Personal Predictors of Job Satisfaction for the Public Sector Manager: Implications for Management Practice and Development in a Developing Economy

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Abstract
The paper identifies personal predictors of job satisfaction among managers in the Nigerian public sector. The results of the findings are discussed, and implications for public sector management in developing nations are given.

Introduction
Despite the increasing level of privatization around the world, the public sector in the developing countries still continues to employ a large percentage of the workforce in those countries. It has been suggested that public service employment has been growing about four times as fast in developing countries as in developed countries (Ozgediz, 1983). Traditionally, the public sector in developing economies has been in the forefront of economic development. As a result of the strategic importance of the public sector in the economic development of many countries, there is a concerted effort to make public sector management respond to the changing needs of developing nations.

There is now a renewed interest in the performance level of the public sector in many developing economies,
as they face a more competitive global environment. Efforts to improve the performance level of the public sector focus on both personal and contextual variables. Studies have shown that employees’ attitudes towards work do affect their performance, and in turn the attitudes of employees are influenced by personal characteristics and job characteristics (DeSantis and Durst, 1996).

The increasing pressure both from within and from without to increase the productivity of the public sector in developing economies makes it imperative to investigate reasons why there is a significant difference in the levels of productivity in the public and private sector. There is evidence from previous studies suggesting that public sector managers experience lower levels of job satisfaction (Solomon, 1986; Kohjasteh, 1993). Implicit in many of these studies is the idea that satisfied workers in most organizations contribute significantly to the effectiveness and success of the organizations. Logic thus suggests that low productivity may be a result of low levels of satisfaction (Naumann, 1993).

Given the empirical and anecdotal evidence that the level of productivity in the Nigerian public sector can stand major improvement (Agim, 1984), the purpose of this paper is to identify factors that relate to job satisfaction among public sector managers in Nigeria. If those factors are identified, institutional changes can be made that will result in higher levels of satisfaction and consequently an improved level of productivity. The balance of this paper reviews the literature related to job satisfaction, explains the methodology used for this study and discusses the results and implications of the study.

**Literature Review**

Job satisfaction is a self-reported positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or from job experiences (Locke, 1976). This attitude towards work is thus necessarily within the context of the work environment, which includes not only the job and organizational characteristics, but also the interaction of the two with worker characteristics (Rousseau, 1978). Researchers have conceptualized job satisfaction in many different ways. While some of the conceptualizations were based on some specific facets of the job (Rice, McFarlin and Bennett, 1989) others have used conceptualizations based on total satisfaction (Levin and Stokes, 1989), while still others have used conceptualizations based on the intrinsic-extrinsic distinctions (Naumann, 1993).

Previous studies have shown that monetary compensation is one of the most important explanatory variables for job satisfaction (Kalleberg, 1977; Voydanoff, 1980). In their study of public sector managers, Taylor and West (1992) found that pay levels affect job satisfaction, reporting that those public employees that compared their salaries with those of private sector employees had lower levels of job satisfaction. Another category of variables that have been found to consistently have an impact on the level of job satisfaction is job characteristics. Those workers that perform tasks that have high skill variety, autonomy, feedback, and job significance experience greater levels of job satisfaction than their counterparts who perform tasks that are low on those attributes (Hackman and Lawler, 1971). Self-expression in job setting has been found to relate positively to job satisfaction (Voydanoff, 1980).

The work-environment characteristic is another category of variables that others have found to have an impact on job satisfaction. Employees’ job satisfaction is related to supervisor characteristics (Harrick, Vanek, &Michlitsch, 1986), and Emmert and Taher (1992) found job-related feedback and the social environment to be important determinants of job satisfaction for public professionals. The last set of variables that have attracted the attention of researchers as possible predictors of job satisfaction are employees’ personal characteristics. Variables such as age, educational level, and gender have been found by many studies to have some relationship to employees’ level of job satisfaction.

Findings on the impact of gender on job satisfaction are at present not consistent. While some of the findings
suggest that there are no differences in the level of job satisfaction among men and women (Mannheim, 1983), others do suggest that the expectations of working women in terms of job satisfaction are different from those of men (Martin & Hanson, 1985). In the relationship of age to job satisfaction, Lee and Wilbur (1985) suggest that job satisfaction increases with age. One explanation for such a finding is that older employees are better able to adjust their expectations to the returns work can provide (DeSantis and Durst, 1996). Researchers have found that there is a negative relationship between education and job satisfaction. Employees with higher levels of education tend to be less satisfied with their jobs. This is especially true of younger workers assigned to routine tasks (Carrell & Elbert, 1974; DeSantis and Durst, 1996).

