JOB SATISFACTION: LUXURY OR NECESSITY FOR THE RETENTION OF NURSES

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INTRODUCTION

In a constantly changing healthcare environment nurses’ job satisfaction is an important factor relating to recruitment and retention. The purpose of this study is to examine the theoretical developments of job satisfaction research and the implication for the nursing profession. Whilst the important issues of an inherently stressful work environment and increasing staff shortages are some of the factors that influence nurses’ job satisfaction, key issues such as nurses’ self-concept influence the way in which job satisfaction can occur. An overview of the significance of job satisfaction to nursing is followed by the importance of job satisfaction for the newly registered nurses. These discussions lead to an exploration of relevant theoretical developments and the generation of job satisfaction instrumentation that relates specifically to the nursing profession. A discussion of the commonalties, such as multidimensionality, leads the final section of this article that examines the relationship of nurses’ self-concept to their job satisfaction.

SIGNIFICANCE OF JOB SATISFACTION

Researchers contend that job satisfaction is possibly the most significant yet elusive factor in understanding worker’s motivation, performance, effectiveness, recruitment and retention. The direct and most often attributable effect of job satisfaction lies in recruitment and retention for an organisation. Indeed, it is often on these grounds alone that many researchers seek to empirically measure job satisfaction.\(^1\) Job satisfaction is also possibly the most often studied aspect of organisational research. Potential and actual sources of job satisfaction are dynamic as well as culturally and historically embedded. Job satisfaction is often defined in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic values or rewards.\(^2\) Extrinsic values include tangible aspects such as wages, work benefits, networks and bonuses. Intrinsic values include status, a sense of achievement, ability to interact with others, self-worth, self-esteem, accumulation of knowledge/skills and the ability to utilize and express creativity. As such, our principal choice of employment can help to shape our view of ourselves, broaden our daily life, and help to give meaning to our existence.\(^3\)

SIGNIFICANCE OF JOB SATISFACTION FOR THE RETENTION OF NURSES

Job satisfaction is considered a critical factor in health care settings for several reasons. There is strong empirical evidence to support a causal relationship between job satisfaction, staff turnover and absenteeism. The evidence suggests that when nurses’ job satisfaction is low, retention of
staff is also low and staff turnover and absenteeism increases. This combination of events can cause significantly lower standards in health care delivery. In addition, the costs of recruitment can be measured in both financial and productivity terms. Klinefelter (1993) suggests that interest in nurses’ job satisfaction is often motivated solely by the organisation’s cost effectiveness rather than by any concern for the individual or the nursing profession. When new nursing staff need to be continually recruited as a result of poor staff retention evolving from low job satisfaction, other areas such as budget and cost containment become problematic. Again, the long-term effect may be a spiraling downturn in standards of healthcare delivery as a result of short-term mismatches in time and care management. In addition, being short-staffed is in itself likely to lower job satisfaction and further compounds the difficulties of retaining nursing staff.

This difficulty in replacing and retaining nursing staff is not a localized phenomenon; rather it is a worldwide issue as the cycle of available nursing staff reaches a new low point. Staff shortages that evolve from low job satisfaction cannot be easily remedied when the available pool of recruits declines. Those who have left nursing as a result of low job satisfaction may be difficult to entice back into the profession because of their prior experience with dissatisfaction. As such, the evidence from nursing research suggests that job satisfaction continues to play a pivotal role in retaining nursing staff. If nursing work is understood by potential new recruits as offering little in the way of job satisfaction then recruitment strategies must address this critical factor.

AN OVERVIEW OF JOB SATISFACTION DEFINITIONS

Despite a plethora of definitions, no one definition appears able to capture the complexities involved in defining our attitude towards our work. Job satisfaction is a complex hypothetical construct that evaluates the affective and the competency elements of our approach to work. The values and attitudes related to our work can reflect both satisfaction and motivation. Therefore, the idea that job satisfaction broadly reflects how we feel about both extrinsic values such as wages, tasks, policies and intrinsic values of status, self-determination and interaction is embraced throughout this paper.

