

**OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AT INDIVIDUAL
LEVEL AND ITS IMPACT ON JOB
PERFORMANCE AMONGST LECTURERS IN
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH (UMS)**

JADE CHEAH LEI-TI



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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of Master
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**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS
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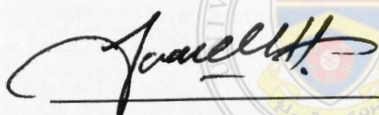
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TANDATANGAN PUSTAKAWAN

Penyelia: Dr. Balvinder Kaur Kler

Tarikh: 28 July 2010

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JADE CHEAH LEI-TI
PE2008-8203C



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CERTIFICATION

NAME : **JADE CHEAH LEI-TI**
MATRIC NO. : **PE20088203C**
TITLE : **OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AT INDIVIDUAL LEVEL AND
ITS IMPACT ON JOB PERFORMANCE AMONGST
LECTURERS IN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SABAH (UMS)**
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VIVA DATE : **29TH JUNE 2010**

DECLARED BY

1. SUPERVISOR

DR. BALVINDER KAUR KLER



Signature

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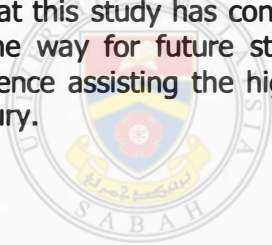
Thank you and God bless.

JADE CHEAH LEI-TI
29TH JUNE 2010

ABSTRACT

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AT INDIVIDUAL LEVEL AND ITS IMPACT ON JOB PERFORMANCE AMONGST LECTURERS IN UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH (UMS)

This study aims to determine the immediate factors in occupational stress at individual level that impact job performance amongst lecturers holding the post of DS45 at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The objectives of this study were achieved by examining the relationship between job performance (dependent variable) and five factors identified as independent variables which include working condition, resources and communication, workload, work-relationship with the Dean, and work-relationship with colleagues. Results from the online questionnaire collected from 228 respondents were analyzed using the multiple regression analysis. The analysis revealed that 31.1 percent and 45.1 percent of the variance were explained by model 1 and model 2 respectively, with working condition, workload, work-relationship with the Dean, and work-relationship with colleagues (total four factors) significant. Although the relationship between dependent variable and independent variables when regressed together produced an acceptable result, further research should be done in order for this model to be proposed as a general model for developing a framework regarding occupational stress at individual level and job performance among university lecturers. It is hoped that this study has contributed to studies in this field and played its part in paving the way for future studies to identify a more sustainable and replicable model, hence assisting the higher education industry to face the challenge of the 21st century.



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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor stres pekerjaan pada tahap individu yang mempengaruhi prestasi pekerjaan di kalangan pensyarah university yang memegang gred DS45 di Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) secara langsung. Objektif untuk kajian ini dicapai dengan menganalisis perhubungan antara prestasi kerja dengan faktor-faktor yang telah dikenalpasti iaitu suasana kerja, sumber dan komunikasi, beban tugas, hubungan pensyarah dengan Dekan, dan hubungan pensyarah dengan rakan sekerja. Hasil daripada pemantauan online yang dikutip daripada 228 responden dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis 'multiple regression'. Ia menunjukkan bahawa 31.1 peratus dan 45.1 peratus varians dapat dipenuhi oleh model 1 dan model 2 masing-masing, dengan suasana kerja, beban tugas, hubungan pensyarah dengan Dekan, dan hubungan pensyarah dengan rakan sekerja, (jumlahnya empat faktor) didapati signifikan. Walaupun perhubungan antara pembolehubah bergantung dan pembolehubah yang tidak bergantung apabila diuji bersama memberi hasil yang diterima, penyelidikan lanjut harus dijalankan sekiranya model ini ingin dicadangkan sebagai model am bagi tujuan pembangunan rangka kerja berkaitan stres di pekerjaan pada tahap individu dan prestasi kerja. Adalah diharapkan bahawa kajian ini dapat memberi sumbangan kepada penyelidikan dalam bidang ini, dan memainkan peranan dalam membuka jalan untuk kajian-kajian untuk mengenalpasti model yang lebih lengkap dan sempurna pada masa hadapan, dan selanjutnya membantu industri pengajian tinggi menghadapi cabaran-cabaran sengit di abad ke-21 ini.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview of Higher Education Industry in Malaysia

As an industry, higher education plays a significant role in the economy. The higher education industry provides a competitive force of the marketplace in which this industry affects almost all of us albeit as students, parents, employees, employers, and citizens of scientific, medical and technological research. Higher education industry provides not only education but with it the essential facilities and infrastructures for lectures such as lecture rooms, conference facilities, research centre, and laboratories in which are equipped with presentation equipment such as LCD projectors, OHP projectors, internet connectivity and sound system.

