

Antecedents to Job Satisfaction in the Airline Industry

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Abstract

Job satisfaction and other unit-level organizational behavior characteristics have been widely explored in the management literature. This study contributes to the organizational behavior literature by empirically investigating important unit-level organizational behavior characteristics in the airline industry such as work-family conflict, sympathy, networking, job satisfaction and job autonomy. Data collected from a survey of 108 employees working in a low-cost airline was used in the present study. The results indicate a significant positive effect of work-family conflict,

sympathy and job autonomy on job satisfaction, and a significant positive impact of servant leadership on sympathy. Our findings can lead to improved job satisfaction, which, in turn, leads to better tangible outcomes such as higher customer satisfaction and higher firm profit for the airline industry.

Key words: *Job satisfaction, Job autonomy, Work-family conflict, Social capital, Servant leadership, PLS-SEM*

1. Introduction

The service industry is different from the manufacturing sector in that services provided are considered to be intangible to the customer. The airline industry can be classified under the intangible service sector (Mc. A Baker, 2013), as it displays all five distinguishing characteristics of services (Mc. A Baker, 2013). Customer satisfaction has been a key customer metric in the service industry and there is a plethora of evidence to suggest that higher customer satisfaction leads to higher firm profit (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006).

The deregulation of the airline industry in the United States of America in 1978 saw the emergence of many low-cost, no-frills airlines (Mc. A Baker, 2013). Due to an increase in competition among airlines after 1978, the customer level service metrics have been imperative for the aviation industry. In spite of the importance of service parameters, the airline industry scored the lowest American customer satisfaction index score among 47 other industries in the year 2012 (Mc. A Baker, 2013). More than 30 years after deregulation, in the year 2015, the airline industry still had one of the lowest customer satisfaction scores (Charrise, 2015). The increased importance of the service sector in the modern economy and the poor customer relations in the airline industry is our primary motivation for this research. Job satisfaction can be considered to be an important antecedent of customer satisfaction (Bulgarella, 2005). Unit level characteristics in the organization such as work-family conflict and job satisfaction have seen growing relevance in the organizational literature in recent times. With the growth of the airline industry and more people choosing to fly to their destination than ever before, the unit level characteristics such as work-family conflict, sympathy, networking, job satisfaction, job autonomy and the relationship among these characteristics in the airline industry have been empirically investigated. Hence, this study contributes to the organizational behavior literature in the aviation

sector. Our findings can lead to improved job satisfaction, which, in turn, leads to better tangible outcomes such as higher customer satisfaction and higher firm profit.

2. Literature Review and Research

Hypotheses

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction can be defined as the overall summary evaluation that a person makes regarding his or her work environment (Scadura & Lankau, 1997). It can also be defined as the level of contentment a person has with his or her job (Spector, 1997). Job satisfaction can be considered to be an important organizational antecedent of employee satisfaction and employee customer service, which, in turn, have a positive impact on tangible business output such as customer satisfaction and profit (Bulgarella, 2005). Both environmental factors and individual factors have an impact on job satisfaction. Previous research indicates a reciprocal correlation between job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Dolan & Gosselin, 1998). The relationship between job satisfaction and job performance has been studied (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001).

Work-Family Conflict

Work-family relationship has received a lot of attention in organizational behavior research (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000). Work-family relationship has been a topic of interest for the four major stakeholders in this relationship: employers, researchers, workers and the families of employees (Lavassani, & Mohavedi, 2014). Work-family conflict occurs due to the incompatible demands between work and family roles of an individual (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Traditionally, researchers have focused on the adverse effects of work-family conflict on the employee and the organization. Research on the adverse effects of work-family conflict argues for the

reduction of work-family conflict, as it can lead to higher productivity for the organization, as well as higher quality of life for the worker and his family (Lavassani et al., 2014).

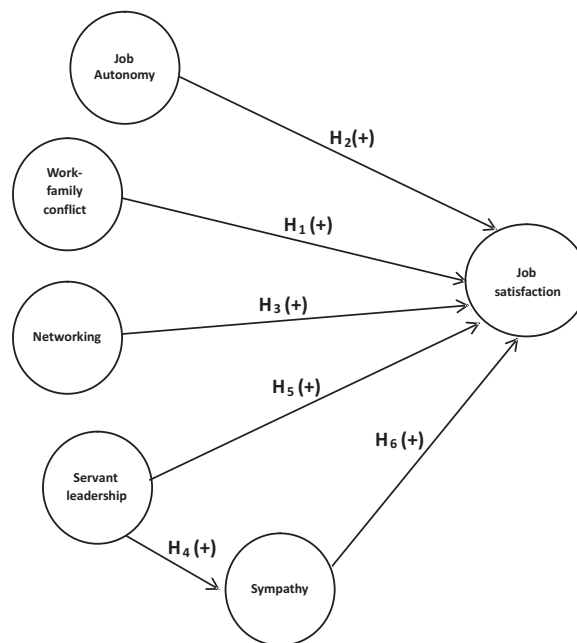
Border theory is a relatively new theory describing the work-family conflict in modern societies. According to border theory, work and family are considered to be two different spheres (Lavassani et al., 2014). Border theory helps in understanding the influence of each sphere on the other.

