

Job Satisfaction and Performance Viewed From a Two Dimensional Model

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Traditional theory suggests that job performance is affected by job satisfaction; increase job satisfaction and you will increase job performance. However, engineering staffs within the government are prime examples of cases in which reality does not match the theory. While these engineering staffs continue to remain highly competitive and turn out high quality products, the government struggles to get a handle on the pay disparity between the private and public sectors. I contend that job performance is much more complex than the traditional theory. After getting no satisfaction from existing research, I am proposing another way to look at job satisfaction and job performance. I have developed a model that does not strongly contradict earlier research, while at the same time addresses some of the challenges to the earlier work. Hopefully, this model will become an additional tool that you can use when you are dealing with job performance issues.

While working on my master's degree in business administration (MBA) in the early 1990s, I wrote a research paper on job satisfaction vs. job performance based upon the publicized work of others. The prevailing theory was/is that increased job satisfaction results in increased performance. Intuitively this theory makes sense. While countless hours of research and money have been invested in this theory, there still seems to be a problem with encouraging high performance.

From the research I performed in the early '90s, I could not come up with a convincing argument to back this theory. I concluded that the two attributes, job satisfaction and job performance, are too closely linked to one another, and that they affect each other. Here are cases in point: If a person is highly satisfied with his/her job, this would lead the person to want to do a good job and to perform well. On the other side is the person's ability level. If the person is struggling with performing the job, it may give the appearance that the person is a poor performer even though he/she may be exhausting a great deal of effort in trying to perform the job. This person's frustration then in turn leads to poor job satisfaction.

Some researchers have expressed similar ideas, such as *performance affects satisfaction* [1], while one researcher went so far as to say that there is no relation [2]. Intuitively we feel that there must be a relationship. After all, it makes sense in our minds, researchers continue their efforts to explore the concept, and many are hungry for the latest information on the subject.

Since 1994, the federal government has allowed the engineering pay scale to erode. In an organization stymied by a great bureaucracy already burdened by financial cuts, it is extremely difficult to find the funds necessary to cover an increase in

engineering salaries. Today, electronic engineers within the federal government perceive that they are making much less than their counterparts in the private industry. It is not surprising that recruiting is extremely difficult and that those leaving to take other jobs (e.g. attrition excluding death and retirement) are greater than the other job series on a military base, and morale has been better.

New Measure of Performance

So what kind of effects has this had on job performance? Thankfully our performance is not as bad as one would predict. We continue to deliver high quality products (I am unaware of any customer complaints of bad quality). This observation stirred an interest in me to go back to the books and review the latest research on job performance. My results were the same as before: The two attributes, job satisfaction and performance, are too closely linked to one another. I was once again left with the feeling that they affected each other. Because of this observation, I started trying to find another way to look at job performance.

To begin, I looked at job satisfaction as a combination of three elements: task satisfaction, employment satisfaction, and market satisfaction.

Task satisfaction comes from performing the tasks required of the job. Increasing a person's salary may make an undesirable task more bearable, but it doesn't necessarily make it more enjoyable.

Employment satisfaction consists of elements such as personnel policies, benefits, career opportunities, work environment, style of management, fit in the organization, etc. Many of these elements are within the company's control; others are not. For example, there may be very little that a company can do for an employee who does not get along with his/her peers. The employer can try to assure that

all individuals are treated professionally, but the company cannot make the co-workers become close friends.

Market satisfaction is comprised of forces external to the company that affect the individual's job. Political situations and public laws can easily affect job dissatisfaction. An individual may be unhappy with having to conform to an OSHA law but the company cannot waive the requirement to improve an individual's job satisfaction. In most cases, market satisfaction will be consistent across the job market; the same external forces will be present even if the employee changes employers. However there are differences in the external forces affecting jobs within the government and those within the private sector.

The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the assumed correlation between job satisfaction and job performance. The theory is that the employee's performance is in direct correlation to their satisfaction; improve their satisfaction and you will improve their performance.

In looking for a new way to look at performance vs. satisfaction, I started with a very basic view: comparing the satisfaction and performance of a specific task. I will refer to these as task satisfaction and task performance. Task satisfaction is strongly influenced by a person's aptitude; it is the satisfaction received by the employee for performing that specific task. *Task satisfaction excludes any outside influences on the individual's total job satisfaction.*

In developing this model, I considered the research of those who have performed a great deal of work in the field of management, including Peter Drucker, Herzberg, and Maslow (see Additional Reading). The test of this model was 1) it should not strongly contradict the work previously performed, and 2) it should help answer the challenges of the earlier work.