The industry and its activities are closely linked to a country's economy even though it is a complex and diverse industry as it combines a dominant public sector of state universities and also the private sector of universities, community colleges, and polytechnics that educate a majority of all students. Significantly, not only are lecturers associated with higher education industry but other parts of the professional services industry are well closely linked to the higher education industry such as the financial, administrative, security and transportation, and medical professions. Therefore, higher education is too important to be left out of the marketplace as it is increasingly being relied upon to solve economic and social problems.

Access to higher education for all young people, regardless of their family circumstances is a vital need-based element of the social mission (Türk, 2008; MacGregor, 2009). However, higher education is not meant simply as a private interest to each individual but it brings benefit to other people. Regardless of ownership form whether it is a public university or private higher education institute, this industry is about competition for the number of students the institute has, which is sometimes viewed as part of the educational mission but sometimes simply viewed as revenue sources to the country.

According to Noordin and Jusoff (2009), education is one of the most important institutional organizations of a nation and as it oversees issues on national agenda, its effective running depends firmly on its coordination in the direction of societal expectation. The success of its' educational programs are founded based on its important contributions of effort, involvement, and most importantly on the overall academic staff professionalization.

In Malaysia, the higher education industry consists of four segments which are the public universities, private universities, polytechnics and community colleges. Currently, there are a total of 20 public universities, 345 private universities, 27 polytechnics, and 59 community colleges established under the Universities and Universities College Act (MOHE, 2010).

1.1 Problem Statement

The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed and perhaps now more than ever before, occupational stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health of the organizations (NIOSH, 1999). It is noted that stress is in the eyes of its beholder whereby some employers would assume that stressful working conditions are a necessity which might assist productivity and profitability in today's economy. However, stressful working conditions could also lead to decreased productivity if it is not handled properly.

Winefield (2000) stated that recent studies done globally on stress among academic staff in higher education industry indicate that the phenomenon of occupational stress in universities is increasing and widespread. In Malaysia, the number of universities has increased tremendously over the past few years and as this number increases, university academic staff may face more problems in their job as management faces competitive pressure from other universities (Ahsan *et al*, 2009).

As institutions of higher learning and a high-level organization, universities need to focus on the quality of management, teaching and learning. Ivancevich *et al* (2008) indicate that very few organizations are likely to escape the impact of

stress among its employees at the workplace. In a higher education industry, the confrontational nature of educational lectures produces significant levels of stress for the lecturers and the high levels of stress amongst lecturers could damage productivity (Huda *et al*, 2004).

At the same time, there is also pressure from Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education in which they have established the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) as they desire to have more of the country's universities to be on-par with the best universities in the world. Generally, the world's well known universities are divided into three groups which are APEX University, Elite University and Competitive University (MOHE, 2010).

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) which is the second public university established in Malaysia located in Penang became the role model for all universities in Malaysia when it was recognized as an APEX University on 27th August 2008 by leading in all aspects of the higher education industry with its characteristics of an APEX university such as excellent leadership, faculties, facilities, and student academic excellence (MOHE, 2010). These days, most universities especially in the public sectors strive to excel and be the next APEX University in Malaysia which may cause the university academic staff to face plenty of stress that could affect their satisfaction, physical or mental health and ultimately cause a significant impact on the individual's job performance (Noordin and Jusoff, 2009; Ahsan *et al*, 2009).

In tandem with the aspiration in preparing Malaysia as a centre of excellence for higher education, Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2001) stated that it is recommended by the year 2005, 75 percent of the academic staff in local institution of higher education must possess doctoral qualifications. According to InsightSabah (2009), Colonel Professor Datuk Dr. Kamaruzaman Hj. Ampon, Vice-Chancellor to the ninth public university in Malaysia - Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) stated that the university is still a long way from achieving that mark due to the university's performance that does not meet the criteria to be recognized as an APEX university. This ultimately increases the intensity of the pressure on lecturers,

which leads us to the heart of this research, to identify the occupational stress at individual level that impacts job performance amongst lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

This research examines the relationship between factors intrinsic to the job and interpersonal relationships at work, and job performance amongst lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The next section presents the research objectives.

