

NEED GRATIFICATION AS A MODERATOR OF THE EFFECT OF CONTENT AND CONTEXT FACTORS ON JOB SATISFACTION: A STUDY WITH BLACK FACTORY WORKERS



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Hierdie studie is ontwerp om drie sentrale voorspellings van die omgewingsteorie oor werkstevredenheid te toets. Die skrywer kom o.a. tot die gevolgtrekking dat 'n algemener teorie van werkstevredenheid nodig is wat toon hoedat die werksomgewing met die individu se verwysingsraamwerk in wisselwerking is om gevoelens van werksbevreëding te ontwikkel. Volgens dr. Orpen behoort die bevindings van hierdie studie bestuurders tot versigtigheid te maan om Herzberg se twee-faktorteorie sonder meer te aanvaar.

INTRODUCTION

The motivation-hygiene theory of job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1959) has had a considerable impact on industrial psychology in many parts of the world, including South Africa. However, despite the impressive number of studies aimed at testing the main predictions from the theory, there is still disagreement between those who feel that the theory is not supported by the data and those who feel that the theory can account for the existing data. This disagreement stems from the fact that, of the only two consistent findings to emerge from these studies, one supports the motivation-hygiene theory in its original formulation, and one does not. The finding that supports the theory is that, on the whole, content elements in the work situation (intrinsic factors like achievement, task responsibility, advancement, and nature of work) are more powerful determinants of job satisfaction than context elements (extrinsic factors like working conditions, relations with supervisors, company policy, and relations with peers). The finding that does not support the theory is that, on the whole, the same elements in the work situation are related to both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. What is clearly needed is some more general theory that can account for both these sets of findings.

The environmental theory, as proposed by Soliman (1970), which is derived fairly directly from Maslow's "need hierarchy" model of human motivation, appears to satisfy this requirement. According to this view, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are opposite ends of the same continuum, and the same elements in the work situation can be related to both. Whether a given element is more highly related to job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction depends on the

general work environment, which is conceptualized as a continuum ranging from highly non-need-satisfying (where it does not provide adequately for one's major needs) to highly need-satisfying (where it provides maximally for one's major needs). In terms of the "need hierarchy" model, persons in the former environment are unlikely to have these lower-level needs fulfilled, whereas persons in the latter environment are likely to have both their lower-level and higher-level needs fulfilled. It is argued from this that persons in a non-need-satisfying environment will obtain job satisfaction and dissatisfaction mainly from fluctuations in the degree of gratification of their lower-order needs, which are maximally responsive to context elements in the work situation, whereas persons in the need-satisfying environment will obtain job satisfaction and dissatisfaction mainly from fluctuations in the degree of gratification of their upper-order needs, which are maximally responsive to content elements in the work situation.

Since the gratification of one's lower-order needs (physiological, safety, and security needs) are fairly well guaranteed in a Western society, this environmental view suggests that in this setting motivator factors, which are maximally responsive to content elements in the work situation, should be the major contributors to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It also suggests that, depending on the degree to which the work environment is need-satisfying, the same elements in the work situation can contribute to either job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction. In other words, the environmental view, as proposed by Soliman (1970), can account for both the consistent findings mentioned earlier. Despite this positive feature, the environmental theory has not yet been tested empirically. The only previous study to examine the theory, that by Soliman (1970) himself,

was inadequate, since it did not employ independent measures of the need-satisfying dimension of the work environment. The present study was designed to test three central predictions from the environmental theory of job satisfaction:

1. In a need-satisfying environment, content factors are more highly related to job satisfaction-dissatisfaction than context factors.
2. In a neutral environment, content and context factors are equally related to job satisfaction-dissatisfaction.
3. In a non-need-satisfying environment, context factors are more highly related to job satisfaction-dissatisfaction than content factors.

METHOD

(a) Subjects

The subjects consisted of three groups of Black factory workers. The first group (A) consisted of 56 supervisors, who were each responsible for at least 10 machine operators and factory cleaners. None of them performed manual work of any kind, having been promoted at least six months earlier from manual positions to their current positions of greater power and responsibility. Their mean age was 36.4 and their mean number of years at school 9.6. The second group (B) consisted of 47 machine-minders, who were each responsible for the operating and routine repairing of machines involved in the making of auto components. Their mean age was 38.2 and their mean number of years at school 7.4. The third group (C) consisted of 51 cleaners who were each responsible for the sweeping of floors and the routine cleaning of machines. Their mean age was 35.4 and their mean number of years at school 5.4.

(b) Procedure

To assess the degree to which the respective environments of these three groups were perceived to be need-satisfying, the subjects were each given a Xhosa version of the 13-item Porter questionnaire (1961). The format and instructions were the same as in his original study, except that the word "management" was replaced by the word "job". Each subject was asked to indicate how much of a given characteristic is attached to his job and how much should be attached to his job. Following Porter, level of need fulfilment was given by the inverse of the difference between these "is now" and "should be" responses.

