

RUNNING HEAD: The effect of workplace relationships on employee job satisfaction for
25 to 35 year olds.

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Abstract

Work and job satisfaction has been shown to impact upon an individual's mental and physical health and overall satisfaction with life. Previous research into employee job satisfaction has explored workers' relationships to their work tasks and their organisation. Less research has been conducted into the impact an individual's workplace relationships has on their level of job satisfaction, with even less research in this area focusing on younger workers. The aim of the present study was to determine the role an employee's co-worker and direct supervisor relationships had in predicting their level of job satisfaction. Sixty-nine individuals participated in the study, 35 males (Age: $M=31.8$, $SD=6.0$) and 34 females (Age: $M=29.5$, $SD=5.0$). Fifty-three participants indicated that they were employed full time; twelve indicated that they were employed part time; and the remaining participants indicated that they were employed casual or 'other'. Work and job satisfaction was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job in General (JIG) scales. Results indicate that 52.1% of an employee's job satisfaction can be predicted by the quality of their workplace relationships, with an individual's relationship with their co-workers the strongest predictor. Results indicate that the quality of an employee's co-worker and immediate supervisor relationships does not significantly predict their level of well-being. Implications of the study's finding with respect to workforce planning are discussed and suggestions for further research are made.

Work is one of the most fundamental of life's tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991). Research focusing on the biopsychosocial impacts of work satisfaction and dissatisfaction on the modern worker (for a summary see Sweeney & Witmer, 1991) suggests that one's level of satisfaction with one's work impacts upon one's mental and physical health and overall satisfaction with life (Balzer, Kihm, Smith, Irwin, Bachiochi, Robie, Sinar & Parra, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Earnshaw, Amundson & Borgen, 1990; Kinnunen & Natti, 1994).

Much of the research exploring job satisfaction suggests that satisfaction with one's job or work is related to the work tasks being undertaken (Balzer et al., 1997). Research completed by Balzer and his colleagues suggests that satisfaction with one's work tasks is the greatest predictor of overall job satisfaction. Further, it remains the greatest predictor of job satisfaction, independent of the specific work tasks being completed by the worker or the age or gender of the worker. However changes in the working conditions of modern employees, including increasing work hours, varying working arrangements and intensifying job demands (Allen, Herts, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Guest, 2002), matched with the segmenting and compartmentalising of many workplace tasks (Hochschild, 1997); as well as the increasingly common current workplace rhetoric of, "*do more, for less ... and faster*" have made it increasingly challenging, particularly for Australia's younger workers, to find job satisfaction in the specific work tasks they undertake.

Research examining the factors that impact upon an individual achieving and maintaining job satisfaction is widespread, and varied (e.g., Gardner, 2003; Guest, 2002; Oats & Vella-

Brodrick, 2003). However, within the 25 to 35 year old demographic; “Generation X” as this cohort has been labelled in popular literature; published research is less readily available. Research does suggest that workplace motivation for Australia’s younger workers is just as likely to be linked to intra-office social connectedness, as it is work task performance (Hays, 1999; Oats & Vella-Broderick, 2003). Longer working hours for Generation X have resulted in an increased need for social support whilst at work. Social activity is pivotal to an individual’s mental, physical and spiritual health, with research indicating that individuals who regularly engage in social activity do experience greater positive well-being (Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000).

The present research explored alternative avenues towards job satisfaction, exclusive of work task satisfaction. We were interested in exploring the effect of workplace relationships on employee job satisfaction, for Australia’s younger workers. The present research was interested in determining if more harmonious workplace relationships with one’s direct supervisor and one’s co-workers would have a positive effect on the individual’s overall job satisfaction and holistic well-being.

It was specifically hypothesised that a respondent’s overall job satisfaction would significantly positively correlate with co-worker satisfaction and direct supervisor satisfaction; and also that co-worker satisfaction and supervisor satisfaction would significantly predict respondents’ perceived level of holistic well-being.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 69 individuals: 35 males (Age: $M=31.8$ years, $SD=6.0$) and 34 females (Age: $M=29.5$ years, $SD=5.0$). Fifty-three participants indicated that they were employed full time, 12 indicated that they were employed part time, and the remaining participants indicated that they were employed casual or ‘other’. Twenty-two indicated that they presently held positions of management of others, 23 indicated that they did not presently hold a position of management of others, and 24 did not indicate either. The average hours worked per week (not including commuting time) by those participating in the present study was 43.9 hours per week, with a range of 11 hours to 65 hours worked per week. The average unpaid hours worked per week was 7.5 hours, with a range of zero unpaid hours work per week to 30 unpaid hours worked per week. Respondents were drawn from a wide range of employment contexts within the Melbourne area and all participants took part in the present study on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

Measures

In addition to demographic questions, such as; sex, age, occupation, annual salary, level of education, relationship status and relationship length, the following scales were included:

Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job In General (JIG) Scale. Work and job satisfaction was measured using the JDI and JIG scales (Balzer et al., 1997). The JDI measures the respondents’ present level of work satisfaction in line with five facets of the responding individuals’ work, including satisfaction with other co-workers and direct supervisor. A sixth facet of the respondents work, satisfaction with the job (in general), measured using the JIG scale, is used as a stand-alone measure of overall job satisfaction. The scales are reliable with Cronbach alphas of 0.91 (Satisfaction with Co-workers), 0.91 (Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor), and 0.92 (Satisfaction with Job in General) (Balzer et al., 1997). The authors also claim good scale validity.

