

Intrinsic work motivation as a necessity for job satisfaction

Mengyu Zhou*

University of New South Wales

*Corresponding author: 547425031@qq.com

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Abstract: Successfully managing and motivating employees is one of the most crucial responsibilities of top executives. This paper discusses the critical role of intrinsic work motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) in conjunction with three factors - goal directedness, self-control, and self-evaluation - in creating employee job satisfaction. The paper goes on to argue that intrinsic motivation (the sense of completing a task from the sheer pleasure of doing so) is of relatively greater importance and is perhaps even a pre-condition of the effects of extrinsic motivation (such as financial reward) and offers insight about what is likely to be important in managing employees in the future knowledge economy, where more complex tasks will benefit from and require a greater level of intrinsic motivation.

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction – defined as a worker’s sense of achievement and success on the job – is perceived as an important factor in the performance and productivity of an organization (Davis & Newstrom, 2006; Maxwell, 2007). Job satisfaction is conceptualized as a positive emotional or pleasure state that arises from an evaluation of one's job or work experience. It is a multifaceted dimension of working life, which should not be taken as an average measure, but rather should be looked at via a set of lenses deemed to be important to the employee (Davis & Newstrom, 2006: 204).

In the management studies literature, job satisfaction is often measured through the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Spector (1985), which proposes nine facets of job satisfaction, namely pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, rewards, operating procedures, co-worker relations, the nature of the work and communication (Spector, 1985: 700). Job satisfaction is also influenced by an employee’s sense of achievement and their self-evaluation of their work (Kašpárková et al, 2018). Other scholars have highlighted that job satisfaction may be partly explained by variance in the ‘big five’ personality traits proposed by psychology, which seems logical enough, however evidence for this remains somewhat mixed (Furnham et al, 2002 cf Templer, 2012; Bui, 2017 et al).

Level of job satisfaction has been shown to influence individuals’ behaviour and attitudes in the workplace such as productivity (Böckerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012), resilience (Kašpárková et al, 2018), proactivity (Strauss et al, 2015), organizational commitment (Fu et al, 2009) and turnover (Lambert et al, 2001), whilst minimising negative behaviours and emotions (Zhang & Deng, 2016 et al). Thus, scholars have frequently made the link between the aim of increasing job satisfaction and improving outcomes such as organizational performance (eg. Locke, 1983; Spector, 1997; Davis & Newstrom, 2006; Maxwell, 2007).

Within this stream of research, employee motivation has been highlighted as a key mediating factor and a driver of job satisfaction, and as something which operates slightly independently from the factors highlighted in Spector’s Job Satisfaction Survey. Whereas Spector’s criteria are largely based on ‘carrots and sticks’, an employee’s motivation depends on a range of independent factors, including those internal to the individual (Spector, 1985; Homberg, 2015; Putra et al, 2017). Whilst job satisfaction and employee motivation as social phenomena may have some causes in common, they are not necessarily synonymous; for example, research suggests that it seems possible for an employee to be satisfied with their job yet not be motivated to do it well (Kian et al., 2014).

Motivation, therefore, is an important related yet independent variable to investigate in seeking to understand the drivers of job satisfaction and other organizational outcomes.

Motivation mediates nearly all human action, and within organizations people develop habits of motivation characterised by, for example, a drive towards achievement, relationships and alliances, or power (Davis & Newstrom, 2006: 102). Motivation is ultimately based on human needs – the need for status, the need to belong, the need for personal growth and advancement (Hackman & Lawler, 1971: 262-3) - and may be drawn from the prospect of external reward – that is, extrinsic motivation- or from the experience of performing a task in and of itself, because it coincides with personal goals – that is, intrinsic motivation (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). Because motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, is in this way linked to self-actualisation, it is directly implicated in an employee's experience at work and thus their level of job satisfaction. Understanding motivation in its different forms is therefore crucial to understanding how to improve job satisfaction and organizational performance.

2. Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, and internal work motivation (IWM)

Motivation in psychology is traditionally divided into intrinsic (internal) motivation and extrinsic (external) motivation (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002; Hennessey et al, 2015). Whereas intrinsic motivation is the motivation to do something to meet a personal goal for its own sake and for the sheer enjoyment of a task, extrinsic motivation is the motivation to do something in order to attain some external goal or meet some externally imposed constraint (Hennessey et al, 2015:1).