The theory of compensation sees workers as individuals who are looking for greater satisfaction from their work or family life, as a result of dissatisfaction with the other (Lambert, 1990). Supplemental and Reactive compensation theory is an extension of the compensation theory and explains the work-family compensation behavior of employees (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Reactive compensation occurs when an individual encounters undesirable experience in one sphere and looks for contrasting experience in another sphere (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

The balance view of work-family conflict mainly highlights the positive effects of work-family conflict (Lavassani et al., 2014). The theories that come under balance view are role enhancement theory, spillover and work enrichment model (Lavassani et al., 2014).

The work enrichment model has gained prominence among leading scholars (Lavassani et al., 2014). According to the work enrichment model, experience in one of the roles (family or work) will augment the quality of life in the other role. The positive effects of work-family conflict have been empirically established (Lapierre & Allen, 2006).

Figure 1. Structural model



Note: Age, gender, and monthly income are used as control variables (Not shown in model).

Following the work-enrichment model under the balance view of work-family conflict, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H₁: Work-family conflict is positively related to job satisfaction.

Job Autonomy

Job autonomy can be described as the control an employee has over his or her scheduling tasks (Liu, Spector, & Jex, 2005). Previous research indicates that lack of job autonomy reduces personal accomplishment (Kim & Stoner, 2008). It has been shown that higher perceived job autonomy reduces the likelihood of the worker quitting his or her job (Spector, 1986).

Incorporating family-friendly policies such as telecommuting and flexible scheduling policies can lead to higher job satisfaction (Glass & Estes, 1997).

Based on the above notion, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H₂: Job Autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction.

Networking

In recent years, networking behavior has focused on building relationships for career advancement of individuals (Gibson, Hardy, & Buckley, 2014). Wolff and Moser (2009) defined networking as “behaviors that are aimed at building, maintaining, and using informal relationships that possess the (potential) benefit of facilitating work-related activities of individual by voluntarily granting access to resources and maximizing common advantages.”

Networking can be carried out both inside and outside of the networker's organization (Gibson et al., 2014).

Recent studies in the marketing literature have provided evidence of the positive effect of peer networking, professional networking and customer networking on salespersons' job satisfaction (Macintosh & Krush, 2014).

Antecedents of networking can be at an individual level, which includes personality and self-esteem, and at the organizational level, which includes decisions and policies implemented (Gibson et al., 2014).

Social Capital

Social capital can be defined as the goodwill that is available to individuals or groups (Gibson et al., 2014). Social capital can act as a mechanism of networking. By networking, people build a support group, from which they can gather help when needed (Gibson et al., 2014). A well-connected teammate can help a group develop trust in the organization (Gibson et al., 2014). Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) represented social capital in three dimensions, namely, cognitive, relational and structural.

Outcomes of networking can be at an individual level and organizational level (Gibson et al., 2014). At an individual level, networking can help in increased visibility and power, that can lead to opportunities for career success (Wolff & Moser, 2009). Those who have built social capital by networking can rely on the relations they have established.

At an organizational level, networking can lead to better job performance, as the employee has greater connections and resources that motivate the employee to undertake more aspiring projects (J. A. Thompson, 2005).

As the airline industry is a highly competitive and dynamic industry, having both strong internal and external network can help in building social capital in the greater organization that includes suppliers and customers. This network can lead to better organizational level output, such as job performance and job satisfaction.

Based on the above notion, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H₃: Networking is positively related to job satisfaction

Servant Leadership

Leadership is a relevant social influence process in behavioral science since the success of economic, political and organizational systems depend on the competent guidance of the leaders of these systems (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The concept of servant leadership has origins linked to ancient teachings of religions, as well as statements of great leaders and philosophers (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Servant leadership in the contemporary study was introduced by Greenleaf (1977), who saw it mainly as a way of life, rather than a management technique. Traditional leadership theories are defined only by what the leader does, whereas servant leaders are

defined by their character and showing their complete commitment to serving others (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

Over the years, many authors have conducted several empirical studies involving servant leadership. Servant leadership theory is a modern theory that is linked to ethics, virtues, and morality (Lanctot & Irving, 2010). Servant leadership can be defined as “placing the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (Laub, 1999). Distinct characteristics of servant leaders include vision, integrity, honesty, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others and empowerment (Russel & Stone, 2002). Laub (1999) listed the six key attributes of an effective servant-led organization: (1) values trust in people, serving and listening to others without judging, (2) Develops people: providing growth, learning, encouragement and affirmation, (3) builds community—developing strong personal and collaborative relationships, (4) displays authenticity—accountable and willing to learn from others, (5) provides leadership—foreseeing the future, taking initiative, and establishing goals; and (6) shares leadership—facilitating and sharing power (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Servant leadership theory has seen growing relevance in recent times, as scholars and practitioners look to an applicable leadership theory to help resolve the challenges of the twenty-first century (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

The positive effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction and organizational profits has been empirically established (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

A recent paper looked at the effect of implementing servant leadership on teacher job satisfaction in a primary school educational environment. In this paper, principles of a sample of primary schools implemented a servant leadership approach, which resulted in higher teacher job satisfaction (Cerit, 2009).

