

## BEYOND JOB SATISFACTION : A QUEST FOR BROADER PERSPECTIVES

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### ABSTRACT

In their endeavour to higher employee performance, organisations have, for long, banked primarily on job satisfaction. However, despite the strong intuitive appeal, the extant literature has not been able to provide strong empirical support for a strong relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. Owing to this, there is a need to broaden the horizon beyond job satisfaction and contemplate other variables which promise better employee performance.

Given this context, the present paper attempts to deliberate on life satisfaction and work-life balance, in addition to job satisfaction, to positively impact employee performance. The arguments have been developed with the support of extant literature, justifying that they be considered, as they not only individually impact employee performance but also have a role to play in positively influencing job satisfaction. The paper is structured by first having an appraisal of the job satisfaction-performance relationship, bringing to fore that the empirical evidence does not provide strong support in its favour. The next section provides arguments to justify the inclusion of life satisfaction and work-life balance (in addition to job satisfaction), as factors influencing employee performance. Thus, it is desirable for organisations to broaden their perspective beyond mere job satisfaction and appraise variables like life satisfaction and work-life balance when trying to improve employee performance.

**Keywords :** Job satisfaction; life Satisfaction; work-life balance; happy worker.

### INTRODUCTION

Organisations have always strived to be competitive and scale higher performance. The Hawthorne experiments shifted the focus from 'Taylorism' and paved way for the human relations movement, endorsing the importance of 'human element'. The years that followed witnessed burgeoning literature on employee attitudes with job satisfaction assuming inordinate importance owing to a strong intuitive appeal that it leads to higher performance (Lawler and Porter, 1967; Mittal & Jain, 2012; Ramezani et al., 2018; Sony & Mekoth, 2019; Memon et al., 2023; Hemsworth et al., 2024; Apriyanto et al., 2026). This presumption gained almost instant acceptance as it complemented the values endorsed by the human relations movement. Apart from the human perspective, it made economic sense for organisations to improve job satisfaction thereby positively influencing employee behaviour leading to increased productivity (Brockerman and Ilmakunnas, 2012). Thus, job satisfaction as a construct became worthy enough to be understood and researched further in an organisations' pursuit to improve organisational effectiveness with due acceptance of the 'human element' as an unparalleled source of competitive advantage (Wright, McMahan, and McWilliams, 1994).

However, job is just one of the things in the lives of people and hence may not completely define an individual. Employees are individuals with distinct demographic backgrounds, personalities, hobbies, likes and dislikes. ***Visualising employees as individuals, can possibly highlight that their satisfaction level to eventually influence their job performance involves***

***much more than mere job satisfaction.*** Their satisfaction with life per se, better known as life satisfaction, also plays a role in influencing their performance. Besides, harmony between work and family, the two important life domains also have an important influence on their overall satisfaction. Thus, when measuring constructs that drives employee performance, all three – job satisfaction, life satisfaction and work-life balance, all have to be addressed simultaneously to define and measure an employee’s satisfaction.

### **JOB SATISFACTION - PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP - AN APPRAISAL**

With increasing realisation of job satisfaction as a predictor of performance, it became one of the most widely researched construct. However, for a period of more than three decades, beginning in 1950s till 1985, the relationship between the two did not stand well to empirical scrutiny. Brayfield and Crockett (1955), reviewed nine studies and concluded that the relationship between the two variables can best be described as “*minimal or no relationship*”, and commented that “*satisfaction ..... need not imply strong motivation to outstanding performance*”. Similar results were reported by Vroom in his seminal publication “*Work and Motivation*” (1964), wherein based on 20 studies, it was reported that there is a median correlation of 0.14 between the two variables (job satisfaction and organisational performance). In 1985, Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, conducted a meta-analysis involving 74 studies and reported an average correlation of 0.17 between the two variables and declared the relationship as an “*illusionary correlation*” that represented a “*management fad*”. Though a study by Petty et al (1984) reported a mean correlation of 0.31, which was more promising than the figures reported by earlier studies, yet their results are rarely cited due to the limited coverage of studies used in their meta-analysis.

