

## **Job Satisfaction: Why it is important for both employees and employers**

A satisfying employment is compared to a happy marriage. You have to give some, to get some so that both can live happily for a long time.

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Why do we need one more article about Job Satisfaction? Has not the world moved away from worrying about job satisfaction to talking about work-life balance and happiness at work? Does satisfaction in job lead to happiness, or is it the other way round? If we have job satisfaction, do we need work-life balance? Have not we been told that if we are satisfied with our jobs and get into a state of flow, we will not need to think about anything else for our happiness? But as the French philosopher Jean Baptiste Karr had said (translated) 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'. This is especially true for human behaviour and consequently for organizations and management.

Let us not forget that any organization is a vehicle for achieving a specific purpose and employees who work for organizations do not always feel deeply committed to the purpose. Work for them, is means to an end and not an end by itself. Likewise, for organizations, an employee is a resource to be optimally utilized to get the job done, irrespective of whether the employee is happy or committed to the purpose of the organization. If this reality sounds harsh, be assured that this is only half the truth.

Organizations need long term commitment for doing certain jobs, especially jobs that are complex and need to deal with uncertainty in design, production or to realize its market value. It is in this aspect that organizations are different from markets, where most of the transactions are short term or one-off. You, as a customer, therefore, do not generally worry much about job satisfaction of the uber driver or the pizza delivery person.

Therefore, the crux of the issue is wherever in organizations we need long term commitment from employees because of the nature of the job, there is need to retain the employee. There are lots of jobs in organizations where such long-term commitment is not necessary – employees can be made to do such work through a combination of rules, targets and financial incentives. Job satisfaction need not be of much concern in these cases. These are also the kind of jobs that can be outsourced to a third party if a reasonably efficient market exists, because markets can complete an economic transaction purely based on rules, targets and prices. But employee satisfaction is necessary in jobs where the output of the job or the process to arrive at it cannot be predefined and the employee is expected to 'give her best' on a sustained basis or to collaborate with others in achieving the output.

While coordination can be achieved through processes, collaboration needs more than that. Rules and incentives can achieve compliance, but commitment requires something more. A satisfied employee will be committed to the purpose and collaborate professionally with her colleagues to do the job, despite its complexity and uncertainties. Being able to deal with the

challenges more often than not will further enhance her satisfaction and the employee will be in a virtuous equilibrium with the organization.

How does an organization achieve this? By sufficiently motivating the employee towards the cause, providing her adequate autonomy to figure out how to reach the goal and recognizing her adequately when she succeeds – financially (yes, it still would matter) and socially. If the organization is able to pull this off, they are able to achieve their objective and retain the employee.

Is this just a one-way process, i.e., the responsibility of employees' job satisfaction lies only with the employer, or should the employee also take some responsibility for it? I would think it is the later.

As social beings, we love to belong to something, and identify with a cause larger than us. This cannot happen if we view everything from a short-term utilitarian perspective. While in the earlier days, it was possible to satisfy such social needs outside of work, today for most professionals, work consumes their lives and has become the most defining dimension of their identity.

Therefore, it is necessary that we get a sense of belonging from the organization that we work for, which is only possible if we take a long-term view. And if one has to be with an organization for the long term, one has to work hard in deriving satisfaction and possible actualization from the job itself, rather than outside of it.

What does it mean for the employee? It needs the employee to be patient, to delay gratification and to take responsibility in creating a workplace that is enriching and meaningful beyond the financial gains that it provides.

Therefore, it boils down to whether the employee and the employer look at their relationship from a long-term perspective. If it is long term, job satisfaction is critical, and it can only be achieved if there is conscious effort from both ends. It is therefore no wonder that a satisfying employment is compared to a happy marriage. You have to give some, to get some so that both can live happily for a long time.

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