It is rather difficult to summarize the findings on job satisfaction. Because most of the studies use different conceptualizations, the findings are not directly comparable. However one can state with reasonable confidence that even when the relationships between specific predictor variables and job satisfaction vary depending on conceptualizations, the direction of the relationships tend to be somehow consistent (Naumann, 1993).

Methodology

Sample

The sample used in this study is of managers in the public sector in Nigeria. These were civil servants in managerial positions in government ministries and parastatals in three states in the southwestern region of the country. Using the Staff Directories for each of the States, a sample of 350 public managers was drawn using a systematic random sampling. The questionnaires were hand delivered to the respondents.

The hand delivery was made possible because selected managers in each state had offices in the same office complex. Because the questionnaires were returned anonymously to a central address, the hand delivery was not considered a problem or perceived to constitute a bias. One hundred forty-eight usable returns (42%) were used for this study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to measure variables the literature review indicates have some relationship with job satisfaction. The variables can be broadly categorized into job characteristics, work characteristics and personal characteristics. For the purpose of this study, the analyses focused on the impact of the personal characteristics on job satisfaction. The dependent variable in the analyses is the subject’s level of job satisfaction. The respondent’s indication of how much he or she likes his or her job was used as a proxy for global job satisfaction measure. Drawing on the literature review discussed earlier in this paper, tenure at the job, age, level of education, income, country of study, and gender were the personal characteristics selected as possibly being related to job satisfaction. It was considered appropriate to use "country of study" as a variable, because there is a significant number of public sector managers who studied outside the country as recipients of government scholarships and are now obliged to serve in the government ministries. In recent times, there has been a significant decrease in the number of scholarships available for study outside the country. This is in part due to the establishment of more universities in the country and the lack of foreign exchange for education purposes. While some studies have considered the relationship of level of education to job satisfaction, there is no empirical evidence of the impact of the country of study on the level of job satisfaction. Gender was not included in the analyses, because fewer than twenty percent of the respondents were female.
Results

TABLE 1
Direction of Expected Relationships with Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Expected Direction</th>
<th>Actual Direction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenure on the job</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Study</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the direction of the expected and actual relationships of specific variables with a global measure of job satisfaction. The expected directions were based on previous studies. Tenure on the job was measured using information on the time in present position, and the total time with the organization. Both measures showed the expected direction of relationship. For the variable "country of study," it was reasoned that those public managers that studied outside of Nigeria would be less satisfied with their jobs. The expectation here is that because the context of the formal training for those managers that studied outside Nigeria is not congruent with their present work environment, expectations are likely to be different and thus they are likely to be less satisfied. Most of these managers studied in developed countries. In addition, because these managers are most likely recipients of government scholarships and are obligated to work in the public sector as a condition of their scholarships, the lack of freedom to choose their place of employment will most likely affect their level of satisfaction, especially among the younger managers.

TABLE 2
Multiple Regression Analysis of Job Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Pearson's Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time in Present Position</td>
<td>.204*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Time with Organization</td>
<td>.133*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.273**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td>-.137*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Study</td>
<td>-.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Income</td>
<td>.137*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Denotes significant at the .05 level.

** Denotes significant at the .01 level.

The full model of the multiple regression analysis indicates that while the predictor variables chosen are statistically significant in explaining job satisfaction among public sector managers, there are other variables or a combination of variables working to explain job satisfaction that were not considered in this study. The model was significant at the .01 level. Table 2 shows the correlation between the predictor variables and the global measure of job satisfaction. All the variables showed the expected direction of relationship with job
satisfaction, and all but one were significant at the .05 level.

The analysis of the present data indicates that there is no significant difference in the level of job satisfaction between those that studied outside of Nigeria and their counterparts who studied in Nigeria.

Discussion

While the present study focuses on personal characteristics, the findings are supported by previous studies, which suggest that the level of job satisfaction is determined by a combination of jobs, work, and personal characteristics. Further analysis of the findings of this study is instructive in terms of management practice and development in nations like Nigeria.

Tenure, the length of time spent in the organization, is positively correlated with job satisfaction. The longer the time spent in the organization, the more satisfied the managers are with their jobs. This may be an indication that once the process of acculturation is over, managers settle into their jobs, have an increased organizational commitment and seem to like their jobs (Farkas and Tetrick, 1989). On the other hand, this may be an indication of complacency, suggesting that the longer the time spent in the organization, the more managers tend to be satisfied with the status quo. If the latter is the case, then a satisfied manager is not necessarily a productive manager. Rotating managers to different jobs is likely to reduce the tendency of complacency and also has the added benefit of task variety, which has been suggested to be positively related to job satisfaction (Naumann, 1993).