All in all, the statistics of these studies led the management practitioners to believe that though the relationship between job satisfaction and performance seems logical and intuitive, the empirical evidence forced researchers to describe the relationship as ‘*negligible*’ (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), ‘*unexpectedly low*’ (Spector, 1997), ‘*meagre*’ (Brief, 1998), ‘*weak*’ (Cote, 1999) and ‘*superficial*’ (Saari and Judge, 2004), raising questions and opening debates on the relationship between the two constructs. However, despite the demoralising empirical evidence, Judge et al., 2001, conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis involving a much larger number of studies (254 studies) and reported a correlation of 0.30 and challenged the results by Iaffaldano and Muchinsky (1985), suggesting that their results deserve re-examination. The promising results given by Judge and his colleagues provided new impetus to the role of job satisfaction in enhancing job performance, as the correlation of .30 was sizable enough to offer not only competitive advantage, but also promised respectable financial consequences for the organisation. These results were supplemented by a meta-analytic research based on 113 articles reporting the relationship to be 0.339 (Katebi, A, et al., 2022). The promising conclusions reported by these studies highlighted that the correlation between job satisfaction and job performance cannot be dismissed. However, owing to the wide disparity in the results reported by different studies, the magnitude of the relationship remained contested (Zelenski et al., 2008), suggesting that there was a need to contemplate more variables that could influence performance.

### **QUESTING BETTER EXPLANATIONS**

Almost around the same time, the ‘*happy-productive worker*’ hypothesis permeated most of the organisational research, claiming that happy workers are likely to exhibit higher performance as compared to their less happy counterparts (Wright et al, 2002). The concept emerged from the findings of the Hawthorne studies, with Elton Mayo and colleagues suggesting that happiness is likely to lead to better performance. However, the concept got

recognition after publications by Thomas A. Wright and Russell Cropanzano (1997-2004) providing compelling evidence that happy employees exhibit higher levels of performance as compared to their unhappy counterparts (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001). The years that followed witnessed publications on the happy-productive worker hypothesis, each supporting that happy workers exhibit better performance. However, majority of the studies testing the hypothesis operationalised happiness as job satisfaction (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001; Wright et al, 2002; Brief and Weiss, 2002), believing that a satisfied worker is a happy worker. Intrigued by their belief, researchers and management practitioners paid almost negligible attention to broaden the field for a more holistic concept of happiness embracing constructs like life satisfaction and work-life balance (Erdogan et al., 2012). Besides, job satisfaction cannot be an effective substitute for happiness, as job satisfaction scales normally do not contain any item to assess happiness (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000; Zelenski, 2008). Accordingly, Wright and Cropanzano (2000), proposed that exclusive reliance on job satisfaction does not stand well to the happy-productive worker hypothesis. Job satisfaction was found to be much narrower in contrast to happiness as it relates to one's job only and does not accommodate aspects of one's life beyond job (Brockerman et al, 2012), and hence exclusive reliance on job satisfaction to influence employee performance might not lead to desired outcomes. It was suggested that more exhaustive measures capturing one's satisfaction across various life domains can be used (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000). Their study recorded an improved correlation of 0.32 when they replaced happiness with job satisfaction.

Besides, the person-centric perspective proposed by Weiss and Rupp in 2011, argues that an individual employee has a life within and outside the organisation, and hence organisations should not limit themselves to job satisfaction, an aspect which exists within the workplace. Viewed this way, both job and life satisfaction be considered as indicators of an employee well-being, with job satisfaction reflecting well-being related to job and life satisfaction reflecting a general assessment of one's life as a whole (Wiese et al., 2025). The study by Jones (2006) further reinforced these findings concluding addition of life satisfaction to the satisfaction-performance model which contributed significantly to the prediction of employee performance, both in-role and extra-role, over and above what is predicted by job satisfaction. The findings by Wright and Cropanzano (2000) and Jones (2006) highlighted the relative importance of life satisfaction in the prediction of job performance. The decades that followed witnessed an appreciable increase in research on the causal relationship between life satisfaction and job performance. Happy individuals were found to be not only more optimistic, perceptive, helpful and confident (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001) allowing them to assume risks, but are also more resilient (Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005). They are generally found to be more helpful towards their peer group and are less likely to be involved in counterproductive behaviours or exhibit job withdrawal symptoms like absenteeism and job burnout (Porter and Steers, 1973). The increasing evidence on the causal link of life satisfaction with job performance advocated its inclusion in addition to job satisfaction with the intent to improve employee job performance. Besides, the longitudinal study by Judge and Watanabe (1993) validated the impact of life satisfaction in influencing job satisfaction, a variable always assumed to have a positive relationship to performance.