1.2 Research Objectives

The overall objective of the study is to determine the relationship between occupational stress at individual level consisting of two independent variables (Factors Intrinsic to the Job, and Interpersonal Relationships at Work) and job performance among lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The specific objectives are to determine:-

- i. The relationship between working conditions and job performance among lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).
- ii. The relationship between resource and communication, and job performance among lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).
- iii. The relationship between workload and job performance among lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).
- iv. The relationship between work-relationship with Dean and job performance among lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).
- v. The relationship between work-relationship with colleagues and job performance among lecturers in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

1.3 Scope of Study

The scope of this study is being limited to lecturers holding the post of DS45 under the Malaysia Remuneration System (SSM) in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Malaysia's ninth public institution of higher education which has plans to gain APEX university status, located in Kota Kinabalu - the capital city for the state of Sabah in East Malaysia (UMS, 2010), with the target to obtain valuable local data.

In addition, the scope in the literature review of this study focused on two key areas which are job performance and occupational stress focusing on factors intrinsic to the job and interpersonal relationships at work, and the linkage between occupational stress and job performance.

1.4 Significance of Study

The results of this study made important implications for the public institution of higher education such as Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). Occupational stress is widespread and increasingly costly both to the individual's job performance and organization's productivity. Therefore, this study is significant to assist the managerial level of higher education organization to manage occupational stress at public institution of higher education.

Throughout this study, managerial level of higher education organization can gain a clearer understanding on what is the occupational stress faced by lecturers at its institution. Management competency is a concern that must not be taken lightly by the managerial level as occupational stress may affect the subordinate/employees efficiency and productivity which would be damaging to the individual's job performance and ultimately affect the organization's overall performance (Gillespie *et al.*, 2001).

This study hoped to serve as guidance and a stepping stone for further studies in various aspects of improving the quality and productivity in the higher education industry as a whole by understanding the level of stress its employees of the twenty first century is experiencing and how it is impacting their job performance.

Finally, this study also contributes to the global literature on stress and job performance amongst lecturers in the Higher Education Institution previously carried out by researcher such as Broadbridge (2002), Jackson and Rothmann (2006), Kazmi *et al* (2008) and Mostert *et al* (2008).

1.5 Operational Definitions Of Key Variables In This Study

1.5.1 Job Performance

Job performance refers to the overall evaluation of how well an individual is meeting the organization's expectation (Allen and Griffeth, 1999).

1.5.2 Working Conditions

Working conditions refers to the extent to which the physical working environment is comfortable and supportive of productivity (Ivancevich *et al.*, 2008).

1.5.3 Resources and Communication

Resources and communication refers to the availability of equipment/resources at work and the effectiveness of communication in the workplace (Johnson *et al.*, 2005).

1.5.4 Workload

Workload refers to all activities that take the time of the individual and are related to professional duties and responsibilities (Hashim *et al.*, 2006).

1.5.5 Work-Relationship with the Dean

Work-relationship with the Dean relates to the individual's relationship and interaction with his or her boss, namely the Dean in the workplace (Meiners and Miller, 2004).

1.5.6 Work-Relationship with Colleagues

Work-relationship with colleagues relates to the individual's relationship and interaction with his or her colleagues in the workplace (Viernes and Guzman, 2005)

1.6 Organization of the Report

The report is organized into five chapters, which is Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Analysis of Findings, and Discussion and Conclusion respectively.

Chapter One, Introduction, provides an overview of the Higher Education Industry in Malaysia. It subsequently derives the Problem Statements, Research Objectives, Scope of Study, Significant of Study, Operational Definitions of Key Variables in this study and Organization of Study.

