SYNTHESIZING THE THEORIES OF JOB-SATISFACTION ACROSS THE CULTURAL/ATTITUDINAL DIMENSIONS

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Abstract

Job satisfaction is a recurring attitude therefore needs continuous management. A huge research is going on in the organizations around the world to understand and thereby control the elements of employees’ satisfaction. An array of theories is available to explain the motivational contents and cognitive processes that constitute the issues of job satisfaction in any organization. Given that human behavior consists of ‘understanding – cognitive’ and the same translated into action (verbal and/or physical) therefore researchers have either theorized on the basis of cognitive levels of motivation or behavioral (physical) levels of motivation and satisfaction. An analysis of the ‘commonly-cited’ theoretical models reveals that these are different views of the same reality. Their differences lie in their prioritization of the main aspects of satisfaction. All the theories can be synthesized into a satisfaction-model according to their contributions. This paper first strives to so organize the main theories that each one adds to our understanding according to its due scholarly-weight and secondly touches on the impacts of cultural differences on the role of theories across the world.

Key words: Diversity of Theories, Content & process theories of Job Satisfaction, Cultural/attitudinal dimensions.
INTRODUCTION

Satisfaction is the contentment felt after a need is fulfilled (Robbins, 1998:170). It is a general attitude that is determined by job factors (i.e., pay, work, supervision etc), individual or personal characteristics (demographics) and other social and group factors (Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004:116). People bring with them certain drives and needs that affect their performance therefore, understanding how needs stimulate performance and how rewards on such performance lead to the job-satisfaction is indispensable for the managers (Newstrom, 2007:123).

Theory is a tool of science as it: a. defines major orientation of a phenomena (such as job satisfaction) by defining kinds of data to be required; b. offers a conceptual scheme or model in which relevant facts are systematically organized, classified and interrelated; c. summarizes the facts into empirical generalizations; predicts facts and finally points to the gaps in our knowledge (Goode & Hatt, 1952:8). Thus, theories are the scientific tools that are used to explain the factors of job satisfaction and how these factors interact in the cognitive and physical processes of job-satisfaction on the basis of existing facts (Griffin, 1990:67).

At present the content and process theories have become established explanations for work motivation, no agreed-upon overall theory exists (Luthans, 2005:240). Furthermore, with the passage of time, factors of job satisfaction and their mutual relations change therefore new models appear as fresh explanations of the old phenomena (Newstrom, 2007:6) for example, Maslow’s theory of needs have been enhanced by ‘two-factor theory’.

JOB SATISFACTION

Whatever, theoretical approach is used to study job satisfaction, most of the researchers have identified two groups of variables: environmental factors and personal characteristics of individuals (Saif-ud-Din, Khair-uz-Zaman, & Nawaz., 2010; Ellickson & Logsdon, 2001; Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004:116; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). Job satisfaction is a popular research topic for the researchers in organization and management studies particularly, organizational behavior (Luthans, 2005:211). Job satisfaction is an attitude or emotional response to one’s job, work environment or according to Herzberg’s two-factor theory, the
contents of the job including achievement, responsibility, and recognition are the factors, which motivate the workers and cause high levels of job satisfaction (Tirmizi et al., 2008).

THEORIES OF JOB-SATISFACTION

Luthans (1995:13) notes that “there is nothing as practical as a good theory.’ Theory is a systematic grouping of interdependent concepts and principles resulting into a framework that ties together a significant area of knowledge (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:13). Or more precisely, a theory identifies important variables and links them to form ‘tentative propositions’ (or hypotheses) that can be tested through research (Newstrom, 2007:6).

Although most of the debates about theories of job-satisfaction start with Maslow’s theory of ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (1943) however, the story begins with the idea of ‘scientific movement’ or ‘Taylorism’ by Frederick W. Taylor (1911), which treats the human being as ‘Economic-man’ where ‘Money’ is the biggest motivator for job-satisfaction. This view was criticized by Elton Mayo & Associates (1924-33) 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 (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:42).”

