Relationships between the 'Hard' Variables of Human Resource Management and Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

This paper presents the results obtained from a literature review of scientific articles related to job satisfaction, published between the years 2000 and 2010. The main findings of various research studies indicate that there is a relationship between the 'hard' aspects of work (schedules, working hours, type of contract, pay, etc) and job satisfaction. The revised bibliography notes that the relationship between these aspects and job satisfaction varies depending on the configuration of the job, although there are general criteria that typically linked to job satisfaction.

Keywords: job satisfaction, management human resources, work

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction has become a key performance indicator for many leading companies in Europe, particularly within the framework of Total Quality Management programs. Besides, "the companies practicing benchmarking know that it is as important to acknowledge and respond to their employees' opinions as to protect and promote their own shareholders´ interests" (Martínez Caraballo, 2007: 83, own translation). For this reason, increasing workers´ job satisfaction should be included in the mission of organizations (Friday & Friday, 2003; Crossman & Abou-Zakı, 2003).

Moreover, a literature review conducted by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bacharach (2000) indicates that job satisfaction has been frequently studied as an antecedent of organizational citizenship behavior, defined as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988: 4); Rowden (2002) argues that it is an essential independent variable that may guide employees´ behavior and affect the functioning of the organization. The popularity of this concept across research fields is also due to job satisfaction being related to a great number of important variables in the life of organizational members. Such variables include productivity, performance, absenteeism and turnover (Luthans, 2002; Robbins, 1998; Spector 1997). Job satisfaction is also closely-related to illnesses, such as burnout (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan & Schwartz, 2002) and stress (Won-Jae, Hee-Jong & Johnson, 2009; Zangaro & Soeken, 2007; Rayle, 2006), which occur when the employee is dissatisfied.

Although no agreement exists about the definition of job satisfaction, different authors (e.g., McCormick & Ilgen, 1980; Peiró, 1984; Robbins, 1998) define it as a generalized attitude towards work or as the positive attitudes towards the tangible aspects of the job, and/or the intangible rewards that meet the worker´s expectations (Gallagher Tuleya, 2007: 158). Besides, Sempane, Rieger and Roodt (2002) hold that this construct results from the individual´s perceptions and evaluations about his or her job, which are influenced by the individual's particular circumstances. Therefore, it is important to point out the individual factors affecting job satisfaction.

In addition, business and organizational studies distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' variables; the former refer to technical, juridical and economic variables, and place emphasis on certain supposedly rational and quantitative elements, whereas the latter involve psychosocial, political and cultural variables, and attach importance to qualitative elements and the rediscovery of the human factor (Grandío Botella, n.d).

Over the last decades, the literature related to psychology has tended to emphasize the 'soft' aspects, underscoring the analysis of constructs such as commitment, identification, organizational culture or climate, to name a few, given the growing international recognition of these topics. Some works (Perez Vilar, 2011; Perez Vilar & Azzollini, 2011) have even pointed out the importance attributed to organizational culture and climate on job satisfaction, in research studies conducted between 2000 and 2010.

However, it is necessary to stress that other relevant aspects of human resource management play a role in achieving organizational success and wellbeing among organizational members. Therefore, this study presents some of the variables associated with the 'hard' aspects of labor and how they influence job satisfaction.

2. *Methodology*

A review of the documentary corpus made it possible to select, describe and analyze research studies on job satisfaction published between 2000 and 2010. To this end, an exploratory search was conducted using Scholar Google (http://scholar.google. com.ar) and SciELO database, the search criterion being the presence of 'job satisfaction' and 'work satisfaction', as well as the Spanish term 'satisfacción laboral', in the titles of works published within the timeframe mentioned above. It should be noted that although the *Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms of the American Psychological Association* (2007) recommends using the term 'job satisfaction', some studies use the recommended term and 'work satisfaction' indistinctly. The same criterion was used in searches conducted with WilsonWeb, EbscoHost and OvidSP databases.

The articles included in this review were selected by reading each abstract, and the unit of analysis consisted of each of the articles that met the following criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

- The limits set to the search output were only year of publication (2000-2010) and each pair of search words (3 pairs, 6 words). Each pair of words was written and the results were sifted by year of publication. Then either full articles were downloaded in the published format, or the references (author, title, journal, year of publication) and the abstracts of each study were saved in text format.
- The selected articles were those whose titles included the pairs of words mentioned, and whose results analyzed or obtained relationships between job satisfaction and other constructs.
- The selected studies were published in refereed journals, whether online or printed, and originally written in (or translated into) English and/or Spanish.
- In cases where the constructs or measurement instruments made reference to literature published before our timeframe, the referenced works were obtained to enlarge the information associated with the articles analyzed.

