

Wenzel Matiaske, Gerd Grözinger*

Introduction

Job Satisfaction Revisited

Ever since the Hawthorne studies (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939), which provided a foundation myth for both organizational psychology and sociology, job satisfaction is considered one of the key variables in the relationship between the human being and the organization. Correlates such as productivity, commitment or voluntary turnover, as well as determinants such as leeway for decision-making and executing tasks, have been extensively analyzed since then.

While the frequently suspected strong correlation between job satisfaction and positive outcomes for the organization was *relativized by empirical research*, the focus on possible consequences of job satisfaction explained the enduring suspicion that behavioral research had been instrumentalized for the employer's interests. Work humanization was welcomed and advocated by labor unions. But from their viewpoint, improved working conditions and the resulting productivity gains should also pay off for the employees. Recently, the organizational determinants of workplace satisfaction have been subject to criticism. Greater freedom of action has been postulated as a precondition for satisfying work conditions by humanistic organizational psychology vis-à-vis bureaucratic organizations and tayloristic modes of production. It has been argued, however, that leeway does not only lead to flexible organizations but also demands flexible human beings and leads to the “corrosion of social character” (Sennett, 1998).

The empirical weak correlations between job satisfaction and outcomes for the organization were explained by the dynamic intra-psychological adaptations of boundedly rational actors: Workplace satisfaction is regularly conceived of as the result of a subjective target-performance comparison between expectations and the perceived situation (March & Simon, 1958). Analogue to contemporary stress theories, classic stimulus-contribution approach already suspected that actors could choose subjective coping strategies, for example by adjusting their aspiration level. This strategy could be applied, if unsatisfying circumstances without external possibilities for change, such as exit (or voice), exist. On the methodological level, these thoughts were transformed into differentiated measuring instruments already in the 1970s, distinguishing between different modes of job satisfaction (Ferreira, 2009). So far, this differentiation has been insufficiently incorporated into empirical research. Yet, the phenomenon of dif-

* Prof. Dr. Wenzel Matiaske, Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Helmut-Schmidt- University Hamburg, and German Socio-Economic Panel Study, German Institute of Economic Research (DIW/SOEP) Berlin. E-mail: matiaske@hsu-hh.de.

Prof. Dr. Gerd Grözinger, International Institute for Management, University of Flensburg. E-mail: groezing@uni-flensburg.de.

ferent success levels in subjective coping strategies can empirically be shown in longitudinal research - even on the basis of simple single item measures of job satisfaction.

Resulting from the focus of psychological and sociological research on the behavior in organizations, another, older strand of job satisfaction research has been ignored for a long time, at least in the business administration literature. The early empirical studies of the “Verein für Socialpolitik” from the beginning of the 19th century are particularly noteworthy for the German-speaking area (Weber, 1995, pp. 409 ff.). The report about social conditions, being the basic idea of these studies, was pursued in the discussion about social indicators. Nowadays, job satisfaction is, among other areas of contentment, a standard indicator of social welfare in survey programs measuring the quality of life beyond the economic social product. Sociological social reports and - with the growing acceptance of these data sources in econometrics - economic studies, allow statements on job satisfaction on the national and international level.

The intention of our spring seminar at the Inter-University Center in Dubrovnik was to bring together these different branches of contemporary research on job satisfaction and the disciplines involved - business administration, economics, psychology and sociology. This special issue comprises some of the papers that were presented and discussed there as well as several additional studies.

By focusing on commitment, *Andrew E. Clark* addresses a correlate of job satisfaction that has received a lot of attention. Seen from an economic perspective, his article does not examine the company but rather the national level. To be more precise, Clark analyzes the commitment of employees in OECD countries between 1997 and 2005 on the basis of the “International Social Survey Programme” (ISSP) data. The significant cross-country differences in the level of commitment in this cross-section study can only partly be attributed to individual or job-related characteristics. Instead, this study throws light upon macro-economic and sociological context variables such as economic and civil liberties which are positively correlated with worker effort and pride in the firm.

Based on German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) data *René Fahr* focuses on organizational determinants of job satisfaction, namely an enriched job design which is characterized by a high degree of autonomy and multitasking. This study supports the assumption that modern job designs described by job rotation, enlargement and enrichment increase job satisfaction. Furthermore Fahr’s analysis finds some evidence for the hypothesis of a fit between workers and job design characteristics as a precondition of job satisfaction. Employees whose observable characteristics match with enriched workplaces report higher levels of job satisfaction than employees who do not match with modern job designs.

Luke Haywood theorizes job satisfaction from an economical perspective and regards jobs as consumption good. The demand for job quality is conceptualized by voluntary turnover. Accordingly, wealth plays an important role: Wealthier employees should be more “picky” about jobs and their turnover rate should be lower. Haywood develops a theoretical model which is empirically tested with longitudinal data using

the British Household Panel and windfall profits to investigate the impact of exogenous changes in wealth on job searching.

Based on the theoretical concept of psychological contracts and a qualitative interview study, *Uta Wilkens'* and *Daniel Nermerich's* paper provide a deeper insight into job satisfaction of highly-skilled flexible workers. The expectancy-oriented approach enables the interpretation of individual coping strategies and aspiration levels. Reciprocity, acknowledgment and skill development are identified as preconditions for job satisfaction in this context.

Traditionally, job satisfaction is conceptualized as an individual attitude in different theoretical frameworks or as one among many welfare indicators without a deeper theoretical foundation., *Ortrud Leßmann* and *Jean-Michel Bonvin* apply the second perspective and view job satisfaction as an indicator of individual welfare to discuss a broader theoretical perspective. They suggest the capability approach, which was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, as a frame of reference for welfare economics in general and job satisfaction in particular.

We would like to express our gratitude to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for the travel grants, to the Dubrovnik Inter-University Center and namely Nada Bruer, for supporting the seminar, as well as to the participants of the seminar for providing interesting discussions. Last but not least, we would like to thank the authors for their contributions.

References

- Ferreira, Y. (2009). FEAT – Fragebogen zur Erhebung von Arbeitszufriedenheitstypen: Zukunftsperspektive für das Züricher Modell. *Zeitschrift für Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie*, 27, 177-193.
- March, J. G., & Simon, H. A. (1958). *Organizations*. New York: Wiley.
- Roethlisberger, F.J., & Dickson, W. J. (1939). *Management and the Worker. An Account of a Research Program Conducted by the Western Electric Company*. Chicago: Hawthorne Works.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Weber, M. (1995). *Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 11. Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit: Schriften und Reden 1908 – 1912*. Hrsg. von W. Schluchter und S. Frommer. Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck).