

EMPLOYEE-SATISFACTION: A TRIANGULATION APPROACH

P J VISSER
M BREED

*Department of Industrial Psychology
University of South Africa*

R VAN BREDA

*Department of Psychology
Vista University, Pretoria Campus*

OPSOMMING

Die navorsing omtrent werknemerstevredenheid is uitgevoer in die vervaardigingsbedryf. Die steekproef het bestaan uit 543 werknemers. Die metode van ondersoek kan beskryf word as 'n "driekantige benadering" (triangulation approach) waar daar van kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe meting gebruik gemaak is en die resultate geïntegreer is in die bestudering van die konstruk. Die navorsing bevestig bestaande bevindinge dat die meting van dimensies soos vergelykbare belonings, werkstoestande, ondersteunende kollegas, inhoud van werk, ens. resultate lewer rakende die vlak van werknemerstevredenheid, 'n enkel vraag, naamlik, "Hoe tevrede is jy met jou werk?" gunstig vergelyk met die algemene indeks. Die bevindinge dui ook op die voordele van 'n benadering waar die kwantitatiewe data gekomplimenteer word deur kwalitatiewe inligting soos verkry uit individuele onderhoude. Die gevolgtrekkings bevestig die waarde wat die kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetode inhou vir kruis-kulturele navorsing in 'n Afrika konteks.

ABSTRACT

The research on employee-satisfaction was conducted in the manufacturing industry. The sample consisted of 543 employees. The methodology could be described as a "triangulation approach" where a combination of quantitative and qualitative measurements were utilised and the results of both types of measurement integrated in the study of the construct. The research confirms existing findings that although the measurement of dimensions such as equitable rewards, working conditions, supportive colleagues, job content, etc. yield results on the level of employee-satisfaction, a single question, namely, "How satisfied are you with your job?" compares favourably with the general index. The findings also suggest the advantage of complementing the quantitative data with qualitative information. The conclusions confirm the value of a qualitative method in cross-cultural research in an African environment.

Employee-satisfaction in one form or another has been related to such variables as turnover, absenteeism, productivity, group cohesiveness, general hygienic factors, job rewards, personal rights, labour unrest and performance appraisal (Barber, Dunham & Formisano, 1992; Danhoff, 1962; Gruneberg, 1976; Mount, 1984; Robbins, 1993; Schemerhorn, 1989; Vroom, 1960b). These dependent variables have monetary implications for organisations and therefore research on employee-satisfaction has been a focus in industrial psychology. In South Africa the political changes and frequent labour unrest necessitate a closer look at and awareness of employees and their level of employee-satisfaction.

It is generally accepted that there is no simple, commonly agreed upon theoretical generalisation which explains employee-satisfaction. This is exemplified by Wanous and Lawler (1972) who state that "there is a serious lack of good theory about the very meaning of employee-satisfaction..." (p. 102).

The generally experienced difficulty in defining the construct of employee-satisfaction restricts theoretical and empirical comparison. It is suggested that conflicting results in various studies of employee-satisfaction may be the result of different researchers simply defining the term differently (Locke & Latham, 1990; Wanous & Lawler, 1972), and different terms being used interchangeably with other terms such as "morale, job satisfaction, attitudes and opinions" (Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Guion, 1958; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, & Capwell, 1957; Kleinbeck, Quest, Thierry & Häcker, 1990).

The history of the construct employee-satisfaction indicates an evolutionary developing process, where the construct was initially perceived to be a simple variable (Beer, 1964; Heron, 1952; Lasswell, 1948; Locke, 1969; Locke, 1970). This approach is illustrated by Beers' (1964) where he defines employee-

satisfaction as "... the attitude of workers toward the company, their jobs, their fellow workers and other psychological objects in the work environment. A favourable attitude toward these indicates job satisfaction and vice versa" (p. 34).

According to Vroom (1964), Dansereau, Alutto and Yammariono (1984), Klein and Hall (1988), Rosseau (1985) and White and Locke (1981) and as suggested by Hulin and Smith (1965), employee-satisfaction is not a uni-dimensional variable but should be considered as consisting of a number of factors or areas of satisfaction.

