

How Important Are Situational Constraints in Understanding Job Satisfaction?

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Abstract

While multitudes of studies have focused on the influence of individual factors on job satisfaction, many have ignored the potential influence of environmental factors, such as situational constraints. One hundred fifty three oil field industrial equipment service workers were surveyed to determine how important situational constraints were in understanding job satisfaction. We found that situational constraints perceived in the work environment accounted for over twenty seven percent (27%) of job satisfaction differences, after controlling for demographic factors that may influence job satisfaction. Results point to supervision as the only significantly influential situational constraint on job satisfaction, providing the greatest potential for improving employee job satisfaction. Thus, these findings suggest that management interested in getting the most “bang for their buck” relative to controlling or influencing contextual organizational situations that may positively influence job satisfaction perhaps should focus on only a single dimension - supervision.

Keywords: organizational constraints, job satisfaction, supervision

1. 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 (e.g., Ilies, Fulmer, Spitzmueller & Johnson, 2009; Dick, *et. al.*, 2008; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002). 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. For instance, some initial work found work role ambiguity (Abramis, 1994) and opportunity and routinization negatively impact job satisfaction (Agho, Mueller & Price, 1993), indicating important environmental variables may have been omitted from previous models of job satisfaction. Potentially important environmental factors in understanding worker job satisfaction include 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 (Peters & O’Conner, 1980).

The purpose of this research note is to explore the relationship between job satisfaction and situational, or organizational, constraints. Specifically, we assessed the job satisfaction-situational constraints relationship across one hundred fifty three (153) employees of an oilfield industrial services firm. Preliminary findings indicate that of eleven potential situational constraints tested, the supervisor imposed constraints item was the only one to significantly influence worker job satisfaction. That is, workers with higher job satisfaction perceived fewer constraints related to their supervisor. These findings suggest that certain situational constraints are most critical in the satisfaction-constraints relationship, and thus should be given more attention by the organization interested in improving worker satisfaction through manipulation of job context factors.

We believe this makes a significant contribution to both job satisfaction and situational constraints literatures, as well as provide practical applications for management concerning guidance on the importance of supervisory actions.

2. REVIEW

2.1 Job Satisfaction and Situational Constraints

Job satisfaction is one of the most commonly researched topics across both management and psychological disciplines with several hundred refereed, published articles in the last decade alone. 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. In fact, job satisfaction spills over into overall life satisfaction more strongly than the reverse (Judge & Wantanabe, 1993). Situational constraints, an often noted form of job stressor or strains, have received moderate attention in explaining environmental, or contextual, components of the work place (Spector & O'Connell, 1994; Spector, Chen & O'Connell, 2000). Likewise, role strain has been found to be influenced by both intrapersonal determiners as well as situational constraints (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994). While early work proved enlightening in understanding the relationship of situational constraints with many intrapersonal, or individual, constructs such as goal setting (Peters, Chassie, Lindholm, O'Conner & Kline, 1982), goal commitment (Klein & Kim, 1998), job attitude (Herman, 1973), worker ability (Schneider, 1978), performance expectations (Villanova, 1996) and subordinate leadership preferences (Singer & Singer, 1990), among others, there appears to be little research that has explored the relationship between contextual organizational, or situational, constraints and worker job satisfaction. We hope to extend previous research on situational constraints and worker job satisfaction by testing the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Individuals who perceive situational related constraints will have lower levels of job satisfaction.

