Bavendam Research Incorporated

Special Reports

Volume 6

Effective Management Through Measurement

Managing Job Satisfaction

Increasing job satisfaction is important for its humanitarian value and for its financial benefit (due to its effect on employee behavior.) As early as 1918, Edward Thorndike explored the relationship between work and satisfaction in the Journal of Applied Psychology.

Bavendam Research has included measures of job satisfaction in all our employee surveys. Clear patterns have emerged.

Employees with higher job satisfaction:

- believe that the organization will be satisfying in the long run
- care about the quality of their work
- are more committed to the organization
- have higher retention rates, and
- are more productive.

Define Your Terms

Be precise. Vague terms like "morale" often include elements of satisfaction, commitment, desire to quit, communication, etc. A major business magazine quoted a CEO who consistently confused job satisfaction with complacency. A lack of conceptual clarity makes it difficult to learn anything useful or precise.

A single construct or multiple dimensions. One area of disagreement is whether job satisfaction has multiple dimensions. Researchers like Porter and Lawler[1] define job satisfaction as a unidimensional construct; that is, you are generally satisfied or dissatisfied with your job. In contrast, Smith, Kendall, and Hulin[2] argue that job satisfaction is multidimensional; that is, you may be more or less satisfied with your job, your supervisor, your pay, your workplace, etc.

For the purposes of our work, we follow Porter & Lawler and define job satisfaction as people's affective (emotional) response to their current job conditions. We also carefully distinguish job satisfaction from its consequents. Desire to stay with an organization is not a **symptom** of job satisfaction, it is a **consequence** of job satisfaction. As an independent factor, desire to stay is also affected by other factors such as employees' job security, expectations about their future success in the organization, etc.

Sources of Confusion

Negative is stronger than positive. Dissatisfaction seems to be more motivating than satisfaction. In a similar way, people often react more immediately and visibly to pain than to a pleasant stimulus.
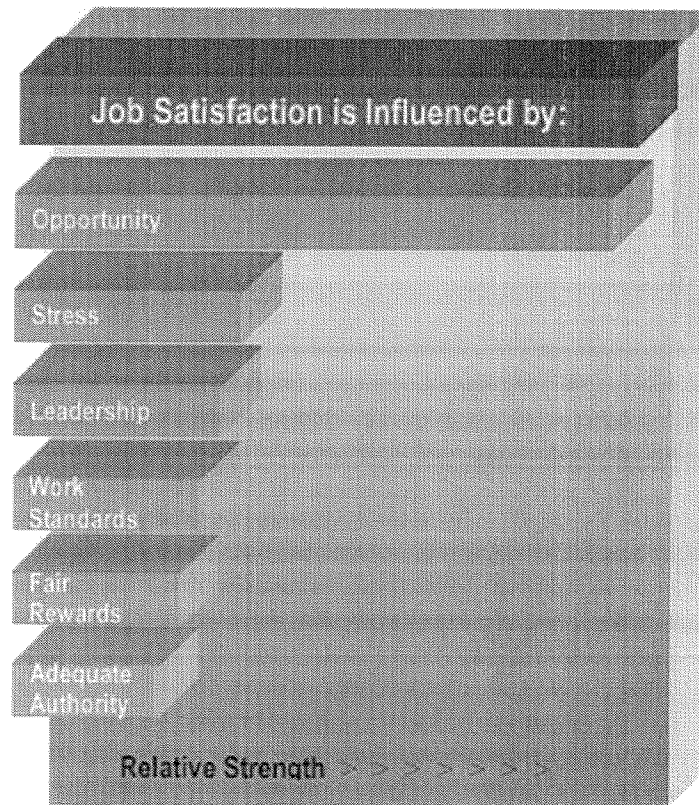
Diminishing returns. Frequently, there is not a simple relationship between satisfaction and its consequents. For example: the greater the dissatisfaction, the greater the motivation to quit. Once people are basically satisfied, they are no longer motivated to quit. How will their behavior be different if they are **wildly satisfied** with their jobs? They will still not be motivated to quit. Thus, once employees are satisfied with their jobs, being wildly satisfied may not produce significantly different behavior. This effect can cause managers to under-estimate just how motivating job satisfaction really is.

