Job Satisfaction

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is job satisfaction?

Job satisfaction is generally thought of as the degree to which an individual likes or dislikes their job (Spector, 1997). Along with organizational commitment, it is one of the most commonly studied job attitudes and is used as a way to gauge how employees feel about their jobs and as a reflection of how well the organization is functioning. Job satisfaction is commonly considered as either "a global feeling about the job or as a related constellation of attitudes about various aspects or facets of the job" (Spector, 1997, p. 2). Thus, job satisfaction is generally measured as either a global construct or at the facet level, with survey questions targeting specific aspects of the job. Each level of measurement is important for different reasons: the global measurement of job satisfaction is generally used to determine employees' overall feelings and to examine how job satisfaction relates to other organizational variables, whereas the facet approach is able to tell organizations which exact aspects of the job are producing either satisfaction or dissatisfaction in employees (Spector, 1997). Once areas of dissatisfaction are identified, organizations can then use this knowledge in order to target improvements in certain areas of the job (e.g., adding more fringe benefits if this is identified as an area of general dissatisfaction among employees).

For the global measurement of job satisfaction, we recommend the job satisfaction subscale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ; Lawler et al., 1975). Although the questionnaire contains scales that assess a variety of different constructs, the job satisfaction portion contains three items including, "All in all, I am satisfied with my job," "In general, I don't like my job," and "In general, I like working here," which can be totaled to arrive at a global job satisfaction score. More information on the MOAQ can be found here.

For measuring job satisfaction at the facet level, we recommend the Job Satisfaction Survey, a 36-item measure that assesses nine facets of satisfaction with pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, the nature of work, and communication (Spector, 1985). Some example items include: "The benefit package we have is equitable" (fringe benefits), "Work assignments are not fully explained" (communication), and "I feel a sense of pride in doing my job" (nature of work). Items within facets can be totaled to arrive at a score for each of the nine facets, or all 36 items can be totaled to arrive at a single job satisfaction score. More information on this measure, including the complete list of items and scoring instructions, can be found here.

Why is job satisfaction important?

Job satisfaction is important in and of itself because organizations should care about having satisfied employees. Additionally, job satisfaction is important to study and measure because it is linked to both unit-level and individual-level outcomes within organizations. At the unit-level, higher job satisfaction among employees is modestly linked to higher profit and moderately linked to greater productivity and customer satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002; Whitman et al., 2010).

When examining the individual level, higher job satisfaction is moderately related to greater performance and organizational citizenship behaviors in the workplace, as well as fewer counterproductive work behaviors (Ilies et al., 2009; Karam et al., 2019; Mackey et al., 2021). There is a strong relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment, meaning that those who are high in job satisfaction also tend to be more committed to their organization (Meyer et al., 2002). Higher job satisfaction is also moderately related to lower turnover and strongly related to lower turnover intentions (Rubenstein et al., 2017; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

What contributes to job satisfaction?

Most research that exists on job satisfaction has examined factors that are correlated with job satisfaction, rather than testing for causality to determine which factors can increase or decrease job satisfaction. Thus, we report below the main factors that are simply associated with job satisfaction. High job satisfaction tends to be associated with factors like having meaningful work, support from one's organization, good fit with one's job, psychological capital, employee engagement, positive forms of leadership (e.g., transformational leadership, leader-member exchange), and components of job design (e.g., job autonomy, task identity; Allan et al., 2018; Avey et al., 2011; Christian et al., 2011; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Ng, 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2019).

Numerous other factors including individual differences, leadership practices, and factors within the organizational context may contribute to experiencing job satisfaction in the workplace. For a more complete breakdown of the other meta-analytically identified correlates of job satisfaction, please refer to the QIC-WD Workforce Research Catalog.

QIC-WD Takeaways

► Job satisfaction is the extent to which an individual likes or dislikes their job.
► Higher job satisfaction is linked to higher unit-level profit, productivity, and customer satisfaction.
► Higher job satisfaction is related to greater performance, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors and to fewer counterproductive work behaviors, lower turnover intentions, and lower actual turnover.
► A variety of individual differences, job attitudes, leadership practices, and factors within the work environment are associated with job satisfaction.

- ▶ For the global measurement of job satisfaction, researchers and practitioners should consider using the 3-item job satisfaction scale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ; Lawler et al., 1975).
- ▶ For the facet-level measurement of job satisfaction, researchers and practitioners should consider using the 36-item Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), which assesses satisfaction with pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, the nature of the work, and communication (Spector, 1985).

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