In the very broadest of sense, job satisfaction is about how we feel about our job. Mueller and McCloskey (1990) define job satisfaction as “the degree of positive affective orientation toward employment”. We are meant to feel good for a job well done and we aim to feel satisfied with all aspects of our job. If this is not possible then the employee may well re-evaluate their position.

A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR NURSES’ JOB SATISFACTION

Theories on what motivates people and the components or factors in job attitudes have rapidly multiplied in the last century. Most of these theories relate directly to the inability of one theory to encapsulate the huge variety of possibilities when explaining human behavior. Motivation and satisfaction are complex and dynamic constructs that have led to a huge array of studies in the past 50 years. Whilst behavioral researchers have lamented the inability of one theory to fit all, other researchers have embraced the multitude of theoretical possibilities. Amongst the most famous behavioral theories relating to motivation and job attitudes are those of Maslow and Herzberg.
THE HERZBERG DUAL-FACTOR THEORY

In 1959, Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman published their theoretical foundations and findings for a study on job motivation. The aim of their study was to explore the duality (i.e. satisfaction and dissatisfaction) of job attitudes based on a large-scale literature search. The exploration began with the fundamental and timeless question: “What does the worker want from his job?” This question has enormous industry ramifications for motivation of workers and as a causative agent in behavioral motivation. One major area that became clear from a review of several thousand articles and books relating to job attitudes was the “primacy of factors” which related to what the researchers called satisfiers or dissatisfiers. Herzberg et al. (1959) found the dual continuums within job attitudes and subsequent behaviour. Worker dignity and individuality upon one and working only for financial gain on the second hypothetical continuum, and a variety of attitudes lay in between. Hence, the innovative concept of satisfiers and dissatisfiers is a complex one, but is at the heart of the dual factor theory of Herzberg et al. (1959).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HERZBERG DUAL FACTOR JOB SATISFACTION THEORY

The Herzberg et al. research evidence suggested that the “unidirectionality” for the two proposed continuums was truer for dissatisfiers than satisfiers. However, this finding was subject to the specific factors or dimensions applicable to the individual worker and workplace. From this premise, the job satisfaction dual factor model was developed on two fronts. The researchers named the dual continuums motivation and hygiene. The motivational factors or dimensions of job satisfaction represented those aspects that were likely to satisfy the workers. Herzberg et al. theorized that what motivates the worker or what is likely to satisfy their needs (based on Maslow’s 1954 theories) leads to positive dimensions of job attitudes. Maslow’s theory centered on the notion of a hierarchy for human needs, which has survival at the inverted apex and self-fulfillment as an example of higher order factors.

The term hygiene represents those aspects of work that incorporate dissatisfaction. Hygiene is used to describe factors that relate to or surround the worker, such as disorganization and unfairness that cause the worker to be unhappy. If these factors are resolved, the worker can move from an attitude of dissatisfied to neutral. For example, salaries or wages are seen as part of the hygiene continuum in that, if remuneration is unfair, then dissatisfaction is likely to occur. If remuneration is fair then neutrality is the most likely response.

Herzberg et al. determined in their studies on industrial organizations that instead of the employee dictating what led to job satisfaction, management or the employer usually set the criterion on what constituted job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The employer rationale underpinning this was that workers tend to be irrational and disorganized about what they want from their job and are therefore unable to be sensible about their job satisfaction. This autocratic style has shown to be highly inadequate in addressing optimal industrial organization. In a recent study by Timmreck (2001) the author suggests that the manager or employer continues to have unrealistic expectations of the employee and that this may be due in part to their lack of managerial experience and understanding of the employee. Timmreck utilised the Herzberg et al.
dual factor job satisfaction theory as the basis of a study of 99 health service mid-managers to determine the current relevance of the theory.\textsuperscript{15}

An interesting and still relevant finding of Herzberg et al. (1959) was that subtle changes in the wording of questions designed to elucidate job attitude could have major effects on the results. Equally, the researchers found that the populations’ studied and sample issues had a powerful effect upon the results of job attitude research. For example, if the intention of a survey or research project is to establish worker morale (which reflects dissatisfaction and consequently a hygiene issue), remuneration may be listed highly. If however, the intention of a survey or research project is to establish worker motivation then remuneration is not high on a list of satisfaction generating factors. Money that represents a reward for performance and acts as a reward for worker achievements however may operate as a motivator rather than as a hygiene factor.

