

# Young workers' job satisfaction



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Job satisfaction is a topic of considerable interest among scholars. The study of job satisfaction and its relation to job performance is one of the most venerable traditions in international organization research (Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton, 2001). The concept of job satisfaction and its implications for workplace and organizational performance are often described as the “Holy Grail” of industrial psychology and organization studies (Judge et al., 2001). Since the 1930s and until present, many developments in the study of job performance affected organizational practices and decisions in all parts of the world. Today, job satisfaction is often conceptualized as employees' affective reactions towards their jobs (Boswell, Shipp, Payne & Culbertson, 2009). These reactions greatly affect work behaviors, motivations, and retention. Unfortunately, despite a wealth of literature, the application of these findings to a particular workplace often lacks consistency (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). The situation is particularly problematic with young employees in their first full-time jobs. Young employees experience considerable difficulties and even shocks in their transition from higher education to workforce (Duchscher, 2008). All these problems justify the analysis of job satisfaction and fulfillment among young workers in their first full-time jobs.

The goal of this thesis is to examine the factors affecting young workers' job satisfaction and fulfillment in New Zealand. The thesis defines job satisfaction and fulfillment and justifies the importance of the study. It investigates the main factors affecting job satisfaction and fulfillment among young full-time workers in New Zealand. Primary data collected through online surveys will be used in this thesis.

## What Is Job Satisfaction and Fulfillment?

Different researchers discuss job satisfaction in different ways. The origins of the job satisfaction research can be traced to 1935, when Hoppock proposed the first definition of job satisfaction and described it as “ any combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that causes a person truthfully to say, ‘ I am satisfied with my job’” (p. 47). In other words, Hoppock (1935) emphasized the importance of employee perceptions in judging their satisfaction with jobs. He wrote that dissatisfaction is a complex result of personal, work, family and social variables.

Hoppock's (1935) definition of job satisfaction is not as popular as the job satisfaction definitions proposed by Locke (1969). Locke (1969), defined job satisfaction as “ the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values” (p. 316). Simply stated, satisfied workers have everything needed to achieve their job values in the workplace (Locke, 1969). Locke's (1969) definition of job satisfaction is focused on employees' subjective perceptions of the workplace and the extent to which it meets their values.

Before Locke (1969), Porter and Lawler (1968) wrote that job satisfaction expressed workers' appraisal of their job and suggested that employees could be either fully satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs. Later in 1971, Porter (1971) proposed that employees developed their job attitudes, by comparing their perceived and expected incomes. In 1971, Hackman and Lawler also published their study, presenting autonomy, task identity, variety and feedback as the fundamental predictors of job satisfaction. Today, job

satisfaction is often defined as employees' affective reaction to their job (Boswell et al., 2009; Fischer, 1998). This definition reflects the major similarities found across the definitions of job satisfaction proposed by Hoppock (1935), Locke (1969), and Porter and Lawler (1968). All these definitions emphasize the subjective dimension of job satisfaction; in other words, job satisfaction is conceptualized as employee's reactions to their jobs. Yet, the most common definition of job satisfaction is still the one offered by Locke (1976): " a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 1304). This definition is popular, since it comprises both affective and cognitive elements of job satisfaction (Saari & Judge, 2004).

The study of employee fulfillment is inseparably linked to the concepts of happiness, well-being, hedonia and eudaimonia. According to Locke (1969), " happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one's values" (p. 316). If, according to Locke (1969), job satisfaction is the state that facilitates the fulfillment of one's job values, it is possible to assume that happiness originates from one's ability to meet their values in the workplace and creates the foundation for enhanced fulfillment in the workplace.

That fulfillment and happiness are closely related was also supported by Oxford Dictionary (2010), which defines fulfillment as happiness or satisfaction from being able to fully develop one's potential. Today, the word " happiness" is often replaced by the term " well-being". Keyes et al. (2002) and Ryff (1989) used the term " subjective well-being". Deci and Ryan (2008) confirm that well-being is subjective and closely related to the

personal feeling of wellness. Yet, it is at least incorrect to say that happiness and well-being are totally subjective.

The subjective view of well-being is often described in terms of hedonia – positive or negative affect used as the basic measure of happiness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). However, many people evaluate their happiness not from the sensual but cognitive angle. In this situation, the term “ eudaimonia” is used to describe happiness and fulfillment as the means of actualizing individual potentials (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This conceptualization creates a more complex view of fulfillment and happiness, from both subjective and objective viewpoints.

In summary, the concepts of job satisfaction, fulfillment, happiness and well-being are closely intertwined. However, describing happiness and job satisfaction in universal terms is virtually impossible (Delle Fave et al., 2011). Mitchell and Larson (1987) explored more than 3, 000 job satisfaction studies and concluded that a universal definition of job satisfaction could not be created. As such, job fulfillment can be understood as a measure and direct expression of workers' satisfaction with their jobs, whereas job satisfaction can be interpreted as the positive feeling resulting from one's ability to fulfill their value and goals in the workplace.