CLASSIFICATION OF THE THEORIES

A survey of literature about the theories of job-satisfaction suggests that theories are commonly grouped either according to the ‘nature of theories’ or their ‘chronological appearance.’ Dr S. Shajahan & Linu Shajahan (2004:90-99) have noted that there are ‘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). This division of theories is acknowledged across the literature.

Fred Luthans (2005: 240-256) suggests that there are Content (Needs Hierarchy, Two-Factors, and ERG theories); Process (Expectancy theory and Porter & Lawler model); and
Contemporary (Equity, Control and Agency theories) theories. While, Stephen P. Robbins (2005:48-61) uses chronology and categorizes the 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). It is however, notable that content and process theories have become ‘standard classification.’

Content Theories

Content theories focus on identifying the needs, drives and incentives/goals and their prioritization by the individual to get satisfaction (Luthans, 2005:240). Experts have been preparing multiple lists of biological, psychological, social and higher level needs of human beings. Interestingly, almost all the researchers categorize these needs into primary, secondary and high level employee requirements, which need to be fulfilled when the worker is needed to motivated and satisfied. Following are the well known content theories that are widely used by the management.

Maslow’s Theory of Motivation/Satisfaction (1943)

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is “the most widely mentioned theory of motivation and satisfaction (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:468).” Building on humanistic psychology and the clinical experiences, Abraham Maslow argued that an individual’s motivational requirements could be ordered as 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 (Luthans, 2005:240). Maslow (1943) identified five levels of need hierarchy:

1. Physical needs: (food, clothing, shelter, sex),
2. Safety needs: (physical protection),
3. Social: (develop close associations with others),
4. Esteem/Achievement needs: (prestige given by others), and
Having said that, individual needs are influenced both by the importance attached to various needs and the level to which an individual wants to fulfill these needs (Karimi, 2007). Researchers have noted that Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs was the first motivation theory that laid the foundation for ‘the theories of job satisfaction’. This theory serves as a good start from which researchers explore the problems of job satisfaction in different work situations (Wikipedia, 2009). Several theories have been suggested so far but almost all begin with a brief on Maslow’s ideas.

*Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959)*

Herzberg did a motivational study in which he interviewed 200 accountants and engineers. He used 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? Tabulating these good and bad feelings, Herzberg argued that there are job-satisfiers (motivators) related to the job contents and job-dissatisfiers (Hygiene factors) are concerned with the job context. Motivators include Achievement, Recognition, Work itself, Responsibility and Advancement. The hygiene factors do not ‘motivate/satisfy’ rather ‘prevent dissatisfaction.’ These factors are contextual such as, Company policy, Administration, Supervision, Salary, Interpersonal relations, Supervisor, and Working conditions (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Herzberg’s theory is the most useful model to study job satisfaction (Kim, 2004). For instance, the researchers have found that it helps in understanding the job satisfaction in the ‘educational settings’ (Karimi, 2007). Others have used it as a theoretical framework for assessing the police officers’ job satisfaction (Getahun et al., 2007) however, a review of literature revealed criticisms of the motivator-hygiene theory (Karimi, 2007). For example, the theory ignores individual differences and wrongfully assumes that all employees react in a similar manner to the changes in motivators and hygiene factors (Wikipedia, 2009).

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

After observing and understanding the manner in which managers handle the employees, McGregor proposed that the manager’s view about the nature of human being is founded on a
group of assumptions and that managers change their behavior toward their subordinates according to these ‘assumptions’ about different employees (Robbins, 1998:170).

Assumptions of Theory X [Negative view of Human-being]

- Human beings have an inherent dislike of work and avoid it if possible.
- Due to this behavior, people must be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment to make them work.
- They prefer to be directed, avoid responsibility, have little ambition, and want security (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:466).

Theory Y Assumptions [Positive view of Human-being]

- 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. People can practice self-direction and self-control in achieving objectives.
- The degree of commitment to objectives is determined by the size of rewards attached with achievement.
- Under proper conditions, human beings learn and not only accept responsibility but also seek it (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:467).