**RELATED THEORIES**

The human-behaviorist theorist Maslow is perhaps best recognized for his theory of needs, which in turn incorporates a theory of motivation. Maslow divided needs into two main types; those are physiologically orientated and psychologically derived. In Maslow’s theory, once physiological needs such as food and water are satisfied, higher needs can then be fulfilled. Maslow referred to the hierarchy of needs as “exclusive organizers of behaviour”. Interestingly, in his multidimensional hierarchy, Maslow listed the need for esteem as the next higher order need after the needs of physiological and safety needs were met. The need for esteem as a part of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs highlights the integral links of a positive self-concept to motivation hence job satisfaction. Maslow theorised that esteem needs are divided into two areas. These two groups are described as a need for self-esteem and self-respect that are derived from achievement, mastery competence and self-confidence as well as status, dominance, recognition, attention and appreciation. A sense of “being useful and necessary in the world” is gained by the push for esteem needs to be satisfied.

The need for self-actualisation is also an essential feature for the working adult. Maslow describes the (higher order) need as one that explains, “What a man can be, he must be”. Satisfaction of these needs is achieved by the motivation or drive to fulfill life with a sense of balance, or equilibrium. If the gratification of a need is achieved, then it no longer serves to motivate. As Maslow points out “if we are interested in what actually motivates us, and not in what has, will, or might motivate us, then a satisfied need is not a motivator”. Therefore, it can be inferred that dissatisfaction is likely to be the truer motivating force.\textsuperscript{16}

This important point in Maslow’s theory of a hierarchy of needs helps to clarify the issue of satisfiers and dissatisfiers, the sources of work motivation and illuminates the role our self-concept plays as a precursor for job satisfaction. Whilst Maslow’s theory relates to what drives our motivation generally, Herzberg’s dual factor theory relates specifically to the work component of life. Both Herzberg and Maslow’s theories incorporate aspects of the ‘self’ such as self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth. Also, both theories propose that job satisfaction and motivation contain multiple dimensions. In this way there is a common link between current self-concept theory, work satisfaction and needs fulfillment/motivation theory.
RESEARCH THEMES AND DEVELOPMENT IN JOB SATISFACTION AND NURSING

In order to quantify job satisfaction people are asked to place a value on, not just the work component, but on how the work makes them feel. The importance of job satisfaction can be underrated partly because of this evaluative perspective. It might be assumed that how satisfied a person is with his job only becomes a significant issue when an organisation is having difficulties either attracting new employees or in maintaining their current employees. However, based on a research through just a segment of the literature, concluded that job satisfaction is a much more complex phenomena.

Although job satisfaction is probably the most often research aspect of nursing work organization. There is surprisingly few job satisfaction instruments designed especially for nurses and very few studies relating specifically to the within-construct of job satisfaction. There are no studies relating nurses’ self-concept and job satisfaction. In fact, studies that aim to establish causal or reciprocal relationships with other work related issues such as stress and attrition appear to outnumber job satisfaction studies by more than two to one.

Previous research on nurses’ job satisfaction is also organised around the types of nursing role such as nurse manager, case manager, hospital nurse, critical care nurse, community nurse, midwife and psychiatric nurse. This point relates to Herzberg’s caveat that sample issues and the populations to be studied, have powerful effects upon the results of a job satisfaction study.

FACTORS INFLUENCING RESEARCH ON NURSES’ JOB SATISFACTION

The rapidly changing landscape of health care may influence the significance of job satisfaction. Not only to nurses care for more critically ill patients and deal with ever increasingly complex technology, but also the nurse’s role in health care and illness prevention continues to expand. New horizons continually challenge nurses in rural and remote areas, community settings, and in a variety of specialty areas (e.g. nurse practitioner, nurse educator and clinical nurse consultant).