When one refers to global employee-satisfaction or certain aspects or facets thereof, it is apparent that certain common elements need to be recognised in defining these terms:

- Employee-satisfaction is an attitude, or more simply a "feeling" based on an evaluation of conditions of employment (Hayeslip, 1982; Robbins, 1993; Steers and Porter, 1975).
- The above reactions and perceptions are of an individualistic nature (Dubin & Champoux, 1977; Heron, 1952; Herzberg et al., 1957; Lasswell, 1948; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

These attitudes are necessarily grounded within the particular content and context of employment and can be considered time bound as attitudes and situations can change (Gurin, Veroff & Feld, 1960; Stoner & Freeman, 1992; Vroom, 1964).

For the purpose of this study the following definition of employee-satisfaction is offered: Employee-satisfaction is a positive or negative attitude by an employee based on his/her evaluation of the content and/or context of his/her job at a particular time.

Being an attitude, the individualistic and personal nature of employee-satisfaction is clear, yet the literature and research to date have largely ignored the individual and his/her idiosyncratic perception. Individuals may have similar attitudes towards their jobs but their evaluation of the content/context

as well as the importance thereof might differ significantly. This void in the conceptualisation of the construct has resulted in the exclusive use of quantitative measurement procedures in the determination of the level of employee-satisfaction.

MEASUREMENT OF EMPLOYEE-SATISFACTION

According to an extensive overview of the research on the measurement of employee-satisfaction, Robbins (1993) identifies the two most widely used measurement approaches as:

1. A single global rating method. According to him this is nothing more than asking individuals to respond to one question such as: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your job?" (p. 184).
2. A summarisation of employee/job dimensions. This more sophisticated approach measures the employee's level of satisfaction with regard to certain key elements in a job. The overall employee-satisfaction score is then calculated (Beer, 1964; Danserau, Alutto & Yammariono, 1984; Locke, 1969 & 1970; Robbins, 1993; Vroom, 1964; White & Locke, 1981).

According to Robbins (1993) the single question measurement correlates with dimensional measurement and he concludes that the concept of employee-satisfaction is inherently so broad that the single rating actually becomes a more inclusive measure.

Should one accept Robbins' (1993) notion in this regard, it is of theoretical value only as the researcher needs to know which of the dimensions mentioned (salary, interpersonal relationships, equitable rewards) increase the overall index and which dimensions decrease the overall score. Both the global and dimensional measurement are needed to obtain an overall comprehensive index and to suggest effective interventions.

Both the single question rating and dimensional measurement of employee-satisfaction reflect the individual's attitude towards his/her job, but research has not focused on the subjective meaning and significance thereof for the individual. Differences in employees' perceptions, feelings and attitudes with regard to the importance of aspects of the job experience have not been accounted for. Although quantitative measurement may reflect the same level of employee-satisfaction, the individual's personal evaluation of his experience is often disregarded.

According to an overview of existing theory on employee-satisfaction as well as the measurement thereof, the authors are of the opinion that comprehensive research on the construct should include not only global and dimensional indexes but qualitative data should also be obtained in order to understand and explain individual levels of employee-satisfaction.

A triangular approach is suggested as an alternative to the widely used quantitative measurement approaches. (Denzin, 1978; Smith, 1975; Van Maanen, 1983; Webb, Cambell, Schwartz & Sechrest, 1966). Denzin (1978) defines triangulation as a combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena. This means that multiple and independent measures, if they reach the same conclusion or complement each other, provide a more certain, extensive and holistic portrayal of the same phenomena. Sieber (in Van Maanen, 1983) points out that the quantitative view of reliability is in many respects inapplicable in qualitative data collection. "Certain kinds of reliability must be intentionally violated in order to gain depth of understanding about the situation ... increased emphasis on reliability will only undermine that unique function" (p. 126).

In all triangulation designs, one basic assumption is relevant. According to Van Maanen (1983) the effectiveness of triangulation rests on the premise that the weakness in each single method will be compensated for by the counter balancing strengths of another. It is assumed that multiple and independent measures do not share the same weaknesses or

potential for bias (Rohner, 1977). Although it is true that each method has advantages and disadvantages, triangulation purports to exploit the advantages and neutralise rather than compound the liabilities.

The purpose of this study is to assess employee-satisfaction not only quantitatively but also qualitatively by means of a triangulation approach in order to determine not only the level of employee-satisfaction but gain an understanding of the individual's idiosyncratic subjective experience and subsequent impact thereof on his/her measured level of satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population

All the employees (543) in the marketing division of a specific motorvehicle manufacturer participated in the research. The level of employment ranged from unskilled/part time employees to top management.

INSTRUMENT

The authors developed a questionnaire on employee-satisfaction including the dimensions which, according to the literature, affect employee-satisfaction. Global rating questions (as suggested by Robbins, 1993) as well as dimensional questions were included based on an integration of theory on employee-satisfaction.

The following dimensions were included:

- Mentally challenging work (Herzberg et al., 1957; Locke, Fitzpatrick & White, 1983; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark & Lowell, 1953; Mobley, 1982; Robbins, 1993)
- Equitable rewards (Adams, 1965; Gruneberg, 1976; Herzberg et al., 1957; Locke, Motowidlo & Bobko, 1986; Orpen and Bonnici, 1987; Schermerhorn, 1989; Vroom, 1964)
- Communication (Gruneberg, 1976; Herzberg et al., 1957; Vroom, 1964)
- Supportive colleagues (Gruneberg, 1976; Mobley, 1982; Robbins, 1993)
- Supervision (Herzberg et al., 1957; King, 1970; Mobley, 1982; Vroom, 1964)
- Company and management (Herzberg et al., 1957; Krepet, 1982; Vroom, 1964)
- Opportunity for advancement (Herzberg et al., 1957; Locke et al., 1986; Porter & Steers, 1973; Mobley, 1982)
- Decision making (Robbins, 1993; Vroom, 1964)
- Level of commitment (England, 1993; Kleinbeck et al., 1990; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Mow-study, 1987)

Bipolar scales were used to measure some of the dimensions, while interval measurement (Likert Scale) were employed on other dimensions. In addition to the quantitative data obtained on the dimensions, qualitative data were solicited as well by means of interviews.

The global rating measurement was enriched by asking open ended questions such as "What do you like best at the organisation" and "What is your biggest concern regarding the company" which provided qualitative data regarding the participant's idiosyncratic perception.

After a pilot study, which included 30 interviews, the questionnaire was adapted to include management style as a dimension as well. The questions posed on this dimension were based on the information obtained in the pilot study.

PROCESS

Structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Quantitative responses were rated according to fixed norms and qualitative data obtained by means of open-ended questions. In order to improve interrater reliability responses were rated independently by both researchers conducting the interviews.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Percentages were obtained on the bipolar questions and the mean and standard deviations calculated for the Likert scales (0-9; low-high). The qualitative data was analysed according to Sieber's methodology (in Van Maanen 1983):

- Intertwining of analyses and data collection
- Formulating of classes of phenomena
- Identifying themes
- Provisional testing of hypotheses regarding dynamics.

RESULTS

Global vs dimensional measurement

Regarding the global employee-satisfaction measurement, a distinction was made between the global employee-satisfaction as defined by Robbins (1993) and a cognitive evaluation of the company. Both questions yielded a mean score of 6,57.

The following table provides the mean scores and standard deviations obtained on the dimensional measurement of employee-satisfaction.

TABLE 1
DIMENSIONAL MEASUREMENT

DIMENSION	MEAN SCORE	S
Departmental communication	6,29	1,90
Treatment by superiors	6,66	1,89
Treatment by colleagues	7,52	1,24
Interdepartmental communication	5,56	2,01
How challenging is your work	7,02	1,81

The mean score of these dimensions yielded a score of 6,61 as compared to the mean score of 6,57 on the global rating. This confirms Robbins' (1993) notion that a global index of employee-satisfaction is an all inclusive measurement which reflects the individual's attitude towards all the relevant dimensions.

