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**JOB SATISFACTION, TASK SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE:
An Investigation of Relationship among Salesmen in Transition
Economy**

By

Abolaji Joachim ABIODUN
abijoac@yahoo.com
Department of Business Studies,
Covenant University,
KM 10 Idiroko Road,
P.M.B. 1023, Ota
Ogun State, Nigeria

Omotayo Joseph OYENIYI
omotayooyeniya@yahoo.com
Department of Business Administration & Technology Management
Lagos State University, Ojoo Lagos

Omotayo Adewale OSIBANJO
koyepaul@yahoo.com
Department of Business Studies,
Covenant University,
KM 10 Idiroko Road,
P.M.B. 1023, Ota
Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research examines the relationship among job satisfaction, task significance and values through a survey of salesmen. Data obtained from salesmen across different industries were analyzed using correlations and regression analysis. Results indicates that task significance and consistency of organizational and salesmen' values positively affect job satisfaction while supervision was found to negatively impact on salesmen job satisfaction; in addition, variables that are less under management control covaries significantly with job satisfaction. It seems that securing a fit and strengthening the organization-salesmen value consistency and expanding the 'external roles' of salesmen in a job enrichment programme holds profit in the long run.

Keywords: Value, Task Significance, Job Satisfaction, job Characteristics, Salesmen

INTRODUCTION

The economic landscape of the developing economy of Africa exerts enormous pressure on the corporate sector. Indeed, a significant number of companies are in difficult economic conditions which weigh significantly on their survival, growth and prosperity. Situations in the corporate sector of the transition economies of African countries are made more difficult by the superior resources, technology, products and competitive strength of firms from the developed economy. Notwithstanding, corporate managers are under obligations from shareholders and board of director to secure profitable operation. Specifically, sales and marketing managers, as revenue generating arm of corporations, are being required to post impressive operating results that support corporate goal achievement.

As companies respond to global competition and sales and marketing managers strive to meet expectations there is an evident awareness and growing recognition of the strategic role of salesmen. Corporations are giving increased attention to the recruitment, training and deployment of salesmen in attempt to secure the market and build sustainable competitive advantage that will secure and strengthen company's financial and business performance.

This response to the emerging competitive pressures seems attractive and promising. First, it is consistent with the employment generation objective of most countries of Africa. Second, salesmen are boundary spanning staff that holds the forte between the firm and its market environment. This role in itself places salesmen as critical agents in determining the success of companies' revenue-producing effort (Churchill, et al, 1974).

Salesmen often invest great effort in job performance in order to achieve significant sales results. Therefore, their perception of the significance of their task may motivate them to achieve performance levels which affect their work and lives positively (Lai, Chi and Yang, 2011) It is intuitively compelling to argue that improving the performance of salesmen ought to be a competitive weapon for making the organisation competitive and gaining larger market share. This stems from the fact that success of companies marketing programme may be determined largely by the innovative and creative activities of salesmen.

However, salesmen as boundary spanning staff often face conflicting role demand: the need to fulfil role expectation from the companies' perspective and demand from customers who are outside stakeholders in the organisation. Though work occupies most of the salesmen time and it provides for their economic well-being (Alam and Mohammad, 2010), however, with reference to history of salesmen activities in the corporate sector in most of the transition economies in Africa; they are seemingly undervalued as a source of competitive strength. In terms of financial rewards, the reward structures for salesmen are seemingly inconsistent with their potentials and the importance of their roles as revenue agents and main

determinant of the success of companies marketing programme. Empirical observations clearly indicate that poor remunerations are common in the employment contracts of salesmen in most nations of Africa. Evidently, this is due to the fact the economies of these nations are often plagued by massive unemployment and poor social infrastructures.

