

Job Satisfaction: What is it? Why is it Important? How Can you Get it? by Kevin Scheid

The issue of job satisfaction, what it is and why it is important, brings with it a great deal of research and opinion accompanied by a vast store of written material. However, the topic job satisfaction lacks clarity and is sometimes controversial. The term “job satisfaction” is understood to mean everything from “making all aspects of a job easy for employees” to “making the job meaningful, significant and challenging.” Research on the importance of job satisfaction can be equally confusing with some research clearly indicating no correlation between job satisfaction and job effectiveness while other research indicates there is a definite connection between the two. The likely reason for this confusion, beyond a lack of understanding on the topic, is that all factors associated with job satisfaction are not understood, agreed upon, measured or correlated. Moreover, all the factors contributing to employee motivation and effectiveness are not captured in any one of the single ambiguous concepts of job satisfaction. Thus, much of the qualitative research has not been verified by qualitative data. Research conducted by Schleicher, Watt and Greguras (2004) indicates that individuals with identical responses to questions on job satisfaction often

possess entirely different behaviors relating to job performance. Additionally, differing factors relating to job satisfaction hold varying degrees of importance to individuals. Thus, a proven model showing the relationship between job satisfaction and performance has been elusive despite the vast quantity of qualitative data

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supporting the relationship. These issues are very complex and have simply not been fully deciphered by researchers.

Dispositional Theory

Some of the theories relating to job satisfaction may further illustrate the complexity of the issue and help the understanding of how management may positively affect job performance through job satisfaction. The first theory is the dispositional theory.

The idea that people who are happy in life are happy in their job is called the dispositional theory and there is significant research to support this idea. Heller(2002) connects three behavioral theories to aid in the understanding of the dispositional theory. These three theories include research on *positive affectivity and negative affectivity*, the *big five personality attributes* and *core self evaluations*.

Positive affectivity is a personality characteristic described as high energy, enthusiastic and pleasurable engagement while negative affectivity is a personality type characterized as distressed, unpleasurable engagement and nervousness (Heller, 2002). Research has shown that people with positive affectivity are happier in their work and happier in life than those with negative affectivity.

The big five personality attributes introduced by Goldberg (1990) have a near consensus agreement from behavioral experts as the comprehensive personality taxonomy. According to Heller (2002) these five traits include: “extraversion (or surgency), neuroticism (or emotional instability), agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness

(or culture).” Research has shown a strong correlation between these five factors and job satisfaction.

The third facet of dispositional theory, core self evaluation theory, developed by Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997) is gaining acceptance as a model for determining job satisfaction and job performance. Core self evaluation theory has four facets including: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (low neuroticism). This theory again links personality attributes and practices with motivation, job satisfaction and job performance. All three dispositional theories recognize the connection between job satisfaction, motivation and performance but focus on the attributes of the person entirely. Thus, the dispositional theory suggests that some people will be satisfied, motivated and high performing at work regardless of how poorly managed while other people will not be happy no matter how great an organization. However, the data indicates that despite the correlation, personality can only explain less than half of the level of job satisfaction. This tells us that there are likely some elements within organizational control which can affect employee job satisfaction.

Hygiene Theory

Fredrick Hertzberg developed the hygiene theory on job satisfaction and employee motivation which can tie the principles of the disposition theory together with the influence management has on job satisfaction, performance and motivation. According to Herzberg (1974) there are two factors

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relating to satisfaction and motivation in the workplace; *satisfiers* and *dissatisfiers*.

Satisfiers relate to the content of the work such as “achievement, recognition for achievement, interesting work, increased responsibility, growth, and advancement. Herzberg (1974, p18).” Dissatisfiers are related to how employees are treated and include such items as “company policy and administration practices, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security. Herzberg (1974, p18).”