#### Why Study Job Satisfaction and Fulfillment?

The scope of literature studying and describing the concept of job satisfaction constantly increases. This, however, does not diminish the importance of studying job satisfaction and fulfillment in young workers in New Zealand. Several important factors justify studying job satisfaction and

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fulfillment. First, the study of job satisfaction and fulfillment is important to employees themselves. Apart from the fact that job satisfaction affects employees' health and wellbeing (Faragher, Cass & Cooper, 2005), it also predisposes their emotional reactions to different aspects of workplace performance. Simply put, happy employees are productive employees (Saari & Judge, 2004). Employees should have full understanding of what drives or impedes them in their striving to excel in the workplace.

Second, business owners and human resource managers constantly try to reduce their costs and increase organizational efficiency, and job satisfaction is widely recognized as the direct pathway to faster organizational growth and better employee performance (Argyle, 1989; Petty, McGee & Cavender, 1984). That job satisfaction predisposes better performance in the workplace has been described by the human relations theory, which posits that employees can increase their productivity if their needs in the workplace are satisfied (McGee & Cavender, 1984). Based on Lawler and Porter (1967), job satisfaction and job performance are directly related, but the order of this relationship is the opposite: better performance leads to greater rewards, and these rewards translate into job satisfaction. Nimalathan (2002) confirms that job satisfaction leads to better performance in the workplace. Locke (1969) concludes that employee performance results from the way employees cope with their priorities and fulfill their goals in the workplace. The study of job satisfaction and fulfillment is important, because both constructs are believed to be directly related to organizational commitment. For many years, investigators have been searching for the antecedents and predictors of organizational commitment (Blegen, 1993). Organizational

commitment has been represented by the way individuals identify themselves with the goals of the organization and the degree to which individual goals coincide with those of the organization (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1971). It should be noted, that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are not the same: Williams and Hazer (1986) write that organizational commitment is an affective response to the organization, whereas job satisfaction is a positive emotional response to various aspects of the workplace. Despite these complexities, understanding the nature of job satisfaction and fulfillment is extremely important for the organizations that lack employee commitment. According to Steers (1977), job satisfaction can predict stronger organizational commitment among employees. Williams and Anderson (1991) further conclude that job satisfaction leads to improved organizational commitment and, later, to organizational citizenship behaviors. At times, organizational commitment is claimed to moderate the relationship between job satisfaction and workplace performance (Testa, 2001). In any case, the relationship between job satisfaction and commitment deserves professional attention.

Third, the study of job satisfaction and fulfillment can have far-reaching implications for understanding the nature, antecedents and methods of preventing high employee turnover in organizations. It is no secret that low job satisfaction leads to low commitment to the workplace which, in turn, increases employee turnover intentions (Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid & Sirola, 1998). Lum et al. (1998) suggest that job satisfaction is a prerequisite of the intention to quit weaker than organizational commitment. Overall, job satisfaction and labor turnover are negatively related (Harter, Schmidt &

Hayes, 2002). Dissatisfied employees are more likely to consider an opportunity to quit (Griffeth, Hom & Gaetner, 2000; Mowday & Spencer, 198; Warr, 2007). The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover was described in abundance. Wild, Hill and Ridgeway (1970) found that employee dissatisfaction with work was the primary cause of leaving the job. Tett and Meyer (1993) further confirmed that both satisfaction and commitment contributed to the prediction of employee turnover intentions. Teckenberg (1978) explored the incongruence between job satisfaction and turnover in the U. S. S. R., whereas Boxall, Macky and Rasmussen (2004) discovered that motivation to quit the job among New Zealand employees was multidimensional. According to Boxall et al. (2004), whether or not employees choose to quit their job depends upon the quality of their relations with colleagues and managers, the quality of extrinsic rewards, as well as the work-life balance, all of which contribute to job satisfaction and further predetermine the scope of turnover in the workplace. In this context, job satisfaction and turnover intentions are also related to worker happiness: “ it is widely assumed that unhappiness in a job leads people to leave that job, although such transitions clearly depend on other factors, such as the availability of relevant alternatives” (Warr, 2007, p. 432).

In summary, the study of job satisfaction and fulfillment is important, because both constructs are directly related to organizational commitment, workplace performance, and turnover intentions within organizations. Better knowledge of job satisfaction and fulfillment will create the basis for reducing costs and enhancing efficiency in organizations.

Why Study Graduates in Their First Full-Time Jobs?

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The study of young workers in their first full-time jobs has great importance for understanding and improving the basic organizational processes in New Zealand. The share of young workers in the nation's labor force constantly increases, and young workers represent the future workforce (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). Therefore, understanding how young workers enter the workforce and what keeps them tied to their first full-time jobs is essential for the future of business profitability and organizational growth in New Zealand.

Today, there is no clear definition of young workers. However, Loughlin and Barling (2001) describe young workers as individuals "between the ages of 15 and 24 [...] a heterogeneous group, including students working part-time, evenings, weekends, and/ or in the summer while attending school, and those working full time in the paid labor force and attempting to establish themselves in the adult world of work" (p. 544). Loughlin and Barling (2001) further write that young workers can be divided into older workers (20-24 years of age), and younger workers (15-19 years of age). The former group represents the end of Generation X, and the younger group is usually called "Generation Y" (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). Those born after 1980 are often called "Millennials" or "Echo boomers" (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). Whatever the definition, the most important is the current state of the young workforce in New Zealand and its main characteristics.

