the interviewees themselves interpret job differentiation, the goals of job differentiation, and how job differentiation was implemented. Subsequently, interviewees were asked to tell about how they perceived job differentiation impacted their jobs in terms of demands and resources. A topic list, consisting of job demands and job resources that were derived from theory, ensured that every interviewee spoke about the same topics which increases the reliability of the study (Bleijenbergh, 2013). At the same time, having topics instead of predetermined interview questions triggered the interviewees to speak freely. To be able to speak freely is important given the goals of the study and the present unawareness of the concept of job differentiation and its impact on jobs and work engagement levels, which also increases the validity of the study. The second part of the interview, however, was aimed at assessing interviewees' current work engagement and is based on the UWES-9 scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), because it is considered to be a reliable scale. In order to understand the impact of job differentiation on work engagement, the interviewees were asked to explain their answers on the UWES-9 questions. These UWES-9 questions can be found in appendix 1. The complete interview guide can be found in appendix 3. In the next section, information is provided on how the concepts under study have been made measurable.

3.5 Operationalization

It is important to note here that the present study is mainly inductive, which emphasizes the importance of collecting new information. For achieving the first sub goal, which is aimed at increasing the insight in the intervention of job differentiation, items are not developed. For the deductive part of the present study, concerning the examination of the impact of job differentiation on these theoretical demands and resources, topics are developed based on the definitions of the concept. For the assessment of employees current work engagement levels, the present study attempted to take advantage of the existing UWES-9 scale. In the following, the definitions of these concepts are explained and complemented with items. The complete interview guide can be found in appendix 3.

3.5.1 Job differentiation

This study focuses on *job differentiation*, which is defined as the rearrangement of tasks in new and/or renewed jobs (Van Dam et al., 2004). A further distinction is made between horizontal job differentiation and vertical job differentiation. *Horizontal job differentiation* is defined by changes in (the division of) jobs whereby the level of the jobs stays the same (i.e. specializations or focus areas). More specific, horizontal job differentiation refers to the jobs that include a specialization or focus area. *Vertical job differentiation* refers to designing and implementing jobs for lower or higher educated people (De Veer & Francke, 2003). Apart from using these definitions, items are not formulated in advance to unravel the meaning of job differentiation. Our limited knowledge of the phenomenon of job differentiation emphasizes the importance of openness to unravel this concept. Pre-formulated items could have threatened the required openness.

3.5.2 Job demands

Five dimensions of job demands were included in the study, based on theoretical grounds. *Emotional demands* refer to the extent to which the job requires sustained emotional effort because of interactional contact with clients (Vander Elst et al., 2016). Examples of items of emotional demands concern: aggressive clients, death of clients, and emotional involvement. *Quantitative demands* refer to the amount and pace of work to be performed (Vander Elst et al., 2016); items as ‘working hard’, ‘working fast’, ‘too little time to talk to patients’ are included. *Physical demands* refer to the extent to which the job requires sustained physical effort because of the profession. Items with respect to these demands include for example positioning of clients, mobilizing of clients, carrying clients, prolonged standing. *Qualitative demands* refer to the degree of role ambiguity and role conflict and the complexity of the job.

Coordination demands are assessed with items such as ‘mutual coordination’, ‘doubling of work’, and ‘(knowledge) gaps’. An overview of these dimensions and codes can be found in appendix 2.

3.5.3 Job resources

Five indicators of job resources were included in the study. *Task variety* is the extent to which a job requires an employee to use a number of different skills, abilities, or talents (George & Jones, 2012). Items refer to ‘skills’ ‘abilities’ and ‘talents’. *Job autonomy* refers to the degree to which a job allows an employee the freedom and independence to schedule work and decide how to carry it out (George & Jones, 2012). Items that are included, concern: ‘freedom in work pace’, ‘freedom in sequence of work’, ‘freedom in how to carry out the job’, and ‘freedom to make own decisions’. *Social support* refers to the extent to which individuals can count on information, assistance, and appreciation from their manager and colleagues at work (Vander Elst et al., 2016). Items concern ‘information’, ‘assistance’, and ‘appreciation’ and refer to the support of both the manager and colleagues. *Development opportunities* refers to the extent to which the job situation provides opportunities to learn and to develop (Vander Elst et al., 2016). This dimension is measured by items such as ‘on-the-job learning’, ‘creativity’ and ‘educational programs’. *Performance feedback* is the extent to which performing a job provides an employee with clear information about his or her effectiveness. (George & Jones, 2012). It was assessed with the items ‘feedback manager’, ‘feedback colleagues’, and ‘feedback clients’. An overview of these dimensions and codes can be found in appendix 2 as well.

3.5.4 Work engagement

Work engagement can be defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Following this definition, three indicators of work engagement were included in the study. *Vigour* is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties (Bakker et al., 2008). *Dedication* is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a). *Absorption* is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a). It was assessed with the UWES-9 scale of Schaufeli & Bakker (2003).

3.6 Data analysis

The first part of the data analysis focused on transcribing the interviews. The transcripts can be found in appendix 4. As the methodological section explains, the study has both deductive and inductive elements. The deductive elements of the present study refer to the list of job demands and job resources that may, according to literature, play an important role in the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement. The inductive elements of the study refer to the lack of knowledge about the consequences of job differentiation for jobs and work engagement levels and the resulting importance of openness for this study, which is argued extensively earlier in this chapter. Since the present study holds both deductive and inductive elements, the analysis will also be both deductive and inductive. The analysis is based on themes, which offers a powerful and flexible way to explore the central job demands and job resources in the narratives constructed by the interviewees that affect work engagement. These themes are defined by codes. Theoretical codes have been formulated a priori by doing a literature review. However, the explorative nature of the study encourages the study to also analyse the data inductively to find patterns that cannot be explained from the theory. In this way, thematic analysis utilizes the strength of qualitative methods: there is room to explore alternative outcomes and examine the importance of theoretical job demands and resources. Together they broaden our understanding of the relationship between job differentiation and work engagement. In the end, this analysis enabled the identification of key themes that are common to interviewees' stories and compare them with the theoretical expectations. Together with the identification of key themes, an interpretive analysis has been conducted to find out how employees perceive the balance between job demands and resources.

4. Results

To gain insight in employees' perceptions of the impact of job differentiation on work engagement, a distinction is made between three single, but interrelated differentiated goals.

The study is aimed at:

1. Gaining insight in the meaning of job differentiation for the case organization and how employees perceive job differentiation;
2. Gaining insight in how employees perceive the impact of job differentiation on their jobs in terms of job demands and resources;
3. Gaining insight in the most important job demands and resources that impact work engagement.

The representation of the results is structured according to these goals.