Therefore, salesmen in the African business environment are confronted with many influences and threats that have high potency for conflict, low morale, mal-content and job dissatisfaction. Specifically, the unique characteristics of the Nigerian business environment with the managerial practices of 'target setting' and commission based reward system for salesman make the study of the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of salesmen with their job an issue of considerable research interest. This is due to the fact that researches conducted in other settings suggest that job satisfaction do affect employees' willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, strong professional commitment and decrease in employees' turnover (Boles, Johnston and Hair, 1997, Chatzoglou, Vraimaiki, Komsiou, Polychrou and Diamantidis, 2011).

Generally, salesmen are required to exercise tremendous amount of initiatives and as boundary spanning staff may have to undertake roles not under any set of standard operating procedures. Therefore, in order to effectively advance the course of the organisation we may safely reason that job satisfaction is of importance if salesmen are expected to contribute efforts to organisation economic prosperity. Besides, salesmen perception of task significance is expected to increase job performance by increasing his experience on the job as being more meaningful (Grant, 2008). Despite this awareness there is paucity of empirical studies focused on job satisfaction of salesmen in developing nations of Africa. This gap in literature is expected giving the economic condition in the corporate sector and the value most companies placed on salesmen in their competition equation. However, this gap is surprising because of the potentials and relevance of salesmen and their strategic role in revenue generation to affect the growth and prosperity of their organisations. Perhaps, efforts at converting the economy of most of the developing nations of Africa from their 'self-limiting static system into creative, self-generating organic growth' are seriously retarded by failure in the creative performance of salesmen in their task (Drucker, 1958).

Therefore, to address these gaps in literature this study is focused on the job satisfaction of salesmen with specific reference to the Nigerian business environment. Further, we seek to provide answer to what job characteristics are important to salesmen in achieving job satisfaction in an environmental setting as in Nigeria? What relationships exist between the salesmen's personal values, their perception of the significance of their job and their satisfaction? This study holds a promise both for practical managerial applications and theoretical.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job satisfaction is a multi-dimensional construct. It describes the attitude; positive or negative, employees have about their job. Beer (1964) defined job satisfaction broadly as encompassing employees' attitude towards the company, their job, fellow workers and other psychological objects in the work environment. The implication is that variables other than the job itself may be responsible for the satisfaction or otherwise of employees. These factors may be compartmentalized into intrinsic, that is, those variables associated with the content of the job; and extrinsic, which embodies variables that are related with the work environment or condition (Rose, 2001). Rogers, Clow and Kash (1994), however, offered a somewhat more job focussed definition of job satisfaction as employee's attitude towards various aspects of their job as well as the job in general.

Derived from the economic and psychological importance of job, job satisfaction has received considerable research focus; notwithstanding, trends in modern work environment make frequent studies of this work attitude more relevant. Therefore, Job satisfaction has

been studied across industries, for example, in the health sector (Alam and Mohammad, 2010; Peters, Chakraborty, Mahapatra and Steinhardt, 2010; Singh and Loncar, 2010), among Sales personnel (Gilbert, Ford and Walker, 1974, Rutherford, 2009; Maxwell, Reed, Saker and Story, 2005; Park and Deitz, 2006, Singh, 2010); accountants (Chatzoglou, et al, 2011) security personnel (Afolabi, Awosola and Omole, 2010). Interests have centred on organisational variables that seem to determine job satisfaction, for example, studies have investigated the influence of organisational culture (Macintosh and Doherty, 2010); pay (Singh and Loncar, 2010) organisational climate (Adeniji, 2011), supervisors behaviour on sales force performance (Chowdhury, 2007), among others.

