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# Employee Satisfaction and Your Management Style

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## Introduction

How does one respond when asked about job satisfaction? What does a person consider before answering? Money? Prestige? Power? Promotion? Desire to serve? All of these? Do employees think of the overall job when considering job satisfaction? Are they selective when considering various aspects of their jobs? What are the key aspects in the equation? Do people consider the possibility of changing jobs a positive move? A necessary one?

Job satisfaction is defined as the degree to which an individual enjoys his or her work. The same factors involved that make a job enjoyable also make it a complex issue. Scarpello and Vandenberg (1992) noted that job satisfaction commonly was defined as, "a function of the match between rewards offered by the work environment and the individual's desires for those rewards" (p. 125). To further refine the definition, others note that researchers often discuss two categories that influence job satisfaction: dispositional determinants (individualistic) and situational determinants (structural) (Morris & Villemez, 1992; Scarpello & Vandenberg, 1992). Individualistic determinants include such factors as a positive attitude, work ethic, and interpersonal skills. Situational determinants are those that the employee may find in the workplace, such as need for overtime and opportunities for promotion. Job satisfaction is a synthesis of these dispositional and environmental factors. Accurate

assessment of the combination mix can help supervisors retain good employees and both can assist individuals in maximizing their personal effectiveness and productivity.

## Dispositional Determinants

An employee's work history and general personality strongly influence the degree to which the person would be satisfied with her or his current position. Research by Scarpello and Vandenberg (1992) has shown that employees who were predisposed to positive attitudes usually were more likely to find any job satisfying. Those whose current positions closely match their talents, needs, values and motives are most likely to feel fulfilled in their work and to continue in it over time. Eichar, Norland, Brady, and Fortinsky (1989) noted that for older workers who re-entered the market, dispositional issues of autonomy and meaningfulness became highly significant. It would be vital that there be a good match between an individual's motivation (determined by needs and values) and the appropriate situational determinants. This match is key because perception of the job situation would be influenced by that individual's values and by the degree to which the person's needs are met.

## Situational Determinants

Most people can imagine circumstances under which they would be happy or unhappy with their jobs. The work

environment is crucial to a sense of fulfillment. Such considerations as salary, vacation time, overtime requirements, level of stress, feelings of effectiveness in helping others reaching their educational goals, available technology, opportunity for promotion, co-worker relationships and the all-important relationship with the supervisor help define one's sense of self as a working individual. The leadership style and skill of the supervisor are highly significant in determining the net effect of the situational determinants. Research reveals that workers who expect advancement, praise, responsibility and power are more likely to stay in a position that rewards quality performance with promotions, positive evaluations, added responsibilities and authority (Eichar, Norland, Brady, & Fortinsky, 1989; Morris & Villemez, 1992; Organ, 1995; Scarpello & Vandenberg, 1992). Emotional responses to those situational determinants are part of an employee's overall view of self as a working person (Scarpello & Vandenberg, 1992). It is imperative that employers understand how the work environment can shape attitudes and influence productivity of counselors, instructors and support personnel.

## Role of Managers

There are a number of factors to consider in determining whether or not an employee would likely be satisfied with the job. For the supervisor charged with positively

**Table 1. Employee Job Satisfaction Characteristics**

	Description	Supervisor's Role
<b>Personality</b>	agreeable personality, positive attitude, and non-combative	coordinate staff on projects by ability and interests
<b>Compatibility with Co-workers</b>	cooperative, sense of community, and team player	monitor intra-office relationships and adjust according to needs and resources
<b>Work Ethic and Ambition</b>	prompt, efficient work output, hard working, and career-oriented	positive reinforcement and feedback, recognition, and promotion
<b>Job Performance</b>	meets or exceeds work expectations	recognition of excellence and remediation strategies if problems persist
<b>Input</b>	willingness and freedom to provide and receive positive feedback	regular staff meetings and conferences, open office policy, and input-response strategies

fecting students' lives or efficient production under less than ideal circumstances, it may require considerable creativity to retain productive employees. In table 1, five basic dispositional characteristics of employee job satisfaction are identified. A good working office relationship can be readily identified by two points: the attitude and behavior of the employees and the actions the supervisor initiates to instill a positive work environment.

There is little a supervisor can do to change an employee's employment history or attitude toward work in general, but there are several possibilities for change in the circumstances under which an employee currently works. Three areas to consider are prominent in the literature: interviewing and hiring procedures, supervisory styles and employee revitalization.