Young workers exemplify an important category of New Zealand's labor force. According to the New Zealand Department of Labor, in 2006 there were more than 500, 000 young people living in the country. Recent estimates by the Department of Labor suggest that at the end of 2011, there

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were 638, 500 young people living in New Zealand, of whom 60.3% participated in the labor force (DOL, 2012). Young workers play a huge role in the development of the nation's labor force. According to DOL (2012), young workers occupy a distinct place in the current system of labor relations in the country, and they also possess a number of distinct characteristics.

Young workers in New Zealand are characterized by high mobility. Actually, mobility is the defining feature of youth in New Zealand's labor force. DOL (2009) notes that young workers are highly migratory and tend to move from one region to another, looking for decent employment. Moreover, New Zealand has a long history of immigration, which greatly affects the state of labor market in the country. Migration and mobility among young workers in New Zealand benefit the biggest cities but leaves the periphery without sufficient labor supply.

Graduates' transition to their first full-time jobs is a serious workplace challenge. New graduates engaging in their first professional roles are confronted with a multitude of physical, emotional, intellectual, sociocultural and developmental changes (Duchscher, 2008). The analysis of graduates' transition to and adaptation in their first full-time jobs relates to the serious challenge to organizations to understand and address the issues that may be driving these graduates out of their profession (Duchscher, 2008). The first few months of full-time employment can be the most difficult and stressful for graduates, leading to reduced job satisfaction, increased absenteeism and role stress (Chang & Hancock, 2003). On the other side of the issue is the concept of employability security, which implies that new graduates

should be flexible enough to constantly adapt to the changing workplace requirements and environments (Bridgstock, 2009). This, in turn, emphasizes the importance of this study for policymaking and educational bodies, which are required to produce “ work ready graduates who are competent within their disciplinary fields and possess the abilities necessary to negotiate a world of work that is in constant flux” (Bridgstock, 2009, p. 31).

It should be noted, that age impacts labor turnover in New Zealand. Young workers, more than their older colleagues, are subject to negative influences in the workplace. Castro (2002) writes that young workers typically work in jobs that require emotional labor and are characterized by high levels of stress; as a result, young employees are increasingly vulnerable to stresses and pressures compelling them to change their workplace. Stresses are particularly problematic in young workers' first full-time jobs that are often characterized by high strain environments (Witte, Verhofstadt & Omey, 2007). Because young workers are mobile and flexible and look for self-fulfillment and profit maximization opportunities, they are more likely to develop turnover intentions and leave their jobs (Flinn, 1986). All these trends and characteristics make the task of retaining young workers extremely challenging. They further justify the importance of studying job satisfaction and fulfillment among young workers in New Zealand.

Of particular importance is the analysis of age, its effects on job satisfaction and the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover attitudes. Block et al. (1964), Butler (1961), Katzell et al. (1961) and Talacchi (1960) agreed that labor turnover was negatively related to job satisfaction. Lee and Wilbur (1985) also found that older employees were more likely to be satisfied with

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the extrinsic characteristics of their jobs than their younger colleagues. Also, job characteristics could influence young and old workers job perceptions (Lee & Wilbur, 1985). All these complexities justify the importance of this thesis. Organizations and managers in New Zealand should have a clearer understanding of what drives young workers, what they expect from their first full-time jobs, what factors predict or impede job satisfaction and fulfillment in the workplace, and what they can do to develop and sustain a productive labor force.

### Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured in the following way. To begin with, a comprehensive review of literature is provided in Chapter 2. The goal of the review is to understand what the current state of literature has to say about the problem of job satisfaction and identify the existing gaps in understanding job satisfaction and fulfillment in young workers. The review is focused on the analysis of job satisfaction and fulfillment among workers and their implications for organizational development and growth. Chapter 3 covers the research paradigms and methods of inquiry. In this chapter, a detailed explanation of the data collection methods and procedures is provided. In Chapter 4, the results of the study and their analysis are provided. Chapter 5 includes a brief discussion of the research findings and identifies the most significant practical implications. Finally, a conclusion and recommendations for the future research are provided.

Young workers represent an essential element of today's New Zealand labor force. Organizations must attract and retain the most prospective

employees, but to successfully accomplish this task, they also need a better understanding of job satisfaction and fulfillment among young workers. As of today, the most popular is Locke's (1976) definition of job satisfaction, which posits that job satisfaction is a product of both affect and cognition. Job satisfaction and fulfillment are directly related and are affected by numerous factors, but young workers are particularly susceptible to pressures, tensions, and stresses in their jobs. The first few months can become extremely challenging for young graduates. It is not surprising that many of them may develop turnover intentions and try to find another job. All these problems justify the analysis of job satisfaction and fulfillment among young workers in their first full-time jobs.