3. METHODS

3.1 Sample

The population consisted of one hundred sixty-seven (167) workers at an oilfield industrial equipment services firm. One hundred fifty three (153) of the one hundred sixty seven (167) identified employees completed surveys for a response rate of approximately 91.6%. Given this extremely high response rate compared too much social science research, we feel confident that the results fairly represent perceptions of job satisfaction and organizational constraints across the population of study. Demographic data were collected on a number of factors, including number of years in the oil industry and at their present firm and job; section (office or two different shops); shift (day, night, and weekend); management/non-management status; contract/regular employee status; age; gender; and highest educational level obtained. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 62. The range of tenure in the oilfield service industry was from 1 day to 40 years (average 11.55 years); range of tenure at the present firm was 1 day to 29 years (average 6.1 years); range of tenure in the current job was 1 day to 23 years (average 4.7 years). The ratio of management to non-management respondents was approximately 15:85, while approximately 20% of respondents were contract employees and 80% regular employees. 25 workers (16.3%) reported working in an office setting, while 68 workers (44.4%) reported working in shop A and 53 (34.6%) reported working in shop B. Workers reported the following shift of their employment: day N=87, 56.9%; night N=44, 28.8 %; weekend N=16, 10.5%. Educational level was from "high school completed or GED" to "graduate level degree", with the median response falling in the high school completed or GED category.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Job Satisfaction.

Job satisfaction was measured using a thirty six (36) item scale Job Satisfaction Survey, developed by Spector (1985). These thirty six questions are designed to measure perceptions related to nine facets of job satisfaction, each with four items. On each item, respondents were provided with six choices on a Likert-like scale that ranged from "1", indicating "disagree very much", to "6", indicating "agree very much." The outcomes of each satisfaction facet were added together to represent overall job satisfaction, as is often done with multi-faceted scales (e.g., Levine & Noe, 2000; Wanous, Reichers & Hudy, 1997)

The job satisfaction scale chosen has been widely used for years both inside and outside academia, and a recent bibliographic check of academic-based works utilizing this scale revealed a multitude of entries (*e.g.*, Blau, 1999a, 1999b; French, 2000; Takalar & Coovert, 1994). Discussions of the development and psychometric properties of the scale are readily available (see Spector, 1997; 1985), with total internal consistency reliability for the scale at .91, based on a sample of 2,870. Individual facet internal consistency reliabilities ranged from .60 to .82, which is similar to past internal consistency reliability measures. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for this variable.

Insert table (1) about here

3.2.2 Situational Constraints.

The extent to which situational constraints were perceived in the specific work environment was assessed by an eleven item scale developed by Spector and Jex (1988) and based on the works of Peters and O'Connor (1980). The scale items were centered around various situational constraints that may be perceived to impede completion of job tasks and included: poor equipment and supplies; organizational rules and procedures; other employees; supervisors; lack of equipment or supplies; inadequate training; interruptions by other people; lack of necessary information about what to do/how to do it; conflicting job demands; inadequate help from others; and incorrect instructions. Five response choices were available for each item, and the range was from 1= "less than once per month, or never" to 5 = "several times per day." Internal consistency reliability of .84 is associated with this scale (Spector & Jex, 1988). The situational constraints scale is considered a causal indicator scale in which the items are not manifestations of a single underlying construct, but instead are considered to constitute a construct when combined. In other words, the items are not parallel forms of a single underlying construct, nor do they replicate each other as is expected in a traditional effect indicator scale (see Spector & Jex, 1998, for further discussion). Spearman's Rho, a nonparametric correlation coefficient based on rank of data is appropriate here due to the ordinal nature of the data that do not satisfy the normality assumption of Pearson. Correlations for all study variables are reported in Table 2.

Insert table (2) about here

3.3 Procedures

Survey instruments were distributed in two mass administrations. In order to assure a high response rate, the survey instrument was administered at a specific firm's facility on two different days and times (a few hours apart) to accommodate second and third shift workers, as well as weekend workers. Nearly ninety percent of the respondents were surveyed at these two survey administrations. To encourage honest and sincere answers, participants were informed during pre-survey instructions that their anonymity would be preserved, that no single response would ever be reported on, and that any response provided on any single questionnaire would only be used in combination with data associated with other questions or questionnaires. Completed questionnaires were collected on site by the first author at the conclusion of each survey administration session. Multiple hierarchical regression was used to test the hypothesis. The first model was used to control for several demographic variables that may influence job satisfaction. The second model introduced the eleven situational constraints variables described above. Results are presented in Table 3.

