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**SATISFYING THE LABOUR FORCE: CRITICALLY REVIEWING  
INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLARSHIP ON JOB SATISFACTION IN  
THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper provides a critical literature review to study the significant body of applied research on the concept of job satisfaction. The study identifies and reviews key academic journal articles and definitions related to job satisfaction. While a fair amount has been written about the concept of job satisfaction in philosophical, religious, and modern behavioural science contexts, nothing bars fresh new attempts from providing greater and more nuanced insight, specifically via the comparative analysis of multiple literary sources. Thus, the study hopes to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of the validity of various forms of qualitative and quantitative research in the field, critiquing their contextual relevance, and revisiting satisfaction in both developed countries as well as the Third World. The following literature, ultimately, is thus an attempt to portray the meaning and importance of job satisfaction as well as a brief appraisal of its practical application.

**Keywords:** Job satisfaction, Employment, Business, Economics, Behavioural science

**INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this literature review is to study the significant body of applied research on the concept of job satisfaction. This paper identifies and reviews key academic journal articles and definitions related to job satisfaction. A fair amount has been written about the concept of job satisfaction in philosophical, religious, and modern behavioural science contexts. However, nothing bars fresh new attempts from cropping up to provide more insight. The following literature is an attempt to portray the meaning and importance of job satisfaction as well as a brief appraisal of its practical application.

**JOB SATISFACTION CONCEPTUALISATION**

Job satisfaction is a dynamic and multifaceted term that has developed over time. Consequently, multiple authors have different approaches to job satisfaction. The following text discusses some of the most frequently quoted definitions.

Vroom (1964) defines job satisfaction as one's positive orientation towards all facets of the work situation. Likewise, in the opinion of Spector (1997), how an employee perceives a job and its various components establishes the foundation for satisfaction. Spector's approach is one of the most widely used indicators to build upon a spectrum of employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the workplace. The interpretations of job satisfaction have expanded. It is one of the critical factors that influence a business organization's efficiency and effectiveness and is, therefore, the most widely observed parameter in managerial studies (Spector, 1997).

Through his work, Hoppock conducted three specific types of studies involving emotional, physical, and environmental conditions, which have helped employees feel content with their jobs (Hoppock, 1975). According to this perspective, while several external influences impact job satisfaction, it primarily has to do with the employee's inner well-being. This approach is further reinforced by Robins (2006), who considers a satisfied employee to be a productive worker. This is based on the premise that strong performance and personal well-being promote the employee's sense of accomplishment and work satisfaction. George (2008) concurs and notes that satisfaction at a workplace requires a unique blend of feelings and beliefs, including psychological, emotional, and physical dimensions. This entails doing a job that one likes, doing well, and being praised for one's achievements (Aziri, 2011).

Job satisfaction is an increasingly important concept for organizations today because satisfied employees will work with agility and motivation. Social scientists, including Farrell and Rusbult (1981) and Locke (1970), have centred on job satisfaction as a prime indicator of employee turnover. While it can be argued that monetary payments are one of the main reasons why individuals seek employment, in his research involving psychological circumstances, Hoppock (1975) found that despite being dissatisfied with their earnings, satisfied workers liked their jobs and continued to work without objection. Financial security, a sense of belonging or calling to work, fair treatment, and being rewarded for good work contributed to this.

The concept of job satisfaction has a substantial overlap with work values, which signifies the degree of interest, relevance, and viability of what occurs at work (Knoop, 1994). While these two concepts are seemingly different, they are theoretically connected in that meaningful employment is viewed as a good indicator of job satisfaction. Kim, Kim, Newman, Ferris, and Perrewé (2019) examined the link between emotional well-being and job satisfaction among sports personnel and concluded that meaningful work of employees and welcoming work culture positively impact mental health, contributing to a high level of job satisfaction.

In examining the correlation between an individual's work satisfaction and the goal-setting theory, Demirkol and Nalla (2018) found that demanding and realistic goals, when perceived as meaningful and essential, lead to higher task performance, which ultimately leads to greater job satisfaction.

Further, Murphy, Athanasou, and King (2002), in their study, couple high levels of organisational citizenship behaviour to employees being satisfied at work and outline that while satisfaction may not be expressed in an employee's efficiency, it is apparent in their voluntary involvement in the workplace.

Researchers have also fairly frequently studied the association between an individual's commitment to the organisation and being satisfied at work (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Organisational commitment is considered an aspect of job satisfaction since it addresses the staff's positive attitude, not towards their work, but the company. Several studies support the notion that job satisfaction increases organisational commitment (ANGLE & PERRY, 1983), while others suggest that it is a precursor to job satisfaction (Martin, Price & Mueller, 1981).

## **RESEARCH SUMMARY OF JOB SATISFACTION**

The following section highlights the outcomes, antecedents, and various determinants of job satisfaction.

### ***Outcomes of Job Satisfaction***

Baker (2011) identifies absenteeism and turnover as the two most important outcomes of job satisfaction. According to Schaumberg and Flynn (2017), the extent of individual satisfaction at the workplace only estimates absences for employees who are likely to participate in counterproductive actions because their conduct reign over their self-serving desires rather than the organisations' reasonable work standards. Likewise, McShane (2009) utilised meta-analytic techniques to re-examine the study and found that significant absenteeism-satisfaction correlations exist only in a distinct minority. The results further reveal that only satisfaction with promotions lacks a mutual relationship with voluntary absenteeism, i.e., absence frequency is a better predictor of voluntary absenteeism than is the number of days missed.