Chapter Two, Literature Review, reviews studies on occupational stress and job performance in the Higher Education Institute previously conducted by others and their findings. Some of these previous studies are nearly the same as this study with focus on different industries in different countries or stated, while some other studies focus on other factors that impacts job performance in the higher education industry. The dependent and independent variables used in this research were derived from the literature review and the relationship between them will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three, Research Methodology discusses the Research Framework, Hypotheses, methods and questionnaires used to conduct the survey for the research. Chapter Four presents the Analysis of Findings and finally, the report concludes in Chapter Five, Discussion and Conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

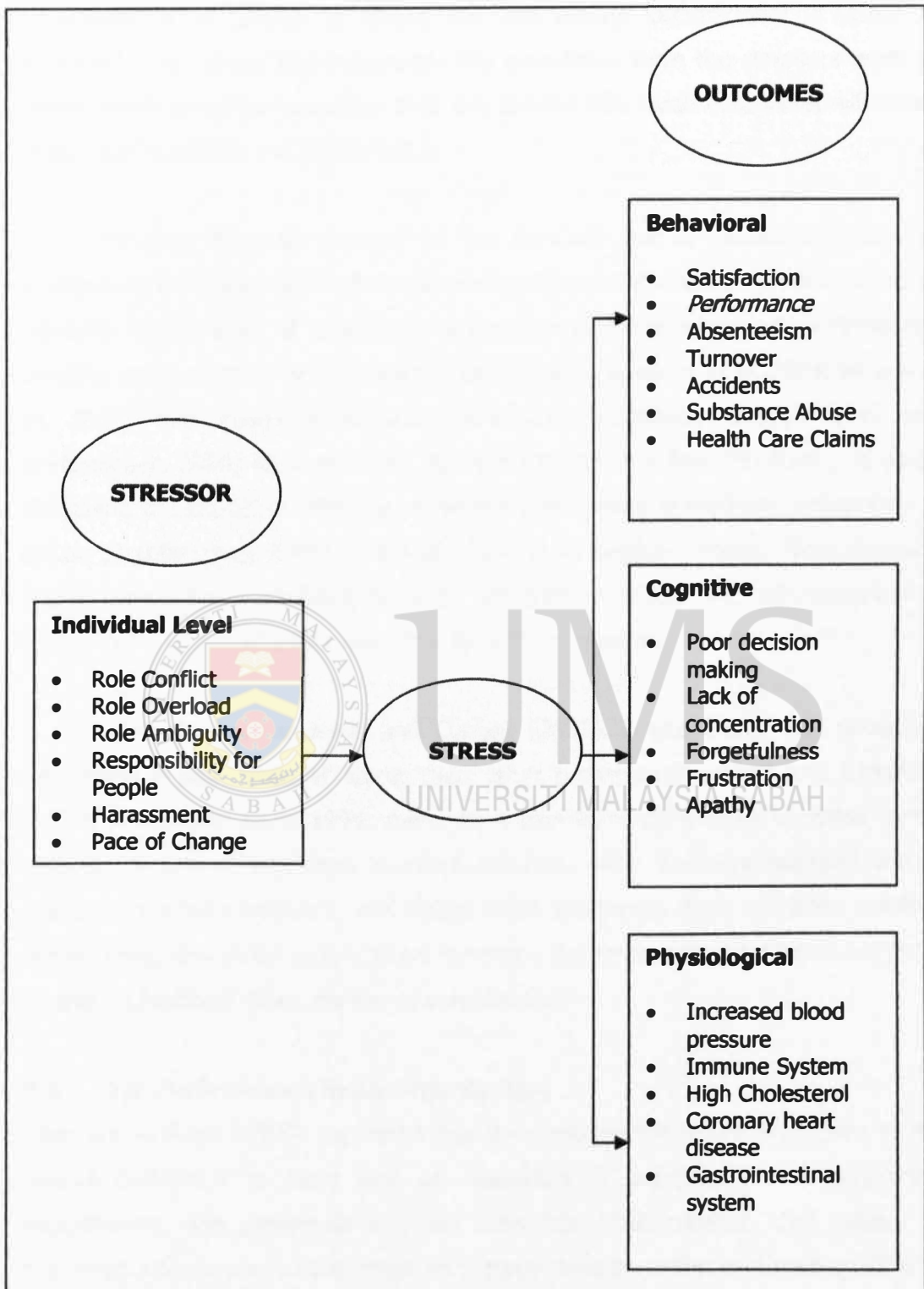
This chapter reviews the literature conducted on the relationships among occupational stress and job performance. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the literature and define the meaning of occupational stress at individual level and its affect on job performance. Next, the chapter justifies the choice of independent variables such as factors intrinsic to the job and interpersonal relationships at work as almost everyone experiences stress at work.