Intrinsic motivation has been linked to outcomes such as creativity and innovation, higher performance, longer-lasting learning, perseverance, and overall job satisfaction (Cho & Perry, 2012; Hennessey et al, 2015), whereas extrinsic motivation such as financial reward has been shown to change the way that tasks are perceived (i. e. in relation to the perceived value of the reward) and can even have a detrimental effect on performance (Ariely et al, 2009; Gneezy et al, 2011). This is particularly true for tasks that do not have straight-forward solutions and require some cognitive skill in executing them. In the case of such tasks, intrinsic motivation has been shown to be more effective at boosting performance and efficiency in execution (ibid). Hennessey et al (2015) point out that, with the emergence of a knowledge economy where complex tasks are the norm, the future depends on employees with a strong sense of intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are moderated by a number of factors, and not all of them are shared in common. Extrinsic motivation may be moderated by factors such as expected reward, expected evaluation, competition, surveillance, time limits, and external control over the task (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Amabile, 1996). Intrinsic motivation has been shown to be moderated by factors such as managerial trustworthiness and goal directedness versus goal ambiguity. These factors can also increase the leverage of intrinsic motivation on job satisfaction, whereas extrinsic rewards decrease this leverage (Cho & Perry, 2012).

Applied to the workplace, the concept of intrinsic motivation has been framed by scholars as “internal work motivation” (Hackman & Oldham, 1975: 162; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Li & Tan, 2013). Internal work motivation (IWM) is mediated by factors such as the meaningfulness employees experience in carrying out the work, the level of autonomy and responsibility for a task, and the feedback they get about the results of the work (Hackman & Oldham, 1975: 161). The way these mediating factors are experienced will be determined partly by the content of the work and partly by the perceptions of the employee in question. Following on from this concept, Renard and Snelgar (2018) have recently developed and tested the Intrinsic Work Motivation Scale (IWMS), a questionnaire which broadly measures personal connection to one's work, along with personal desire to make a difference and perform (Renard & Snelgar, 2018:4).

We have seen that intrinsic motivation increases individuals' working efficiency, creativity, and innovation, and can directly boost job satisfaction. Likewise, internal work motivation (IWM) can shape behaviours and attitudes, leading to better performance and, in turn, affecting job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Aziri, 2011).

3. Why intrinsic work motivation is (more) necessary to job satisfaction

This paper will make the case for the necessity of internal work motivation to both job satisfaction and performance from three perspectives, which are: goal directedness, self-control, and self-evaluation. Goal directedness pertains to the extent to which a goal is made clear and to which the employee has the autonomy to formulate strategies for its execution. Self-control refers to the extent to which employee desires undergo restraint of personal desires in favour of pursuing organisational goals. Self-evaluation is the way in which the employee perceives themselves in relation to the task and rates their performance subsequently. All these factors influence job satisfaction and have been shown to be moderated by level of intrinsic motivation, treated here as internal work motivation. Based on the existing research literature, the paper goes on to propose the relative importance of intrinsic motivation as compared with extrinsic motivation, since internal work motivation appears to be a precondition of the efficacy of extrinsic reward.

Perspective 1: Goal directedness

Whereas goal ambiguity – for example, ambiguity in relation to mission comprehension, target, timeline, and priority - is negatively associated with job satisfaction and performance (Chun & Rainey, 2005; Jung, 2013), goal directedness – having clear and challenging goals - increases intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Locke & Latham, 1990; Cho & Perry, 2012). Furthermore, when goal directedness is combined with autonomy in completing the task to achieve the goal, both intrinsic motivation and performance increase (Locke & Latham 2006). On the other hand, high levels of goal ambiguity will cause poor understanding amongst employees, who are consequently likely to be reactive and recalcitrant, leading to decreased job satisfaction (Perrow, 1961; Cho & Perry, 2012).

