

Mediating role of Job satisfaction in the relationship between Task characteristics and Life satisfaction

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Abstract

The need to understand group influences on individuals at work is believed to be of great importance in organizational psychology. The reason for such continued studies is the belief that individuals' wellbeing depends on the nature of task being performed by the members of the group. This study focuses on identifying the relationship of task characteristics with life satisfaction having job satisfaction as mediating variable. For this a hypothetical model is developed and tested with a sample of four hundred and four employees of service sector involved in group task. Results of the analysis show amongst the task characteristics: task autonomy, decision making autonomy and feedback have a positive and significant relationship with job satisfaction leading to life satisfaction. One of the important characteristics: task variety has significant but inverse relationship with job satisfaction. Work scheduling autonomy, method autonomy and task identity have no influence on job satisfaction. Results confirm that life satisfaction is a spillover effect of job satisfaction. Based on this, managerial implications of findings, contributions, limitations, and future research directions are discussed.

Key words: Task characteristics, Job satisfaction, Life satisfaction

1. Introduction

The nature and the characteristics of the task is known to affect the state of employees as evidenced by various studies made by Frese (1985), Karasek, Baker, Marxer, Ahlbom and Theorell (1981), Hackman, (1992), Cohen and Bailey (1997). Individual job satisfaction has been the focus of research efforts for several decades within the field of organizational psychology and the job satisfaction construct was linked with a wide range of outcomes. Research within the group and group performance has demonstrated that mean level of job

satisfaction is related with individual life satisfaction.

The job characteristic's effect on in-role job performance was the main focus of previous research. We state that viewing the job performance should not be limited to in-role job performance but also to supplement of job performance i.e. Life satisfaction. Over the years, job satisfaction and life satisfaction relationship has been conclusively researched. In spite of this, we were curious in knowing the mediating effect of job satisfaction having task characteristics as precedence in explaining life satisfaction. We posit this type of analysis allows strongest conclusions on designing the job to enhance individual's life satisfaction. Our search on identifying the relationship of job characteristics with life satisfaction have not fetched much results, even if, those studies have concentrated on job demands and its resources and life satisfaction having burnout as mediating variable (e.g. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli. 2001)

2. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

2.1 Task Characteristics and Job Satisfaction:

The concept of meaningfulness of a task is based on task and its nature. Autonomy is related to how tasks are liaised with the other groups of the organization. The autonomy in group task has been defined as the amount of job-related independence, initiative, and freedom either permitted or required in daily work activities (Stamps & Piedmonte 1986), it includes autonomy of scheduling the work, method and decision making.

Higher autonomy means, individuals are vested with more privilege to make decisions, design work activities and adapt to transforming conditions. Workers provided with considerable information and decision making authority, experience prominence in the attainment of the objectives and heightened self-realization being a twin benefit of increased autonomy (Spreitzer, 1995). Increased involvement in decision making, facilitating

and interacting develops satisfaction and enhances performance (Beekun, 1989). Task performance is improved due to higher levels of collective autonomy since the information held by team members is also collectively increased (Hollenbeck, Ilgen, LePine, Colquitt, & Hedlund, 1998). We put forth, it is more beneficial to have task autonomy when work conditions and requirements are uncertain.

Task variety has been identified as best predictors of satisfaction by Glisson and Durick (1988). In their study, Campion, Medsker and Higgs (1993) found participation in decision making, variety in task and significance of task as job design variables delineate employee satisfaction. Zeffane (1994) disseminated task diversity, participation in decisions correlated highly and positively with job satisfaction. Groups with autonomy had increased job satisfaction, while it decreased in non-autonomous groups (Pearson 1992). The significant relationship of task characteristics such as task autonomy, task identity and feedback on performance were identified with job satisfaction by Chiu, Chen and Hsiao, (2005). Task characteristics i.e. skill variety and task significance have been identified to affect the level of job satisfaction positively (Badran, Kafafy & Jihan 2008) raising an issue of redesigning the job with presence of these characteristics. Task feedback defined as the extent to which a team is given information on the quality of its work (Strubler & York, 2007), can build internal job motivation as it conveys the outcomes of work activities (Cohen, Ledford & Spreitzer 1996)

