

Job Satisfaction Theories: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Theories are the scientific tools, which are used to identify factors of job satisfaction and their mutual relationships during the motivation and job-satisfaction process. Several theories have been proposed to view this attitude of job satisfaction in the organizational work environment. Content theories explain what motivates people at work that is, identifying the needs, drives and incentives/goals and their prioritization by the individual to get satisfaction and thus perform effectively. Unlike content theories, process theories are more concerned with, how the motivation takes place? Process theories try to explain how the needs and goals are fulfilled and accepted cognitively. However, an analysis of all the leading theories suggests that these are neither contradictory nor replace one another rather all are complementary and supplementary in explaining different dimensions of the human motivation leading to job satisfaction. This paper is an attempt to synthesize the front-line theories into a conceptual model wherein the respective contribution of each model is identified.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, Theory, Job satisfaction model.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most-used definition of job satisfaction is by Locke [1] as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" [2]. Locke, who is the leading academician among many researchers, states that there are important points in above definition of job satisfaction: an emotional state implied that there is an effective component to the job satisfaction; an appraisal process implied that there is a cognitive or evaluative component to the job satisfactions. In other words, Locke's definition consists of three elements: effective, cognitive and job-focused. The term job satisfactions refer to the attitude and feelings people have about their work. Positive and favorable attitudes towards the job indicate job satisfaction. Negative and unfavorable attitudes towards the job indicate job dissatisfaction [3]. To explain and understand the phenomena of "job-satisfaction" several theories have been suggested (Maslow, Vroom, Adams etc.) and this effort continues forever because as things change, the old theory needs to be either modified, or replaced with a new model.

There is no universally accepted definition of employee satisfaction, but there are many definitions of job satisfaction in the literature. The reason is that job satisfaction means different things to different people, since people are affected by various different factors including personal characteristics, needs, values, feelings and expectancies. Also, it varies from organization to organization, since job satisfaction influencing factors such as working environment, job characteristic, opportunities for employees and working environment differ according to organization. [4]

There are various definitions of job satisfaction as mentioned; first of all, it can be defined as concerning one's feeling or state of mind related with the work and "an employee's positive attitude towards the company, co-workers and, finally, the job". [5]

Employee satisfaction has multidimensional construction with supervision at work, work itself, pay and conditions, appraisal, promotion practices and co-workers. [6]

2. JOB SATISFACTION THEORIES

Job satisfaction is defined in the literature with several theorists according to their own workable conditions. Theory is a structure of fundamental concepts and principles around which knowledge in a field is organized. Principles are regarded as fundamental truths which can be used to describe and predict the results of certain variables in a given situation [7]. This part of the chapter purposes to provide a

highlight of the main theories and to give a broad perspective of the main developments in job satisfaction over the last decades. Theory is a conceptual device for organizing knowledge and providing a framework for action. It is a roadmap to guide towards goals [8]. Theory is a systematic grouping of interdependent concepts and principles that gives a framework to or ties together a significant area of knowledge [9]. Theories offer explanations of how and why people think, feel, and act as they do. Theories identify important variables and link them to form tentative propositions that can be tested through research. [10]

Though most of the discussions about the theories of job-satisfaction start with Maslow's theory of "Hierarchy of Needs" [11] however, the story actually begins from early decades of the 20th century with the theory of "Scientific Management" commonly referred to as "Taylorism" by Frederick W. Taylor (1911) [12] wherein humans are treated as "Economic-men" therefore "Money" is considered the biggest motivator for job-satisfaction. This view was then split apart by Elton Mayo & Associates during "Hawthorne Studies" about the nature of human being. They found that multiple factors contribute to the motivation and satisfaction of workers including, personal morale, positive interrelationships, management founded on the understanding of individual and group behavior through interpersonal skills like "motivating, counseling, leading and communicating." [9]

3. CLASSIFICATION OF THE THEORIES

Across the literature, theories about the job-satisfaction have consistently been grouped either on the "nature of theories" or chronological appearance these theories. For example, Dr S. Shajahan & Linu Shajahan [13] give nature-based grouping as Content-theories (Maslow's Needs Hierarchy, Herzberg's Two Factor theory, Theory X and Theory Y, Alderfer's ERG theory, and McClelland's theory of Needs) and Process-theories (Behavior Modification, Cognitive Evaluation Theory, Goal Setting theory, Reinforcement theory, Expectancy theory, and Equity theory).