Exclusion criteria:

- Works were excluded when their full texts were not available, for economic reasons, or when the database did not permit access to the full article.
- Works not specifically related to the subject matter of organizational psychology were also excluded, whereas the preferred works were those published by journals with a higher impact factor, and/or those dated more recently and containing greater theoretical description and references of the concepts and instruments used.

Elimination criteria:

- Works evaluating job satisfaction only in a specific population were eliminated. One such case was *Job Satisfaction amongst Dutch Nurse Anaesthetists: The Influence of Emotions on Events* (Meeusen, van Dam, van Zundert & Knape 2010), where only job satisfaction was measured, and the conclusions were valid only for the population assessed.

- Other works that were eliminated were those found more than once through different search words, and those replicating studies, or obtaining similar results using the same methodology and/or instrument in the same population types as studies already selected.
- Once the various criteria had been applied, the corpus sample consisted of 388 articles.

3. *Hard variables of human resource management and their relationships with job satisfaction*

Two of the main factors that have been studied in organizations and have been related to job satisfaction are work schedule and working hours. For example, working hours have often been used as a control variable, and they are usually negatively related to job satisfaction (Booth & van Ours, 2008; Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2003). According to Booth and van Ours (2008), satisfaction with working hours bears little relation to job satisfaction in men, whereas women are more satisfied with their jobs if they work fewer than 30 hours a week; some authors (Dunaway & Running, 2009; Brough, O'Driscoll & Kalliath, 2005) found that working many hours (over 38 hours a week) was negatively related to job satisfaction. Boyles and Shibata (2009) stated that in ordinary jobs where women were able to use their skills, job satisfaction could improve remarkably if their working hours were reduced, and overtime hours were eliminated. Another study (Andresen, Domsch & Cascorbi, 2007) of maritime pilots, who suffer chronometric and chronobiological changes in their working patterns by working up to 24 hours a day, found that working unusual hours - despite the negative social and psychological consequences - was neither the only nor the strongest variable determining their job satisfaction. However, its influence varied when associated with environmental and family variables. Sveinsdóttir (2006) obtained similar results about job satisfaction by analyzing changes in the circadian cycle of Icelandic nurses working shift assignments.

Regarding the relationship between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction, some authors (e.g., McNall, Masuda & Nicklin, 2010) found that reducing the weekly working hours and having a flexible time arrangement were positively related to job satisfaction.

Another 'hard' variable that has been investigated is the type of contract. According to Booth and van Ours (2008), despite the poor working conditions in England, women (with and without children) with part-time jobs were more satisfied with their jobs than those working full-time, although small variations would depend on diverse situations such as education, marital status and the number of children (Jimenez Figueroa, Gonzalez Escobar & Reyes Pavez, 2009). However, Yueng-Hsiang, Shaw and Chen, (2004) found no significant differences between part-time and full-time employees. In a study conducted in Colombia, Manrique-Abril and Herrera-Amaya (2008) found significant differences in several dimensions of job satisfaction in employees linked to the firm through an intermediary organization, who were less satisfied than those directly employed. This study also found significant differences between workers hired for an indefinite time - who showed higher levels of satisfaction - and those hired for a definite time; whereas Persson (2009) found that individuals who started their own businesses and held managing positions had very high levels of job satisfaction. Another study worth mentioning is the one conducted in post-tsunami Sri Lanka by Abu-Sharkh and Standing (2008), who reported that job and labor market security was not associated with job satisfaction. These authors found that a permanent contract or working for the State (synonymous with job security) played an almost insignificant role in increasing job satisfaction, as compared with the more significant role played by relative and absolute incomes.

As regards income, it is distributive justice linked to reward and promotion that has been shown to be associated with satisfaction (Kumar, Bakhshi & Rani, 2009; Findler, Wind & Mor Barak, 2007; Andresen et al., 2007). Other authors (e.g., Ibrahim & Boerhaneoddin, 2010; Artz, 2008; Green & Heywood, 2008; Heywood & Wei, 2006) have investigated the relationship between individual performance pay and job satisfaction, and found that they were positively related (more in men than in women), although according to Heywood and Wei (2006), not all sources of performance pay relate to job satisfaction in the same way. For instance, Pagán and Malo (2009) argue that the value of hourly pay is related to job satisfaction. However, Shikdar and Das (2003) compared different labor situations and found that monetary incentive did not influence or was negatively related to job satisfaction. These authors attributed these findings to the pressure to seek the monetary incentive imposed on the workers, or the fact that the incentive was inadequate or insufficient. On the other hand, Artz (2008) found that this relationship would depend on firm size, because in larger organizations performance pay is significantly related to job satisfaction.