4.1 Job differentiation

Keeping the lack of a clear, complete and delineated definition of the concept in mind, the first aim of the present study is to gain insight in the intervention itself and how employees perceive job differentiation. This is important, since the way in which organizations try to achieve job differentiation may have consequences for the impact on the jobs and work engagement levels.

4.1.1 What does job differentiation mean?

The organization does not apply one and the same definition for job differentiation: a few ways of job differentiation can be distinguished. Job differentiation mainly refers to employees having specialized knowledge about certain diseases in contrast to "normal" employees, who do not have this knowledge. In half of the cases, these specializations are performed in addition to the employees' regular job. However, this is not the case for specialized nurses, who have tasks exclusively related to their specialization. This decision was made years ago, aiming to differentiate between regular nurses, generalist nurses and specialized nurses. In other words, nurses' regular tasks are not performed by specialized nurses.

An interesting pattern that comes forward when analysing the data, is that employees often have their own group of clients as a result of job differentiation and that they normally work with their clients until they pass away. This network of regular clients gives employees the

feeling that they come closer to their clients, making the relationship between the employees and clients more intense.

In one of the cases, vertical job differentiation took place as well, meaning that the job acquired higher-level tasks. More specifically, the job of a nurse specialist is a level below the position of doctors and after job differentiation, this employee performs basic tasks that earlier belonged to the job description of doctors.

“I provide medical care. I perform all common tasks myself. However, I propose the unusual problems to the doctors. See it this way: we are like a tandem. I am a tandem with several doctors. I am doing all the things myself, but I am not as competent as the doctors. Doctors perform the tasks in which I lack expertise and competence.” - Interviewee 2 (nurse specialist)

Job differentiation in the case organization almost always results in more autonomous jobs in which employees' flexibility increased as well. The autonomy levels are sometimes increasing in such a way, that employees perceive their renewed jobs as individualistic and sometimes isolated. An example of the increased flexibility refers to the flexibility employees have to fill in their own schedule. Employees also perceive that the flexibility contributes to the quality of care as offered by the organization and improves the client orientation.

“I think that, without flexibility, we are not able to perform well in our jobs. Or I mean, we are then not that client-oriented anymore. If someone must stay in bed for two hours because the occupational therapist starts to work at half past eight... You can't do that. And to be client-oriented is also a priority of the organization.” – Interviewee 6 (occupational therapist)

Given the fact that the employees often work at more different locations and departments as a consequence of job differentiation, flexibility also seems critical, because the work area of these employees is generally larger. Another interesting result is that the interviewees indicate that they are not always directly involved with clients: sometimes they are called in as experts when “normal” employees find themselves unable to help clients in the best way. Employees of differentiated jobs thus have an advisory role.

4.1.2 Why job differentiation?

The interviews that were held in the case organization showed that the motivation for job differentiation differs among jobs. In here, a distinction can be made between two underlying motivations to implement job differentiation. In many cases, job differentiation is implemented to improve the quality of care. This can be illustrated by an example in which an

interviewee stated that the organization is increasingly oriented at the (future) needs of society, ensuring a better fit between the organizational supply and client demands as a result. For example, six specialized nurses are employed to improve the quality of care with respect to common diseases like Parkinson, COPD, Wounds and Geriatrics. Based on future prospects of diseases, the choice for the implementation of these specializations was made five years ago.

“Back then, I indicated that I thought that more nurses were necessary and that we should make a distinction between specialized nurses, general nurses and basic nurses. At that moment, we also decided in which specialisms we wanted to profile, based on future prospects and growing diseases. COPD was one of those specializations. This is how it all started and why those six specializations are still here.” – Interviewee 8 (specialized nurse)

The second motivational source to implement job differentiation refers to the employees themselves: all interviewees indicate, in different ways, that they are constantly looking for new ways to challenge themselves. Their drive originates from their interests, years of experience and/or seeing opportunities to improve the quality of the services as provided by the organization.

“I am an edema client myself, so I know for example how it feels and when it is getting worse, so I have practical experience. And we did not have all those specializations at the organization at that moment. When I started to work at the MTC, I directly perceived that we lacked knowledge in certain diseases. Besides, I did not have a permanent contract and tried to make myself indispensable.” – Interviewee 3 (physiotherapist)

However, not all employee interests with respect to job differentiation are directly put into operation. Job differentiation is only fully implemented when the organization is interested as well. For example, one of the respondents had to fight for years to be able to perform her job the way she wanted (including specializations), because initially the organization was not convinced of the added value. Nevertheless, it is clear that the satisfaction levels among employees are very high, when employee motivations are the basis for the implementation of job differentiation. The motivation underlying vertical job differentiation involved an experiment to assess whether the rearrangement of tasks would benefit (in terms of efficiency and effectivity) both doctors and the nurse specialist.

4.1.3 How?

The way in which job differentiation was implemented varies from one case to another. In some cases, employees were hired (internally or externally) so that the organization would dispose of the necessary knowledge directly. However, it also occurred that employees were chosen to specialize themselves in a certain disease. The organization facilitates this process with educational programs to help their employees grow. In this case, job differentiation is a logical consequence of these educational programs and enables employees to use their acquired specialized knowledge next to their regular job.

The necessary knowledge for performing specializations is sometimes acquired in previous jobs, while other employees go in any form of education or training to acquire this knowledge. On-the-job-learning and coaching are also ways to empower employees to perform their renewed jobs. Strikingly, the organization does not have prior formulated job descriptions: in almost all of the cases, the organization allowed employees maximum flexibility to fill in their renewed jobs as they wish.

4.1.4 Summary

Job differentiation in the case organization can be interpreted in several ways. In most of the cases, it refers to acquiring a (mostly complex) specialization (and the associated knowledge). These specializations are sometimes performed next to the regular tasks of the jobs, while other cases show that job differentiation could also imply that employees, from then on, only perform their specialization. In one case, job differentiation included both horizontal (a specialization) and vertical (higher-level tasks) shifts. Job differentiation also generally leads to increased job autonomy and flexibility, and more intense relationships with clients.

Two motivations underlie the organizational decision to differentiate jobs. The first reason for implementing job differentiation is to improve healthcare quality and respond to the (future) needs of society. The second reason underlying the implementation of job differentiation originates in employees' drive to challenge and develop themselves. However, employees do not get to decide if they want to get their jobs differentiated: job differentiation is only implemented if the organization is convinced of the added value.

Job differentiation takes place at multiple levels: both assigning a specialization to an employee or a job, and hiring external and internal candidates are ways to achieve job differentiation. Sometimes, educational programs and/or training attended by employees triggered the organization to implement job differentiation. Employees of differentiated jobs

often have been given maximum flexibility and many opportunities to shape their jobs the way they want them too.

4.2 The relationship between job differentiation and the JD-R

Having gained insight in the meaning of job differentiation, how employees perceive the intervention and the way(s) in which the case organization tries to achieve job differentiation, the next step is to gain insight in and describe how job differentiation is perceived to impact jobs in terms of job demands and resources.