Fred Luthans [14] have been using a mix of nature-based and historically founded classifications since his first writings on the topic (See for example, Luthans, 1995) organized the theories into Content (Needs Hierarchy, Two-Factors, and ERG theories); Process (Expectancy theory and Porter & Lawler model); and Contemporary (Equity, Control and Agency theories). However, Stephen P. Robbins [15] applies single base of chronology and categorizes the job satisfaction theories into Early-theories (Hierarchy of needs, Theory X & Y, Two-Factor theory) and Contemporary theories (McClelland's theory of needs, Goal Setting theory, Reinforcement theory, Job Design Theory (job-characteristics model), Equity theory and Expectancy theory). At present the content and process theories have become established explanations for work motivation.

3.1 Content Theories

The content theories base on what motivates people at work that is, identifying the needs, drives and incentives/goals and their prioritization by the individual to get satisfaction and thus perform effectively. [14]. Researchers have prepared different lists of biological, psychological, social and higher order needs or requirements of human beings. Almost all the researchers have categorized these needs into primary, secondary and high-level requirements of employees, which need to be fulfilled whenever worker is required to be motivated and satisfied. There are several content theories, which guide the managers in understanding "what motivates the workforce?"

3.1.1 Maslow's Theory of Motivation/Satisfaction (1943)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is "the most widely mentioned theory of motivation and satisfaction." [9]. Capitalizing mainly on humanistic psychology and the clinical experiences, Abraham Maslow postulated that an individual's motivational needs could be arranged in a hierarchy. Once a given level of needs is satisfied, it no longer helps to motivate. Thus, next higher level of need has to be activated in order to motivate and thereby satisfy the individual [14]. Maslow identified five levels in his need hierarchy:

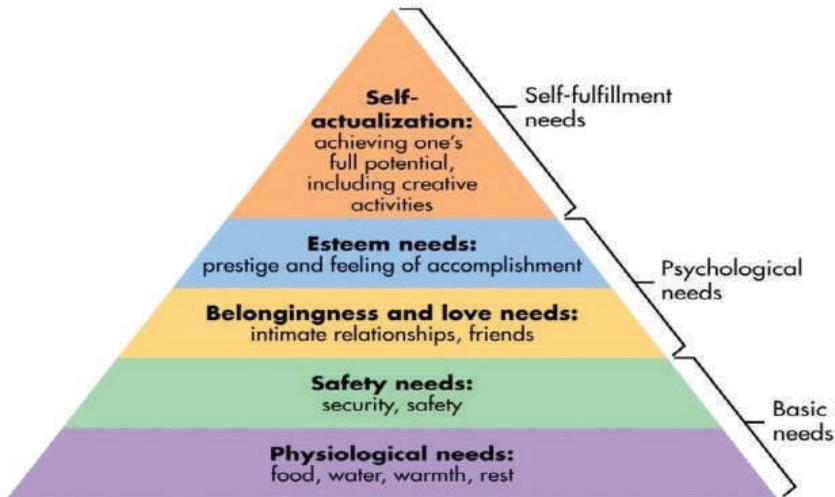


Figure 1: Maslow's Needs of Hierarchy

Furthermore, individual need satisfaction is influenced both by the importance attached to various needs and the degree to which each individual perceives that different aspects of his or her life should, and actually do, fulfill these needs [16]. Some argue that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is the first motivation theory actually laid the foundation for "job satisfaction theory". This theory served as a good basis from which early researchers could develop job satisfaction theories. [17]

3.1.2 Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959)

Herzberg developed a specific work motivation theory. He did a motivational study on about 200 accountants and engineers employed by firms in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He used the critical incident method of data collection with two questions: a. when did you feel particularly good about your job – what turned you on? And b. when did you feel exceptionally bad about your job – what turned you off? [14]

