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Job Satisfaction Variables: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract

In a competitive environment organizations are turning towards an important internal wealth, their employees. Because satisfied employees are considered to perform and stay loyal, the present paper examines the viewpoints in the literature regarding job satisfaction and delimits the need to address the variables which influence and explain the high and low satisfaction for the specific Romanian labor market. Additionally, the authors aim to discuss the variable differences between the public and the private sector. The Grounded Theory methodology was chosen due to its ability to extract theory from data. The qualitative research focused on 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with professionals from the Romanian public and private sector. After a thorough analysis, six main job satisfaction variables emerged with sub-elements. All 36 determinants were included in a new honeycomb model of job satisfaction variables which offers a strategic perspective for human resource management strategies.

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 20th century, we have been witnessing an increasing interest regarding the relationship between employee performance and satisfaction. Even if Bateman and Organ (1983) argue that performance does not consistently follow from satisfaction in a direct functional relationship, it is agreed that they are influencing each other. Scientists and managers believed that if they reduced job dissatisfaction, employees would increase their performance (Lawler and Porter, 1967) and decrease turnover (Hackman and Oldman, 1980). More than that, Steijn (2004) even argues that satisfied workers are more productive and creative.

Thus, several works have explored the possible motivation techniques for employee satisfaction like job rotation (Scott, 1966), less time spent at work, spiraling wages, job participation (Herzberg, 1968), autonomous work groups

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(Gulowsen, 1972) and others. But as Herzberg (1968) further emphasized, none reached their purpose because they have not taken into consideration the factors affecting job attitudes. Scholars have understood that job satisfaction is indeed attained through adequate motivation but only by taking into consideration a multitude of variables.

First studies considered that high and low job satisfaction was determined by age, sex, education, occupation and income (Lawler and Porter, 1967). Later on, this idea has been disputed because other variables linked to job content and organizational context were seen to better explain differences in job satisfaction (Ting, 1997; Steijn, 2004).

Turner and Lawrence (1965) developed the requisite task attributes which were predicted to relate positively to employee satisfaction and attendance. Hackman and Lawler (1971) provided evidence that job characteristics like: variety, task identity, autonomy and feedback can affect employee attitudes and behavior at work. Meyer (1991) linked job satisfaction with job commitment, arguing that an affective orientation, an involvement and identification with a particular organization will satisfy and maintain employees devoted to their tasks and responsibilities. Ting (1997) reported other specific determinants of job satisfaction like: lack of promotional opportunity, task clarity, utilization of skills and the meaningfulness of the task altogether with organizational commitment, relationships with supervisors and colleagues. Reiner and Zao (1999) considered skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback as the most important dimensions of the work environment.

Steijn (2004) was inspired to use previous classifications to propose the following job satisfaction variables: individual characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, and education level), job characteristics (income, supervisory position, working full time, permanent job, skill utilization and sector of work), work environment (task autonomy, satisfaction with management, pay and work load), personnel management practices and overall satisfaction. Finally Wei (2006) researched the determinants for strategic human resource management and classified them into three categories: a human resource function factors, personal factors and firm level factors.

Unfortunately few scholars have tried to study job satisfaction variables taking into consideration the public and the private sector with their unique particularities. Barrows and Wesson (2000) undertook a comparison between job satisfaction of professionals in the public and private sector but without highlighting the major variables that influenced these results. In addition there is scarce research in the Romanian scientific literature about employee satisfaction variables whether we speak about the public or the private sector.

Thus, the present paper aims to understand the main variables that influence employee satisfaction in the Romanian public and private sector and proposes a grounded theory approach to discover theory from interview data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Furthermore we present the grounded theory methodology, the variables resulted from the qualitative analysis and we discuss their particularities.

2. The Grounded Theory Methodology

This methodology offers systematic and at the same time flexible guidelines for data collection and analysis to construct theories which consist of abstract conceptualizations of substantive problems that people experience. Accordingly, the present research proposes to identify and analyze what influences job satisfaction in the Romanian private and public culture for future sustainable human resource motivation strategies.

With this objective in mind and based on the existing literature, the authors have set forth their research questions:

- Which are the specific variables that influence job satisfaction (in the Romanian private and public sector)?
- What is the employee's motivation for choosing and keeping a job?
- How can human resource management impact an organization?

By answering these questions, managers and human resource (HR) specialists will possess the knowledge to adequately motivate their staff and prevent turnover. More than that, they will improve employee performance and productivity for a sustainable organizational trajectory.

But these questions can be answered only by field professionals. Therefore, the proposed qualitative study envisages in-depth interviews with professionals from the public and private Romanian sectors. As the theory-building process “occurs via recursive cycling among the case data, emerging theory, and later extant literature” (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007), Grounded Theory (GT) is built upon two key concepts (Suddaby 2006): constant comparison (no separation between data collection and analysis) and theoretical sampling (envisages decisions

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