4.2.1 Job differentiation – job demands

Job differentiation – Qualitative demands

All healthcare employees face increased complexity of client demands as caused by the general ageing issue. Job differentiation, however, results in an additional increase in complexity, because these employees often face a more complex client base in comparison to their fellow employees whose jobs did not differentiate. According to the interviewees, employees' specializations make the jobs more difficult content wise. This applies above all to broad specializations like Parkinson and Geriatrics: Geriatrics is about the ageing human being and all of his/her somatic and mental complaints. Also Parkinson does not refer to one specific disorder: the unique client's context, as caused by Parkinson, increases the complexity and makes working with the client more difficult.

“The elderly do not fit protocols. I work a lot with dementia patients. They cannot indicate what is going on with them and what they need. The caregivers also think it is hard to understand what those people are doing and why they do those things. You also have to deal with the client's family and relatives, who have their own opinions. These things also complicate the job.” -

Interviewee 2 (nurse specialist)

During the process of working with clients, specialized employees are offering their knowledge, psychosocial support, solutions and try to signal what is going on. Because the specializations are often comprehensive, employees are expected to know everything about anything. Clients do have these expectations as well, even though employees do not always have the right solutions. Employees perceive this as complex.

Because job differentiation thus generally leads to a more complex client base, employees also perceive that it is more complicated to reach certain goals with clients. The goal remains

the same, but in reality employees are trying to limit the decline of clients' health. Another factor that complicates the work of employees refers to clients' behaviour: clients can be aggressive, they do not understand things or they do not want to recover. These behavioural factors are not the result of job differentiation, but employees whose jobs differentiated are more likely to be confronted with complex clients because of their expertise in several diseases. Taken all together, the increased complexity of the work of employees can be both ascribed to the general ageing issue as to the tendency that job differentiation often results in facing more complex cases.

Job differentiation, in some cases, also impacts the extent to which employees perceive role ambiguity and role conflict. Notable is that, according to the interviewees, job differentiation impacts the amount of secondary tasks (i.e. non-direct client tasks) they need to perform: arranging educational programs, networking, performing lectures, being involved in project groups, advising teams; these are several activities that become part of the jobs. However, these jobs are still accounted for their productivity, making employees feel like the tasks are at odds with each other. Especially specialized nurses suffer from role conflict and ambiguity. They argue that their jobs are 'floating', meaning that their department is not accommodated well. This results in discrepancies between the tasks they think they need to perform and the tasks upon which their performances are judged.

"My job involves way more... If you are talking about Opella as an organization and the quality of care and what we, as a team, do for the organization... Those activities are not directly productivity hours, but it contributes to the general quality of the organization. The organization expects us to do many things, which we would love to do, but those activities are not directly productive. So actually, I perceive tensions between production time, and at the same time ensuring that the entire organization is doing well qualitatively. So If you are asking me, what makes your job demanding? Then I will say that this tension makes my job demanding. That I continuously have to deal with the production pressure while I've been doing a lot for the organization. So on the one hand, I am given the task to do these activities that improve the healthcare quality, but I am still held accountable for my production figures. So what should I do then? It is so contradictory." –

Interviewee 1 (specialized nurse)

Job differentiation – Quantitative demands

As already indicated earlier in this chapter, employees often perceive that job differentiation is associated with additional tasks like teaching nurses teams, developing educational programs, and advising with respect to procurement. These tasks do not only contribute to the

qualitative demands of the jobs, but also to the quantitative job demands (i.e. workload). As a result of these additional secondary tasks, employees have a hard time achieving their production time (i.e. direct client time). Given the fact that the production pressure is currently high, respondents perceive the workload as an important job demand. This perception is strengthened by the interviewees' feeling that these secondary tasks are definitely part of their jobs and could contribute to improving the healthcare quality of their organization. One of the respondents mentioned that due to the high workload, she refused to stay home when she was sick.

“The work pressure is really high and keeps getting higher. A few weeks ago, I found out that I reported sick two years ago. So even though you are feeling sick, something inside me made me go to work anyway... Because if I'm not going, my colleagues should work even harder. As a consequence, I have worked with for example pneumonia.” – Interviewee 3 (physiotherapist)

Generally speaking, the workload is perceived as high. However, there are differences among interviewees with respect to the workload perceptions: while few describe their workload as 'high', others describe it as 'too high'. According to the interviewees, job differentiation definitely impacts their workload, mainly caused by the additional tasks these employees need to perform. However, it is too premature to ascribe the high workload only to job differentiation: the workload may be high in the entire organization as a result of the shortages on the labour market in healthcare (SER, 2012) and the organizational focus on efficiency.

Job differentiation – Coordination demands

Demands with respect to the mutual coordination are perceived differently by the interviewees. Job differentiation, however, is often associated with knowledge gaps. A few employees argue that it is complex to get everyone on the same page and coordinate things together. Employees who often advise teams from their position, experience that this information melts away fast. On the other hand, respondents understand that there will always be knowledge gaps and that this is also the reason that their jobs (and expertise) will always be needed within the organization. Communication problems, experienced by a few interviewees, were sometimes also ascribed to job differentiation:

“Sometimes, you need to make a big effort to be able to speak with people and receive the necessary information and communicate the information to others.” – Interviewee 5 (specialized nurse)

Interestingly, mainly the employees of the more isolated jobs – nurse specialist and specialized nurses – experience these demands with regard to the coordination. In contrast to these employees, physiotherapists and occupational therapists do not perceive the coordination as complicated, which may be explained by the fact that those employees do have a more fixed team and workplace, which potentially improves the mutual coordination.

Job differentiation – Emotional demands

Looking at the emotional demands of the jobs, it may be concluded that the jobs require more from employees emotionally. This can be explained due the ageing issue and the increased complexity of client demands. However, job differentiation also seems to affect the emotional demands: as mentioned earlier, job differentiation is associated with more intense client-employee relationships. To see their clients' health deteriorating, see them pass away or not understand the behaviour of their clients increases the emotional demands of the work.

Job differentiation – Physical demands

The extent to which employees perceive physical demands differ among jobs and employees. In a few cases job differentiation has enlarged the work area of the relevant employees, which increased the walking distance and travelling time. Another reason for the increase in physical demands as caused by job differentiation according to one of the respondents is:

“I work with elderly who are often hospitalized with a wheelchair. So I'm really busy pulling and lifting these clients until the moment they are able to walk again.” – Interviewee 3 (physiotherapist)

Mainly physiotherapists and occupational therapists perceive higher physical demands as a result of job differentiation, since they are more exposed to clients' physical problems: they are often involved in activities to support their clients physically. In contrast, other interviewees did not perceive more physical demands or even indicated that their physical demands were lower, because their tasks changed in such a way that their jobs became less physical.