Increased 'psychological state' of employee has been used as a 'measure' by Arnold and House, (1980) and Fried and Ferris, (1987) for identifying the mediating relationship of task variables with job satisfaction, while others (see, Fried, 1991; Taber & Alliger, 1995; Wall & Clegg, 1981) identified direct relationship between the two by controlling psychological state. The task characteristics create a sense of responsibility and influence helpful behaviors resulting in making the work psychologically meaningful and satisfying (Farh, Podsakoff & Organ, 1990). Bhuian and Mengue (2002) supporting earlier findings of Hackman and Oldham (1971, 1980) confirm that autonomy gives a sense of responsibility amongst employee in carrying out their

task and act as intrinsic motivation, influencing the net result of job satisfaction. Based on this we posit, enjoyment in the task and improved satisfaction enables an employee to align importance of his job with global functioning of the organization.

Task variety and work schedule opportunities, such as flexible hours, compressed workweeks, and working from home have provided employee a sense of belonging and enhanced job satisfaction (Levering & Moskowitz, 2007) and this finding was further supported by Lunenburg (2011) revealing task variety addresses the growth need strength of an employee, experiencing greater job satisfaction as they are highly motivated. This concept is essentially the same as Herzberg's, (2009) motivation factors. Inadequacy of task variety may lead to frustration, stress, and job dissatisfaction. To sum up, there is enough evidence suggesting meaningful individual relationships between characteristics of tasks with job satisfaction (see. Fried & Ferris, 1987; Spector, 1985; Stone, 1986).

Though, researchers consistently demonstrate a relationship of core task characteristics with job satisfaction (c.f. Judge, 2003; Saavedra & Kwun, 2000), only a single or few elements of task characteristics were investigated by researchers, i.e. job interdependence (Anderson & Williams 1996; Pearce & Gregersen 1991). Researchers in the past integrated all job characteristics into a single index and limited their focus only on identifying job satisfaction not extended to life satisfaction. In contrast, we analysed the four of five essential job dimensions identified by Hackman and Oldham's (1975) (i.e., task variety, task identity, autonomy, and feedback). Within autonomy we extended the study in identifying relationship of task autonomy, work method autonomy, work schedule autonomy and decision making autonomy. Accordingly, our discussion on task characteristics is extensive and statistically clarifies the unique effect of each task characteristic on job and life satisfaction.

Based on the above discussion, we expect a constructive relationship of task characteristics with job satisfaction and propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Task autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction.

H2: *Work scheduling autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction*

H3: *Decision making autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction*

H4: *Work method autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction*

H5: *Task variety is positively related to job satisfaction*

H6: *Task identity is positively related to job satisfaction*

H7: *Feedback is positively related to job satisfaction*

2.2 Job and Life Satisfaction:

Life satisfaction is the outcome of one's satisfaction with domains of life such as family, health and work. As such, it is based on the conditions of environment and interceded by both work and non-work domains satisfaction. Details of experience regarding conditions of work, support of supervisors and compensation are evaluated by the individuals and preferred level of these factors leads to one's satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction is desirable outcome resulting in constructive organizational behaviour. This accentuates optimistic emotional state and engenders constructive effect in the work place. A person having life satisfaction perceives their work as more fulfilling, useful and enjoyable thus ensuing personal development, cooperation, supportiveness. As an outcome they show positive emotional symptoms (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000) leading to engagement and continuance resulting in reduced in employee turnover. In sum, job is an importunate and prominent of individual and society's wellbeing impinge on individual's life and entire community.

Research indicates, satisfaction related to work and non-work province describes fifty percent of the life satisfaction variance (e.g. Brief, Butcher, George & Link 1993). The 'bottom-up' perspective proposed by Brief et al (1993) identified job satisfaction as part of life satisfaction and having a casual influence on life satisfaction. Researchers have concluded that job satisfaction is considerably related with, or 'spills over' into perspective towards life, or life satisfaction (for reviews see Rain, Lane & Steiner, 1991; Tait, Padgett & Baldwin 1989,). Whereas, Diner (1984), considered job

satisfaction as a part of life satisfaction and has a perfunctory influence on life satisfaction.