To assess the degree to which content and context factors contributed to job satisfaction-dissatisfaction, the subjects' responses to the four content (motivator) and four context (hygiene) job aspects, as assessed by the Halpern (1966) job factor questionnaire, were correlated with their responses to the Brayfield-Rothe (1951) index of job satisfaction. In the Halpern questionnaire, subjects indicated their amount of satisfaction with each of the content factors (achievement, advancement, nature of work, and responsibility) and each of the context factors (company policy, working conditions, relations with superiors, and relations with co-workers) on a series of six-point rating scales, ranging from 6 (extremely

satisfied) to 1 (extremely dissatisfied). In the Brayfield-Rothe index the subjects responded along five-point scales to 18 job-related items to yield an overall score, indicating their level of general satisfaction with their job. The questionnaires were administered by a fellow black factory worker to the subjects, under anonymous conditions, during lunch-breaks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As expected, group A perceived their work environment as relatively "high" in need-satisfaction, group B as fairly "neutral" in need-satisfaction, and group C as fairly "low" in need-satisfaction. For instance, the mean need-deficiency score on the Porter questionnaire obtained by the African cleaners ($M = 51.2$, $SD = 5.1$) was significantly greater ($p < .01$) than that obtained by the African machine-minders ($M = 35.6$, $SD = 6.3$), whose mean score, in turn, was significantly greater ($p < .01$) than that obtained by the African supervisors ($M = 28.9$, $SD = 4.8$). The general level of job satisfaction expressed by the three groups was in the same direction; for instance, the mean satisfaction score on the Brayfield-Rothe index of the supervisors ($M = 76.5$, $SD = 8.4$) was significantly greater ($p < .01$) than that of the machine-minders ($M = 66.3$, $SD = 11.3$) whose mean score, in turn, was significantly greater ($p < .01$) than that of the cleaners ($M = 50.1$, $SD = 9.4$). In each of the three groups there was a positive relationship between perceived need-fulfilment and rated job satisfaction, indicating that the less deficient the subjects felt their work environment was in gratifying their major needs, the more satisfied they were with their jobs. For instance, in the supervisor group the correlation between need deficiency and overall job satisfaction was significantly negative ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$) as it was in the machine-minders group ($r = -.44$, $p < .01$) and in the cleaners group ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$).

The main predictions from the environmental view were confirmed. It was found, for instance, that content factors were more highly related to job satisfaction than context factors among the supervisors, that content and context factors were equally highly related to job satisfaction among the machine-minders, and that context factors were more highly related to job satisfaction than content factors among the cleaners. For instance, in the first case, the mean of the correlations between satisfaction with the four content factors and overall job satisfaction ($r = .68$) was significantly higher ($p < .05$) than that between satisfaction with the four context factors and overall job satisfaction ($r = .42$) in the group of black supervisors, whose mean score on the Porter need-fulfilment questionnaire suggests that these individuals, on the whole, find their work environment fairly high in need-fulfilment. In the second case, the mean of the correlations between satisfaction with the four content factors and overall job satisfaction ($r = .53$) was not significantly different ($p < .05$) from that between satisfaction with the four context factors and overall job satisfaction ($r = .49$) in the group of black machine-minders, whose mean score on the Porter need-fulfilment

questionnaire suggests that these individuals, on the whole, find their work environment fairly neutral in need-fulfilment. In the third case, the mean of the correlations between satisfaction with the four content factors and overall job satisfaction ($r = .23$) was significantly lower ($p < .05$) than that between satisfaction with the four context factors and overall job satisfaction ($r = .46$) in the group of black cleaners, whose mean score on the Porter need-fulfilment questionnaire suggests that these individuals on the whole find their work environment fairly low in need-fulfilment.

In short, these results indicate that in a need-satisfying work environment, content factors are more important determinants of job satisfaction than context factors, but that in a non-need-satisfying work environment the position is reversed, with context factors being more important determinants of job satisfaction than content factors. They establish clearly that whether content or context factors are more important contributors of feelings of job satisfaction depends, to a large extent, on the nature of the work environment, especially the degree to which it is perceived as gratifying one's major needs. Moreover, they suggest that the motivation-hygiene theory of job satisfaction is only really applicable in the special case where the work environment is seen as producing a fairly high degree of need-fulfilment. What is needed now is a more general theory of job satisfaction, which shows how the work environment interacts with the individual's frame of reference to produce feelings of satisfaction about the

job. The present study highlights the need to consider explicitly the "extent to which the work environment is seen as need-satisfying" in any such general theory of job satisfaction. The results of the study should therefore caution South African businessmen against the uncritical acceptance of the Herzberg two-factor theory. They suggest that the remedy for job dissatisfaction proposed by Herzberg — that of enriching jobs — may only "work" with black workers who are in a need-satisfying environment. For those black workers in South Africa who are *not* in this kind of environment, attention should perhaps be focused on "improving" the hygiene factors first, before introducing expensive job enrichment schemes.

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