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

McClelland and Associates postulated that some people have a compelling drive to succeed and therefore strive for personal achievement rather than the rewards of success themselves. They have the desire to perform better than before therefore they like challenging jobs and behave as ‘high achievers’ (Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004:95). This theory focuses on the achievement motive thus, called ‘achievement theory’ but it is founded on achievement, power and affiliation motives:

1. **Achievement**: This is the drive to excel and achieve beyond the standards of success.
2. **Power**: It refers to the desire to have an impact, to be influential, and to control others (Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004:95; Robbins, 2005:53).
3. **Affiliation**: It is the desire for having friendly and close interpersonal relationships (Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004:95). Those with high affiliation prefer cooperative rather than competitive situations (Robbins, 2005:53).
**ERG Theory (Alderfer, Clayton P.) (1969)**

Clayton Alderfer (1969) explored the Maslow’s theory and linked it with practical research. He regrouped the Maslow’s list of needs into three classes of needs: Existence, Relatedness, and Growth, thereby calling it ERG theory. His classification absorbs the Maslow’s division of needs into: Existence (physiological and security needs), Relatedness (social and esteem needs) and Growth (self-actualization) (Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004:94). Alderfer suggested a continuum of needs rather than hierarchical levels or two factors of needs. Unlike Maslow and Herzberg, Alderfer does not suggest 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 (Luthans, 2005:244).

**Process Theories**

Process theories are more concerned with ‘how the motivation takes place?’ Similarly, the concept of ‘expectancy’ from ‘cognitive theory’ plays dominant role in the process theories of job-satisfaction (Luthans, 2005:246). Thus, these theories strive to explain how the needs and goals are fulfilled and accepted cognitively (Perry et al., 2006). Several process-based theories have been suggested. Some of such theories have been used by researchers as hypotheses, tested and found them thought-provoking. The well known theoretical models for process motivation are:

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

This theory suggests that employees weigh what they put into a job (input) against what they get from it (outcome) and then compare this ratio with the input-outcome ratio of other workers. If they find this ratio equal to that of the relevant others, a state of equity is said to exist (Robbins, 2005:58). The equity theory has extensively been studied over the past few decades under the title of distributive justice (Yusof & Shamsuri, 2006). It has been found that rewards increase employee satisfaction only when these rewards are valued and perceived as equitable by the employees (Perry et al., 2006).
Vroom’s Expectancy Theory (1964)

Victor H. Vroom asserts that people are motivated to work to achieve a goal if they believe that that goal is worthy and there is the probability that what they do will help them in achieving their goals (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:470). Vroom’s theory is based on 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 is 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 can be motivated (motivational force or effort) toward better performance (first-level output) to realize promotion (second-level output) (Luthans, 2005:247).

Expectancy theory recognizes the importance of various individual needs and motivations (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:471). It suggests that rewards used to influence employee behavior must be valued by individuals (Perry et al., 2006). Therefore, theory is considered as the “most comprehensive theory of motivation and job satisfaction (Robbins, 2005:60).” It explains that motivation is a product of three factors: how much reward is wanted (valance), the estimate of probability that effort will lead to the successful performance (expectancy), and the estimate that performance will result in getting the reward (instrumentality) - explained as ‘Valance × Expectancy × Instrumentality = Motivation’ (Newstrom, 2007:115).

Porter/Lawler Expectancy Model (1968)

This model is very popular explanation of the job satisfaction process. Porter and Lawler stress that ‘effort’ (force or strength of motivation) does not lead directly to ‘performance.’ It is rather moderated by the ‘abilities and traits’ and the ‘role perceptions’ of an employee. Furthermore, ‘satisfaction’ is not dependent on performance rather determined by the ‘probability of receiving fair rewards’ (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:473). The Porter-Lawler model suggests that motivation is affected by several interrelated cognitive factors, such as motivation results from the ‘perceived effort-reward probability.’ However, before this effort is translated into performance, the ‘abilities and traits’ and ‘role-perceptions’ of employee affect on the efforts used for performance. Furthermore, it is the ‘perceived equitable rewards’, which determine ‘job-satisfaction’ of the workforce (Luthans, 2005:249).
Goal-Setting Theory (Locke, 1968)

Edwin Locke (In late 1960s) asserted that intentions can be a major source of motivation and satisfaction (Shajahan & Shajahan, 2004:95). Some specific goals (intentions) lead to increased performance, for example, difficult goals (when accepted) lead to higher performance than easy goals and that feedback triggers higher performance than no feedback. Likewise, ‘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 as feedback identifies discrepancies between what have they done and what they want to do. All those studies, which tested goal-setting theory, demonstrate that challenging goals with feedback, work as motivating forces (Robbins, 2005:54).