The other outcome examined is job turnover. Several scientists have conducted research to broaden their understanding of the key antecedents of intention to leave and employee turnover (Martin, Price & Mueller, 1981). Meta-analytic studies carried out by Cotton and Turtle (1986) recognize a vital linkage between employees' sense of well-being and their intention to stay in an organisation. More recently, empirical studies conducted by McElroy, Morrow, and Rude (2001) indicate that the two variables, job satisfaction, and turnover, are not proportional. Tsai and Wu (2010) have expanded this claim with their cross-sectional study involving 300 questionnaires,

which reveal that while job satisfaction runs parallel with organisational citizenship behaviour, it is negatively related to turnover rate.

### ***Antecedents of Job Satisfaction***

Researchers have investigated several situational and dispositional variables that affect job satisfaction.

Pritchard (1973) cites the Lawler and Porter model of job satisfaction which, is based on the assumption that satisfaction will result from both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. On the contrary, Spector (1997) highlights the humanitarian perspective, which suggests that job satisfaction is an indicator of psychological health in that, people who are treated equitably exhibit job satisfaction, and high levels of job satisfaction indicate an excellent mental state of employees. Such organisations treat employees as their greatest asset and lead with transparent fairness. More recently, Spector (2004) discusses the dispositional model, which takes a slightly different approach in proposing that job satisfaction is associated with individual personality. Staw and Ross (1985) makes an opposing view and contends that job satisfaction may be deduced as much by personal dispositions as situational factors. In other words, personality is often disrupted by situational circumstances, the latter being the more impelling cause behind employee fulfillment.

According to Baker (2011), variables that influence job satisfaction are more specific and correspond to the nature of the task, social cues in the workplace, imperceptible mental states of employees such as their desires or attitudes, and employee perceptions. This approach is supported by Rizwan, Jaskani, Ameen, Hussain, and Omair (2014), who explore the extent of liberty and acknowledgment given to employees, workplace ambiance, and remuneration as the antecedents of satisfaction at work. Their study provides evidence for the positive association between employee satisfaction and workplace environment, enhancement in pay, and motivated employees.

Alfayad, Suriani, and Arif (2017) look at job satisfaction from the perspective of Herzberg's hygiene-motivation theory. This theory proposed that different factors cause job satisfaction and the lack thereof. Herzberg's theory categorized these factors into hygiene and motivational factors. He related hygiene factors or dissatisfiers to the environment surrounding the job, such as salary, supervision, relationship with clients and colleagues, workplace conditions, security, and company policies. In contrast, motivational factors or satisfiers are found within the job and involve work performance and responsibility, recognition, job status, growth opportunities, and advancement. Alfayad et al. (2017) highlighted that while motivators cause employees to work harder, poor hygiene factors or the lack thereof will decrease employee satisfaction.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF JOB SATISFACTION**

The following is an attempt to deliberate about the application of job satisfaction in a real-life scenario. In theory, it may be a straightforward affair. However, practical application may often be frustrating.

In conformity with the above analysis, it is reasonable to concur that commitment and involvement are two critical factors that encompass the execution of a task to perfection. Commitment and involvement in the task will not persist if the particular action or activity does not generate satisfaction to the doer. Granted that one can continue to execute the job tirelessly without any pleasure or satisfaction. However, it will ultimately take a toll on the individual's mental, physical, or even financial health. As a student who is on the verge of commencing a professional career, it is paramount that I find a potential employer who exhibits the same values as I do (Allen, 2013).

Practically, the choice of a relevant educational program predates finding a satisfying position in the job market. The complexity involved in deciding on one's career path challenges my exiting beliefs regarding job satisfaction. The established theory is that one must follow one's heart and find his/her calling to work. In practice, however, a seemingly sound and rational decision may go awry at a later stage leading to resentment and frustration.

After completing a relevant course at university, the real test one faces is in finding a job that not only pays the bills but is also satisfying. The factors that help determine whether or a not a job will be a satisfying one are too many, such as job location, size of the company, monetary compensation, working conditions, career advancement prospect, suggestions from family, and peer groups (Baker, 2011). Therefore, a worthy question to be debated upon is whether one must wait until such time he/she finds such a job. In other words, choosing the first available option may result in an opportunity cost in the form of scarce work satisfaction. At the same time, a wait-and-see attitude will result in an opportunity cost in the form of lost wages. In my opinion, it is prudent to forego potential wages until I find a mentally fulfilling job. The choice is personal and will vary with each individual. Despite there being abundant empirical evidence on the matter, there is no one solution that may be universally applicable in all situations. After all, job satisfaction is highly subjective and cannot be put into a straight jacket.

The above literature highlights the oscillating nature of the human mindset in deriving satisfaction in doing his/her job. It provides, at most, a broad outline of its contributing factors as it would be futile and unrealistic to provide a tailor-made solution. Under conceptualisation, the expansion and progression of the definitions of job satisfaction have been explored. The research summary tackles its outcomes and antecedents. Lastly, a discussion on its practical application zeroes in on the concept being highly impressionistic as several variables drive it.

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