Table two summarises the data obtained on the bipolar questions.

TABLE 2
BIPOLAR QUESTIONS

DIMENSION	POSITIVE RESPONSE YES	NEGATIVE RESPONSE NO
Organisational commitment to employee care	56%	44%
Opportunities to participate in decisionmaking	66%	34%
Equitability of the reward system	46%	54%
Organisation as long term career option	90%	10%
Proudness to be associated with the company	95%	5%
Presence of boredom	87%	13%

QUALITATIVE DATA

In order to compliment the quantitative data, individuals were asked to illuminate their evaluation by means of open ended questions. Two categories of data were deduced viz. positive factors contributing to employee-satisfaction and negative factors lowering the overall index.

In the positive category the following themes were identified:

- Work content (Challenging work, identification with the products)
- Positive feedback regarding the workforce in general (superiors, supportive colleagues and subordinates)
- Proud to be associated with the company (improving image)
- Participative management.

The following themes which had a negative impact on the overall index were identified:

- Lack of security (internal practices and contextual factors eg. political and economic situation, market share)
- Management style
- Unfair reward system
- Lack of interdepartmental communication
- Discriminatory practices
- Lack of employee care.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

● Positive factors contributing to employee-satisfaction

Thirty-five percent of respondents named their work content as the most important factor which contributes to their level of employee-satisfaction. Most respondents see their jobs as challenging, the score increased as the job grade level increased (mean = 7,02) and very few reported frequent boredom. This confirms the determining effect of work content on employee-satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1957; Locke, 1989; McClelland et al., 1953; Mobley, 1982; Porter & Steers, 1973; Robbins, 1993).

The results indicate that the second most important contributing factor seems to be the people at the company. This aspect was rated by 20% of respondents as the most positive aspect, regardless of job grade level and this finding is confirmed by the results obtained on the dimensional measurement of supportive colleagues, superiors and subordinates. The employee's experience support and help from one another which is much appreciated (Gruneberg, 1976; Robbins, 1993). Most of the employees also report adequate support from their immediate superiors (mean = 6,66) (Herzberg et al., 1957; King, 1970; Mobley, 1982; Vroom, 1964). Although this seems like a positive tendency, the influence thereof on the level of employee-satisfaction is contaminated by the employees' negative perception and subjective experience of top management and the general management style in the company. As many of the employees do not consider management as supportive they seek support from their colleagues.

Ninety-five percent of all employees stated that they are proud to work for the organisation. An overwhelming majority of employees (90%) see the company as a longterm career option and confirmed their commitment to the organisation (England, 1993; Kleinbeck et al., 1990; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Mow-study, 1987).

Immediate superiors were evaluated as positive by most of the respondents. They experienced their superiors as open and allowing participative management. This was complimented by their general perception that their immediate superiors take responsibility for their well-being. It needs to be mentioned that this positive evaluation of immediate superiors is in contrast with the negative evaluation of top management and the prevailing management style. It seems that employees have the perception that their immediate superiors buffer them from the negative impact of the general management style and top management.

● Negative factors decreasing the level of employee-satisfaction

The most negative factor contributing to the present level of employee-satisfaction is the management style (Herzberg et al., 1957; Krepet, 1982; Vroom, 1964). As it became evident in the pilot study that the employees view the management style as a major area of concern, an additional question was put to address and further explore this phenomenon.

Fifty-seven percent of the employees perceive the management style as uncaring and unsupportive. Some employees are of the opinion that the present management style is autocratic and even dictatorial. The following perceptions prevail:

- There is a lack of vertical communication and insufficient consultation with the workers;
- Middle-management perceives top management to be unsupportive – they are in a precarious position as they have to execute decisions made by top management without the necessary support. “We get the responsibility but not the authority.” The fact that management is seen as dictatorial in this regard leads to a situation where middle-management is urged to perform and innovate, but because of the fear of the reaction from top management it has the opposite effect in that they do not function out of their comfort zones;
- Lack of vertical communication from management adds to confusion amongst the workers perceiving it as a lack of direction. This results in lower levels of commitment.
- Lack of continuity at top management level further contributes to the employees’ insecurity.
- The black workers view management as being racist and discriminating.