Job differentiation – Administrative tasks

An interesting pattern in comparing employees' perceptions has to do with the impact of job differentiation on the number of administrative tasks employees need to perform. As a result, employees are regularly working overtime and less time remains for other aspects of their jobs (f.e. development). Job differentiation sometimes also implies that employees are in charge of both intramural and extramural clients, and have to work at different locations and

departments. Consequently, it takes longer to report and it complicates the administrative tasks, since the different locations and departments often work with different systems. Although all employees could face these different systems, employees whose jobs have been differentiated may face them more often since they are often brought in in other departments and locations because of their expert knowledge.

4.2.2 Job differentiation – job resources

Job differentiation – Task significance

One of the motivations of organizations underlying the decision to implement job differentiation is to improve healthcare quality: it would enable employees to offer their clients a better service because of their specialized knowledge and skills. The interviewees also feel that they have more specialized skills tools to help their clients with several goals (f.e. make clients speak again, calm the clients down, make them autonomous again) and improve their quality of life. They perceive that the increased intensity of the employee-client relationship strengthens the feeling of offering higher service quality even more.

“And because I am more competent, I better understand my clients and know what I must to help them optimally. That is logical I think: more relevant expertise enables you to find solutions that fit the client.” – Interviewee 7 (musical therapist)

Job differentiation – Task identity

Another interesting pattern refers to employees' wider range of tasks. The range of tasks can be defined as task identity: the extent to which a job involves doing a complete and identifiable piece of work from beginning to end (Moerman, 2008). Frequently mentioned tasks that are performed by these employees (except from direct client tasks) refer among other things, to the development and diffusion of their specialized knowledge: advising, doing professional advancements, networking, writing educational programs, giving lectures, being part of commissions and participating on strategy level, are part of the job of these employees. Increases in secondary tasks ensure sufficient variety in tasks and well-balanced jobs.

Job differentiation – Sense of responsibility

All interviewees indicated that they feel very responsible in their work. This is demonstrated in the relation to the client: employees work hard to offer their clients high quality services. An illustration of this effort refers to an employee offering her clients to join them in appointments in her free time. Furthermore, employees indicate that they always take time for their patients. The personal and intense relationship between employees and clients may trigger employees' sense of responsibility. Furthermore, employees feel responsible to

promote their specializations within the organization, which is expressed by attempts to transfer their knowledge to others in and outside the organization. Interestingly, the interviewees also feel responsible for the organizational quality and the organizational image, regardless of their (specialized) jobs.

“Yesterday, I looked into ‘zorgkaart Nederland’ because I knew that someone would respond to that survey. She gave us an 9.2! And yes, I feel really responsible for the Valkenburcht. I helped to improve the quality of the services and helped building brand awareness. So I feel responsible to maintain the current level of service quality. I feel very bad when things [at the Valkenburcht] go wrong.” – Interviewee 3 (physiotherapist)

It is hard to ascertain whether job differentiation is the factor that triggers this general sense of responsibility. However, the interviewees seem to perceive that job differentiation enables them to actually contribute to the organizational quality. Buljac (2007) argued that an increased task identity may also be an important factor in the relationship with employees’ increased sense of responsibility. The increased task identity, as a result of job differentiation, may then explain employees’ greater sense of responsibility. The relationship could also be explained the other way around: the greater sense of responsibility results in employees’ continuous efforts to contribute to the organizational quality by engaging in more organizational activities which increases their task identity.

Job differentiation – Challenging jobs

As discussed earlier, job differentiation is also perceived to impact the complexity of the clients. Funny though it may be, the complexity is rather perceived as challenging than as demanding. Many interviewees argued that job differentiation empowered them to perform better. Ongoing efforts to search for new challenges, which characterizes the interviewees, are found in collaborations with other disciplines, complex client cases, the required creativity and the autonomy to fill in their own jobs.

Job differentiation – Job autonomy

The conversations with the interviewees indicated that their autonomy levels are high. A possible explanation for this sighting is the self-managing nature of the MTC unit, in which employees are encouraged to be autonomous. However, job differentiation also seems to play a role in relation to job autonomy: employees become experts in their job, which gives them more control content wise. This control concerns determining how and when to work, but also

to take decisions without having to discuss them with their managers. In one case, the responsibility is restricted. This can be explained from the fact that the job differentiated not only horizontally but also vertically: although the doctor does not perform those tasks anymore, he/she stays responsible for the performances. The interviewee who faced this kind of differentiation is still obliged to discuss her client-related actions with her supervisor (the doctor) and is therefore less autonomous in contrast to the other interviewees.

Job differentiation – Development opportunities

Interviewees perceive that their development opportunities increased as a result of job differentiation: they claim that they develop themselves in multiple ways with respect to their job differentiation. Frequently mentioned sources to develop are: networks, educational programs, collaborations with other disciplines and on-the-job learning. Next to this, employees are free to give shape to their renewed jobs.

“And still... My job description is established, not completely, but almost. However, this job description is not fixed. I am able to determine the boundaries of my job and I am free to broaden my competences. Therefore, I feel like I am still learning every day.” – Interviewee 2 (specialized nurse)

Job differentiation thus increases employees’ opportunities to develop themselves. Moreover, employees’ desire to develop themselves has regularly led to the organizational decision to differentiate the job of that specific employee. However, the organizational budget limits the opportunities to develop: the training budget is, in general, not sufficient to cover all employees’ educational costs.

Job differentiation – Task variety

The jobs that underwent job differentiation generally have a high task variety. First of all, every client is unique and therefore needs a different approach. This type of variety is not caused by job differentiation, because employees also worked with different clients before their jobs differentiated. However, the amount of non-client tasks increased as a result of job differentiation: interviewees are performing way more indirect tasks like developing educational programs and advising other employees within and outside the organization. This also increased task variety. In addition to these changes in this kind of variety, working on different locations and departments, including different groups of clients, contributes to a higher task variety. Also the use of different skills contributes to an increased task variety. In particular employees who have multiple specializations indicate that they make use of multiple skills.

Although the task variety increased as a result of job differentiation in most of the cases, one case suggests the opposite: in this interview, the employee frequently mentioned that her job eroded as a result of job differentiation. She explained that she had to let go a part of her tasks, making her feel that she cannot apply all of her knowledge and skills during her daily work. This example shows that when job differentiation comes down to a fragmentation of the job, the task variety is threatened.

Job differentiation – Social support

To what extent job differentiation impacts social support, is hard to assess. Because social support consists of several factors, it is split in a few dimensions. First of all, job differentiation requires more collaboration between different disciplines. Many tasks performed are in collaboration with other disciplines, doctors and nurses. Looking at the role of the manager, it is interesting to note that the manager-employee relationship does not seem to have changed. The interviewees' need for a sparring-partner or a manager who's looking after the employees seems, however, to have increased as a result of the increased autonomy. Job differentiation did not change the degree of colleagues' attention and kindness according to the interviewees, but the need to did. The increased individualism of the differentiated jobs may explain the increased need for colleagues' attention.