If we combine this theory with the disposition theory we can more clearly see a model for job satisfaction in which some satisfaction or dissatisfaction is inherent in the nature of each individual worker, some satisfaction comes from the content of the work and some dissatisfaction comes from the way they are treated. Managers have some influence on the level of satisfaction by fostering achievement, recognizing achievement, making the work interesting, giving employees responsibility and providing for opportunities for growth and advancement. More importantly, managers can create dissatisfaction with inequitable pay, poor company personal policies, working conditions or job security. The importance of each of these job dissatisfiers relates to the frequency it occurs and the intensity of the shortfall. In other words a policy that treats employees poorly every day is a bigger dissatisfier than a policy which treats them poorly only once per month. Moreover, the severity of the dissatisfier affects the importance of that dissatisfier. Therefore, if pay is at such a level that people cannot meet their basic needs, then pay would overshadow all other dissatisfiers and eclipse job satisfiers.

How do you improve on job

satisfaction? Now that you may have a feel for the complexity of the issue you may better understand how improving job satisfaction in your organization can be an illusive goal. The first step in improving job satisfaction might be to hire people who are satisfied with their life. This step should be fairly easy if you are hiring Christians who are putting Christ at the center of their lives. One school superintendent who led a school certified as a Best Christian Workplace told his staff that he wanted people who wanted to work at the school, liked the kids and were happy with the work. If they were not happy then they owed it to themselves to move on and find a job where they were happy. This might not have been the singular policy making this school a great place to work, but the job satisfaction theories certainly support the idea that this policy would have a significant impact on the overall positive culture of the workplace.

Of course there is more management must do to make a great workplace. Management must minimize dissatisfiers and maximize satisfiers. Although there is not a single instrument developed to measure and guide management in creating a satisfied workforce, the Best

Christian Workplace survey provides some excellent insights. Taking a look at the survey instrument, we see there are several questions in the survey which are lagging indicators of job satisfaction. These lagging indicators include:

1	I would rate my organization as an exceptional place to work.
2	All in all, I am satisfied with my job.
3	In general, I like working for this organization.

Table 1. Job satisfaction questions

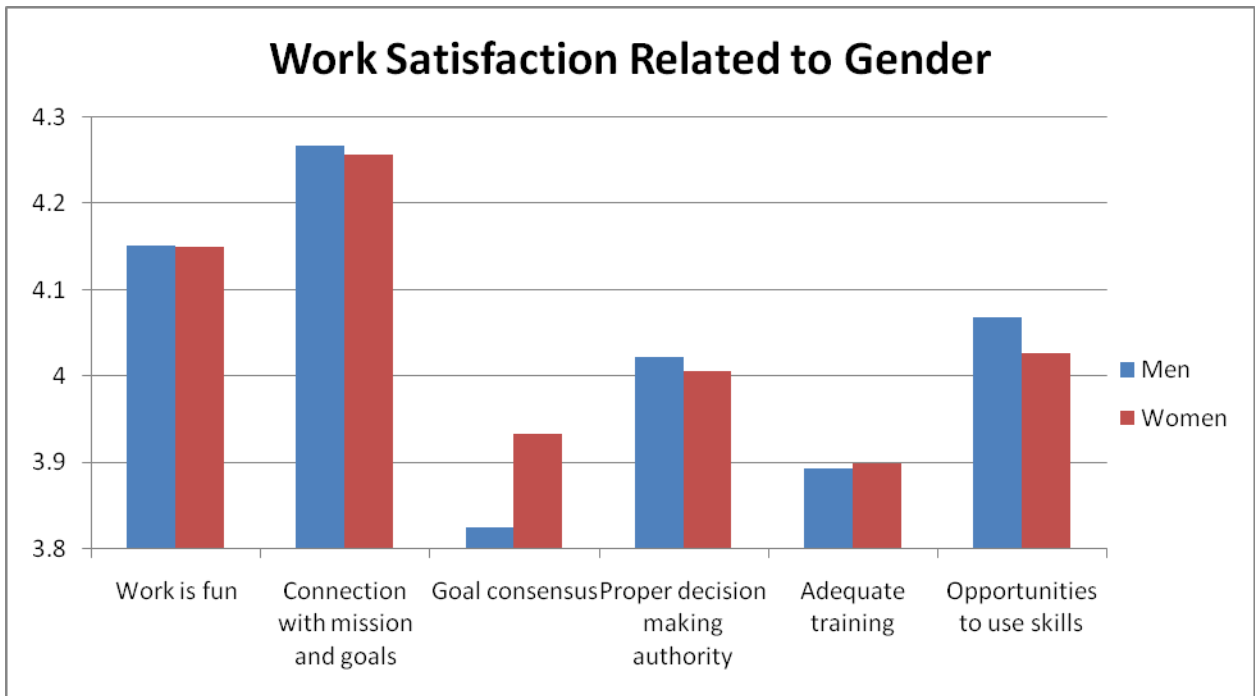
So they measure job satisfaction but not necessarily what creates higher levels of job satisfaction. Essentially all the questions in the rest of the survey have some correlation to job satisfaction, but to help us focus in a few areas concentrating on the work satisfaction dimension in the survey is in order. The questions related to work satisfaction include:

19	I have fun at work.
20	The mission and goals of my organization make me feel my job is important.
21	There is clear consensus on my organization's goals.
22	I have the decision-making authority I need to do my job effectively.
23	I receive the training needed to do my current job effectively.
24	I am very satisfied with the opportunities I have to use my skills in my job.

Table 2. Work satisfaction questions

Admittedly, these questions represent only a portion of the work related question possibilities and do not include the dissatisfiers. However, limiting the scope to these six questions will allow a concise view of Christian organizations' motivators which relate directly to the characteristics of the work. Expanding the study to a more comprehensive examination of job satisfaction could possibly be the subject of a future book but is beyond the scope of this paper.

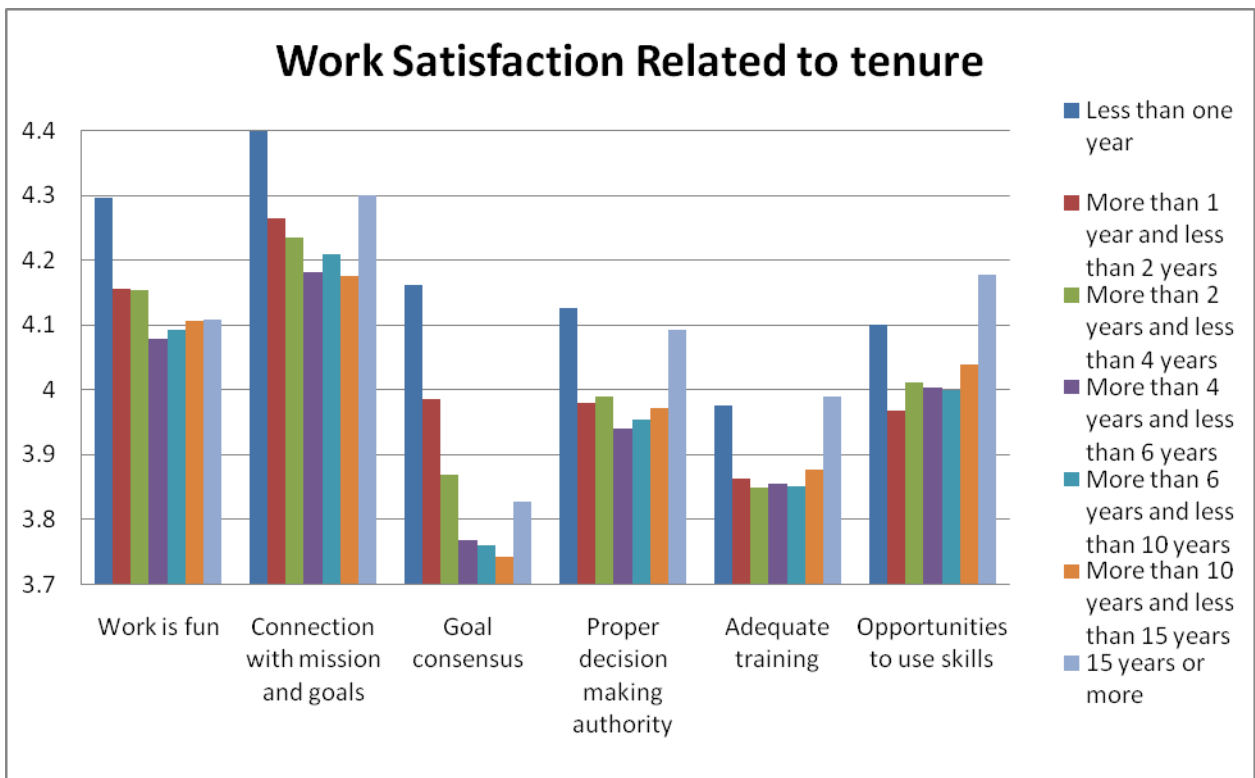
Chart 1 shows average scores of the six questions in table 2 from over 16,000 surveys of employees in Christian organizations. We can see overall there is little difference between men and women on these work