The second most negative aspect decreasing the level of employee-satisfaction seems to be the perceived unfair reward system (Adams, 1965; Herzberg et al., 1957; Locke et al., 1986; Orpen & Bonnici, 1987; Vroom, 1964). Only 46% of all the employees evaluated the reward system as fair and hourly paid employees expressed the most dissatisfaction. The perceived unfairness of the reward system stems from the following:

- Dissatisfaction with salary and the calculation thereof;
- Discriminatory practices – race and sex;
- New appointments benefit financially;
- Dissatisfaction with the existing grading system.

People expect a reward system to be equitable. The worker compares his input/outcome ratio to other employees in similar positions and if these ratios are perceived to be inequitable the underpaid individual will seek to rectify the situation by being less productive and/or producing items of lower quality (Adams, 1965). The perceived unfairness of the reward system has a negative impact on the motivation of the employees. According to the expectancy theory of motivation (Dachler & Mobley, 1973; Vroom, 1964), work is a goal directed phenomenon based on the perception that performance results in outcomes. Thus, if the reward system is perceived to be unfair and leaning towards favouritism and discrimination, employees do not expect their efforts to be rewarded and they subsequently reduce their efforts. This has negative implications for productivity, as confirmed by Adams (1965).

Although interdepartmental communication yielded a mean score of 5,56 (average) on the Likert scale, many respondents, especially the higher job grade levels indicated that their level of employee-satisfaction is reduced by this dimension. The quantitative score does not reflect the subjective meaning and importance of the level of interdepartmental communication for many of the employees. The strong group cohesion that develops as a result of the employees’ negative perception of management and the lack of interdepartmental communication leads to a situation where the employees in any specific department unify against the perceived threats from other departments and top management. This undermines the common goals of the company as the departments function more and more in isolation.

A perceived lack of security was stated by 43% of the respondents as their main concern regarding the company and thus has a negative influence on their level of satisfaction. The reasons stated differed in the various job grade levels with higher level employees stating external factors and lower level employees internal practices. Some people ascribed their insecurity to the consequences of the present political situation, eg. strikes and the economic situation in general. Twenty-five percent of the respondents expressed fears regarding the future of motor manufacturing as an industry and more specifically the company’s market share.

The other reasons for the perceived insecurity stem from internal practices (17%), especially the appointment of people from outside the company and perceived lack of promotional opportunities. The prolonged temporary status of some black employees also resulted in insecurity. These factors were also highlighted in responses on other questions and are generally viewed as a reflection of management’s uncaring attitude towards employees. These negative perceptions result in lower levels of motivation. A restructuring of the company, which took place in the previous year and the subsequent job changes added to the insecurity of the work force. This demonstrates the intertwining of variables as the lack of security is linked to the negative perception of management style.

The perceived lack of commitment to employee care also lowers the level of employee-satisfaction. Only 56 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the organisation is committed to employee care. The qualitative responses demonstrated not only the intertwining of variables but also the importance of the idiosyncratic needs of individuals. The perceived management style and lack of employee care were equated.

Positive as well as negative comments about management’s attitude towards the workers in general were expressed. Negative comments such as “feels nothing for their employees ... doesn’t listen ... heavy-handed ... threatening ... take it or leave it ... over promise-under deliver ... too many changes, many of them without consultation with the workers ... no communication ... doesn’t recognise the needs of the workers ... no recognition ... autocratic” were reported (23%).

The black workers who gave positive responses were those who felt that the organisation supports them in the following ways: “they provide work ... my children can eat ... they provide loans ... my children can go to school”.

These responses illustrate the idiosyncratic needs of individual employees and the influence thereof on their attitude towards their jobs and level of satisfaction.

