

Job Satisfaction and Job Performance at the Internship Level

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Industrial psychologists and management theorists have been examining the linkage between job satisfaction and job performance for at least fifty years. The results have been, at best, tenuous. The effects of age, gender, personality and environment have been considered without yielding concrete resolution. Since an internship or similar work integrated learning experience might well be a career starting point, a study was conducted to determine what, if any, relationship exists between satisfaction and performance at this stage. Assessment of job performance for student interns is an accepted practice for work integrated learning operations. This paper examines the results of 359 internships over a period of years. Consideration was given to the gender of the intern and their supervisor and the key factors that interns and their supervisors tended to focus on in their evaluations. Gender did not seem to play a role in the students' view of the value of various work characteristics. The effect of moderating variables were considered when examining the satisfaction-performance relationship. Although the use of such moderators did alter the results, their effect was fairly small and did not have a meaningful impact on the conclusions drawn. A clear finding emerged suggesting that job satisfaction is more highly related to job performance in situations where the intern and their supervisor are of the same gender.

INTRODUCTION

A recent Conference Board report (Barrington and Franco, 2010) stated that job satisfaction had reached its lowest point ever reported. The idea that so many were workers discontent would be troubling enough, but, the further concern that such sentiment might affect productivity, during an economic slowdown, is worthy of consideration. The belief that job satisfaction is tied to job performance has been advanced and examined for at least, the last seventy years. William Shakespeare wrote "To business that we love, we eagerly arise, and go to with delight." Although the linkage between these two factors is an intuitively appealing proposition, the research evidence is, at times, less persuasive. This paper utilizes a sample of job interns and examines whether performance and satisfaction are related at the earliest stage of one's professional career.

The origins of a belief in a job satisfaction-job performance connection are often traced to the Hawthorne Effect and the early Human Relations model (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Mayo, 1945). At the outset, causal relationship was posited between satisfaction and performance. In their oft cited paper, Brayfield and Crockett (1955) found that this relationship was minimal or non-existent (p.405) when they reviewed the published research. Since that time, numerous attempts were made to

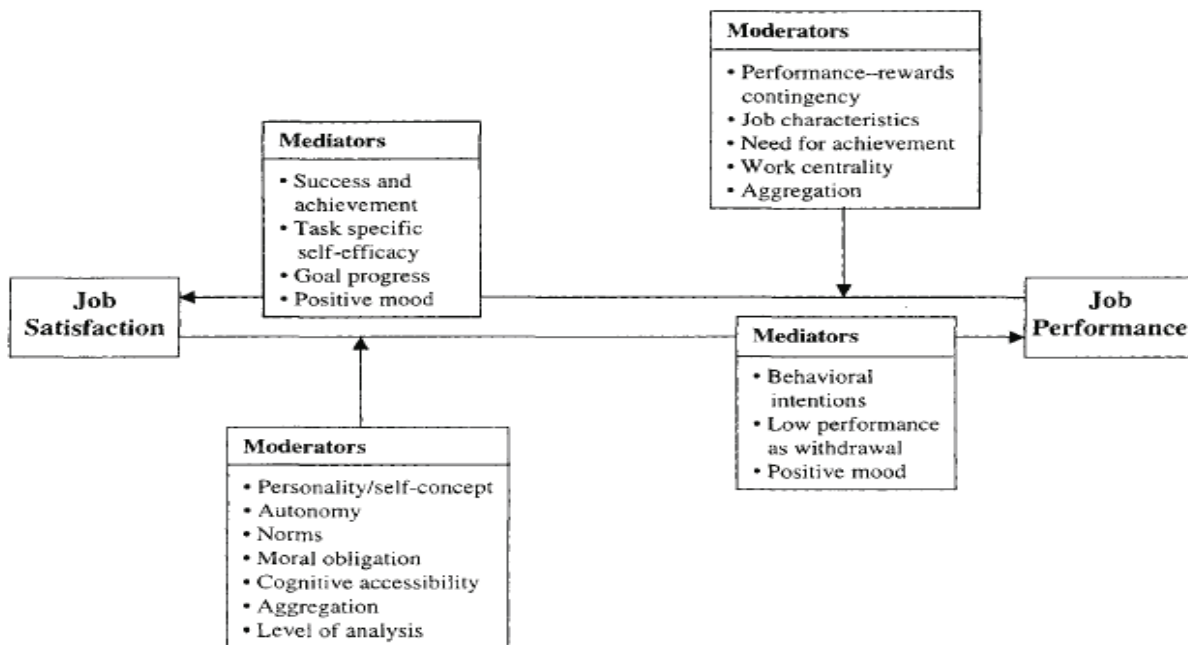
discover the presence and nature of the satisfaction-performance linkage. Later, an alternative viewpoint developed suggesting that job performance caused job satisfaction because workers were able to derive intrinsic rewards from their work (Lawler and Porter, 1967; Locke, 1970). Four studies found a significant linkage in this direction (Brown, Cron, & Leigh, 1993; Darden, Hampton, & Howell, 1989; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998; Stumpf & Hartman, 1984). Other research (Dubinsky & Hartley, 1986; Dubinsky & Skinner, 1984; Hampton, Dubinsky, & Skinner, 1986), Birnbaum & Somers, 1993; Brown & Peterson, 1994) did not find a significant relationship.