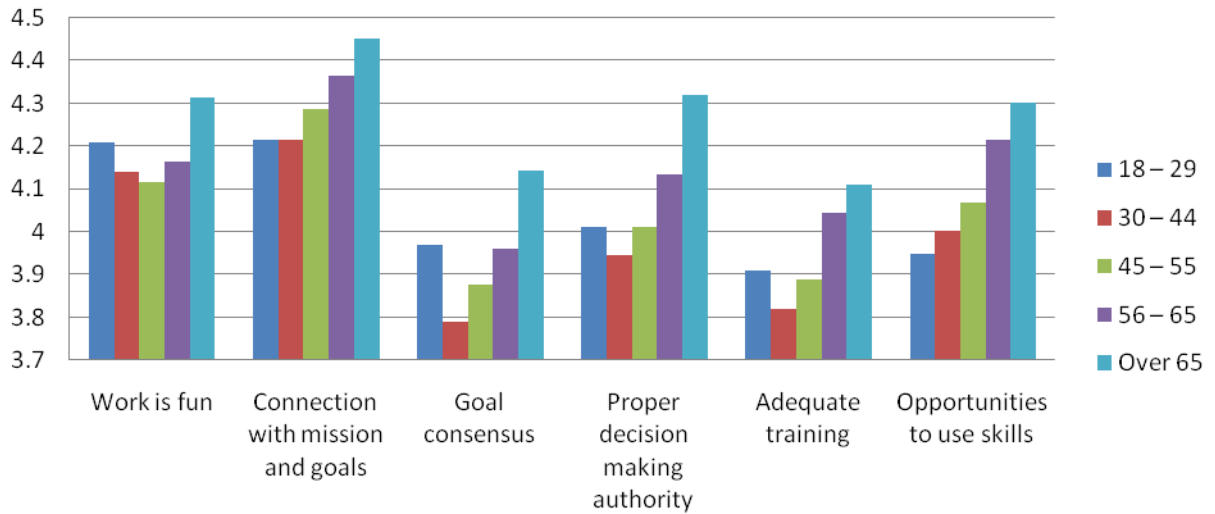
satisfiers and the strongest areas for Christian organizations appears to be connection with the mission and the work is fun.

“Opportunities to use skills” is also strong, but the connection with the mission is definitely a strength managers should be

aware of and on which they should build. The two areas most lacking is goal consensus and having adequate training. Goal