Considering Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the Demand/Control Model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), Turner, Barling and Zacharatos (2002) suggested that building job characteristics into work enables employee to have a sense of well-being and be productive in their task. Research studies on life satisfaction and its impact on the job satisfaction have thrown conclusive light on the above concept. It is assumed that individuals assess the facet of their experiences while reasoning overall satisfaction with the life (Rice, McFarlin, Hunt & Near, 1985). Higher job satisfaction through positive meaningful job conditions and events were significantly associated with life satisfaction (Staw, Bell & Clausen 1986). In a different line of thought, Judge and Watanabe (1993), identified, life satisfaction has an immense relationship with job satisfaction than otherwise and such relationship is spurious, resulting from common influences such as task characteristics and social support. But Iverson (2000) tested a causal model and observed that job satisfaction has a stronger effect on life satisfaction and not otherwise.

As the outcomes of task related characteristics, Luthans (2002) identified that the life satisfaction is related to job satisfaction but the study analysed the influence of other variables such as commitment not strictly as an outcome of task characteristics. Taking an account of task characteristics, Rode (2004) identified life satisfaction as a spillover of job satisfaction. Bowling, Eschleman, Wang and Qiang (2010) in their meta-analysis found a stronger and positive correlation between job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

In order to test the relationship, the hypothesis is formulated as:

H8: *Job satisfaction is positively mediate the relationship between task characteristics and life satisfaction.*

3. Method

3.1 Sample

This study was carried out amongst the professionals engaged in business service sector. This sector was

chosen, as it has prominent emergence in achieving higher national and states income, trade, inflows of foreign direct investments and employment. This sector has steadied the growth of the Indian economy with a great amount of contribution. Economic survey of Government of India 2012-13 states " business service sector is a provider of skilled employment both in India and abroad, generating direct employment for nearly 2.8 million persons and indirect employment of around 8.9 million in 2011- 12, the shares of the services sectors in employment increased from 19.70 percent to 25.30 per cent".

As the study aims to analyze the impact of task characteristics, only individuals whose work has a presence of task characteristics have been included and individuals performing routine tasks and whose job does not have or have lesser task characteristics have been excluded from the study. Amongst 510 respondents randomly selected in the participating organizations, a structured questionnaire was distributed and the final sample consisted of 404 professionals. Amongst the participants 54.8 percent were male and 45.2 percent were female. Of those, under the age of 25 constitute 53.7 percent of total. Participants' educational levels are high school diploma (12.6%), bachelor's degree (60.6%), master's degree (9.9%), and professional degree (7.9%). Highly skilled constitute 15.4 percent and skilled 64.2 percent.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Task Characteristics

A five point Likert type response format was used for all the measures ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Autonomy, was measured with 12 items, drawn from scales developed by Hackman and Lawler (1971) 'Job Dimension measure', Hackman and Oldham (1975) 'Job Diagnostic survey', Breugh,(1985) 'Work Autonomy Scale', Morgeson and Humphrey (2005) 'The Work Design Questionnaire' for assessing job design and the nature of work. Task variety (4 items), Task identity (4 items), Feedback (6 items) were drawn from Hackman and Oldham (1975) and Morgeson and Humphrey (2005).

3.2.2 Job and Life Satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured by 10 items, drawn from Macdonald, Intyre (1997) 'Generic Job Satisfaction Scale'. Life satisfaction was measured by 5 items, drawn from Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin, (1985) 'Satisfaction with Life Scale instrument' designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one's lives.

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

The construct reliability of the measure used was assured by Cronbach's alphas. All the item loadings which explained the variance of over 50 percent in respective constructs were only included. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability values are 0.5 and 0.7, respectively, more than the recommended cut-off points. (Ref. Table 1). Loadings and cross-loadings of variables were assessed in order to test discriminant validity and found that each item loaded higher on their specific construct than it cross-loaded on other constructs. As suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), a correlation matrix was constructed to represent square root of the Average Variance Extracted as diagonal values (see Table 2). A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to confirm the overall factor structure of variables with LISREL (version 8.72). The analysis on measurement model bestowed good fit to the data: Normed chi-square= 2.07 ($p < .05$), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .89, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.86, Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.98, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.96. (Table 1)

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

The results of the structural equation modeling using maximum likelihood technique of the model proposed depicted in Figure 1, demonstrate a good fit: Normed Chi-Square= 2.11 ($p < .05$), GFI = .86, AGFI= 0.84, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI= 0.96, NFI= 0.94.