Another factor possibly influencing current levels of nurses’ job satisfaction is the change in entry-level education for registration as a nurse. Prior to the education of nurses at universities, student nurses were apprenticed within a hospital system. The apprenticeship system acclimatised the nurse throughout a three-year student period to the mechanisms and expectations of a health care system within hospitals. The newly graduated registered nurse in the 1990s has limited experience. This change in training and education may lead to job satisfaction being regarded as a critical issue early in a nurse’s career.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NURSES’ SELF-CONCEPT AND JOB SATISFACTION

The idea that job satisfaction measurement is underpinned by the theories of motivation and needs has important implications for this study. As noted earlier, the broad categories of esteem needs are significant for job satisfaction. While self-concept theory relates to how we perceive ourselves in relation to experience and environment. Job satisfaction theory relates to the needs
and values embedded in the worker and work environment. A relationship is established on theoretical grounds although; previous measurement models have been confounded by a lack of appropriate instrumentation that utilises the multidimensional structure for both important constructs. In many ways the development of the IWS as a measure of nurses’ job satisfaction parallels the concerns of instrument development and construction in self-concept. Research into both constructs have struggled to utilise an all-important multidimensional framework and sometimes failed to address vital within-construct issues such as the interweaving of “theory building and instrument construction”. The theory and tools now exist to construct a valid measure of nurses’ self-concept and the IWS addresses all those similar concerns for nurses’ job satisfaction.

There is significant research evidence to confirm the importance of job satisfaction for nurses. While much of this research comes from studies where job satisfaction is utilised as a between-construct measure and is unidimensionally measured, the evidence points to the need for job satisfaction in retaining nursing staff. The antecedents of job satisfaction are not well reported in literature and research; consequently there are very few studies (none in nursing) that enquire into the effects of self-concept on job satisfaction. In one of the few studies linking self-concept and job satisfaction reported a positive correlation in a study of relations between personality types, self-concept and job satisfaction for young Indian adult workers.22

The limitations of previous research have been established in these two chapters on self-concept and job satisfaction. They have included an ongoing struggle with theoretical concerns being ignored in favour of easily administered and quickly interpreted measures that focused on a global approach to both constructs. While Herzberg and Maslow’s theories point out the close link between what a person brings to a job (i.e. their personal characteristics such as self-concept) and the contents of work effect on job satisfaction, nurse researchers have yet to empirically establish the link of self-concept to job satisfaction. This study aims to address the previous limitations by conducting significant and original research that addresses those vital within-construct concerns for nurses’ self-concept and then move onto an innovative between-construct study of self-concept and job satisfaction.

This study has introduced the significant and complex field of job satisfaction theory and research. The importance of job satisfaction as the second construct in this study has been determined. The theoretical basis for job attitudes and organisation was examined from a historical standpoint as well as its relevance for current nursing job satisfaction measurement. The relationship of these theories is reviewed in light of the conceptual and multidimensional basis they provide for job satisfaction measurement. The critical theme of satisfiers and dissatisfiers is discussed in respect of their explanatory ability for the multiple domains that exist for current job satisfaction research and measurement. A review of the literature relating to research on nurses’ job satisfaction has revealed similar important issues to that of nurses’ self-concept research. Although the literature reveals that job satisfaction is multifactorial and heavily influenced by locality and sample issues, nursing researchers are keen to utilise job satisfaction measures for between-construct studies without necessarily addressing the vital issues of within-construct makeup. A confusing picture arises from the review of multidimensional nursing job satisfaction measures regarding the job satisfaction components as well as the psychometric
properties of instrumentation and findings. Finally an exploration of the relation of self-concept and job satisfaction through theoretical underpinnings and multidimensionality is proposed.

REFERENCES


14. Herzberg et al., 1959


18. Herzberg et al., 1959