Job differentiation – Performance feedback

Although the manager is, in general, far removed from the workplace, job differentiation clearly implied that employees received even less performance feedback from their manager. The individualistic jobs may explain the impact of job differentiation on performance feedback, since the manager does not have sufficient information to give these employees feedback on their performances. To compensate, the interviewees sometimes encourage colleagues to give feedback. In some cases, clients are also asked to give their opinion about the services, but this does not seem to link to job differentiation. The appreciation, which has improved according to the interviewees, could however be a result of job differentiation since employees have more expertise to help clients.

4.2.3 Summary

Job differentiation, as implemented in the case organization, is perceived to impact several job demands and resources. First of all, the qualitative demands (i.e. job complexity, role ambiguity and role conflict) have increased as a result of job differentiation. Next to the increased qualitative demands, the workload increased as well: interviewees perceive higher

quantitative demands as a result of job differentiation, since their range of tasks has extended. The coordination demands are also enlarged: especially knowledge gaps and communicational problems have been perceived more prevalent. Emotional demands and physical demands (only in a few cases) are also perceived to be impacted by job differentiation. The changes in these types of demands can be explained from the increasingly demanding client base. However, employees perceive that these demands increased less in contrast to the qualitative, quantitative and coordination demands.

Resources are, according to the interviewees, also perceived to be impacted by job differentiation. The resources that particularly increased as a result of job differentiation refer to task significance, task identity, the challenges of the job, employees' sense of responsibility and development opportunities. Job differentiation enables employees to perform on a higher level and offer qualitatively higher services to their clients. Interviewees also perceive that their jobs are extended: employees are more involved in activities like networking, advising and developing. The increased complexity of the client base is often perceived as challenging. Besides, employees feel more responsible to transfer their knowledge to the entire organization to improve the organizational quality. Job differentiation is also perceived to offer more opportunities for development.

Changes in task variety, social support and performance feedback are somewhat less experienced by the interviewees. In a few cases, using different skills and working on different locations and departments have been mentioned as increases in task variety and as consequences of job differentiation. The need for social support seems to have increased somewhat because of the individualistic nature of the jobs after they differentiated. The appreciation from clients has also increased according to the interviewees. This may be a result of the improved quality of the services offered to the clients as a result of job differentiation. Employees indicate that they got less feedback, but it is hard to attribute this to job differentiation, since in several cases the change of management was indicated as the most important cause for receiving less feedback.

4.3 Job demands and resources in relationship to engagement

As described in the previous section, job differentiation is perceived to impact several demands and resources of the jobs. The JD-R model stated that these job demands and resources are important in relation to work engagement. Furthermore, an assumption of the JD-R model is that the demands and resources that could best explain the relationship between job demands and resources and work engagement, differ among organizations and sometimes even among jobs. Following this notice, this section provides an overview of the most important job demands and job resources for experiencing work engagement as perceived by the interviewees.

4.3.1 Key job demands

Looking at the five dimensions of job demands that were derived from literature, the qualitative and quantitative job demands are perceived as the most important demands in relationship to work engagement. The other dimensions of job demands (emotional demands, physical demands and coordination demands) are mentioned from time to time, but clearly less than the quantitative and qualitative demands. The administrative tasks (i.e. tasks that have little to do with their profession) also emerged from the data as being an important job demand in relationship to work engagement.

Administrative tasks

Although almost every interviewee perceive job autonomy and the sense of responsibility as resources, administrative tasks – tasks that have little to do with the performance of their profession – are perceived as demanding and infringes the extent to which employees feel engaged. The prevalence of this type of demands may be explained from the fact that employees love their profession and argue that administrative tasks stand too far away from the job they love. Too many administrative tasks can limit the enjoyment of work, which normally is an important resource for employees in relationship to work engagement. Besides, the administrative tasks could enlarge the jobs, which may pressure their quantitative demands as well.

“Me and most of my colleagues perceive work pressure because of all those administrative tasks. Employees working here, chose these jobs because they love working in the medical care. If we would have loved to do administrative tasks, we would not be working in the medical care. –

Interviewee 8 (specialized nurse)

Quantitative demands

In line with literature on job demands, the workload is seen as one of the most important job demands. Most of the interviewees argue that they love the feeling of working intensively, but that their workload is currently too high. They indicated frequently that they always have more work than that there is time, which highlights the importance of setting priorities. Consequently, interviewees always perceive a production pressure: they feel that they are not able to complete all their tasks because they have too many clients to see every day.

“I think there is too little time to see the number of clients I need to see every day. Because of this, I feel that I need to rush my work. I am not sure whether this has negative consequences for the quality of services I deliver. Most of the time, it actually implies that I do not have time left to do other activities like for example developing protocols.” – Interviewee 4 (physiotherapist)

To improve the efficiency of the MTC, there has been a change of management recently. This, however, has only put more pressure on employees' workload. Although the workload has always been high, it is especially this increased pressure that requires the most energy.

“Particularly demanding to me, is that I am working very hard and I am occupied in several activities like giving lectures and advising, but those tasks do not belong to my production time. However, seventy percent of our working time should be spend to the production (direct client time). So, I feel really pressured when I am involved in other, non-productive tasks.” – Interviewee 5 (specialized nurse)

Qualitative demands

The qualitative demands of the jobs are also experienced as demanding. The increased complexity of care requires more energy of the employees. Achieving certain goals is an important resource for employees, but because these days clients stay at home longer and their health is worse when they are hospitalized, it is more difficult for employees to achieve those goals. According to the interviewees, this makes their jobs more demanding. Of course, the access to the internet has also contributed to more qualitative demands, since clients do more self-research and think they know better what is going on with them. Coping with clients own ideas and with the clients' relatives, who sometimes also have definite opinions that differ from employees' opinions, adds another layer of complexity to the jobs.

“When I started in 1979, clients were much less outspoken. And nowadays, I perceive that clients and their relatives are more outspoken and more aware of their diseases, also as a result of the increased use of internet. Clients are more up to date and increasingly think that they know better

what they need than me. That is fine, but it also complicates my job.” – Interviewee 5 (specialized nurse)

It should be noted however, that the complexity is not always considered a burden. As long as the complexity balances the employees’ resources, the ‘complex client’ is perceived as a job resource. Creativity and experience are two important factors to cope with the complexity: job differentiation often leads to employees becoming experts in their professional areas which enables them to come to more suitable solutions and improvements. This will be discussed further later on.