Insert table (3) about here

4. RESULTS

Model 1 contains demographic variables that can account for twenty one point one percent (21.1%) of the variance in worker job satisfaction. When adding the eleven situational constraints facets, the R^2 increased from .211 to .485, an increase that is significant at the $p < .001$ level ($F = 5.317$). Surprisingly, only a single situational constraint dimension manifested as having an important relationship with individual job satisfaction. The situational constraints variable "supervision" was significant ($t = -2.731$, $p < .01$). Thus, situational constraints perceived in the work environment account for over twenty seven percent (27%) of job satisfaction differences across the sample at hand, after controlling for many potentially influential demographic factors. Specifically, the higher the job satisfaction rating, the lower the reported perceived constraint associated with supervision. Ten other identified potential situational constraints were not significantly related to job satisfaction at the $p < .05$ level.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Job satisfaction is a perhaps the most widely researched topic in various literatures from management to psychology to career oriented theorists.

Situational constraints have been less studied, particularly of late, in these same literatures. What has been missing and what has been provided in the present study is an investigation of the relationship between worker job satisfaction and situational constraints. Based on previous research in the separate fields, we hypothesized that such a relationship existed, and using multiple regression techniques found support for our hypothesis, and were able to identify a specific constraint as most important in understanding job satisfaction. In particular, the empirical results of this study demonstrate that supervision appears to be the only situational constraint (across eleven tested commonly identified potential constraints) that is significantly related to worker job satisfaction. Even though only a single significant constraint was identified as related to worker job satisfaction, it packs a huge impact. These findings suggest that management interested in getting the most “bang for their buck” relative to controlling or influencing contextual organizational situations that may positively influence job satisfaction perhaps should focus on only a single dimension - supervision. In addition to our finding that worker job satisfaction and supervisory constraints are related, the relationship between workers and their supervisors appears to be important across a number of contexts. For instance, improving first level supervision is identified as the most effective way to improve organizational performance (Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010).

Furthermore, satisfaction with supervision has been found to be related to various forms of commitment (Jernigan & Beggs, 2005), buffer the relationship between workers and their intent to turnover (Harris, Harris & Harvey, 2008; Harris, Harris & Brouer, 2009), as well as influence interpersonal (supervisor and coworker targeted) and organizational aggressiveness (Herschcovis, *et al.*, 2007). The stage has been set for future research, particularly as it pertains to understanding the critical importance of appropriate supervision in various work-based relationships and outcomes. While the findings here are substantial in the level of influence that the single factor of supervision has on job satisfaction, some limitations should be noted. These include that a single sample in a single industry was the focus of study, thus the results may not be generalizable to all samples. Future research should explore antecedents and consequences to the job satisfaction-organization constraints relationship, as well as longitudinally look at this relationship.

This investigation has demonstrated that while we might expect some facets of situational constraints to be more influential than others relative to worker job satisfaction, individuals appear to be really only substantially affected by their supervisor. Our findings generally indicate that individuals are much more satisfied with their jobs if they perceive supervision as not a hindrance to their job related efforts. This situational constraint facet of supervision accounts for an additional 22% of the variance in JS, indicating its critical level of importance. It seems that people who did not feel constrained by their supervisors were much more satisfied with their job. 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 constraint. In sum, this study provides guidance on a path for better management practices and additional insight into improving worker job satisfaction.

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Table 1 Sample Size, Mean, Standard Deviation, Observed and Possible Ranges Variables

Variable/Measure	N	M	SD	Observed Range	Possible Range
Poor Equipment/Supplies	148	2.53	1.26	1-6	1-6
Rules/Procedures	147	2.27	1.21	1-6	1-6
Other Employees	147	2.51	1.35	1-6	1-6
Your Supervisor	142	1.88	1.26	1-6	1-6
Lack Equipment/Supplies	147	2.59	1.33	1-6	1-6
Inadequate Training	148	2.18	1.27	1-6	1-6
Interruptions by others	142	3.14	1.47	1-6	1-6
Lack of Information	146	2.49	1.21	1-6	1-6
Conflicting Job Demands	145	2.64	1.29	1-6	1-6
Inadequate help from others	147	2.45	1.29	1-6	1-6
Incorrect Instructions	148	2.20	1.23	1-6	1-6