2.1 Conceptualization of Stress

Stress is certainly nothing new under the sun as Ivancevich *et al* (2008) stated that even our cave-dwelling ancestors faced stress every time they left their caves and encountered their enemy, the saber-toothed tigers. However, the saber-toothed tigers of yesteryears have since been replaced by another predator known as the "work predator" that creates stress for individuals on the job.

In this current era, a key "work predator" is known as occupational stress. One of the complicating issues in understanding occupational stress is that the list of potential stressors is almost infinite. As such, the main focus was on identifying literature which related to occupational stress (independent variables) at individual level which affects the individual's job performance (the dependent variable). This focus area is important for Organizational Behavior and Management as the impact of occupational stress on an individual's job performance would often times lead to indirect costs to organizations such as absenteeism, turnover, lower productivity, and quality problems.

Figure 2.1: A Model of Stressors, Stress and Outcomes



Source: Ivancevich *et al* (2008)

Figure 2.1 shows the model of stressors, stress and outcomes illustrated by Ivancevich *et al* (2008). It shows the link among occupational stressors at individual level, stress and outcomes. The experience from the stressors leads to stress which produces outcomes that are divided into three categories which are behavioral, cognitive and physiological.

Previous literature focused on the common link of various occupational stressors at individual level with lower levels of job satisfaction and higher turnover (Kinman, 2001), ways of coping the stressors and the effect on job performance focusing more on other professions such as nursing (Lambert *et al*, 2004; Nizami *et al*, 2006) and customer service (Dole and Schroeder, 2001; Tuten and Neidermeyer, 2004; Netemeyer *et al*, 2005) to name a few. Moreover, research examining the impact of stress levels on the productivity of staff and universities is sparse (Jacobs *et al*, 2007). Although there is increasing evidence from research that indicates the association between occupational stress and job performance exists, there is little attention paid to a specific occupation.

According to De Jesus and Conboy (2001), it was found that educators experience higher levels of stress than other professional groups and Chalmers (1998) stated that since 1994, there were significant differences in stress levels between groups of educators in which lecturers were the most stressed group, followed by senior lecturers, and tutors while professors were the least stressed group. Thus, this study looked upon university academic staff specifically lecturers as one professional group worthy of consideration.

2.2 Job Performance in an Organization

Allen and Griffeth (1999) explained that job performance refers commonly to the overall evaluation of how well an individual is meeting the organization's expectations. Job performance is an extremely vital criterion that relates to organizational success or outcomes. In a study done by Befort and Hattrup (2003), they found that job performance is a multidimensional construct in which two general factors received more attention, namely task performance and contextual performance which supports Viswesvaran and Ones' (2003) findings.

Task performance refers to the set of core duties and tasks that are central to a particular job (Ferris *et al.* 2008). This includes behaviors that contribute to the core transformation and maintenance activities in an organization which is presented by the job itself (Motowidlo and Schmit, 1999). Ferris *et al.* (2008) stated that task performance can be distinguished by the explicitly prescribed tasks and duties typically provided in job descriptions. This form of task performance can be linked to the factors intrinsic to the job such as conforming to the working condition, managing the demand in workload, and carrying out activities involving resources and communication.

On the contrary, contextual performance refers to behaviors which contribute to the culture and climate of the organization (Befort and Hattrup, 2003). Examples of contextual performance behaviors are volunteering for extra work, persisting with enthusiasm, following rules and procedures, helping and cooperating with others, and supporting or defending the organization (Motowidlo and Schmit, 1999). This form of behavior can be linked to the interpersonal relationships at work such as work-relationship with boss and colleagues.

In a workplace, Levey (2001) state that job performance is viewed as the result of three factors working together: skill, effort and the nature of work conditions. The skill include knowledge, abilities and competencies the employee brings to the job while effort is the degree of motivation the employee puts forth toward getting the job done, and the nature of work conditions is the degree of accommodation of these conditions in facilitating the employee's productivity.

However, Ivancevich *et al.* (2008) conceptualizes the definition of performance as a function of the capacity to perform, the opportunity to perform, and the willingness to perform. Ivancevich *et al.* (2008) identified that the capacity to perform relates to the degree to which an individual possesses task-relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences which means to say that high levels of job performance are only possible when the employee knows what is supposed to be done and how to do it. The opportunity to perform is another critical ingredient in the job performance recipe in which the individual's job performance is