Job Characteristics

Job characteristics describe the entire attribute that identify the essential nature of the job including work environment and relationship with colleagues. Studies have generally examined job dimensions as variables for assessing job satisfaction. Indeed, Gilbert, et al (1974) posited that global measure of job satisfaction is deficient for accurate and full assessment of job satisfaction and aspect of work environment that sales personnel find satisfying. It is significant that organisations understand factors that affect job satisfaction mainly because of its implication for the management of human resources. Some job dimensions such as customers, pay, supervision, career progression, among others can be considered as pertinent to salesmen (Gilbert, et al 1974; Rutherford, Boles, Hamwi, Madupalli, and Rutherford, 2009). Rutherford, et al investigated emotional exhaustion as a dimension of the salesmen job and found it only relates to certain dimensions of job satisfaction. As indicated in the study the nature of salesmen job give rise to various job related stress. Interestingly, research evidences indicated that burnout impact on job related outcomes, (for example, Boles, et al, 1997; Sigh, et al 1994, Adeniji, 2007). In addition various dimensions of burnout have continued to attract research attention (for example, Babakus, Cravens, Johnston and Moncief, 1999; Jaramillo, Mulki and Locander, 2006).

Besides job dimensions the personal characteristics of salesmen and their perceptions of the relevance of their job seem to have implication in the expression of job satisfaction. According to Basset (1994) low status of roles can lead to low job satisfaction. This draw attention to salesmen perception of the significance of their task and values; task significance is the degree to which task has significant impact on the company and others lives. Values, according to Rokeach (1973) are an enduring belief of the personal and social preference of mode of conduct or end state of existence. It serves as standard for evaluating the propriety of individual and social choices (Kast and Resenweigh, 1985). Management students have come to develop the notion that personal values systems make a difference on how we evaluate information and make decision (Mcmurry, 1963; England, 1967. Abbas and Hollman, 1987)

METHODOLOGY

Participants for the study were drawn from a part-time MBA programme at a University in Lagos, the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria. However, consistent with the study's focus only participants who are engaged as salesmen for their companies were included in the sample. The setting for the study offers an advantage of direct administration of the research instrument by the research assistant and a rich concentration of salesmen employed in several organisations, both public and private, or as independent professionals. This facilitates direct comparisons of experience by the participants.

Besides, accessibility and the desire to secure reasonable responses are main motivations in our choice of part-time MBA programme that offer rich concentrations of sales personnel. This approach seems purposeful and cost effective given the nomadic nature of the job schedules and assignment of an average salesman. The schedules of an average salesman take them more outside the office environment which hinder access and their response to a typical

research instrument. Though the research instrument was administered to respondents on the MBA programme, respondents who could not immediately respond were permitted to return the completed response at a later date. This liberty, however, resulted in late return of some of the instrument and non-response from some participants who needed to travel by the demand of their work. The final sample was made up of seventy-nine (79) usable response which translate to a response rate of 69.3% of the one hundred and fourteen (114) questionnaire administered

The present study attempts to add to literature on salesmen job satisfaction in a competitively hostile environment of the developing economy. This hostility which often threaten job security is a product of the instability of the environment, declining demand, unpredictability of customers behaviour, intense competition from firms from the developed economy as a result of globalisation. Therefore, the research instrument utilized in data collection was a set of structured questionnaire. The questionnaire items focused on the key research variables utilized in the study: job satisfaction, dimensions of job satisfaction, salesmen perception of task significance, customers, which reflects the salesmen performance, burnout and consistency of personal values with organisation values. Each of these variables was scored on a seven-point likert type scale with 7 being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree; in-between are varying degrees of agreement or disagreement.

Job satisfaction was measured using multi-item indices which require that on the strength of the experience respondents are to react to the intensity of their satisfaction with their job on a seven point scale. The mean responses on this scale were used as global indicator of the respondents' satisfaction with his job. In addition, other variables gleaned from literatures as bearing on job satisfaction were measured using multi-item indices. Specifically, pay, promotion, working conditions, supervision, organisational climate and burnout were gauged using multi item indices. The choice and design of questionnaire item for all the variables utilised in the study benefitted from literatures. Specifically, from the works of Churchill, et al, 1974; Rutherford, et al, 2009, Peters, et al, 2010; however, task significance and values consistency was measured using a single item index on a seven point scale.

