Theories of job satisfaction

Lesson 6.5.1 | Organisational psychology

Core ideas

Job satisfaction is a worker's positive evaluation of their job, shaped by the work itself, conditions, rewards and opportunities.

Herzberg's two-factor theory separates hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction, from motivators, which increase satisfaction.

Hygiene factors include pay, supervision, company policy and working conditions; improving them may reduce complaints without creating strong motivation.

Motivators include achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and meaningful work.

Hackman and Oldham argue that job characteristics affect satisfaction through psychological states such as meaningfulness, responsibility and knowledge of results.

Job design techniques change the structure of work: enrichment adds responsibility, rotation moves workers between roles and enlargement adds more tasks at a similar level.

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Key terms

Job satisfaction: A positive attitude or feeling about one's job.

Hygiene factor: A job feature that can prevent dissatisfaction when adequate but does not necessarily motivate by itself.

Motivator: A job feature that can increase satisfaction and motivation.

Job characteristics model: Hackman and Oldham's theory linking job design to psychological states and work outcomes.

Skill variety: The degree to which a job uses different skills and activities.

Autonomy: The amount of control a worker has over how they complete the job.

Job enrichment: Redesigning work to add responsibility, challenge and decision-making.

Job rotation: Moving workers between different tasks or roles over time.

Further detail and evidence

Herzberg separates hygiene factors preventing dissatisfaction from motivators increasing satisfaction. Fair pay, conditions and policy are hygiene; achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and the work itself are motivators. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are treated as partly distinct dimensions.

Theories of job satisfaction

Continued

Hackman/Oldham: skill variety, task identity and task significance support experienced meaningfulness; autonomy supports experienced responsibility; feedback supports knowledge of results. Together these psychological states are proposed to improve intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, subject to individual/contextual differences.

Enlargement adds tasks at a similar responsibility level (horizontal change). Enrichment adds autonomy/responsibility and more meaningful control (vertical change). Rotation moves a worker among tasks/roles. Belias and Sklikas (2013) review these job-design approaches and their potential benefits/limitations; this is a literature review rather than one controlled intervention.

Applying the ideas

Adding several repetitive duties enlarges a job without necessarily enriching it. Allowing an employee to plan a complete piece of work, check results and make relevant decisions can add identity, autonomy and feedback. Rotation can reduce monotony while requiring training and safe transitions.

Evaluation and connections

Theories give actionable predictions but self-report and retrospective explanations may reflect bias. A challenging enriched role may suit one worker and overload another. More autonomy is useful only with resources and authority. Compare satisfaction with performance, turnover and wellbeing instead of assuming all outcomes move together.