Emotional demands

Although the jobs are perceived as emotionally demanding, the interviewees agree that it is part of their jobs and one of the reasons to choose these jobs. Generally, working with these vulnerable people gives employees energy, making it unlikely that these emotional demands are strongly and negatively related to their work engagement levels. On the other hand, it is worth noting that interviewees state that they are able to look soberly and naturally to emotionally complex situations (f.i. aggressive clients and clients passing away). This also implies that the employees, in general, do not take these emotional demanding situations home. Colleagues do however play an important role in this, since emotional demanding situations are preferred to be discussed at the workplace.

Physical demands

Most of the time, the physical demands of the jobs are doable, despite being named in literature as an important demand for healthcare employees in relationship to work engagement. A possible explanation for this interesting outcome may be that the respondents include therapists instead of nurses. The physical demands are thus not that high generally speaking, but there are individual differences. These demands may be job-specific: a nurse specialist (i.e. trainee doctor) does not face the same physical demands in contrast to physical and occupational therapists. The physical demands in this sense refer to the walking, standing, and supporting their clients physically.

“My working day includes a lot of walking and standing. I am in several unusual positions to help and support my clients. And at the Valkenburcht, we have two floors. So we need to take the elevator with every client that is in a wheel chair. That is really heavy. So yes, my job is physically demanding.” – Interviewee 3 (physiotherapist)

Coordination demands

Even though job differentiation is perceived as impacting the coordination demands, only two interviewees specifically mentioned that these demands are determinative for their work engagement. What is demanding with respect to the mutual coordination concerns the fact that employees are just a small part within the network involved with the client, which can complicate the communication. As a consequence, employees feel that it is more demanding to get all disciplines to move in the same direction. These demanding factors, however, differ among interviewees: they are not perceived by every interviewee. Especially the employees who indicate that they work more individually than before their jobs differentiated, experience difficulty with the mutual coordination. Besides, it could also depend on employees' character, since the complexity of the coordination increased in general, but is only perceived as demanding in a few cases.

4.3.2. Key job resources

Findings regarding the most important job resources for experiencing work engagement are interesting, since the conversations show that employees perceive to dispose of many job resources which may be an explanation of the high work engagement levels. Although the job demands are relatively high (and increased as a result of job differentiation), as shown in the previous sections, it seems that the employees dispose of sufficient job resources to cope with the demands and keep their engagement levels high. The job resources that are perceived as important for experiencing work engagement will be discussed below.

Task significance

The most important job resource concerns task significance, which is striking, since this resource is not mentioned in earlier studies that investigated the relation between job demands and resources and work engagement in the healthcare sector. Task significance refers to the extent to which an identifiable piece of work affects or is important to others within or outside the organization. In this study, task significance is about the consequences of the delivered service to the client's well-being (Moerman, 2008). According to the interviewees, client well-being is first priority at all times. They underline multiple times and in multiple ways that task significance boosts their work engagement. To be able to help clients is the most important job resource for these employees and for most of them the most important reason as well to work in the healthcare sector. They perceive job differentiation to play an important role, because they can use this additional expertise to offer clients higher quality services and improve their quality of life, consequently boosting employees' energy levels.

“Investigating things, and then getting to a stage that a client feels happier or is not afraid anymore... To me, that is one of the most important job resources.” – Interviewee 7 (musical therapist)

Task identity & Task variety

The task identity of the jobs is also perceived as an important resource. Many interviewees are busy networking, participating in commissions and workshops, writing protocols, developing educational programs and more. These secondary tasks, that are performed next to the primary tasks with the client, make the jobs multifaceted and improves employees’ enjoyment. Job differentiation thus plays an important role, since it is often associated with a higher task identity. Task variety, in terms of having different and unique clients, is also perceived as boosting employees’ work engagement levels.

Challenging jobs

Although many complex side cases surrounding the client are perceived as demanding, the complexity of the profession is perceived as challenging and boosting employees’ energy levels. To be able to improve or to find a solution for a complicated case, is perceived as an important resource. Job differentiation can facilitate this, given the expertise areas employees can dispose of. Almost all interviewees indicate that they think it is important to have enough room to challenge themselves.

Development opportunities

A clearly evident pattern that comes forward in the interviews, is that employees are always looking for opportunities to develop themselves. They try to achieve this in multiple ways, for example by following training programs, being involved in project groups, giving lectures, and developing educational programs. The organizational training budget is, according to the interviewees, relatively low and absorbs energy since it is not sufficient to facilitate all employees’ wishes with regard to development opportunities.

Job autonomy

To what extent autonomy boosts employees’ energy levels differs among employees. What becomes clear is that the flexibility (when and where to work) coming from autonomy is perceived as an important resource: to be able to create a healthy balance between work and private life is experienced as a positive consequence of job autonomy. Besides, employees have maximum flexibility to fill in their jobs, which they perceive as important for their work engagement levels. A perceived disadvantage however refers to the lack of performance feedback.

“Actually, I want to feel appreciated from time to time. That is funny though... My daughter and I were on a trip a few days ago. I said to her: sometimes I am afraid that I make mistakes because I am working that individualistic and I am not sure whether I am doing the right thing. However, I just do what I think is right.” – Interviewee 8 (specialized nurse)

Another interesting result for the more individualistic jobs, is that experiences among interviewees differ. While one employee feels isolated, making her less engaged, the other indicates that her individualistic job encourages her to meet other people and transfer her knowledge to others within the organization. In one case, the individuality of the job is even experienced as an energy booster in itself.

“Being autonomous is very important to me. I think I have always worked this way. Actually, my job and the way I performed it did not change when the MTC became more self-managing. So for me, being autonomous is business as usual.” – Interviewee 7 (musical therapist)

These differences in perceptions also make it clear that the extent to which an employee feels engaged is not only determined by specific job demands and resources, but also what he/she thinks is important.

Social support

Social support is predominantly important for employees in relation to their work engagement. A good team of colleagues is generally perceived as important for performing the job accurately and ensuring an optimal mutual coordination. Also in situations where employees face emotionally difficult clients, the team has an important role. Collaborations give employees a lot of energy. A few employees who work more individually, miss this connection and perceive the lack of support as demanding. As a result of shortages in workplaces and forcing people to work at home, the distance between employees increases.

The absence of social support from the manager is, in most of the cases, also perceived as demanding. Interviewees indicate that they are not necessarily in need of a personal connection with their manager, but that they would like to feel more appreciated, recognized and supported by their manager. Especially employees who are to a lesser extent part of a team, seem to suffer from the lack of social support from their manager.

Performance feedback

In fact, performance feedback is rarely mentioned spontaneously as important for experiencing work engagement. Employees indicate that they regularly ask others, in an informal way, to give their feedback, but it is not perceived as decisive for their work

engagement. This feedback is mainly requested from direct fellow-employees, doctors, other disciplines and nurses. The only source of feedback that really boosts employees' energy levels is the feedback in the form of clients' appreciation.