In Figure 2, I have broken the relationship of performance and satisfaction into four quadrants to further explore and explain the complexity of the relationship. This figure helps to understand the complexity while trying to keep the concept manageable. There are varying degrees of satisfaction and performance so it is difficult to state exactly where one would draw the line between high performance and low performance and between high satisfaction and low satisfaction. Each person is somewhere along those two lines. We can only try to understand what will happen as the employees move along those lines.

Figure 2 creates four quadrants. Two of the quadrants are the ones referenced by traditional theory:

- High Task Satisfaction and High Task Performance.
- Low Task Satisfaction and Low Task Performance.

The other two quadrants are:

- High Task Satisfaction and Low Task Performance.
- Low Task Satisfaction and High Task Performance.

My initial discussion using the two-dimensional model will look at the two axes from a positive viewpoint, i.e., the person wants to perform well.

High Task Satisfaction and High Task Performance. This individual loves his/her job. He/she has the aptitude, the skill, and resources necessary to perform the assigned task, and he/she performs the task quite well. A person in this quadrant may become so caught up in his/her task that the person does not realize that he/she has worked past quitting time.

Low Task Satisfaction and Low Task Performance. The manager should consider whether or not something is missing. Does the employee lack the aptitude, the skills, or the resources necessary to perform the task well? Being in this quadrant does not mean that the employee is not trying! From the employee's perception, the employee may be expending a great deal of effort in trying to complete the task. The employee may feel that he/she is doing everything humanly possible and he/she does not understand why management is unhappy with his/her performance. This person may experience very low task satisfaction because he/she finds it difficult or unfavorable to perform the task. This person may be a clock-watcher, never arriving early or staying late without being mandated and compensated.

Low Task Satisfaction and High Task Performance. Is a person in this

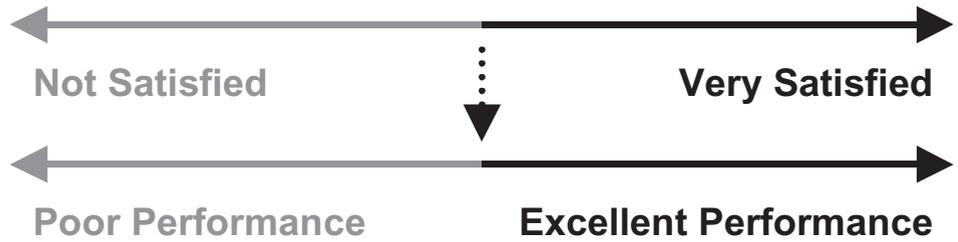


Figure 1: *Traditional Satisfaction vs. Performance Model*

quadrant really that rare? This person is indicating that they would rather be doing another job, but at the same time their personal values are such that they are giving this task their best effort. I suggest that this is a person that you want to keep. It may well be worth your effort to look at developing a graceful transition plan that would allow this individual to move to another position while minimizing the impact to your present operations.

High Task Satisfaction and Low Task Performance. From a positive viewpoint, a person in this quadrant loves his/her work but he/she is not performing as expected. The employee may find it hard to quit working on a task knowing that he/she can always make it better (i.e., a perfectionist that never finishes his task). Or, the person may enjoy what he/she is doing but lacks the aptitude, skill, or other resources necessary to do the task quickly.