The goal-setting theory is the most researched theory of employee motivation, for example, it has been applied to the study of more than 40,000 participants' performance on well over 100 different tasks in eight countries in both lab and field settings (Perry et al., 2006). Goal theory suggests that difficult goals demand focus on problems, increase sense of goal importance, and encourage persistence to achieve the goals. Goal theory can be combined with cognitive theories to better understand the phenomena, for example, greater self-efficacy is positively related to employees’ perception that they are successfully contributing to meaningful work and therefore foster enhanced work motivation (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

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

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. Hackman and Oldham's (1980) original formulation of job characteristics theory argued that the outcomes of job redesign were influenced by several moderators. These moderators include the differences to which various employees desire personal or psychological progress (Perry et al., 2006). The clarity of tasks leads to greater job satisfaction because greater role clarity creates such workforce, which is more satisfied with, committed to, and involved in work (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

The jobs that are rich in motivating characteristics trigger psychological states, which in turn increases the likelihood of desired outcomes. For example, the significance of a task can ignite a sense of meaningfulness of work that leads to effective performance (Perry et al., 2006). 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.) (Wikipedia, 2009).

DISCUSSION

Synthesizing the Diversity of Theories

The researchers comment that one of the errors in using theoretical frameworks is the tendency to overlook the need for ‘compromising, or blending’ while there is a little doubt about the fact that the “ability to compromise with the least of undesired consequences is the essence of art (Koontz & O'Donnell, 1972:7).” Role of theory is to provide a means of classifying significant and pertinent knowledge (Weihrich & Koontz, 1999:13). Several motivational models are available. All these models have strengths and weaknesses as well as advocates and critics. Though, no model is perfect, but each of them adds something to understanding the motivational and satisfaction process. While new models are emerging, there are also efforts to integrate the existing approaches (Newstrom, 2007:122; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

Table 1: Showing the Synthesis of Motivation/Satisfaction Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Requirements</th>
<th>Human Behavior (Mediated by the personal, job-related, environmental and organizational characteristics)</th>
<th>Rewards for Human Behavior</th>
<th>Fulfilled Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>Efforts/Performance</td>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical, Cognitive &amp; Social Needs</td>
<td>1. Personal Characteristics [Theory X &amp; Y McGregor 1960; Expectancy Theory Vroom 1963; Porter &amp; Lawler Model 1968; Attribution Theory; Control Theory Scott &amp; Snell 1992]</td>
<td>Intrinsic &amp; Extrinsic Rewards</td>
<td>If satisfied, the worker is likely to repeat the same behavior. If dissatisfied, the worker is more likely to discontinue the same behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Job Characteristics [Job-characteristics Theory Hackman &amp; Oldham]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Environmental Characteristics [Hawthorne Studies Mayo]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[16 Theories]
Cultural Limitations

Most of the motivation/satisfaction theories were developed in USA by natives for natives. So we need to be careful in assuming that these theoretical models are workable across the cultures in the same manner. For example, almost all the theories emphasize individualism and achievement, which are pro-American characteristic (Robbins, 2005:61). Thus, the story of these theory changes from one culture to another due to several factors. For example, religion attaches varying values with diverse needs/motives thereby changing the importance of different needs in different religious beliefs (Luthans, 2005:258), which definitely modifies the hypotheses of the original theories.