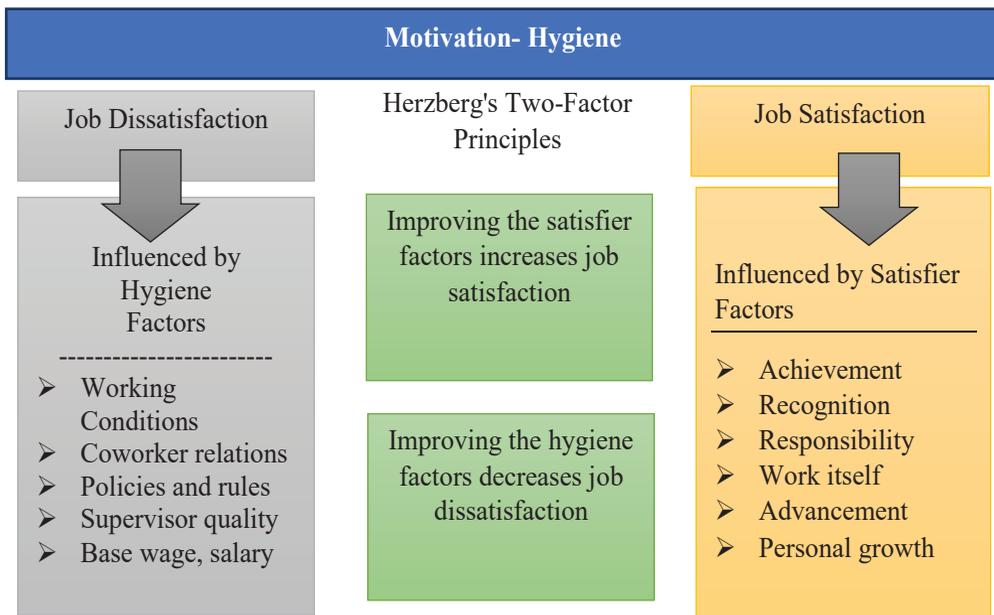


Figure 2: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, 1959

Tabulating these reported good and bad feelings, Herzberg concluded that job satisfiers (motivators) are related to job content and that job dissatisfiers (Hygiene factors) are allied to job context. Motivators

relate to the job contents like Achievement, Recognition, Work itself, Responsibility and Advancement). They hygiene factors do not "motivate/satisfy" rather, prevent dissatisfaction. These factors relate to the context of the job such as, Company policy, Administration, Supervision, Salary, Interpersonal relations, Supervisor, and Working conditions. [18]

The theory has been admired as the most useful model to study job satisfaction, for example, the theory has been found supported in educational settings [16] and it has been used as a theoretical framework for scientifically assessing police officers "job satisfaction however, a review of literature revealed criticisms of the motivator-hygiene theory" [16]. For example, researchers have not been able to empirically prove the model. Likewise, the theory ignores the individual differences and assumes that all employees react in a similar manner to the changes in motivators and hygiene factors. The model is also criticized for suggesting no specific method to measure the factors of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. [17]

3.1.3 Theory X & Y (Douglas McGregor) (1960)

After viewing the way in which managers dealt with employees, McGregor [19] concluded that a manager's view of the nature of human being is based on a certain grouping of assumptions and that he or she tends to mold his or her behavior toward subordinates according to these assumptions. [15]

Theory X Assumptions

- Average human beings have an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if they can.
- Because of disliking work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment to get them work for organization.
- Average human beings prefer to be directed, wish to avoid responsibility, have relatively little ambition, and want security

Theory Y Assumptions

- Physical and mental efforts in work are as natural as play and rest.
- External control and threat are not the only means for producing effort toward organizational objectives. People will exercise self-direction and self-control in achieving committed objectives.
- Degree of commitment to objectives is in proportion to the size of the rewards associated with achievement.
- Average human beings learn, under proper conditions, not only to accept responsibility but also to seek it. [9].

3.1.4 Theory of Needs - Achievement Theory (David McClelland, 1961)

McClelland and Associates argued that some people have a compelling drive to succeed. They are striving for personal achievement rather than the rewards of success per se. they have desire to do something better or more efficiently than it has been done before so they prefer challenging work - these are high achievers. [13]. Theory emphasizes on the achievement motives thus, also known as "achievement theory" however model includes three interrelated needs or motives:

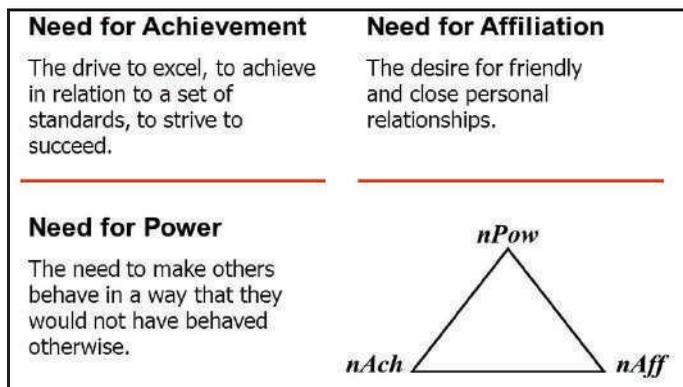


Figure 3: David McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory, 1961

3.1.5 ERG Theory (Clayton P. Alderfer.) (1969)

Clayton Alderfer (1969) has reworked Maslow's need hierarchy to align it more closely with the empirical research. He did a grouping of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs into three groups of needs: Existence, Relatedness, and Growth, thus ERG theory. His classification of needs absorbs the Maslow's division of needs into: Existence (physiological and security needs), Relatedness (social and esteem needs) and Growth (self-actualization). [13]