A meta-analysis study conducted by Iaffaldano & Muchinsky (1985) reviewed the research from 1955 and found a correlation between satisfaction and performance of .17 (p.963). Although some studies have used longitudinal data (Bagozzi, 1980; Sheridan & Slocum, 1975; Siegel & Bowen, 1971; Wanous, 1974) they are the exceptions. A more typical methodology is to examine the relationship in a cross-sectional manner.

Most recent work in this area has incorporated moderating variables when connecting performance to satisfaction. One origin of this model was Korman (1970) who argued that self esteem would positively influence the tie between performance and satisfaction. A wide range of other variables have been considered including need for achievement (Steers, 1975), cognitive ability (Varca & James-Valutis, 1993), similarity in problem-solving styles (Goldsmith, McNeilly, & Ross, 1989), perceived appropriateness of supervision (Jabri, 1992) and disposition (Hochwarter, Perrewe, Ferris, & Brymer, 1999). The papers that have included moderating variables suggest that such factors tend to influence the jobholder's perception of a given situation and affect the satisfaction-performance relationship.

One research effort, a meta-analysis by Judge, Thoresen, Bono and Patton (2001) found a correlation of .19, but argued that, if one adjusted for issues such as social contexts and behavioral tendencies, the true measure was .30. Their model is shown in Figure 1, below.

FIGURE 1
JUDGE ET AL SATISFACTION—PERFORMANCE MODEL



Source: Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton, G. (2001)

The Judge, et al (2001) Figure 1 model represents their integration of the satisfaction – performance literature, combining the results from tests of 7 different simple models of possible satisfaction -

performance relationships over more than 300 empirical studies. They note that stronger correlations of the two result when attitudinal measures of satisfaction are used, which involve judgment and evaluation, over more purely affective measures of satisfaction, which involve more temporary emotional surges, whether positive or negative. Net, though, they concluded that none of the 7 simple depictions of the satisfaction-performance relationships was clearly favored in the results, whether studied alone or considered with covariates and moderators. They also note, however, that research errors clouded the simple empirical relationship of satisfaction and performance, whatever causal link may exist, such that research conclusions have understated the probable true relationship between these two important work place variables. Finally, they conclude that the evidence strongly suggests that moderator variables or covariates of some kind do account for significant variation in how strongly satisfaction and performance correlate.

This research was undertaken to build on the extensive review and evidence provided by Judge and his colleagues (Judge, et al, 2001). Specifically, we were interested to examine satisfaction and performance relationships among new entrants to professional management, as they test their new professional life through internship experiences. We expected that a number of variables would affect both how satisfied new professionals would be, and how well they performed. These covariates included factors like gender-match with the supervisor, degree to which the internship relates to their planned field of practice, as well as the degree to which the internship provided opportunity to use newly acquired professional skills.

OVERVIEW

This paper utilizes data drawn from 359 internships performed by management majors at a midwestern state university over a number of years. The sample included 181 female interns and 178 males. Students needed to have completed 90 semester credits before accepting an internship. At the conclusion of their internship, they were required to complete a survey detailing their satisfaction with the experience. The survey questions focused on the perceived adequacy of one's supervision, the appropriateness of job assignment, usage of problem solving skills, how related the job was to one's field of study, if one could experience a sense of responsibility and if the internship aided the transition to a "career job" environment. In addition, students were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the internship. Employers also provided evaluations. They rated students on their ability to learn, judgment, dependability and the quality of their work. Lastly, the supervisor's were asked to provide a global rating on job performance.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results of an OLS regression of the student's ratings of certain moderators on overall satisfaction. Utilizing the estimated value for satisfaction allows one to explicitly adjust the satisfaction ratings for perceived level of those factors. Although these factors seem to have measurable effects on satisfaction, the consideration of supervisor and intern gender leads to more complex findings.