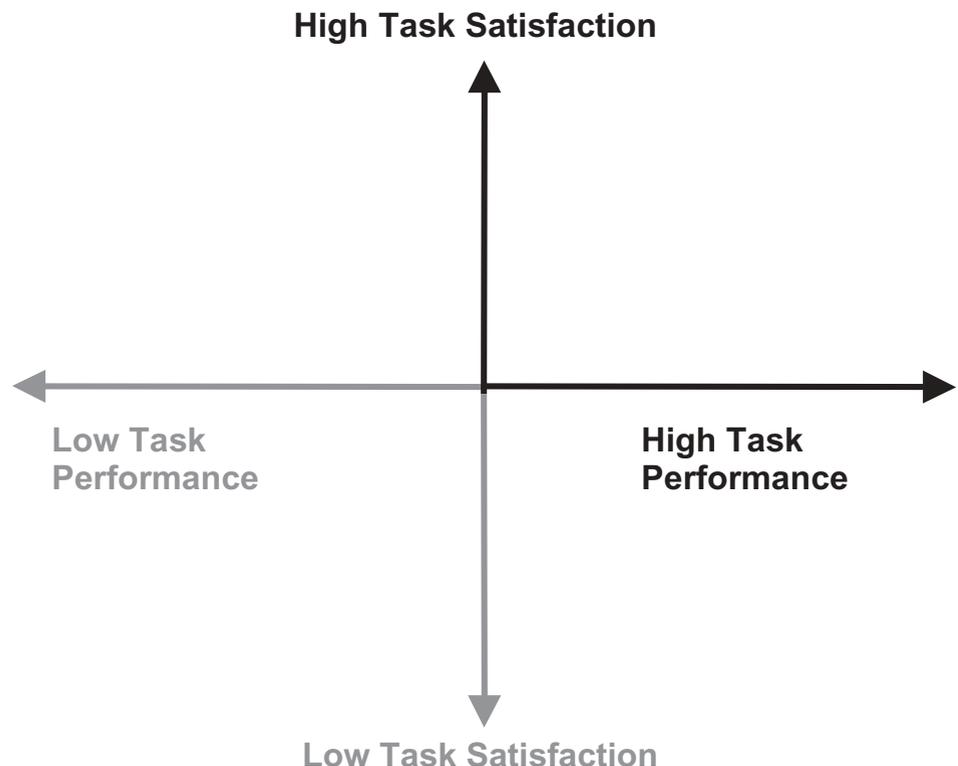
The discussion so far has been from a positive viewpoint. If the person's aptitude is such that they enjoy the tasks and they have the skills to perform the tasks,

then they have the potential of being in the high satisfaction and high performance quadrant. If the basic needs are not met, then increasing the person's salary is not going to improve performance. If a person *should* be in the high task satisfaction and high task performance quadrant and they are not performing as expected then the question is one of choice, "Why did the employee conscientiously or unconscientiously chose to move towards the left (decreased performance) in Figure 2?" Factors influencing the person's conscious or unconscious movements along the performance line include those related to employment satisfaction and market satisfaction.

While working on my MBA, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take a course on business ethics [3] in which we explored moral reasoning. The four levels of moral reasoning are as follows:

1. Reasoning based upon "me." The kind of reasoning that is seen in children and criminals such as, "I want it therefore I'll take it."

Figure 2: *Two Dimensional View of Task Satisfaction vs. Task Performance*



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2. Reasoning based upon outside influence like public law or religious teachings such as, "It's against the law to speed, so I don't speed," or "It's a sin to steal, so I don't steal."

3. Reasoning based upon your personal value system such as, "I believe that by helping others I help to make the world a better place, therefore I volunteer to help others."

4. Reasoning based upon the greatest good for the greatest number. Political leaders are often faced with basing decisions on this type of rational.

The lowest level of moral reasoning is level 1; the highest level is to recognize the various levels and understand what level of reasoning you are using. For example, a person may have to base a decision using the greatest good for the greatest number even though that decision may contradict the person's own personal value system. Recognizing the different levels of reasoning will help the person understand why they are anguishing over a decision. Some decisions are made conscientiously whereas others are made unconsciously such as reactions.

What I am suggesting is that each person is consciously or unconsciously moving along the line from low performance to high performance based upon their own personal value system and their moral reasoning. This is why two individuals with similar skills, knowledge, and capabilities appear to be at different ends of the performance spectrum. Both employees may feel as though the company does not value them, but the first employee's value system is based upon the thinking, "Two wrongs don't make a right, and I'm still going to do my best." Whereas the other employee's value system may be based upon, "You get what you pay for. You pay me half of what I feel that I am worth, therefore I'll produce half of what I'm capable of producing."

We will never be able to pinpoint an exact correlation between job satisfaction and performance that will work in every situation. Doing a job well may improve job satisfaction, being satisfied may encourage a person to try harder, and each person's personal value system will have an effect on how he/she reacts to motivators and impediments. The best you can do is try to understand that performance is a complex issue, and recognize where you have control to address issues affecting an individual's performance. ♦

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David B. Putman is branch chief of the Avionic Software Development Branch at Hill Air Force Base, Utah. He has more than

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