The Intrinsic Work Motivation Scale (IWMS) suggests that employees will put in more effort beyond their job description to achieve outcomes when they have a high personal desire to perform (Renard & Snelgar, 2018:2). These types of situations and tasks have also been termed “want-to” goals, being that they are based on the coincidence of personal goals with goals that happen to benefit the organisation (Werner & Milyavskaya, 2018). Such desires could stem from the employees' own personal objectives and be unrelated to the organisation or, perhaps more likely, from a desire to succeed through their work. As we have seen, employees who are intrinsically motivated will not be truly motivated by the goals set by their employer, but motivated by their personal reasons for performance, such as their own goals in completing the task and/or succeeding at work.

Another important factor in whether an employee takes ownership of the goal in question, in addition to the clarity of its framing, is the level of autonomy and personal control they experience in attempting to meet that goal (Locke & Latham, 2006). In other words, the clarity of the goal as set extrinsically by the organisation combined with the autonomy to approach and complete the task in what an individual perceives to be the most appropriate way may increase this personal desire to perform by allowing for individual adaptiveness towards a goal and their intrinsic motivation to achieve it (Freund & Hennecke_2015). This goes some way towards explaining why eliminating goal ambiguity and increasing goal directedness alongside autonomy leads to the greatest increases in intrinsic work motivation and job satisfaction overall (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Goal directedness and autonomy, when combined, have the potential to affect the way an employee perceives a task and to change an individual's attitude towards the achievement of goals, which can provide job satisfaction for them when such goals are achieved.

Perspective 2: Self-control

Self-control has been variously defined in the literature (eg. Kanfer & Karoly, 1972; Muraven & Slessareva, 2003; Kotable & Hofmann, 2015; Werner & Milyavskaya, 2018) and is sometimes seen as distinct from self-regulation, which includes goal planning, developing strategies for achieving goals, engaging in goal-oriented actions, goal disengagement, and balancing the pursuit of many goals. In essence, self-regulation is a broad phrase that encompasses the entire goal-setting process, of which self-control is only a small element (Gillebaart, 2018:3). For the purposes of this paper an

operational definition of self-control may be articulated as the ability to overcome or block instinctive, habitual, or intrinsic actions, urges, emotions, or desires that would otherwise obstruct goal-directed activity (Gillebaart, 2018).

The expectancy theory of motivation (Lewin, 1938; Tolman, 1959) suggests higher order needs, such as personal growth, development, accomplishment, serve as powerful motivators (Hackman & Lawler, 1971: 262-3) and these needs are linked to how employees' "want-to" goals are framed (Werner & Milyavskaya, 2018). Unlike desires, higher order needs are frequently pursued consciously and are related with declarative expectations of long-term gains (Kotabe & Hofmann, 2015). For example, let's imagine an employee has the following goals: 1) stop wasting time now. 2) stop wasting time now and complete report before next week. The two goals are both related to work efficiency, yet the first one is reflecting only a desire (to stop wasting time), whereas the second one also mandates a behaviour (complete the report) compatible with this original higher-order goal. The behaviour thus provides a focus for self-control based on a personal goal and an organisation goal, and there is evidence that job satisfaction increases when goals are achieved in this way (Werner & Milyavskaya, 2018).

Higher order needs influence the propensity towards self-control by defining the 'control motivation', one of the seven major components of self-control theorised by Kotabe & Hofmann (2015). When an employee pursues higher order needs, they are often motivated to curb some of their current desires, and it is this restraint that we have termed self-control, and which has been shown to lead to higher performance and consequently greater job satisfaction. Studies have also shown that individuals can overcome for a lack of self-control resources by increasing intrinsic motivation (Muraven & Slessareva, 2003). Thus, not only does intrinsic motivation provide a focus for meeting higher-order needs in the pursuit of goals, but there is also a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and greater self-control, thus leading to greater job satisfaction.

Perspective 3: Self-evaluation

It has been noted that highly achievement-oriented individuals are more likely to seek self-evaluation and feedback (Markiewicz & Sansone, 2000: 95). Since it may be assumed that individuals with higher intrinsic motivation and autonomy would be more achievement-oriented and that individuals achieving high levels of success in their organizations are expected to contribute more, we can infer that higher-level performance, partly driven by greater intrinsic motivation, necessitates better self-evaluation capacity.