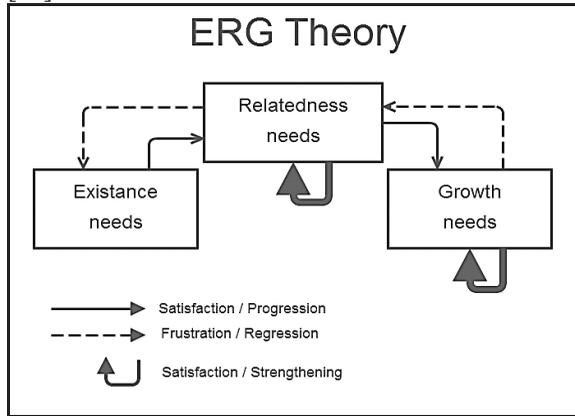


Figure 4: ERG Theory (Clayton P. Alderfer, 1969)

Alderfer is suggesting more of a continuum of needs than hierarchical levels or two factors of prepotency needs. Unlike Maslow and Herzberg, he does not content that a lower-level need must be fulfilled before a higher-level need becomes motivating or that deprivation is the only way to activate a need [14].

3.2 Process Theories

Unlike content theories, process theories are more concerned with, how the motivation takes place? The concept of "expectancy" from "cognitive theory" plays dominant role in the process theories of job-satisfaction. [14]. Thus, process theories try to explain how the needs and goals are fulfilled and accepted cognitively [20]. A number of process-oriented theories have been suggested. Some of these theories have caught the attention of researchers who tested these hypotheses in different environments and found them thought-provoking. The leading theoretical formats in process domain are the following:

3.2.1 Equity Theory (J. Stacy Adams) (1963)

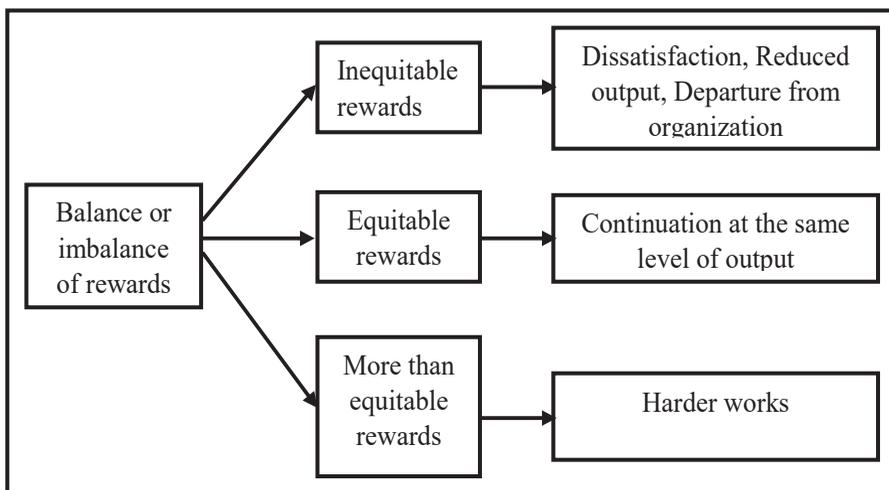


Figure 5: Equity Theory, (J. Stacy Adams, 1963)

Equity theory says that employees weigh what they put into a job situation (input) against what they get from it (outcome) and then compare their input-outcome ratio with the input-outcome ratio of relevant

others. If they perceive their ratio to be equal to that of the relevant others with whom they compare themselves, a state of equity is said to exist. [15]

3.2.2 Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964)

Victor H. Vroom [21] holds that people will be motivated to do things to reach a goal if they believe in the worth of that goal and if they can see (probability) that what they do will help them in achieving those [9]. Vroom's theory is characterized with three major variables: valance, expectancy and instrumentality. Valance is the strength of an individual's preference (or value, incentive, attitude, and expected utility) for a particular output. Expectancy refers to the probability that a particular effort will lead to a particular first-level outcome. While instrumentality is the degree to which a first-level outcome will lead to a desired second-level outcome. For example, a person would be motivated (motivational force or effort) toward superior performance (first-level output) to realize promotion (second-level output). [14]

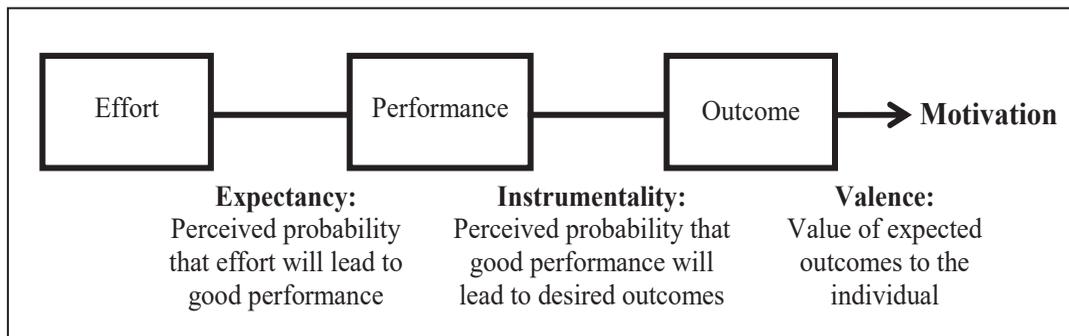


Figure 6: Vroom's Theory, 1964

This theory explains that motivation is a product of three factors: how much one wants a reward (valance), one's estimate of the probability that effort will result in the successful performance (expectancy), and one's estimate that performance will result receiving the reward (instrumentality), which is explained as " $\text{Valance} \times \text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality} = \text{Motivation}$ ". [10]