Having theoretically validated the inclusion of life satisfaction as an important variable influencing performance, the quest for more efficacious alternative shall, however, be incomplete without ensuring harmony between work and other life domains. In the last few years, the landscape has changed drastically as both men and women, with or without children and dependents to care for, all want to "*have a life*" beyond work (Lewis and Cooper, 2005). There is increasing realisation that individuals have no desire to discount their

personal lives simply because they work, rather they attempt to balance between work and life (Igbinomwanhia et al, 2012). This contributes more productively with improved integration of work with family and personal lives. In addition to this, recent years have witnessed increased diversity of workforce than ever before, with each generation bringing with them their baggage of values. Generation Z, as they are popularly called, are the latest entrant to the workforce, and their emphasis on a better work life is much more than what was desired by their predecessors (Schawbel, 2014).

Besides, in contemporary times with women entering the workforce, the dynamics of work and family has changed, leading to work-family conflict. Work and family are two most important domains and coexist for all employed individuals (Lewis and Cooper, 1995, Netemeyer et al, 1996), and hence a balance between work and family becomes imperative. Apart from this, with organisations going global, the rapidly changing business and economic environment and the ever-increasing competition, all call for an increased effort to secure employment, thus changing the very nature of work itself. Coupled with this is the development in information technology, which has made it possible to work seamlessly beyond routine and work-days across workplace boundaries. All this has led to intensification of work, with employees working for long hours often at the cost of their personal time to be spent on family or leisure, leading to conflict between the two domains. The extant literature has enough evidence to suggest that conflict between work and life negatively influences job satisfaction and life satisfaction (E. Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Allen et al, 2000; Perrewe et al, 1999; Netemeyer et al, 1996), both of which are said to be positively influencing employee performance. This necessitates that organisations desirous of higher performance need to work on practices to create harmony between these two domains of life. Responding to this interplay between work and life, progressive organisations acknowledge the fact that work and life are interwoven and it shall be in the best interests of both, the organisation, and employees, if they are treated as such.

Thus, in contemporary times, when organisations are going global, and are becoming more gender inclusive and multigenerational, it becomes crucial to add life satisfaction and work-life balance to job satisfaction when attempting to influence employee performance. The three are highly interrelated concepts for the working population as it is not possible to experience high job and life satisfaction without harmony between work and life (Aribas et al, 2021).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The job satisfaction-performance relationship has witnessed a mixed response, ranging from minimal or no relationship to a modest correlation of .30, as reported by Judge et al., 2001. The study by Bowling (2007), claimed the relationship to be '*spurious*' and therefore stated that exclusive dependence on job satisfaction to enhance employee performance is likely to be ineffectual. Notwithstanding this, job satisfaction should not be regarded as unimportant, as satisfied employees are likely to exhibit higher contextual performance (Organ & Ryan, 1995) and lower incidence of counterproductive behaviour (Dalal, 2005).

Given this context, the paper tries to theoretically contribute to the existing literature that while identifying variables that influence employee performance, exclusive reliance on job satisfaction may be an incomplete representation, as there is empirical evidence to endorse that addition of life satisfaction to the satisfaction-performance model contributed significantly to improvements in employee performance, both in-role and extra-role (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Jones, 2006). Besides, life satisfaction influences job satisfaction (Judge and Watanabe, 1993), hence organisations should try to improve their employees

overall life satisfaction as it positively influences job satisfaction. There is also empirical evidence to endorse that both job and life satisfaction have a causal nexus, which is beneficial for both, the individual employee and the organisation at large (Unanue et al., 2017). In a similar vein, it is also desirable to appreciate the impact of harmony between work and life when contemplating variables that affect performance. Thus, it is desirable for organisations to broaden their perspective beyond mere job satisfaction and appraise variable like life satisfaction and work-life balance when trying to improve employee performance.

With that being said, it shall be amiss if the limitation of this conceptual approach are not mentioned. Owing to the complex nature of human behaviour, there may be other factors, not considered in this paper, that may significantly influence the variability in employee performance. Future studies may widen the scope of the study by inclusion of more constructs to arrive at more dependable conclusions.

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