Self-evaluation usually takes place during the pursuit of a goal, or soon after its completion. Whilst pursuing a goal, autonomy allows employees to constantly review and adjust their perceptions of the goal to make their approach more relevant to the task in hand. It is also possible that autonomy modifies the impression of effort, making "want-to" goals appear easier subjectively but requiring the same amount of objective work (Werner & Milyavskaya, 2019). This may cause individuals to see the task as less difficult, leading them to opt to continue engaging in a goal-oriented activity towards it. In short, individuals may put in more effort, whilst it continues to feel effortless due to their intrinsic motivation based on inherently pleasurable, fun, and/or significant goals. After the completion of a task or the achievement of a goal, feedback, and self-evaluation feed directly into job satisfaction. Employees with more positive self-evaluation and greater intrinsic motivation have more positive perceptions of their performance, and intrinsic motivation is positively associated with positive self-evaluation and better performance (Joo et al, 2010).

4. Intrinsic motivation as a basis for the effects of extrinsic motivation

There is ample evidence underlining the importance of extrinsic drivers of motivation. For example, based on social exchange theory, employees will respond with expected actions if they feel they are treated favorably by the organization; within the employee-organization exchange framework, the combined effects of high inducements and high expectations will best boost employee job outcomes (Tsui et al, 1997; Hom et al, 2009; Shaw et al, 2009). A high-performance work

environment enhances employees' perceptions of organizational support, fostering employee creativity, and when employees think they are not being treated well or do not perceive organizational support, they behave negatively (Tang et al, 2017). Conversely, segmented labour markets theory predicts a negative relationship between the stratification of workers on unequal employment terms and job satisfaction. In such circumstances, workers compare themselves negatively with others and feel increasingly marginalized and deprived, leading to a decrease in job satisfaction (Kulik & Ambrose, 1992; Pearce, 1998; Wilkin, 2013). Leadership of an organization, both in terms of policy and personal relationships, links strongly with the performance and job satisfaction of employees (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

However, research has shown that such factors cannot alone predict outcomes, and that the logic of our extrinsic reward systems may in many cases backfire. For example, one of the biggest extrinsic motivators is said to be monetary reward, perhaps in the form of performance-related pay. However, research has demonstrated that financial incentives can result in a negative impact on overall performance, especially in the case of tasks requiring greater thought and attention (Ariely & Gneezy, 2009). Such tasks are surely the dominant feature of the future knowledge economy, yet extrinsic rewards are not sufficient to motivate employees in towards completing them efficiently and effectively, and thereby achieve job satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, has been shown to be positively associated with goal-directed behaviours, adaptiveness, autonomy, self-control, self-evaluation, performance and ultimately job satisfaction. It is therefore proposed that, without high levels of intrinsic motivation amongst employees, extrinsic 'carrots and sticks' may be to no avail.

5. Conclusion

Job satisfaction is mediated by a variety of circumstances, including extrinsic rewards such as pay, promotion, and organisational expectations. Traditional rubrics to measure job satisfaction have focussed on 'carrot and stick' factors such as salary, benefits, and operating procedures (Spector, 1985). However, intrinsic work motivation in achieving job satisfaction is critical, as it has a positive effect on aspects of goal directedness, self-control, and self-evaluation, which have all been shown to improve performance and job satisfaction. In fact, this paper has argued that intrinsic motivation forms a basis for job satisfaction beyond most external factors; if employees are not intrinsically motivated to achieve their goals, the effects of financial reward and organizational policy may not be felt. Furthermore, since many drivers of performance depend on intrinsic motivation, and perceived high performance is an important necessity for job satisfaction, there is a direct positive link between the two.

It is also crucial to note the limits of extrinsic rewards in organizational settings. Whilst intrinsic motivation increases creativity, innovation, problem-solving, and performance, extrinsic rewards can be unhelpful and even lead to poorer performance. To meet the demands of the knowledge economy of the future, senior executives should take note of these phenomena and focus on ways to increase employees' intrinsic motivation in order to boost productivity, creativity, performance, and job satisfaction.

In summary, when an employee has high level of intrinsic motivation, the resultant development of clear goals, the exercise of self-control and a positive self-evaluation all lead to greater job satisfaction. The arguments outlined in this paper suggest that the presence of intrinsic motivation may be an important pre-condition of the effects of extrinsic motivation, and that therefore intrinsic motivation is of primary importance in increasing job satisfaction

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