3.2.3 Porter/Lawler Expectancy Model (1968)

Porter and Lawler point out that "effort (force or strength of motivation) does not lead directly to performance. It is moderated by 'abilities and traits' and by 'role perceptions.' Similarly, "the satisfaction does not depend on performance; rather it is determined by the probability of receiving fair rewards" [9]. The Porter-Lawler motivation model suggests that motivation depends on several interrelated cognitive factors, for example, effort stems from the "perceived effort-reward probability before it is initiated. However, before this effort is converted into performance, the 'abilities and traits' plus 'role-perceptions' cast moderating effect on the real efforts invested for performance. Finally, it is the perceived equitable rewards, which determines job-satisfaction." [14]

3.2.4 Goal-Setting Theory (Edwin Locke, 1968)

In late 1960s, Edwin Locke argued that intentions, expressed as goals, can be a major source of work motivation and satisfaction [13]. Some specific goals lead to increased performance. For example, difficult goals, when accepted, result in higher performance than easy goals and that feedback leads to higher performance than no feedback. Similarly, specific hard goals produce a higher level of output than generalized goals of do your best. Furthermore, people will do better when they get feedback on how well they are progressing toward their goals because feedback helps to identify discrepancies between what they have done and what they want to do. Studies testing goal-setting theory have demonstrated the superiority of specific, challenging goals with feedback, as motivating forces. [15]

Goal theory proposes that difficult goals require focus on the problem, increase sense of goal importance, and encourage persisting and working harder to achieve the goals. Goal theory can be combined with cognitive theories to better understand the phenomena, for example, cognitive tool of self-efficacy is the perception of the difficulty of a goal and ability to achieve the goal. Greater self-efficacy is positively

related to employees' perception that they are successfully contributing to meaningful work and therefore foster enhanced work motivation. [22]

3.2.5 Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham) (1975-76)

Hackman and Oldham's ([6] original formulation of job characteristics theory argued that the outcomes of job redesign were influenced by several moderators. Notable among these moderators are differences in the degree to which various individuals or employees desire personal or psychological development. [20]. Job characteristics are aspects of the individual employee's job and tasks that shape how the individual perceives his or her particular role in the organization. The clarity of tasks leads to greater job satisfaction. We expect that greater role clarity will create employees who are more satisfied with, committed to, and involved in their work. [22]

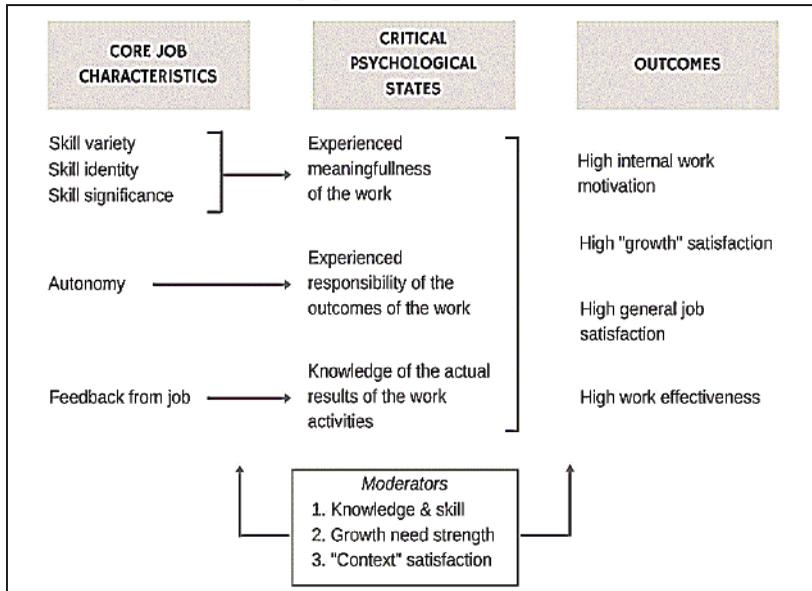


Figure 7: Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1975-76)

More precisely, the model states that there are five core job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) which impact three critical psychological states (experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of the actual results), in turn influencing work outcomes (job satisfaction, absenteeism, work motivation, etc.) [17]