**Hiring Procedures**

Organ (1995) provided anecdotal evidence that hiring innately happy people promoted office morale and helped ensure employee retention. Citing organizational consultant Jack C. Davis, Organ argued that an employee's appraisal of the work situation was determined in large measure by her or his disposition toward work in general. In other words, individuals inclined to cheerfulness assessed less-than-ideal circumstances more favorably than did

workers inclined to pessimism. For cheerful individuals, the external rewards of a job were less important than internal rewards. In view of the monetary constraints in some work environments, supervisors should seek employees for whom intrinsic rewards are very important. Organ called this "positive affectivity." While the mechanics of a job can be taught, attitudes are largely established by late adolescence. Organ suggested hiring cheerful, qualified individuals in order to maintain morale and to increase productivity. Cowan (1989) made a number of suggestions for doing the same thing. Arguing that morale is essential to retention, Cowan urged supervisors to exercise caution from the beginning and to avoid several common mistakes:

- Avoid hiring "mirror images" of oneself.
- Do not overestimate the value of good first impressions.
- Avoid the rush to fill a vacancy which may push a supervisor to hire an incompetent.
- Allow applicants to sell themselves. The interviewer should not do all the talking.
- Make sure applicants understand the organization's structure and culture.

Ensuring from the beginning that an applicant is suited for both the work and the circumstances reduces the chances that the person might leave later on.

Supervisors can increase the likelihood that employees are satisfied with their jobs by careful initial evaluation of the employee/employer fit.

**Supervisory Styles**

Almost everyone has had problems with a supervisor; it is common breaktime gossip fodder. Certain supervisory styles have been proven to be detrimental to employee retention. Rahim and Buntzman (1989) found a complex relationship among three broad areas of employee/employer relations: bases of supervisory power, styles of handling conflict, and outcomes of conflicts. Generally speaking, these investigators found that supervisors who relied on a coercive power base were less likely to observe employee compliance and more likely to find dissatisfaction among staff members. Supervisors who lead by example (referent), by virtue of their recognizable expertise (expert), and by their recognized authority (legitimate) were more likely to handle conflicts constructively and to engender employee satisfaction.

Employees responded more positively to the personal power of an individual supervisor than to the supervisory position. Supervisors involved in conflicts who showed concern for others, a willingness to exchange information, and a desire to reach amicable compromises were perceived as being effective and as being sources of employee satisfaction.

Along with sensible hiring procedures, a supervisor who uses personal power to promote compromise during conflict can often maintain a high employee retention rate. Employees appreciate a boss who recognizes their worth to the company and who respects their basic sense of dignity. French (1998) noted that effective leadership is the "process of influencing individual and group behavior toward the attainment of organizational goals and vision—requires a mix of traits and behaviors appropriate to the conditions or forces present in the situation" (p. 122).

### Employee Interest Revitalization

Given a positive attitude and a work environment which originally met the employee's needs, a worker may grow stale and start thinking about "changing the scenery." Such a worker may have arrived at the workplace concerned primarily with basic needs such as: reasonable pay, safe working conditions and job security. To keep this individual motivated, supervisors must attend to the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs—achieving recognition and self-actualization. Pulich (1989) has suggested several ways of accomplishing this. Employers should:

- Encourage employees to develop new ideas, skills and attitudes by attending conferences, reading journal articles, and presenting new findings in mini-seminars for other employees.
- Encourage employees to participate in outside activities, such as committee service, professional associations, inter-departmental activities.
- Encourage and provide for employee cross-training. This is helpful to both parties because it allows the employee to acquire new skills and the employer to acquire a better-trained employee.
- Encourage participative management by delegating authority and increasing employee decision-making powers.

Pulich (1989) warned that these steps may not prevent a valued employee from leaving, but the chances that the person might move on can be reduced greatly by helping the individual to grow in the current job.

### Conclusion

Job satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept. It involves a number of variables ranging from the dispositional to the situational. Employee retention requires the supervisor to take in to account these variables within the context of the basic hierarchy of needs which every person experiences. What employees bring to the job and what they find when they arrive all contribute to their general sense of well-being. Supervisors can help to increase an employee's sense of satisfaction by ensuring from the beginning that the applicant "fits" both the job and the prevailing corporate culture.

To assure on-going employee satisfaction, supervisors must conduct on-going assessments of employees' needs to develop as human beings. Opportunities for growth must be available within the work environment for employees to remain motivated. Supervisory styles and techniques of conflict management also help to determine employee attitudes and influence retention decisions. When it becomes apparent that a valued employee is dissatisfied and ready to move on, a wise supervisor may suggest appropriate revitalization programs to help the worker rediscover his or her original enthusiasm for the job. Job satisfaction is a crucial measure of a stable, well-trained workforce.

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