The well known research by a Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede identifies four cultural dimensions to help and explain how and why people from various cultures behave as they do. These dimensions also explain the reasons for modifying the theories according to the specific dimensions of every single nation and culture. The researcher filled 116,000 questionnaires from the IBM employees from 70 countries (Hofstede, 1980). He found that cultures are different on the following four dimensions:

- **Power distance**: People in societies where authority is obeyed without question live in a high power distance culture. In cultures with high power distance, managers can make autocratic decisions and the subordinates follow unquestionably. Many Latin and Asian countries like Malaysia, Philippines, Panama, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Mexico demonstrate high power distance but America, Canada and several countries such as Denmark, UK, and Australia are moderate or low on power distance (Rugman & Hodgetts, 2002:133).

- **Uncertainty avoidance**: It refers to understanding the tendency of people to face or avoid uncertainty - are they risk-takers or risk-avoiders. Research reveals that people in Latin countries (in Europe and South America) do not like uncertainty. However, nations in Denmark, Sweden, UK, Ireland, Canada, and USA like uncertainty or ambiguity. While Asian countries like Japan and Korea fall in the middle of these extremes (Luthans, 2005:257).

- **Individualism**: is the tendency of people to look after themselves and their immediate family only. On the contrary is the collectivism, the tendency of people to belonging to groups that look after each other in exchange for loyalty. For example, US, UK,
Netherlands, and Canada have high individualism but Ecuador, Guatemala, Pakistan and Indonesia have low individualism (Rugman & Hodgetts, 2002:134).

- Masculinity: If the dominant values of a society are ‘success, money and things’ in contrast to femininity (caring for others and the quality of life), the society is known as ‘Masculine’. Research tells that Japan, Austria, Venezuela, and Mexico are high on masculinity values than Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Netherlands while America is moderate on these two extremes (Rugman & Hodgetts, 2002:134).

The researchers pinpoint that there are more differences than similarities in the application of various job satisfaction theories (Luthans, 2005:258). For example, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs demonstrates more the American culture than the countries like Japan, Greece, or Mexico, where uncertainty avoidance characteristics are strong, safety needs would be on top of the needs hierarchy (Robbins, 2005:61-62). Despite these differences, all the theories of job-satisfaction share some similarities, for example, they encourage managers not only to consider lower-level factors rather use higher-order, motivational, and intrinsic factors as well to motivate and thereby satisfy the workforce (Newstrom, 2007:123).

**CONCLUSIONS**

There is common saying that theories are neither right nor wrong rather different views of reality (Checkland, 1981:44). They are actually different perceptions (views) wherein every researcher visualizes the same attributes of the situation but gives them meaning from his/her own perspective thereby creating a difference of perception, which is again a psychological truth in the sense that psychologists even suggest that human cannot see the reality they simply develop a unique perception of it (Luthans, 1995:86). However, “at present there is a lack of integration or synthesis of the various theories (Luthans, 2005:240).’

However, mere knowledge of theory cannot guarantee the successful practice unless one is clear about how to use it therefore any system of principles and theory demand clear concepts, which provide “mental images of a thing formed by generalization from particulars (Koontz & O'Donnell, 1972:11).” Thus, good theories need to be practical, by addressing the behavioral issues through adding to our understanding of workers, work environment and organizational objectives (Newstrom, 2007:6).
Both content and process theories aim at generating the understanding of the work situations by postulating the ‘human behavior.’ Though most of the theories try to become global views of reality (employee and work environment characteristics) however, research has revealed that these theories are culture-specific. Since most of the job satisfaction theories have generated in USA therefore match more closely with the American culture (Rugman & Hodgetts, 2002; Luthans, 2005; Robbins, 2005). However, since cultures are different therefore the same ‘Needs’ have different meanings and prioritization with the change in the culture.

Furthermore, these theories need to be restructured according to the new areas of research in human psychology, for example, ‘positive psychology’ movement is now earning footings among the researchers on human motivation and job satisfaction (Seligman, 1998). This thinking emerged from the argument that so far psychology has been exclusively preoccupied with controlling negative, pathological aspects of human behavior. Thus, positive psychology emerged as a scientific method to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals, groups, organizations, and communities to thrive and prosper. These factors are optimism, hope, happiness, resiliency, confidence, and self efficacy (Luthans, 2005:271). Thus, theories of job satisfaction have to be tested against these emerging factors of positive psychology and their impact on human behavior at individual, group and organizational levels.
References