3.2.6 Discrepancy Theory

According to Discrepancy Theory, differences between received outcome levels and desired outcome levels determine the satisfaction. When received outcome level is below the desired outcome level, dissatisfaction occurs. Katzell and Locke have presented two most developed discrepancy theories. Locke proposed that perceived discrepancy is important, and satisfaction is determined by the difference between what people want, what they receive/perceive and what they expect to receive. [23]

3.2.7 Other Relevant Theories

According to Balance Theory, people create many relationships with other people, and these relationships have various impacts on people's attitudes and behaviors according to Rogers & Kincaid. Furthermore, according to Heider balancing in relationships can be important because it affects positively an individual's cognitive or emotional. [24]

Cognitive Evaluation Theory is proposed by Deci, who states individuals aim at deciding about their own behavior so that regarding themselves as the causal of that behavior.

4. FACTORS THAT AFFECT JOB SATISFACTION

Job satisfaction is affected by environmental, individual and psychological factors. Factors that relate to the environment are: communication, employee recognition and so on Krayer & Westbrook [25] & Weiss & Cropanzano [26], while those that relate to the individual are emotions, genetics and personality Cote & Morgan [27]. Those that are psychological in nature include one’s life, family, and community Wright & Cropanzano, [28]. These factors are briefly explained below:

Accordingly, if an individual does not receive enough input on the job or is unsuccessful in processing these inputs, the individual is more likely to become dissatisfied, aggravated, and unhappy with their work which may lead to low level of job satisfaction. Superior-subordinate communication is also an important influence on job satisfaction in organizations. The way an employee perceives a supervisor’s behavior can positively or negatively influence job satisfaction. Communication behavior such as facial expression, eye contact, vocal expressions, body movement and language and so on are crucial to superior-subordinate relationship. These nonverbal communications from the superior helps to increase interpersonal involvement with their subordinates impacting job satisfaction. At times nonverbal communication appears to be more impacting than the verbal content. A manager who uses nonverbal immediacy, friendliness and open communication lines is more likely to receive positive feedback and job satisfaction from a subordinate. However, a manager who is antisocial, unfriendly and unwilling to communicate will receive negative feedback and create low job satisfaction in their subordinates in the organization. [28]

A somewhat different approach regarding the factors of job satisfaction is provided by Rue and Byars, [29] Figure 8.

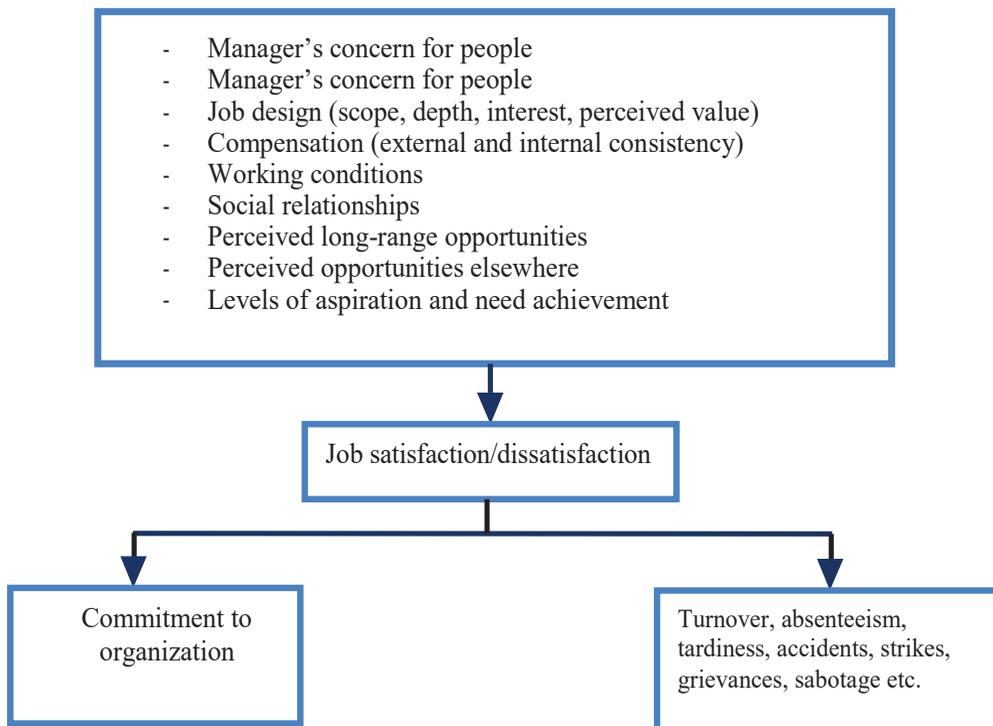


Figure 8: Determinants of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction (Rue and Byaes, 2003)

Studies also indicate that employees derive satisfaction from working with companies that are effective in human resource management best practice – employee recognition programs and to some extent, financial reward programs. Employee recognition should not be confined to praise, gifts and points but should extend to changing the organization culture in order to meet goals, initiatives and connecting employees

to the organization's core values and beliefs. This is strategic and strategic employee recognition is seen as the most important program to improve employee retention, motivation and positively influence the financial situation.