Job Satisfaction Related to Age



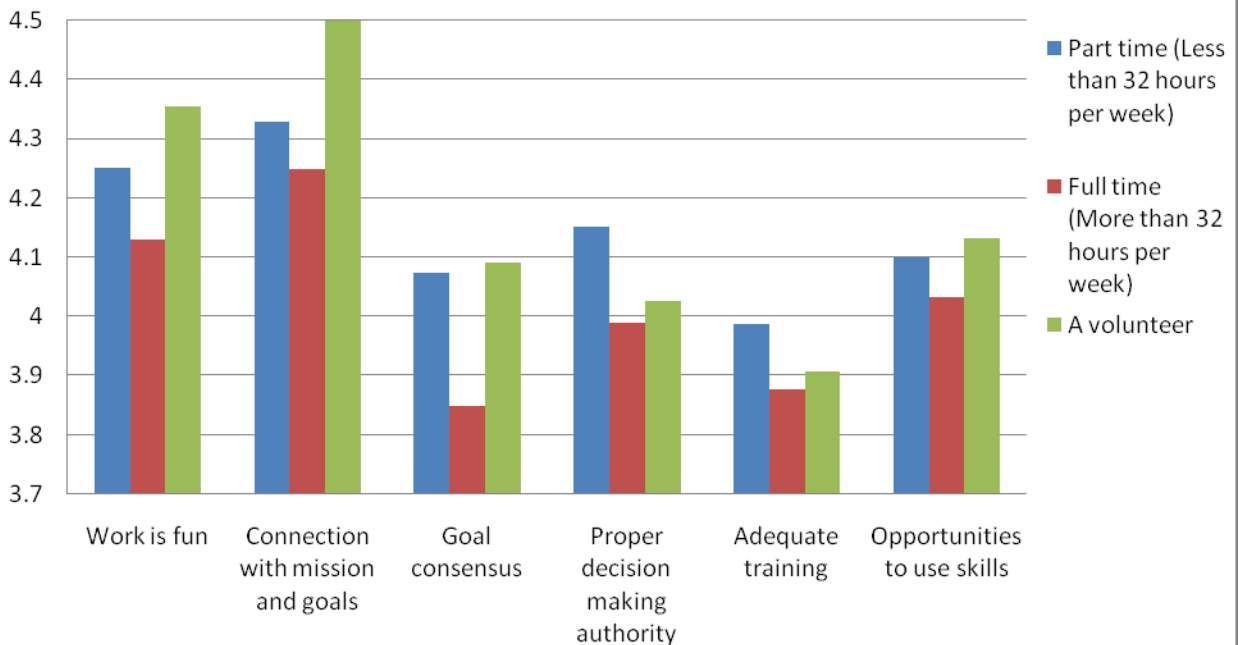
consensus appears to be the only question lacking in consensus between men and women. As goal consensus is overall a communication process, Christian

organizations might want to spend more time in ensuring there is consensus on the goal especially for male staff. Although “I have the proper decision

making authority” is marginally strong, there is room for improvement in this area.

Looking deeper into the

Job Satisfaction Related to Employment Status



demographics of these six questions, we can see in Chart 2 that tenure in an organization generally follows a standard pattern of newer people being the most positive next to the longest tenured people and the people in the middle being less satisfied until 4-6 years have passed. After 4-6 years people generally become more satisfied. From Chart 2 we can see the challenge for management is to maintain the positive attitude of a new hire. We can also see that goal consensus continues to decrease as time goes on and increases only slightly for people over 15 years in the organization. Understanding that this last group likely includes a higher percentage of top management, we can see that goal consensus becomes increasingly dispersed as tenure increases. Possibly weighting the inputs on organizational goals relative to tenure may be a technique to balance out this perception.

Chart 3 shows the questions in table 2 relative to employee age. An interesting pattern arises from this chart where satisfaction increases as people get older. With the exception of a minor blip with the youngest group it appears this increase is almost linear. The observation that older people are the happiest people working in Christian organizations

may be significant. However, we do not know why older people are more satisfied. It could be because they are wiser and have learned to appreciate work, or it could be that they are more senior, get paid more, are more secure or simply do not have as many expectations from their work. Satisfaction related to age may be an area warranting future research.

The final demographic relating to employment status shows some surprising results. Full time employees are the least satisfied in every area. Possibly the most surprising is the significantly lower score for goal consensus of full time employees. This again shows the importance of including your most important and committed people in developing organizational goals and creating consensus.

Although job satisfaction, employee motivation and productivity are complex and confusing issues, management should not back away from facing them. Understanding that some parts of job satisfaction and motivation is simply an attribute of the employee over which you have no influence should temper your approach to improving job satisfaction. Managers should focus on two areas to improve job satisfaction, motivation and

productivity: how employees are treated and the content of their work. A good employee survey should help management focus in on areas which are creating dissatisfaction or which are not providing adequate motivation.

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