Table 2 Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1. Total Satisfaction																					
2. Years in the Oilfield	-.148																				
3. Years with Company	-.210	.672																			
4. Years in Current Job	-.295	.506	.659																		
5. Section	-.328	-.002	-.206	.065																	
6. Shift	.106	-.296	-.484	-.226	.167																
7. Management Status	-.143	-.256	-.325	-.073	.325	.141															
8. Employment Status	.125	-.345	-.569	-.485	-.029	.274	.176														
9. Age	-.081	.624	.385	.292	-.036	-.084	-.075	-.102													
10. Gender	.133	-.148	.032	.190	-.174	-.093	.083	-.013	-.059												
11. Highest Educ. Attained	-.019	.058	.202	.025	-.107	-.198	-.226	-.099	-.051	.092											
12. Poor Equipment/Supplies	-.193	-.140	-.302	-.262	.142	.216	.127	.165	-.060	-.080	-.131										
13. Rules/Procedures	-.241	-.029	-.105	-.079	.024	-.037	.025	.043	.128	.061	.002	.171									
14. Other Employees	-.361	.015	.109	.095	.015	.048	.080	.064	.125	.077	.045	.136	.262								
15. Your Supervisor	-.420	-.036	.008	.156	.074	.039	.058	.098	.082	.043	.140	.159	.277	.477							
16. Lack Equipment/Supplies	-.326	-.122	-.158	-.111	.167	.201	.060	.000	-.057	-.138	-.134	.662	.288	.253	.299						
17. Inadequate Training	-.216	.058	-.038	-.020	-.001	.162	-.110	.068	.136	-.039	.150	.179	.376	.353	.367	.265					
18. Interruptions	-.295	.361	.357	.297	-.012	-.337	-.132	-.180	.151	.121	.192	.000	.221	.331	.161	.088	.169				

by others																				
19. Lack of Information	-.384	.162	.088	.103	.183	-.033	-.034	-.059	.106	-.053	.049	.155	.374	.320	.308	.262	.354	.425		
20. Conflicting Job Demands	-.378	.160	.232	.213	.062	-.218	-.001	-.178	.108	.067	.103	.160	.245	.450	.317	.210	.204	.514	.498	
21. Inadequate help from others	-.233	.066	.105	.046	-.013	-.072	.064	-.025	.064	.043	.086	.180	.390	.417	.305	.217	.271	.291	.287	.401
22. Incorrect Instructions	-.301	.107	.153	.204	.079	-.022	.031	-.161	.104	.018	-.015	.336	.244	.331	.347	.408	.258	.223	.545	.489

All correlations $\geq .165$ are significant at $p < .05$; all correlations $\geq .216$ are significant at $p < .01$. N= 142-153

Table 3: Regression - Job Satisfaction and Situational Constraints

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	t	β	T
Constant		14.092***		16.669***
Years in the Oilfield	.051	.384	-.014	-.119
Years with Organization	-.142	-1.044	-.139	-1.161
Years in Current Job	-.175	-1.564	-.118	-1.159
Section	-.285	-2.940**	-.208	-2.482
Shift	.115	1.251	.114	1.349
Management Status	-.137	-1.429	-.123	-1.480
Employment Status	.037	.419	.087	1.082
Age	.006	.051	.089	.920
Gender	.160	1.758	.152	1.920
Highest Ed. Attained	-.044	-.504	.013	.171
Poor Equipment/ Supplies			-.113	-1.139
Rules/Procedures			-.091	-1.027
Other employees			-.146	-1.577
Your supervisor			-.251	-2.731**
Lack Equipment/ Supplies			-.117	-1.136
Inadequate Training			.028	.323
Interruptions by Others			-.049	-.528
Lack of Information			-.134	-1.322
Conflicting job Demands			-.071	-.732
Inadequate Help of Others			.005	.057
Incorrect instructions			.136	1.427
R ²	.211		.485	
Adjusted R ²	.146		.387	
F	3.237***		4.931***	
ΔR^2			.274	
F			5.317***	

* $p < .05$,
 ** $p < .01$,
 *** $p < .001$