Emotions and mood form part of the individual affective factor in job satisfaction. Weiss & Cropanzano opined that moods tend to be longer lasting but often weaker states of uncertainty origin, while emotions are often more intense, short-lived and have a clear object or cause. Mood relates to overall job satisfaction. Positive or negative emotions also relate to overall job satisfaction Brief & Robertson [30] and Weiss, Nicholas & Daus [31]. Emotion management requires that all of the conscious and unconscious efforts to increase maintain or decrease one or more components of an emotion must be used. Suppression of unpleasant emotions decreases job satisfaction and the amplification of pleasant emotions increases job satisfaction.

Research indicates that genetics also influence job satisfaction due to its role in intrinsic - achievement or challenge as opposed to extrinsic - environmental factors like working conditions. Further, personality is associated with job satisfaction. Research by Brief & Weiss [31] describes the role of negative affectivity and positive positivity. Negative affectivity is related strongly to the personality trait of neuroticism. Individuals who are high in negative affectivity are more prone to experience less job satisfaction. Positive affectivity is related to the personality of extraversion.

Therefore, those who are high in positive affectivity are more prone to be satisfied in their lives and jobs they do. Alienation and locus of control are two personality factors that are most related to job satisfaction. Employees who have an internal locus of control and feel less alienated are more likely to experience job satisfaction, job involvement and job commitment. A meta-analysis of 135 studies for example of job satisfaction found that there is a positive relationship between internal locus of control and job satisfaction. [33]

5. JOB SATISFACTION MODEL AND IMPORTANCE

The importance of job satisfaction specially emerges to surface if had in mind the many negative consequences of job dissatisfaction such a lack of loyalty, increased absenteeism, increase number of accidents etc. Spector lists three important features of job satisfaction. First, organizations should be guided by human values. Such organizations will be oriented towards treating workers fairly and with respect [34].

In such cases the assessment of job satisfaction may serve as a good indicator of employee effectiveness. High levels of job satisfaction may be sign of a good emotional and mental state of employees. Second, the behavior of workers depending on their level of job satisfaction will affect the functioning and activities of the organization's business. From this it can be concluded that job satisfaction will result in positive behavior and vice versa, dissatisfaction from the work will result in negative behavior of employees. Third, job satisfaction may serve as indicators of organizational activities. Through job satisfaction evaluation different levels of satisfaction in different organizational units can be defined, but in turn can serve as a good indication regarding in which organizational unit changes that would boost performance should be made.

Christen, Iyer and Soberman [35] provide a model of job satisfaction presented in Figure 9 in which the following elements are included:

- Job related factors,
- Role perceptions,
- Job performance and
- Firm performance.

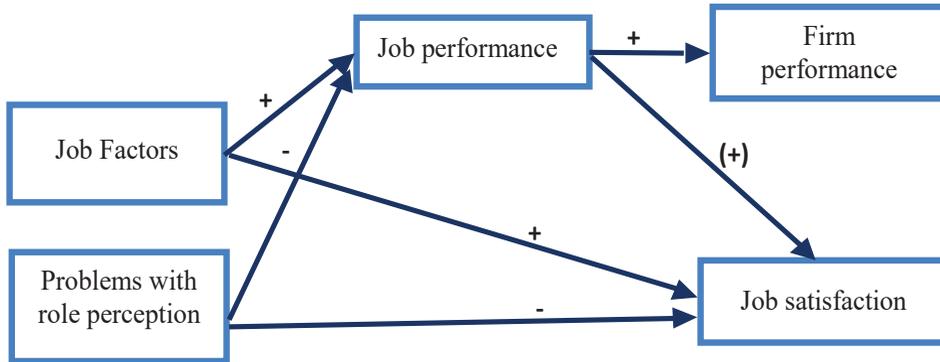


Figure 9: Christen, Lyer and Suberman Model of Job Satisfaction (Christen Et. 2006)

Lawler and Porter [36] give their model of job satisfaction which unlike the previous model places a special importance on the impact of rewards on job satisfaction, Figure 10-