The results of the analysis revealed the path coefficient of task autonomy with job satisfaction showing significant and positive relationship with the value of

Table 1 : Item Statistics and Estimated Loadings

Construct	Mean	Std.	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	Composite reliability	Item loadings (range)
Task autonomy	3.58	0.68	0.75	0.680	0.730	0.790-0.821
Work scheduling autonomy	3.58	0.71	0.77	0.651	0.726	0.710-0.756
Decision autonomy	3.40	0.75	0.70	0.667	0.820	0.721-0.769
Work method autonomy	3.58	0.72	0.72	0.655	0.793	0.768-0.802
Task variety	3.67	0.66	0.80	0.721	0.721	0.779-0.840
Task identity	3.64	0.63	0.76	0.681	0.676	0.626-0.672
Feedback	3.68	0.63	0.88	0.751	0.682	0.735-0.781
Job satisfaction	3.64	0.64	0.89	0.782	0.691	0.724-0.790
Life satisfaction	3.11	0.57	0.81	0.721	0.703	0.710-0.746

0.60 ($t = 9.76$, $p < 0.05$) thus supporting the hypothesis one. The hypothesis two is not supported as the coefficient of work scheduling autonomy shows non-significant negative relationship with the job satisfaction. As far as the decision autonomy is concerned it has positive significant relationship with job satisfaction with the value of 0.40 ($t = 11.26$, $p < 0.01$) hence the hypothesis three is also supported. The relationship between method autonomy and job satisfaction is not significant ($t = 0.96$, $p > 0.05$) thus hypothesis four is not accepted. Hypothesis five i.e. Task variety is positively related with job satisfaction is not supported, however, the results shows there is negative relationship which is of significance with the value -0.41 ($t = 13.42$, $p < 0.05$).

The relationship of task identity with job satisfaction is not significant hence the hypothesis six is not accepted. The feedback being positively related with job satisfaction as the value of coefficient being 0.53 ($t = 7.34$, $p < 0.01$), supports the hypothesis seven formulated. In total the task characteristics explain 35 percent of job satisfaction ($t = 11.27$, $p < 0.05$). The job satisfaction explains 31 percent of life satisfaction with $t = 26.75$, $p < 0.01$ and also shows a positive significant relation with 0.43 coefficient value. So the hypothesis eight is supported.

5. Discussion and Implications

A multitude of heterogeneous findings by previous research identifying relationship between job satisfaction and task-related variables has produced complicated results. The significant relationships of task-related variables with job satisfaction has been confirmed by empirical research (e.g., Fried & Ferris, 1987; Fried, 1991; Judge, Locke, Durham & Kluger 1998; Judge, Bono & Locke, 2000), but the topic of interest is the magnitude, extent and direction of the relationships. Thus the present study advances the existing literature on the mediating mechanisms of job satisfaction and its effects on life satisfaction and confirms the earlier findings of Hart, (1999) and Near, Smith, Rice and Hunt, (1984) who have found prominent relationship of job satisfaction with life satisfaction.

Autonomy has come to be synonymous with empowerment in modern research. In the present context both refer to the concept of providing workers, groups of workers with increased opportunity to determine their own courses of action towards attainment of the group goals and in the process, the objectives of the organization. This study results suggest building up task autonomy enables one to succeed even in the absence of continuous supervision and confirms earlier findings

(see, Bhuian & Mengue, 2002; Brown & Peterson, 1993; Fried & Ferris, 1987). Task autonomy provides a sense of trust worthiness and ownership of completing a task or project without depending upon much support from the supervisors. This feeling of trust results in accuracy and efficiency of task performance, building a congenial relationship among the members of the organization and also strengthens employee efforts in performing their task. Further it instills a 'sense of ownership' augmenting job satisfaction.

Decision autonomy as vertical loading includes empowering employees to decide and seek solutions to problems on their own which enhances work performance and in turn job satisfaction. Task designers must provide as much feedback as possible, as employees invest a substantial amount of their time and want to know how well they are doing. This will enable an employee to make appropriate adjustments in the current