4.3.2 Summary

The general work engagement level of employees who faced job differentiation, is high. This is a confirmation of earlier studies (Smulders, 2006) which showed that the engagement levels in healthcare are relatively high compared to other sectors. The high engagement levels in the case organization may probably be explained from the large number of job resources that they can dispose of. These job resources are directly related to work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and play an important role in coping with job demands (Hakanen et al., 2005). It is important to note here that the job demands of the interviewees are definitely not low. These findings therefore confirm the study of Van den Broeck et al. (2008), who argued that work engagement is especially high when there is a combination of high job demands and high job resources.

The interviewees perceive the administrative tasks, qualitative demands and quantitative demands as the most important in relation to work engagement. To a lesser degree are physical demands, emotional demands and coordination demands involved. Task significance, task identity, challenging jobs and development opportunities are perceived as the most important job resources. Also important for perceiving work engagement, but less obvious than the previously mentioned resources are job autonomy and social support. The relation between performance feedback (except from clients' appreciation) and work engagement was not mentioned explicitly in any case.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conclusions

The general goal of this study was to gain insight in the meaning of job differentiation for the case organization, how employees perceived the intervention and how job differentiation impacted their jobs in terms of job demands and resources and their work engagement. Research focused on this goal is important in view of (a) the increased use of job differentiation in healthcare organizations to remain viable in the future, (b) the lack of a clear, complete and delineated definition of the concept of job differentiation, (c) the increased interest in work engagement among both academic researchers and practitioners because of the argument that engaged employees can make the difference, and (d) the limited attention in organizational literature for employee outcomes. In this study, the JD-R model has been applied to gain insight in the perception of job differentiation and how it impacts work engagement, since this model has been tested frequently in relation to work engagement. However, although the JD-R has been successful in relating job demands and resources to work engagement levels, we were aware of the fact that this model has never been studied in relation to an intervention like job differentiation. The present study therefore needed openness to explore the relationship between the model and job differentiation. This argument, combined with the lack of theoretical insight in the intervention of job differentiation, the importance of the balance between job demands and resources for experiencing work engagement, and the assumption of the JD-R model that the most important demands and resources for experiencing work engagement are job specific, this study has adopted an explorative design in the form of a single case study.

Based on the interest in the intervention of job differentiation, the outcome of work engagement, and the adoption of the JD-R model related insights from literature, the three interrelated goals underlying this study were: (a) to gain insight in the meaning of job differentiation for the case organization by collecting employees' perceptions, (b) to gain insight in how job differentiation impacted employees' jobs in terms of job demands and resources, and (c) to gain insight in the most important job demands and resources in relation to work engagement. Looking at these three sub goals, it can be concluded that job differentiation at the case organization means that employees get specialized tasks, which in some cases are executed next to their regular tasks, while others only perform their specialization. The aim of implementing job differentiation is to improve the quality of services provided by the healthcare organization. When employees exclusively perform their

specialization and have to distance themselves from the regular tasks of their job, the work engagement can be threatened. In general, however, job differentiation results in higher work engagement levels, which seems to be caused by the increase in the number of job resources that play an important role in relation to work engagement like task significance, task identity, challenging jobs and development opportunities. At the same time, the demands of the jobs, however, also increased: job differentiation mainly results in higher qualitative, quantitative and coordination demands, which are perceived to be important precedents of work engagement. Keeping in mind that the work engagement levels are high, the job demands currently seem to balance the job resources. However, when it takes too much energy to meet these demands, the high demands could harm the work engagement in the long run (Bakker et al., 2008). The results and conclusions of this study have numerous theoretical implications with practical value.

5.2 Theoretical implications

At a more general level, this study has a few implications for the JD-R model as described by academic researchers who used the theory to understand the precedents of work engagement. Despite the limited number of respondents, implying that the results should be interpreted with caution, the study showed that the job demands and resources that have been adopted from literature do indeed impact employees' work engagement levels (to a greater or lesser extent). These findings seem to confirm the theory on the association between job demands and resources and work engagement in the healthcare sector. The only resource that definitely impacted work engagement to a lesser degree was performance feedback. The autonomy of the jobs may explain this outcome: others are too far removed from this group of employees (whose jobs have been differentiated) in order to be able to provide them with feedback. As a result, these employees are perhaps not used to receive feedback on their performances; therefore they might not consider performance feedback as important in relation to work engagement. This possible explanation was however not the focus of the study and should therefore be taken with caution.

A significant finding of the study above all, was the importance of task significance and task identity in relationship to employees' work engagement levels. These two resources are considered as important job characteristics by Hackman and Oldham (1980), which is recognized widely in literature. However, it is striking that a thorough analysis of (around

twenty) empirical studies on the relation between job resources and work engagement showed that these groups of job resources rarely emerged, some articles quoted the importance of job characteristics as formulated by Hackman and Oldham (1980). Studies on work engagement in the healthcare sector would benefit from taking these two job resources into account, since it would give more valid results. The findings also indicated that development opportunities are an important job resource in relationship to work engagement levels. This corresponds to the study of the CBS (2016b), in which was claimed that, in comparison to other occupations, healthcare employees have a stronger need to learn, develop and progress in their career.

Another interesting finding is how employees perceive complex clients: they are perceived rather as a resource than a demand. This finding gives reason to refer to the study of Janssen (2001), who argued that the relation between job demands and work engagement is U-shaped, meaning that an increase in job demands is, to a certain extent, beneficial for experiencing work engagement. According to Crawford et al. (2010), the relation between job demands and work engagement is not always U-shaped and depends on the relevant demand and the size of the demand. This may explain why the U-shaped relationships between other demands seem less evident. The studies of Janssen (2001) and Crawford et al. (2010) could definitely help to understand the findings of the present study, but again, the greatest caution is essential in view of the relatively small scale of this study.

Furthermore, the results also give reason to believe that the absence of certain resources could limit work engagement. Employees who felt they could dispose of much social support, perceived this as a resource while other employees who experienced a lack of social support perceived it as demanding. This finding may reflect the study of the CBS (2016b) in which was indicated that social support (from both manager and colleagues) is an important resource for healthcare employees to deal with job demands.

The balance between demands and resources is important for the perception of work engagement. Although previous studies already suggested it, this study provides specific examples in which the underlying assumptions of the JD-R model are illustrated. This study showed that the JD-R model is a useful framework to gather insight how job differentiation is perceived to impact employees' work engagement. However, to obtain a complete picture of the relation between job differentiation and work engagement, this study would recommend future studies to be aware of the context: the interviewees frequently mentioned that they perceive the employer as an important part of work engagement. Besides, they think that their personal character plays an important role as well in relation to their work engagement levels.