Data analysis procedure for the study was done using the SPSS computer package to compute the reliability of the research instrument, descriptive statistics of respondents' responses, correlation and regression analysis of the variables to provide answers to the questions raised in the study. In order to examine the internal reliability of the items in the research instrument the Cronbach Alpha test was computed on each of the multi item utilized to measure the key research variables. Table 1 show the Cronbach Alpha value for each of the key variables.

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha Coefficients of Research Variables

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Variables	Cronbach Alpha
Job Satisfaction	0.80	Customer	0.82
Burnout	0.84	Supervisors	0.70

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The descriptive statistics of job satisfaction among salesmen surveyed in the study indicate that respondents satisfaction with their job may be described as moderate or slightly on the average (mean=4.933, SD= 1.43). It can be seen from the table that respondents perceptions of the significance of salesmen task is rated above average (mean= 5.23, SD =1.58). It appears that salesmen are quite conscious of the impact of their job on the organisation and the boundary spanning roles they fulfilled in meeting expectations of outsiders. These perceptions may possibly have contributed positively in the provision of opportunities for self direction, accomplishment at work and internal satisfaction with their job (Cummings and Worley, 2009). Consequently, salesmen may have overlook disagreeable circumstances within the organisation, for example, unfavourable career progression and pay on the strength of their perceptions of the significance of their work. Indeed, findings from the study indicate

moderate satisfaction with these variables (Promotion: mean: 4.66; SD=1.12; Pay: mean =4.49, SD =1.29)

Furthermore, personal value may have been the mediating variable. This is because the alignment of the value of these salesmen with their organisations' is favourably rated above average (mean= 5.17, SD =1.57). Indeed, respondents expressions of satisfactions with variables under direct organisational managerial influence ranged between average to slightly above average, for example, supervision (mean=4.81, SD =1.22) and Promotion (mean= 4.66, SD=1.11) Organisational climate which was conceived to include relationship with colleagues, management and organisational influence on their job performance have an above average mean scores of 5.2,SD 1.21. The scores for burnout (mean=4.73, SD =1.6) on a seven-point likert scale appear to suggest the acceptance of fatigue and burnout as a subtle component of salesman's job

Generally, the correlations coefficients between the dimensions of job satisfaction examined in the study are low. It is, therefore, evident that the problem of multi-collinearity does not exist were the data set to be subjected to regression analysis.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variables	mean	Std D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Burnout	4.733	1.60	1								
Supervision	4.814	1.229	.008	1							
Job Satis	4.933	1.431	-.266*	.278*	1						
Promotion	4.658	1.117	-.019	.235*	.257*	1					
Pay	4.492	1.290	.047	.325*	.213	.369**	1				
Org Climate	5.218	1.210	-.031	.211	.39**	.088	.283*	1			
Customer	4.731	1.562	-.014	.269*	.351**	.276*	.123	.227*	1		
Task Sig	5.231	1.579	.00	.239*	.534**	.063	.087	.30**	-.052	1	
Value	5.167	1.574	-.134	.191	.488**	.121	.132	.212	.296**	.287*	1

*correlation is sig at the 0.05

**correlation is sig at 0.01

In all the cases the 'r' value is less than 0.6. Task significance (r=.534, p=0.01), value consistency (r = .488, p= 0.01) are the most correlated with job satisfaction. Expectedly burnout negatively covaries with job satisfaction (r = -.226, p= 0.05)

The result of the regression analysis appears to indicate that variables that are less subject to management control showed statistically significant relationship with the salesmen job satisfaction. Salesmen perceptions of task significance appeared to have the strongest influence on job satisfaction ($\beta = .405$, $t = 4.884$, $p = 0.00$) The consistency of the personal values of these salesmen with their organisations' as a statistically significant determinant of job satisfaction seem to associate with earlier research findings(Abiodun,2009). Furthermore, the current study indicates that burnout has a negative effect on job satisfaction consistent with finding