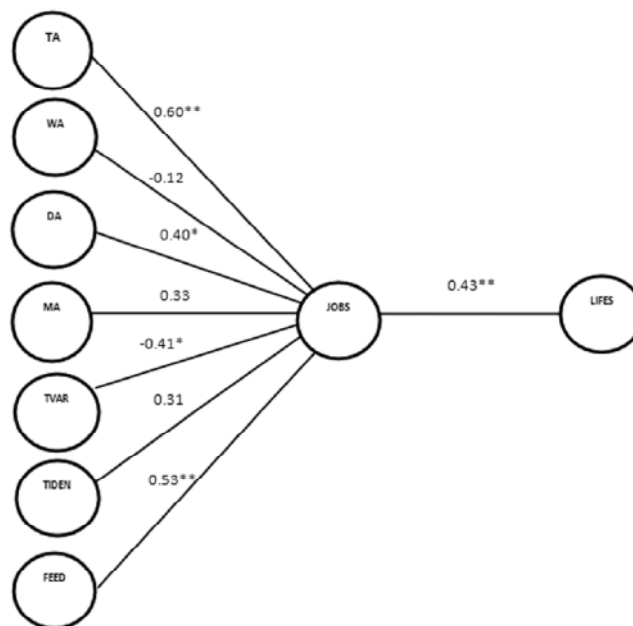
performance.

Our study results differ from Kopelman, (1985), Graen, Scandura, and Grean, (1986), who have found job enrichment as an outcome of task variety, increases the quality of job performance and enhances job satisfaction. However, the research findings of Kelley (1990) indicated that job enrichment works better only in less complex organizations (i.e. Small firms) providing support for this study result, as this study was carried out in the larger organisations having many different and connected tasks. Our study result suggests, too many tasks assigned may have negative impact on individual job satisfaction if the nature of the job is complex. Hence managers should ensure enrichment should be based on the nature of the job being performed and competency level of employee. Competency mapping at regular interval may help in creating skill level inventory enabling the managers to assess the capacity of their

Table 2 : Correlation Matrix and Discriminant Validity Assessment

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Task autonomy	0.680								
2. Work scheduling autonomy	0.610	0.651							
3. Decision autonomy	0.629	0.565	0.667						
4. Work method autonomy	0.561	0.572	0.586	0.655					
5. Task variety	0.604	0.584	0.610	0.583	0.721				
6. Task identity	0.626	0.581	0.615	0.621	0.684	0.681			
7. Feedback	0.618	0.598	0.623	0.610	0.635	0.584	0.751		
8. Job satisfaction	0.642	0.610	0.531	0.592	0.620	0.639	0.690	0.782	
9. Life satisfaction	0.521	0.514	0.554	0.565	0.510	0.545	0.640	0.667	0.721

Note : N = 404



Note: All path coefficients are standardised. *p<0.05, **p<0.01

TA - Task Autonomy, WA - Work Scheduling Autonomy, DA - Decision making Autonomy, MA - Method Autonomy, TVAR - Task Variety, TIDEN - Task Identity, FEED - Feedback, JOBS - Job Satisfaction, LIFES - Life Satisfaction

Figure 1. Structural Equation Modeling

subordinates for job enrichment.

Considering the prominence of the organizational groups, it becomes imperative to devise work places where the employees feel positively about the work. We therefore put forth, managers should make the employee to perceive their task as autonomous, meaningful, and satisfying. This can be done through role clarity and role alignment, as this will have a positive impact on both job satisfaction and life satisfaction simultaneously.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Life satisfaction is known to be determined by variables such as in-role performance (e.g. Rode, et.al. 2005), personality construct (e.g., Rode, 2004), non-work domains (George & Brief, 1992) that were not assessed as part of this study. The data provided by the participants at only one point of time, emphasizes the need for longitudinal research. It is believable that the responses may change for number of model constructs subjected to particular situation. In the same line of research the

future attempts should be proceeded with additional task-related variables i.e. task significance and task interdependence in explaining the job and life satisfaction as well. The data collected for this study through self-reported measures via a single source hence common method variance could be a concern. Individual response of survey items may not be completely independent as there is a chance of influence of group membership.

The current study was carried out to identify the effect of task variables on life satisfaction having job satisfaction as the mediator, but an attempt must be made to delineate the direct linkages of task characteristics with life satisfaction. For example one could put forward the direct linkage between task autonomy with life satisfaction, evidencing an autonomous task provide individuals with much more life satisfaction. This study addresses only specific sector, hence similar studies can be extended to other sectors i.e. manufacturing and service providers of distinctive nature to form conclusive evidence.

End Note

An earlier version of the manuscript was published in the proceeding of 6th Conference on Excellence in Research and Education held at IIM Indore in 2014.

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