What are the statistically significant factors that affect job satisfaction?

Case Study:

We surveyed over 15,000, largely white collar, employees nationwide from all levels of the participating organizations. 20% were managers/supervisors; 91% worked full-time; average age was 33; there was an even proportion of males and females.

As part of a larger project whose goal was to create an employee-driven, survey-improvement process [our MFI® process], Bavendam Research identified **six factors that influenced job satisfaction**. When these six factors were high, job satisfaction was high. When the six factors were low, job satisfaction was low. These factors are similar to what we have found in other organizations.

Job Satisfaction is Influenced by:
Opportunity
Stress
Leadership
Work Standards
Fair Rewards
Adequate Authority
Relative Strength

Opportunity.

Employees are more satisfied when they have challenging opportunities at work. This includes chances to participate in interesting projects, jobs with a satisfying degree of challenge and opportunities for increased responsibility. Important: this is not simply "promotional opportunity." As organizations have become flatter, promotions can be rare. People have found challenge through projects, team leadership, special assignments-as well as promotions.

Actions:
- Promote from within when possible.
- Reward promising employees with roles on interesting projects.
- Divide jobs into levels of increasing leadership and responsibility.

It may be possible to create job titles that demonstrate increasing levels of expertise which are not limited by availability of positions. They simply demonstrate achievement.

Stress.

When negative stress is continuously high, job satisfaction is low. Jobs are more stressful if they interfere with employees' personal lives or are a continuing source of worry or concern.

Actions:
- Promote a balance of work and personal lives. Make sure that senior managers model this behavior.
- Distribute work evenly (fairly) within workteams.
- Review work procedures to remove unnecessary "red tape" or bureaucracy.
- Manage the number of interruptions employees have to endure while trying to do their jobs.
- Some organizations utilize exercise or "fun" breaks at work.

Leadership.

Employees are more satisfied when their managers are good leaders. This includes motivating employees to do a good job, striving for excellence or just taking action.

Actions:
- Make sure your managers are well trained. Leadership combines attitudes and behavior. It can be learned.
- People respond to managers that they can trust and who inspire them to achieve meaningful goals.

Work Standards.

Employees are more satisfied when their entire workgroup takes pride in the quality of its work.

Actions:
- Encourage communication between employees and customers. Quality gains importance when employees see its impact on customers.
- Develop meaningful measures of quality. Celebrate achievements in quality.

Trap:
be cautious of slick, "packaged" campaigns that are perceived as superficial and patronizing.

Fair Rewards.

Employees are more satisfied when they feel they are rewarded fairly for the work they do. Consider employee responsibilities, the effort they have put forth, the work they have done well and the demands of their jobs.

Actions:
- Make sure rewards are for genuine contributions to the organization.
- Be consistent in your reward policies.
- If your wages are competitive, make sure employees know this.
- Rewards can include a variety of benefits and perks other than money.

As an added benefit, employees who are rewarded fairly, experience less stress.

Adequate Authority.

Employees are more satisfied when they have adequate freedom and authority to do their jobs.

Actions:

When reasonable:
- Let employees make decisions.
- Allow employees to have input on decisions that will affect them.
- Establish work goals but let employees determine how they will achieve those goals. Later reviews may identify innovative "best practices."
- Ask, "If there were just one or two decisions that you could make, which ones would make the biggest difference in your job?"

The secret:

One thing that makes humans unique is our ability to focus energy. Whether to heat a home or to cut steel with a laser, focusing energy where it's needed produces significant results. As a manager, you need to know what is important and where it is a problem. Focusing time and resources on a specific problem is more likely to produce measurable benefits to the organization.

The actual causes unique to your organization can only be uncovered through a proper analysis. Bavendam Research Inc. has developed a survey process that identifies underlying causes of the factors such as:

- retention/turnover
- productivity
- teamwork
- communication
- job satisfaction
- and much more.

You can choose from standard, semi-custom and fully custom analyses. We even help you manage the improvement projects once they begin.

Find out more about Bavendam Research and our Merlin™ process:

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