

12.12: Attitudes that Affect Job Performance

Learning Objectives

- Differentiate job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- Explain the use of employee attitude surveys.
- Explain employees' perceptions of organizational justice.

When you think of how effective an employee is for an organization, a number of factors might come to mind: intelligence, skill, training, and others. However, as important as these matters are, perhaps there is an even greater and more influential factor: attitude. Even the most skilled and talented employee might be prone to severe underperformance if his or her attitude in the workplace is lacking. On the other hand, employees whose positive attitude of dedication and commitment leads them to high levels of effort often excel even when they are not the most talented and skilled. Organizations have grown increasingly aware of the significance of this matter and are investing more time and effort than ever to create the best attitude possible among their employees.

Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

Though the issue may be complex, it is widely recognized that employees who have a positive attitude are more productive and useful to the organization. One of the primary factors in employee attitude is **job satisfaction**. If employees enjoy their work, feel confident in their abilities to succeed in the tasks assigned, and appreciate the role they are assigned, they are far more likely to have a positive attitude in the workplace.

A focus on optimizing job satisfaction will influence an organization's priorities from the earliest stage in its interaction with employees—even before they become employees. Specifically, the organization will be attuned to the value of a good employee-to-job fit. When the organization is looking to hire someone to fill a role, it might be tempted simply to hire the most generally talented or experienced applicant regardless of whether that person's interests and preferences match the potential role. An applicant who has excellent knowledge of the industry but prefers to work in research and development should likely not be hired for a role in marketing. Similarly, many excellent technicians are not interested or comfortable in management roles, and placing them in those positions simply because they excel as a technician might be a disastrous choice. Even if they have the skills to succeed, asking them to accept a role that they are not comfortable with or that they do not enjoy does not provide the highest likelihood of success for the company or the employee himself.

The same principle of employee-to-job fit applies to existing employees as well. Careful management practices will keep an eye on the changing developments of employee interests. As team members grow in their skills, interests, and ambitions, it is good policy to provide avenues that enable those employees to pursue the course that most excites them. This will encourage their highest levels of effort and commitment, keep their attitudes positive, and thus make for greater productivity. Sometimes this means allowing employees to move departments, or it could simply mean adjusting their responsibilities and focus within their current role. Of course, it may not always be possible to cater to every preference of every employee—and trying to do so can become a self-defeating proposition—but making a sincere commitment to this principle is likely to result in positive outcomes for the organization.

The Society for Human Resource Management conducts an annual survey to gauge employee job satisfaction and engagement. While the factors that most influence job satisfaction can change from year to year, employees consistently cite some factors as important to their job satisfaction. These include the following:

- Respectful treatment of all employees at all levels
- Compensation/pay
- Trust between employees and senior management
- Job security
- Opportunities to use their skills and abilities at work^[1]

Here is a video that explains some of the commonly identified factors that contribute to job satisfaction:

A link to an interactive elements can be found at the bottom of this page.

You can [view the transcript for “TOP FIVE Contributors to Job Satisfaction” here \(opens in new window\)](#).

Job satisfaction is a primary factor in employee attitude, but it is also worth distinguishing it from the broader category of **organizational commitment**. While job satisfaction focuses on the employee's feelings about his particular role, organizational commitment looks at how the employee feels about the organization as a whole. Does he identify with and care deeply about the organization and its success? If so, he will be far more likely to offer maximum effort and strive for high performance.

When high job satisfaction is matched with a high organizational commitment, employees are very likely to have a positive work attitude. If both job satisfaction and organizational commitment are low, employees are not nearly as likely to work as diligently as possible. They are also far more likely to leave the organization in search of another work opportunity. Though having employees whose attitudes are poor is not a good situation, neither are the instability and disruption that result from high levels of employee turnover.

What happens when either job satisfaction or organizational commitment is high but the other is low? Employees who are very satisfied with their job but not committed to the organization are still likely to provide good effort, though perhaps not as high as possible, but they also remain more likely to depart the company in the future. If a new opportunity with another organization arises that offers better pay or a better match for their interests, they see little reason to stay with their current company.

On the other hand, what happens if an employee is committed to the organization but has low job satisfaction? In such situations, it is common that the employees are willing to struggle through the low job satisfaction on account of their general belief in and commitment to the organization. However, over time, their dissatisfaction with the job is likely to wear on their attitude. They will likely not be able to retain their positive view on the organization forever, and it will be far better if their role can be changed. Otherwise, they too will be more likely to seek another working situation, even if it means leaving the organization.