Table3. Multivariate Regression Result of the Variables

Variables	β Coefficients	t-value	Sig
Constant	-.013	-.015	.988
Burnout	-.167	-2.286	.025
Supervision	-.011	-.101	.92
Promotion	.121	1.050	.297
Pay	.056	.541	.59
Org Climate	.148	1.376	.173
Customer	.222	2.616	.011
Task Significance	.405	4.884	.000
Value	.200	2.437	.017

$R^2 .552$, $F: 10.646$, $Sig = 0.00$

earlier research findings (Rutherford, et al,2009). The findings on the bearing of supervisors on salesmen's' job satisfaction is somewhat of interest, a negative though statistically not significant effect was found to exist ($\beta = -.011$, $t = -.101$, sig .92) It seem reasonable to reason that supervisors may serve as agents to aggravate or ameliorate salesmen burnout. Man management capacity of supervisors might prove an important factor in securing their job satisfaction.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study is somewhat exploratory. We have examined job satisfaction among salesmen in a business environment of the developing economy of Nigeria where companies, sometimes, base reward on commissions plus a low fixed monthly payments to salesmen. Findings from this study, however, have some implications for practicing executives and shed lights on our understanding of job characteristics that affect salesmen job satisfaction. Consequently, the research provides a viable means to enhance salesmen job performance in order to raise company's business and financial performance.

The result of personal values on salesmen job satisfaction indicate that companies might profit from developing programmes and policies aimed at securing a fit between salesmen and organisational values. When reasonable fit is achieved, companies, in the long run, may secure competitive advantage that support its strategic goals and posture through the performance of the salesmen. Indeed, personal value system may significantly affect the extent to which individuals accept or rejects organisational pressure, goals as well as achievement (Abiodun, 2009). Besides, there is a promise in this direction that a fit between organisational values and the values dispositions of salesman will more likely produce organisations with willing, self motivated sales force that are committed to organisations' value driven goals in much the same way as their personal values. This is of immense value in the business landscape of most African nations more so Nigeria where sharp un-ethical business practices have become issue of central concern for corporate survival.

The current study also suggests that task significance is an issue of relevance to salesmen job satisfaction. Indeed, the study indicates that task significantly covaries and significantly determines job satisfaction of salesmen. Organisations could well profit from this associations if management will focus efforts on job enrichment and enlargement programmes that significantly expand the 'external roles' (that is roles and capacity to meet expectations of those outside the organisation) of salesmen. This approach may serve to enhance opportunities for self direction and accomplishment through creative and innovative response to the demand of these outside stakeholders in the organisation

The merit of this approach is magnified given the negative impact of supervision on job satisfaction of the salesmen in the study. Or, it seem evident that the interest of supervisors in influencing and controlling the behaviours of salesmen is possibly suffocating in effect as it reflect negatively on their job satisfaction. Perhaps, supervisors represent management more in the role of 'targets drivers' than in supervisory position or management pressure on the supervisors are often transferred to salesmen down the hierarchy. In this wise, therefore, organisations may need to devote careful thought to re-designing their structure to somewhat flat organisational design which permit salesmen increase access to better trained officer in the hierarchy. It may equally be of worth if leadership skills are made a core performance evaluation dimension for supervisors. Supervisors in attempt to provide performance-enhancing leadership may then be more considerate in representation of management to salesmen and consider it profitable to incorporate the views of these salesmen as key variable in their decisions.

Managerial programmes that enable salesmen to manage burnout might prove beneficial in positively affecting job satisfaction among salesmen. Besides, the method of commission plus a rather low fixed monthly payment reward system restricts the potential roles of pay and career progression on job satisfaction; this has implications for performance for companies that emphasis association between satisfaction and performance. Salesmen that vales career progression may possibly seek realisation of their career goal by exiting the organisation. Management need to foster organisational climate that are focussed in achieving job satisfaction and supervision that will naturally drive productivity

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