The importance of having an adequate supervision was revealed in all internship situations. Males seemed more commonly to value the degree to which their internship related to their field of study. Females appeared more satisfied with placements where they were able to experience responsibility in their work.

Table 2 exhibits the impact of a number of dimensions on the overall performance rating given supervisors to their interns. An intern's judgment and attitude were strong determinants of a supervisor evaluation, irrespective of gender concerns. An intern's relations with others at work only appeared to matter when the supervisor and intern were of the same gender. Female supervisors seemed to focus more on the quality of work than their male counterparts did.

TABLE 1
OVERALL SATISFACTION AND STUDENT RATINGS OF INTERNSHIP ATTRIBUTES

| | Female Supervisor | | | Male Supervisor | | | Overall |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| | Female Intern | Male Intern | All Interns | Female Intern | Male Intern | All Interns | |
| Constant | .788 | .880 | .575 | -.072 | .558 | .872* | .709** |
| Develop skills | .086 | .316** | .121 | .211 | .031 | .130 | .122* |
| Related to field of study | .166 | .266** | .163* | .176 | .195** | .239*** | .205*** |
| Adequate supervisor | .239** | .111 | .222*** | .239* | .373*** | .226*** | .239*** |
| Responsibility | .272** | .072 | .299** | .345** | .140* | .130* | .200*** |
| Problem Solving | .073 | .061 | .085 | .079 | .168* | .112 | .102* |
| Adjusted r ² | .528 | .387 | .567 | .641 | .528 | .445 | .505 |
| F | 16.87*** | 8.32*** | 28.28*** | 12.45*** | 20.66*** | 24.60*** | 52.35*** |

*=significant at the .05 level; **=significant at the .01 level; ***=significant at the .001 level

A number of researchers have examined how gender might affect job satisfaction (Hodson, 1989; Clark, 1997; Vlosky and Aguilar, 2009). No meaningful gender distinction was found in this sample. Female satisfaction averaged 4.53, while the level was 4.55 for males. Female job performance averaged 4.51 and male 4.40. None of these differences were statistically significant. A very noticeable gender effect did appear, however, when examining the relationship between pay and satisfaction directly. Table 3 reveals a pattern of a higher performance-satisfaction linkage when interns were working for supervisors of the same gender. In particular, male intern showed a statistically significant correlation between satisfaction and performance when working for a male supervisor, but not when with a female supervisor. The usage of an adjusted measure for overall satisfaction did not appear to have any substantial consequences.

TABLE 2
OVERALL PERFORMANCE AND SUPERVISOR RATINGS OF INTERN ATTRIBUTES

| | Female Supervisor | | | Male Supervisor | | | Overall |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| | Female Intern | Male Intern | All Interns | Female Intern | Male Intern | All Interns | |
| Constant | -.355 | .207 | .329 | .500 | .311 | .374 | .174 |
| Quality of work | .310** | .360* | .346*** | .063 | .134 | .099 | .182*** |
| Ability to Learn | .205* | -.046 | .103 | .136 | .094 | .118 | .113* |
| Judgment | .152* | .101 | .138* | .223* | .222*** | .220*** | .200*** |
| Dependability | .044 | .176 | .096 | .065 | .058 | .066 | .089 |
| Attitude | .189* | .185 | .182** | .244*** | .262*** | .253*** | .218*** |
| Relations with Others | .175* | .182 | .168** | .170 | .173* | .171** | .167*** |
| Adjusted r ² | .693 | .614 | .650 | .454 | .614 | .577 | .608 |
| F | 36.38*** | 10.41*** | 44.26*** | 8.46*** | 31.00*** | 42.33*** | 84.47*** |

*=significant at the .05 level; **=significant at the .01 level; ***=significant at the .001 level

TABLE 3
INTERN AND SUPERVISOR GENDER EFFECTS ON PAY-SATISFACTION RELATIONSHIP

| | Observed Satisfaction Level | | | Adjusted Satisfaction Level | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Female Supervisor | Male Supervisor | All Supervisors | Female Supervisor | Male Supervisor | All Supervisors |
| Female Intern | .09 | -.11 | .02 | .21* | -.02 | .07 |
| Male Intern | -.02 | .24* | .17 | .11 | .30** | .17 |
| All Interns | .06 | .11 | .08 | .06 | .16 | .12 |

*=significant at the .05 level; **=significant at the .01 level; ***=significant at the .001 level

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance for Management majors engaging in internship experiences. It was discovered that satisfaction was significantly related to performance in settings where the intern and their supervisor were of the same gender. Adjustments made for moderating variables had a minimal impact.

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