

THE IMPACT OF SITUATIONAL CONSTRAINTS ON OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION

Tamela D. Ferguson, B.I. Moody III College of Business Administration, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, P.O. Box 43570, Lafayette, LA 70504-3570. 337-482-6081, tferguson@louisiana.edu

William L. Ferguson, B.I. Moody III College of Business Administration, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, P.O. Box 44570, Lafayette, LA 70504-4570. 337-482-6664, ferguson@louisiana.edu

ABSTRACT

Many studies have focused on influential individual factors on job satisfaction, but most have ignored the potential influence of environmental factors such as situational constraints. A survey of service workers revealed situational constraints perceived in the work environment account for substantial differences in job satisfaction. Preliminary results indicate supervision was the only significantly influential situational constraint on job satisfaction, providing the greatest potential for improving employee job satisfaction. These findings suggest firms interested in controlling or influencing contextual organizational situations that positively influence job satisfaction should focus on only a single dimension - supervision.

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is a topic of interest to many workers, supervisors and researchers. While substantial progress has been made in accounting for even small influences in job satisfaction, much of this work has focused on factors related to the individual. However, a more complete understanding of contextual job-related factors may provide detailed insight into job satisfaction facets ignored, or only briefly covered, in previous research. One such set of overlooked, but potentially important factors includes aspects of the work situation (e.g., availability of appropriate supplies, tools, instructions, information, and training; supervision; conflicting job demands; rules and procedures; and interruptions by others) identified collectively as situational constraints [3].

The purpose of our paper is to explore the relationship between job satisfaction (JS) and situational, or organizational, constraints (SC). Specifically, we assessed the JS-SC relationship across one hundred fifty three (153) employees of an oil services firm. Preliminary findings indicate that of eleven potential situational constraints tested, supervisor imposed constraint was the only one to significantly influence JS. That is, those who perceived being constrained by their supervisor reported lower levels of satisfaction with their job. These findings suggest certain situational constraints are most critical in the JS-SC relationship, and thus should be given more attention by firms interested in improving JS through manipulation of job context factors. This makes a significant contribution to both job satisfaction and situational constraints literatures.

Job Satisfaction and Situational Constraints

Job satisfaction is one of the most commonly research topics across both management and psychological disciplines with several hundred refereed, published articles in the last decade alone. Situational constraints, an often noted form of job stressor or strain [4], has received moderate attention in understanding environmental components of the work place. However, there appears to be little research that has explored the relationship between organizational, or situational, constraints and job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is an important concept in and of itself simply because we spend more hours at our job than at any other activity during most periods of our adult lives. Furthermore, JS spills over into overall life satisfaction (LS) more strongly than the reverse [1]. Thus, what happens in our work life influences our personal life. Situational constraints have been found to be significantly related to commitment to assigned goals [2]. Therefore, the types of constraints perceived as being present in a job setting can influence goal-related outcomes. We intend to extend previous research on organizational constraints and job satisfaction by testing an hypothesis that individuals who perceive organization related constraints on their ability to adequately perform their jobs will have lower levels of job satisfaction.

PRELIMINARY TESTING

The population consisted of one hundred sixty-seven (167) workers at an oilfield services firm. Demographic data were collected on a number of factors. Job satisfaction was assessed using a thirty six (36) item scale Job Satisfaction Survey (JS), developed by Spector [4]. The extent to which situational constraints were perceived in the specific work environment was assessed by an eleven item scale developed by Spector [5] and based on the works of Peters and O'Conner [3].

Survey instruments were distributed in two mass administrations, and achieved a response rate of approximately 91.6%. Given this extremely high response rate compared to much social science research, we feel confident that the results fairly represent perceptions of job satisfaction and organizational constraints across the population of study. Multiple hierarchical regression was used to test the hypotheses. The first model was used to control for several demographic variables that may influence job satisfaction. The second model included the eleven situational constraints variables. The difference between the two models was significant, with the higher the job satisfaction rating, the lower the reported perceived constraint associated with supervision. Thus, it appears that the organization as a whole should be concerned with training supervisors to understand a good balance between providing support and guidance for workers, and allowing them the freedom to go about their task without interference.

REFERENCES

- [1] Judge, T.A. & Wantanabe, S. (1993). Another look at the job satisfaction-life satisfaction relationship. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78: 939-948.
- [2] Klein, H.J. & Kim, J.S. (1998). A field study of the influence of situations constraints, leader-member exchange, and goal commitment on performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41(1): 88-95.
- [3] Peters, L.H. & O'Conner, E.J. (1980). Situational constraints and work outcomes: the influence of a frequently overlooked construct. *Academy of Management Review*, 3: 391-397.
- [4] Spector, P.E. (1997). *Job satisfaction: Application, assessment, causes, and consequences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- [5] Spector, P.E., Dwyer, D. and Jex, S.M. (1988). Relation of job stressors to affective, health, and performance outcomes: A comparison of multiple data sources. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 73: 11-19.