Perceived discrimination was cited by 21% of the respondents as an important reason why they are of the opinion that the organisation is not committed to employee care. “Discrimination against black people (unqualified, ... same work but different grade levels ... same grading but white people better paid ... discrimination in terms of fringe benefits ... discrimination in terms of career opportunities and promotion”.

Poor working facilities were also seen as an indication of management’s lack of caring. Comments range from complaints regarding the open plan office structure to the lack of canteen facilities and sport facilities.

The reward and grading system were seen by twelve percent of the respondents as proof of an uncaring attitude towards employees. “Salary too low ... same work, different gradings ... poor increases.”

Promotional practices were regarded by some employees as negative. Responses included statements such as “prolonged temporary status ... people from outside are given better jobs with more money while the present staff is neglected”. Although only thirty-three employees expressed such concerns, it needs to be stressed that whenever this response was given it was seen as demotivating and unfair and these employees reported lower overall satisfaction scores. They expressed a need to know the reasons why they are disregarded for promotion and an opportunity to rectify the situation.

General negative comments regarding lack of employee care included “no job descriptions ... too many change ... no feedback ... no training ... no participation in decisionmaking ... red tape ... top management sees the workers as their opponents and not as people who share their goals”.

CONCLUSION

The findings confirm the concordance between a single global rating (6,57) and facet measurement (mean 6,60) in the determining of the level of employee-satisfaction (Robbins, 1993). The value of a dualistic approach (global and dimensional) is evident as those factors contributing to positive and negative employee-satisfaction are identified. This can be helpful in the selection of appropriate interventions.

The authors are also of the opinion that the adopted methodology (triangular approach), provides the researcher with an opportunity to compliment the cold quantitative data with meaningful qualitative descriptions. This is of special significance in the South African context with its multi-cultural population. The research findings also illustrated the phenomenon where the quantitative evaluations of a specific facet by different individuals and groups corresponded, yet these evaluations were based on different underlying needs and perceptions. Individuals and populations differ with regard to their interpretation of situations and the subjective meaning they attach to the significance thereof (Kleinbeck et al., 1990; Gruneberg, 1976). The qualitative responses solicited illustrate the prominence of difference in perception and needs between individuals and culturally diverse groups (Khoza, 1986; Koning, 1992; Nzimande, 1986; Watts, 1988).

Although it is possible that the negative perception of management style and the effect thereof on employee-satisfaction is only limited to the specific organisation, the relationship should be investigated further. The findings of the research should further also be assessed within the broader social-political context where management might be perceived as an extension of the previous apartheid policy in South Africa. This subjective equation of company management with political structures might influence the views of the respondents as management inherits those qualities ascribed to positions of authority in the past. This indicates the importance of contextual factors in organizational functioning and research (Kleinbeck et al., 1990; Cascio, 1991; Schermerhorn, 1989; Templer, 1982).

It should be remembered that the prevailing organisational climate often aligns with the broader social context and that external factors have an effect on perceptions within an organization (Gruneberg, 1976; Stoner & Freeman, 1992; Szilagyi, 1988). The research findings indicate the importance of understanding individual perception in the study of organisational behaviour. Assumptions regarding individual feelings and perceptions can not be made without validation by those individuals themselves.

The research findings seem to indicate that the dilemma regarding employee-satisfaction and the conceptualisation thereof can not be successfully addressed without considering the idiosyncratic needs and perceptions of individual employees as the qualitative data yielded notable differences.

The individual as basic unit of analysis should not be ignored in favour of groups and organisations, especially in a multi-cultural society (Koning, 1992; Nzimande, 1986). The qualitative approach to the research problem as defined addressed this requirement.

THE SEMINAR

Qualitative Researcher:

"Many people these days are bored with their work and are ..."

Qualitative Researcher: [interrupting]: "What people, how many, when do they feel this way, where do they work, what do they do, why are they bored, how long have they felt this way, what are their needs, when do they feel excited, where did they come from, what parts of their work bother them most, which ..."

Qualitative Researcher: "Never mind" (van Maanen, 1983, p. 7)

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