The level of job satisfaction is higher the older the managers are. This suggests that the turnover rate among younger managers may be high. The tendency is that the younger managers will consider themselves more mobile and seek greener pastures, perhaps in other government agencies, but most likely in the private sector. This scenario suggests that eventually the public sector will have a shortage of young skilled managers. Manpower planning in the public sector should address those organizational issues that will attract young qualified managers to the public sector. As the private sector in developing countries becomes more significant in those economies, it will be harder for the public sector to keep a cadre of young qualified managers.

The fact that older managers and those with longer tenure in the work place have higher levels job satisfaction than younger workers, and those with shorter tenure, can also suggest that the latter groups are more susceptible to the recent political turmoil that the country is experiencing. It stands to reason that in times of political and economic uncertainty, the first causality in the workforce will be those that were recently hired, who tend to be the younger employees. Low levels of job satisfaction among this group may be explained more in terms of the job context than of personal characteristics.

The expected negative relation between education and job satisfaction suggests that higher levels of formal education, especially among those that are relatively young, may result in dissatisfaction in the bureaucratic routine tasks sometimes required by most government jobs. The public sector in Nigeria is still organized around an administrative mind set that is more suitable for the pre-independence era. In this present day era of globalization and privatization, the public sector can ill afford a bureaucratic mammoth that does not fully utilize the skills of its well trained young people. There is a need to reengineer the structure and procedures of the public sector if young, qualified managers are expected to participate in the public sector (Agim, 1984).

As suggested earlier, the expectation was that managers that studied outside Nigeria would be less satisfied, as a group, than their counterparts that studied in Nigeria. While the direction was as predicted, the relationship was not statistically significant. This may suggest that studying overseas does not necessarily have a negative effect on the level of job satisfaction of public managers. However, a more critical issue is to investigate the positive effect of having studied outside the country. If there is no significant difference in the productivity and contribution of those managers that are trained outside when compared to those of their
colleagues trained locally, the practice of offering scholarships for overseas studies must be revisited.

As expected, as the level of income rises so does the level of job satisfaction. Conversely, those that have low levels of income are less satisfied with their jobs. While there are conflicting results on the importance of money to the Nigerian worker (Eze, 1984, Fashina 1984 and Anikpo, 1984), a strong case can be made for the significance of pecuniary compensation in determining the level of job satisfaction. The continuous exodus of public managers to the private sector is primarily related to the differences in the level of income. Many of these managers are willing to leave the security of government employment for the more risky but financially rewarding private sector employment. The impending shortage of managerial personnel in the public sector that will occur does not bode well for the long-term economic development of the country.

Manpower development in developing countries should emphasize both organizational and personal variables that will improve employee satisfaction. While the strategic importance of the public sector has changed in terms of economic development, some of the structures and processes of the public sector still reflect the realities of decades ago, when they were no more than administrative centers serving the needs of the colonial powers. Public sector management must investigate ways not only of attracting younger managers, but also of identifying those factors that will increase their level of satisfaction and retain them. Some of the practices in the private sector should be adopted in the public sector. Programs such as job rotation and job enhancement may be attractive to these managers, who are, more than likely, more educated than their predecessors. The perception that the public sector is a less rewarding and challenging place of employment must be changed. This may stem some of the movement of better qualified and trained managers to the private sector.

While this study has focused on the personal predictors of job satisfaction, the linear model used for the analysis suggests that there are other variables (job and work characteristics) that are predictors of job satisfaction. As suggested by DeSantis and Durst (1996), there is the possibility that some of the personal variables may interact with job and work characteristics. As suggested earlier, the political and economic instability of recent years is bound to affect the perception of job satisfaction by Nigerian public managers. Future research investigating such interaction will be desirable. Because the subjects in this study work in the public sector, future research investigating predictors of job satisfaction among private managers or managers from different industries will be desirable. Finally, the global measure of job satisfaction may not capture the same realities as a conceptualization that distinguishes between extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction. Using a different conceptualization of job satisfaction than the one used is this study can be instructive in identifying other predictor variables for job satisfaction.

References


Martin, J. & Hanson, S. 1985 Sex, family wage earning status and satisfaction with work. Work and Occupations, 12, 91-109.


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