Managers can use two general approaches to create organizational commitment among employees. First, they can tie employee rewards directly to the success of the organization. This often happens in the form of monetary compensation of some sort. Annual bonuses could be determined in part by the success that the company enjoyed during the year, giving an obvious incentive for employees to seek the good of the company. Also, studies have shown that when employees have a vested financial interest in the organization, such as in the form of stock shares, they exhibit higher levels of commitment.

On a different level, many organizations also seek to develop organizational commitment by emphasizing and seeking to align employee perspectives with the vision and values of the organization. If the company mission resonates with the deep, personal values of employees, they are far more likely to commit to the organization. Efforts can be made to shape the values of employees to conform them to those of the company, and highly inspirational leaders are often successful in this. However, it can be difficult to change employees' values, so many organizations focus on the process of recruiting employees who already share company values.

? ? Practice Question

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Organizational Justice

In addition to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, another often-significant factor in employees' attitude is the sense of **organizational justice**. Naturally, employees want a workplace characterized by fairness, a place where everyone is treated with equal respect and given equal opportunities. If they feel otherwise, it is almost certainly going to have a negative impact on their attitude over time.

Employees tend to focus especially on pay equality and advancement opportunity when evaluating organizational justice. If they feel that their effort and production is not compensated appropriately, especially as compared to that of their coworkers, it generally leads to dissatisfaction and disgruntlement. Divisions between employees can arise, as well as between employees and their managers, creating an atmosphere of tension and making productive teamwork a more difficult proposition.

The same holds true if employees feel that they are not given a fair opportunity for advancement. If it is perceived that promotions are given to employees based on favoritism rather than as a fair reward for the highest performance, employee attitude is likely to suffer as a result.

It is highly important to provide a fair workplace and promote a sense of organizational justice. This can be rather difficult at times, however, because employees exhibit bias in their evaluations just as managers do. They can be prone to think too highly of their

own abilities and performance, which leads to a sense that they are not receiving due appreciation and compensation. Still, a strong commitment to fairness can go a long way in limiting the negative effects of such biases.

Employee Attitude Surveys

The importance of employee attitude has led to an increased use of employee attitude surveys. These surveys are used to identify areas of concern that employees have. It is generally wise to keep the individual answers confidential, and the use of online technology has made that easier than ever to do. This gives employees an opportunity to share their concerns or criticisms with management without the fear of being punished for voicing negative thoughts.



Employee attitude becomes significant when interacting with customers and clients

The leaders in an organization should want to hear those criticisms and be aware of the concerns employees have. If there are problems, knowing about them provides an opportunity to address and fix them before they grow out of hand and lead to serious problems. The sooner action is taken, the better. For this reason, many organizations encourage regular communications about employee attitude.

Employee attitude surveys are generally only beneficial, however, if the results of those surveys actually lead to substantial action and change. For the short-term, employees may receive a sense of catharsis in being allowed to vent their frustrations, but if nothing ends up changing in the long run, employees will simply become jaded and disillusioned. They will not respect the attitude surveys, which may actually become an object of disdain.

On the positive side, however, if management shows a willingness to listen and adapt, that very attitude itself can provide hugely significant boosts to morale. This can be true even if the actual issues being dealt with are relatively minor. When employees believe that management listens to concerns, cares about them, and is willing to make changes, that goes a long way toward creating a positive atmosphere and positive attitudes among employees.

A great deal of research and discussion has taken place concerning the most effective ways to measure employee attitudes. Trying to gauge things such as job satisfaction can be difficult in light of the potential for emotional change on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis. If surveys are taken during a time of abnormally high stress on the job or after an unsuccessful project, the survey results might give a worse picture of satisfaction than is fair. Also, companies have found that surveys can easily introduce biases that make objective measurement of attitudes difficult. Using professionally designed surveys and working with independent agencies who specialize in such surveys can help an organization measure and improve employee attitude more effectively.

Similar to employee attitude surveys, exit interviews with employees who are leaving the organization can also provide valuable insight into workplace issues. In fact, it is sometimes only in such exit interviews that employees are willing to be fully honest about their feelings. At the same time, there can be a tendency for such employees to be unduly negative in their assessment, especially if their departure is directly tied to workplace conflict or problems. Though this must be taken into account, conducting exit interviews remains a wise and helpful practice.

Though often these surveys are intended to discover potential problems, they also can be useful in identifying where a company is successful in encouraging positive attitudes and feelings. Identifying areas of strength can reinforce helpful policies and encourage organizations to continue the programs or initiatives that prove beneficial.

? ? Practice Questions

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1. 2017 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement: The Doors of Opportunity Are Open. (2017, April 24). Retrieved September 21, 2017, from <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/Documents/2017-Employee-Job-Satisfaction-and-Engagement-Executive-Summary.pdf>↵

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