It should be noted that this study also investigated other types of reward - such as pay for team performance, pay for workplace, and profit-sharing – and found no significant relationships with job satisfaction. Nevertheless, what would seem to be conclusive, according to Hamermesh (2001), who conducted a historic comparative study of workers in the United States and Germany, is that drastic changes (shocks) in recent incomes of employees influence job satisfaction, with the effects of these shocks dissipating over time. In the matter, Cornelißen (2009) stated that other, non-pecuniary, aspects of labor (such as good social relations or job content) had more important effects on job satisfaction than income. Firm size – which is usually divided into three groups: small (fewer than 51 employees); mid-sized (between 51 and 500 employees); and large (over 500 employees) (Artz, 2008) – has also been associated with job satisfaction. In fact, some authors (e.g., Artz, 2008; McCausland, Pouliakas & Theodossiou, 2005) have found that employees in small firms feel more satisfied.

According to Harrington, Bean, Pintello and Mathews (2001), the organizational structure – including the quality of supervision, clarity of job demands, adequacy of funding and opportunity for employee input – also relates to job satisfaction. Particularly, adequacy of funding could be related to the study by Ellickson and Logsdon (2002), who argued that one of the ten predictors of job satisfaction was equipment and access to resources. Similarly, when analyzing job satisfaction at an emergency department, Rondeau and Francescutti (2005) found that the resource factor (access to technology, beds, and stable investments) had a direct impact on job satisfaction.

In further support of this finding, the work context or physical environment (equipment, furniture, lighting, acoustics, ventilation, etc) has been analyzed from different perspectives, and its positive effects have been associated with job satisfaction (Newsham et al., 2009; Cornelißen, 2009; Cass, Siu, Faragher & Cooper, 2003). In fact, exposure to loud sounds has been shown to be negatively related to job satisfaction (Melamed, Fried & Froom, 2001). Another study (Newsham et al., 2009) references several relationships among physical components of the work environment that positively influence job satisfaction, and stresses the important role of management in improving indoor work environments to raise job satisfaction.

Another element in the literature is the length of service at the organization, although some researchers (e.g., Schroder, 2008; Foulkrod, Field & Brown, 2010) hold that this is not related to job satisfaction, or that the relationship is of little significance and non-linear (Manrique-Abril & Herrera-Amaya, 2008; Lundgren, Norldholm & Segesten, 2005). However, most authors argue that the relationship between the length of service at an organization and job satisfaction would be U-shaped, with employees with the least and most seniority showing high levels of job satisfaction, and those in-between having low levels of job satisfaction (Pagán & Malo, 2009; Haley-Lock, 2008; Ma, Samuels & Alexander, 2003). It would seem that new workers experience a "honey-moon" period, with high levels of job satisfaction during the early period on the job and a more realistic version of the job later on (Resnick & Bond, 2001). Others (Adeyemo, 2007; Carmelli, 2003) also pointed out the mediating effect of emotional intelligence between these two constructs. On the other hand, Oshagbemi (2000) found that the positive relationship between seniority and job satisfaction is associated with the current job and not with the length of service in the line of business, whereas Jepsen and Hung-Bin Sheu (2003) suggest that the career stage of an employee influences the foreseeable assessment of job satisfaction.

Finally, it is worth making reference to a study by Armstrong, Hawley, Lewis, Blankenship and Pugsley (2008), who found that job configuration was directly related to job satisfaction in its different dimensions. This is in keeping with the finding of Mueser, Becker and Wolfe (2001) that by aligning employee preferences (before starting the job) with the work assignment, better levels of job satisfaction are achieved.

4. Conclusions

This overview has led to the conclusion that it is important to consider the hardest aspects of human resource management. Such variables as pay (distributive justice, performance pay, and drastic pay increases), type of contract (part-time, formal employment, and employment for indefinite time), the working schedule and working hours, seniority, firm size, physical work environment, and access to resources and equipment become key elements in workers' job satisfaction.   Although this study is limited in that it is not an exhaustive review of the selected works, it covers their main results and proposes important aspects to be taken into account in organizational management, with an emphasis on employees' well-being. Furthermore, the reviewed results are so recent that further research is recommended, particularly the study of the concepts across the wide variety of work environments, and the relationships between the different variables in the international context and their real effects on job satisfaction in organizational members in Latin American countries.

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