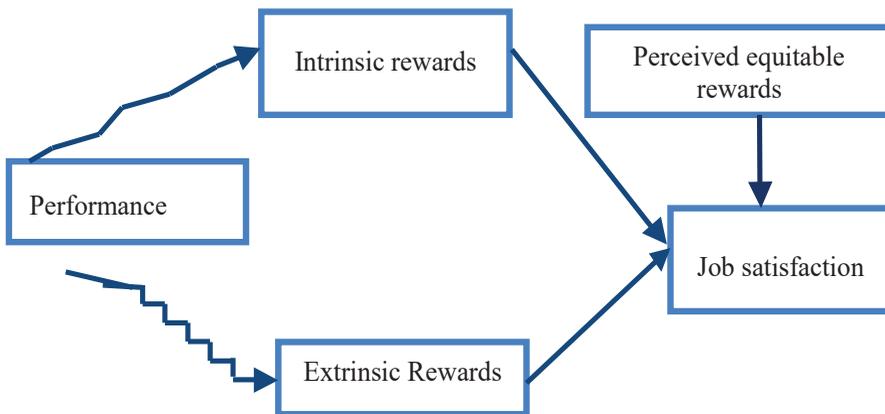


Figure 10: Lawler's and Porter's Model of Job Satisfaction (Lawler and Porter, 1967)

According to this model the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are not directly connected with job satisfaction, because of the employee's perceptions regarding the deserved level of pay.

Locke and Latham provide a somewhat different model of job satisfaction. They proceed from the assumption that the objectives set at the highest level and high expectations for success in work provides achievement and success in performing tasks. [37]. Success is analyzed as a factor that creates job satisfaction. This model is presented in figure 11-

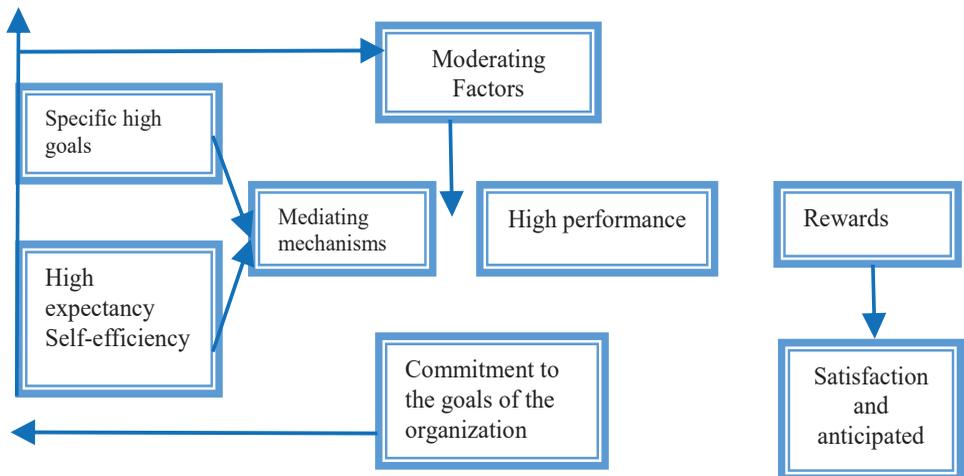


Figure 11- Locke and Latham Model of Job Satisfaction (Locke and Latham, 1990)

6. LITERATURE FINDINGS

An important literature finding for organizations to note is that job satisfaction has a relationship with employee satisfaction which is tenuous. This serves as a piece of information to managers, businessmen and researchers. It is further observed in the literature that meta-analysis found that the relationship between satisfaction and employee performance can be moderated by job complexity, such that for high complexity jobs the correlation between satisfaction and performance is higher than for jobs of low to moderate complexity. In this study, it has been investigated that, human behavior is made of belief (cognition) and action (physical) therefore most of the theories either emphasize cognitive or prioritize action/behavior levels to be important in the employee's attitudes of motivation/satisfaction. In this paper, it is reported that, still another group of theories cover individual and group characteristics, attributes of the work environment, organizational and managerial context and broader social contexts of the organization as the determinants of job satisfaction. The review also found that job satisfaction predicts absenteeism, suggesting that increasing job satisfaction and organizational commitment are potentially good strategies for reducing absenteeism and employee turnover. It should also be noted that the relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance is not straightforward as many factors are responsible and the notion that 'a happy worker is a productive worker' should not be regarded as a foundation of organizational decision-making.

7. CONCLUSION

Job satisfaction represents one of the most complex areas facing today's managers when it comes to managing their employees. Although thousands of papers and research have been conducted on job satisfaction all over the world, in the Republic of Bangladesh this is one of the least studied research fields. Many studies have demonstrated an unusually large impact on the job satisfaction on the motivation of workers, while the level of motivation has an impact on productivity, and hence also on performance of business organizations. There is a considerable impact of the employees' perceptions for the nature of his work and the level of overall job satisfaction.

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