Mental, Physical and Spiritual Well-being Scale (MPS Scale). Participant well-being was measured using the MPS Scale (Vella-Brodrick, 1995) containing three subscales, mental well-being, physical well-being and spiritual well-being of 10 items each, measuring positive aspects of the three facets of health. The author claims good scale validity and good reliability for the individual subscales, with reliability coefficients (α) as follows; Mental well-being ($\alpha = .75$); Physical well-being ($\alpha = .81$); Spiritual well-being ($\alpha = .85$).

Procedure

Participants were recruited via word of mouth. Criteria for participation in the present study included: no children or other dependents reliant upon the participant (this was a requirement for a larger study of which this study was a part), 25 - 35 years of age and currently engaged in some form of paid employment. Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire. Respondents were asked to voluntarily complete the questionnaire and return using the reply paid envelope provided. The response rate was 29%.

Results

Data tended to be moderately negatively skewed but it was considered insufficient to warrant statistical transformation towards normality. No sex differences were found for any of the measures used. Therefore all data was pooled for analysis.

The effect of co-worker satisfaction and direct supervisor satisfaction on overall job satisfaction. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated between *global job satisfaction* (JIG) and the other specific measures of job satisfaction and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients for the JIG Scale, Co-worker and Direct Supervisor Satisfaction Sub-Scales of the JDI Scale and Total Well-being (N=69)

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Satisfaction with Job In General (JIG)	39.49	15.34			
2. Satisfaction with Co-workers	36.16	12.39	.682***		
3. Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor	39.16	12.86	.529***	.471***	
4. Total MPS well-being	93.49	15.66	.461***	.253*	.065

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed significance)

As shown in Table 1 the *global job satisfaction* measure is positively and significantly correlated with the Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor sub-scale scores and with Total MPS Well-being.

A multiple regression was calculated to determine the role Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor had in predicting the variance in *global job satisfaction*. Satisfaction with Co-Workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor were entered simultaneously. The hierarchical regression model accounted for 52.1% of the variance in JIG scores ($F(2, 66) = 35.83, p < 0.001$) with Satisfaction with Co-workers being the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$).

The effect of co-worker satisfaction and direct supervisor satisfaction on mental, physical and spiritual well-being. The three sub-scales of the Mental, Physical and Spiritual Well-being Scale (MPS Scale; Vella-Brodrick, 1995) were combined and used as the measure of *holistic well-being*. The unitary measure of *holistic well-being* showed good reliability and

internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$). Pearson's correlation coefficients between the MPS Scale and Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor; are shown in Table 1. Satisfaction with Co-worker scores were significant and moderately positively correlated with *holistic well-being*, but Satisfaction with one's Direct Supervisor was not.

A multiple regression was undertaken to determine the role that co-worker satisfaction and direct supervisor satisfaction had in predicting the variance in *holistic well-being*. Satisfaction with Co-workers and Satisfaction with Direct Supervisor were entered simultaneously. The hierarchical regression model was not found to be significant and accounted for only 6.7% of the variance in MPS scores ($F(2, 66) = 2.39, p > 0.05$).

Discussion

Key Findings

The focus of the present study was to explore what role one's relationships at work had in the facilitation of greater job satisfaction. Further, the focus of the present study was to explore the effect these workplace relationships have on the holistic well-being of Australia's younger workers.

The results suggest that the quality of co-worker and direct supervisor relationships significantly positively impact on overall job satisfaction. Indeed, more than half of the variability in overall job satisfaction in the present study was accounted for by the quality of one's co-worker and direct supervisor relationships. This finding supports previous research by Morrison (2004) looking at the role of non-romantic relationships in the facilitation of job satisfaction of hospital nurses in New Zealand. Morrison found that greater employee cohesiveness and the prevalence of workplace friendships resulted in reduced turnover intentions. Job dissatisfaction has been found to have a significant direct and mediating effect on employee turnover (Fields, Dingman, Roman & Blum, 2005; Morrison, 2004). The current finding indicates the need for those involved in workforce planning to consider the promotion and support of the social aspects of workplace relationships, as a way of further improving employees' experiences of their work.

Previous research regarding the role of job satisfaction on employee well-being has found that job satisfaction does affect individual mental and physical well-being (Balzer et al., 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Earnshaw et al., 1990; Kinnunen & Natti, 1994). The present study failed to support the second hypothesis; that satisfaction with one's co-worker and direct supervisor relationships would significantly predict one's level of holistic well-being.

Limitations, implications and further research

The present study explored the role workplace relationships had in facilitating global job satisfaction for employees aged between 25 and 35 years, using co-worker and direct supervisor relationships for that exploration. The results of the study indicate the importance of these two relationships in the augmentation of overall job satisfaction. It should be noted that prior research (e.g., Balzer et al., 1997) implies that satisfaction with work tasks is the greatest single predictor. The high correlation between this and both overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with co-workers needs further exploration. It is plausible that those one works with might well affect one's satisfaction, both with the specific task at hand and with the job overall.

The sample also reported a slight negative skewing of the study's data, which may suggest either social desirability effects, or range restriction due to only relatively satisfied people responding. Further research should employ an increased sample size, and endeavour to recruit less satisfied respondents.

Finally, although the present study drew its sample from a wide range of professions and industries all of the respondents in the study were from the Melbourne metropolitan area. Further research could include respondents from rural areas and also respondents from who are geographically dispersed across the entirety of both regional and metropolitan Australia.

Conclusion

Generation X is a significant worker demographic in Australian society. The pursuit of holistic health and work-life balance is of increasing importance to these younger workers (Hays, 1999). The results indicate that one's relationships with co-workers and direct supervisor are a significant factor determining positive job satisfaction for Generation X, although these relationships do not significantly predict holistic well-being.

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