It is therefore in the interest of future studies to be aware of these contextual factors when investigating the conditions of work engagement. In a study by Bakker and Demerouti (2014) these factors have partly been included in the form of personal resources. It is recommendable to pay permanent attention to these aspects.

The present study also made clear that job differentiation is a broad concept that deserves more attention. Organizations often implement job differentiation to achieve certain organizational goals, while the concept lacks a clear, complete, and demarcated definition. The findings of this study presents a preliminary outline of the impact of job differentiation on the job composition and how employees perceive the impact of the intervention on the extent to which they feel engaged. Because of the absence of a clear definition of job differentiation, it is however possible that other ways of job differentiation may lead to different findings. To improve the insight in job differentiation and the consequences of the intervention, it would be useful for future studies to pay more attention to the concept of job differentiation and its delineation.

5.3 Study limitations

Despite the interesting results that this study obtained, there are some limitations. For practical reasons, the study is cross-sectional and retrospective. According to Rich et al. (2010), work engagement is a dynamic concept, suggesting that a longitudinal study would be able to gain better insight in the work engagement levels over time. The study of Mauno et al. (2007) however showed that over time, work engagement is relatively stable. Following this study, the cross-sectional design would not harm the study. A longitudinal design would however be useful to collect data before, during and after the implementation of job differentiation to get a clearer picture how job differentiation is perceived to impact employees' jobs and work engagement levels. By adopting this longitudinal design, it is also possible to remove the memory bias of the present study.

Another limitation of the study, which has already been discussed a few times, refers to the small number of respondents, occupied in different jobs, that has been interviewed. Even though the job demands and resources have been picked up with caution by doing a thorough literature review, academic researchers emphasize that the importance of job demands and resources for experiencing engagement are organization or even job specific. Therefore, to be able to draw general conclusions about all jobs in the MTC that have been differentiated,

people employed in different occupations have been chosen to collect the data from. Drawing general conclusions may be in contradiction with the argument of job specific demands and resources, but the results showed that, despite a number of critical individual differences, similar patterns for therapists could be identified with respect to key job demands and resources. Before assuming that all therapists in the healthcare sector perceive the same job demands and resources as important to their work engagement levels, future research should focus on replicating the study to other healthcare organizations first to find out to what extent the results can actually be transferred to other healthcare organizations.

The transferability of the results is also hard to assess because of the concept under study. What makes the transferability of results difficult is that job differentiation is an increasingly used intervention in organizations but lacks a clear, complete and delineated definition. This makes it possible that job differentiation is executed differently among organizations, which makes it likely that the same study in another organization would lead to a different outcome. Before testing the outcomes of the present study quantitatively, it would be better for future studies to start with defining the concept of job differentiation.

5.4 Practical implications

Although there are a few limitations, the present study definitely has practical implications. First of all, the organization would benefit of comparing the concrete implementation of job differentiation with the goal of the intervention (i.e. improving the healthcare quality). Although the study indicated that employees clearly perceive job differentiation to have a positive impact on the access to job resources, attention should be paid to the increases in job demands as well. The increases in qualitative, quantitative and coordination demands can lead to higher demands than employees are able to cope with in terms of job resources. Although the employees feel that they are able to offer their clients higher quality services, it is important to keep in mind that the service quality mainly depends on nurse performance (Simpson, 2009). For that reason, maintaining the level of employees' work engagement is really important for service organizations like the healthcare sector. In view of the increases in the three groups of demands, it is questionable whether the aim of improving the healthcare quality is achieved. Next to this, there is real production pressure. Even though efficiency and effectivity can go hand in hand, this seems to lead to contradictions in the case organization: the task identity has been increased as a consequence of job differentiation, while employees

are still held accountable for their production time. This pressure on efficiency could seriously threaten the quality of healthcare, which was the main goal of implementing job differentiation.

The pressure on efficiency also has a spill-over effect on employees' experiences with administrative tasks. Because employees need much time doing administrative tasks, they have less time left to perform their primary tasks. Since these administrative tasks are frequently mentioned as demanding, it would be clever to take this into account in the long run. Besides, employees perceive this demand as largely influencing their work engagement levels, because the administrative tasks do not have anything to do with the content of their jobs. It is in the interest of both the organization (because of efficiency reasons) and employees (engagement levels) that the administrative tasks are organized and facilitated well: use one and the same system, educate employees in the systems, create protocols that employees could use and make room for these administrative tasks. These actions enable employees to lose as little time as possible working on administrative tasks. Besides, it supports the organizational focus on efficiency.

A more specific advice for the organization with respect to improving healthcare quality by implementing job differentiation refers to the involvement of these employees. The advice would be to give the employees the opportunity to participate on a higher level and enable them to make decisions that have to do with their specializations, since they are the experts and have expert knowledge. This makes it likely that they can indicate well what is needed with respect to their jobs and in what way the organization could remain viable in the future. The organization should rely more on the great sense of responsibility of the employees, also keeping in mind that employees perceive task identity as an important resource.

This 'mismatch' between the desired level of involvement and the actual level of involvement appears to result from the lack of collaboration between management and employees becomes clear. Employees perceive that they have sufficient possibilities to develop their jobs, but in reality the real participation is significantly lower. Next to this, the results also suggested that the need for social support has increased, since job differentiation may sometimes lead to more individuality (demanding!). Taken these results together, the organization can do a better job by creating a deeper connection: involve employees actively to improve the overall healthcare quality. Ensure a supporting role in which development processes can be facilitated and guided to improve the quality of healthcare.

Based on the results, the last suggestion would be to give room to employees' ambitions to develop themselves. All interviewees indicate that they are better equipped to help their clients and find better solutions as a consequence of their differentiated jobs. In their opinions, job differentiation really improves the healthcare quality. Besides, the employees who wanted to specialize, are characterized by their relatively high levels of work engagement. Challenging jobs and development opportunities are really important for these healthcare employees with regard to their work engagement. Giving the necessary space to employees' development can therefore contribute directly to improved healthcare quality, but it may also contribute to employees' work engagement levels. An important recommendation is not to reduce the renewed jobs in size in comparison to the jobs before job differentiation: fragmentation of the jobs is perceived to impact negatively work engagement and could therefore also undermine the quality of healthcare.

In summary, this study produced interesting results that offer sufficient support for the organization. However, we are aware of the current dual agenda: job differentiation is often implemented to improve healthcare quality, while at the moment the focus is on organizational efficiency. As a result, reducing the workload, taking away administrative tasks and giving full support to employees' desire to specialize seem to be less feasible for the time-being. These recommendations are therefore mainly intended to keep in mind long-term. On the other hand, improving the collaboration between management and employees is a recommendation that is short-term oriented and realistic to achieve: in this way, an important step is taken in increasing the task identity and social support.

6. References

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Appendices