Sympathy

Sympathy is a feeling that can be characterized by the reaction to the distress or need of another life form (Decety & Michalska, 2010). Sympathy should not be confused with empathy. Sympathy has not been well researched in organizations.

Sympathy can be listed as one of the emotions displayed by employees in an organization (Fineman, 2000). The expression of sympathy or emotional support can discourage workers from relinquishing work relationships (Fineman, 2000). Stressed workers in organizations often find emotional relief when their co-workers sympathize with their work situation (Frost et al., 2000).

Employees can feel joy and closeness when they receive support from their peers (Frost et al., 2000).

We believe that servant leaders will be more sympathetic to their co-workers, as they will be more caring to employee needs and look to build strong personal and collaborative relationships with their employees. We also believe that the emotional relief and joy gained by an employee through sympathy expressed by their boss or co-worker will lead to higher job satisfaction for the employee.

Based on the above notions, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H₄: Servant leadership is positively related to sympathy

H₅: Servant leadership is positively related to job satisfaction

H₆: Sympathy is positively related to job satisfaction

3. Method

3.1. Measurements

All organizational behavior constructs outlined below were based on the concurrent design, where all exogenous constructs are measured at the same point

in time as the constructs of interest (Gibson et al., 2014). A 7 point Likert scale was used, measuring agreement and disagreement for each item (1 = “Strongly Disagree,” two = “Disagree,”...7 = “Strongly Agree”). The full-scale development can be found in Appendix A.

Job satisfaction

The job satisfaction measure was based on the brief index of affective job satisfaction, known as BIAJS (E. R. Thompson & Phua, 2012). BIAJS is a 4 item questionnaire and is affective. BIAJS has been validated for internal consistency reliability, temporal stability, convergent and criterion-related validities (E. R. Thompson & Phua, 2012). Some of the items for job satisfaction measure included “Overall I am satisfied with my work,” “My work gives me a high level of personal satisfaction.” Cronbach's alpha for the job satisfaction measure was 0.891.

Work–Family Conflict

For a full understanding of work-family interface, the work-family conflict measure was designed to include both directions of work-family conflict: work interference with family and family interference with work (Carlson et al., 2000). Some of the items for work-family conflict measure included “My work interferes with my home and my family life,” “Because of my job, sometimes I have to make changes in my family activities.” Cronbach's alpha for the work-family conflict measure was 0.841.

Job autonomy

The Job autonomy measure was based on a three item subscale from the Job Content Questionnaire (Karasek et al., 1998). Some of the items for job autonomy measure included “I have autonomy to determine how to do my job,” “My job gives me opportunities to do my work freely and independently.” Cronbach's alpha for the job autonomy measure was 0.874.

Networking

Networking measure was designed to include both

internal and external networking, as it is important to consider both types of networking (Gibson et al., 2014). Some of the items for networking measure included “Participate in social events with other employees in the organization,” “Participate in meetings with customers, suppliers or others associated with the organization.” Cronbach's alpha for the networking measure was 0.81.

Servant leadership

Servant leadership was based on a six-item measure (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005). Some of the items for servant leadership measure included “Seek the help of my supervisor if I have a personal problem,” “My supervisor makes me focus on supporting our community.” Cronbach's alpha for the servant leadership measure was 0.862.

Sympathy

The items for the sympathy measure were designed to include both positive and negative relations between boss and co-workers and between co-workers. Some of the items for sympathy measure included “I am kind to my coworkers,” “I avoid conflicts or arguments with my co-workers.” Cronbach's alpha for the sympathy measure is 0.74.

3.2. Data Collection

The data was collected through an online survey. The survey consisted of 30 items and took an average of 35 minutes to complete. Employees from a low-cost airline based in the United States of America were first sent a postcard listing the survey details followed by an email link to the survey. Screening before the actual survey was done to ensure that only employees with at least one year of experience with the company took part in this study. Strict confidentiality of responses was maintained. Respondents were not paid for taking part in the survey.

The survey was distributed to 300 pre-screened employees; 108 responses were collected with a response rate of 36%.

3.3. Demographics

The survey consisted of a few demographic questions such as gender, age and monthly income of the respondents. 78.8% of the respondents were male, and 21.2% of the employees were female. The mean age of employees was 36.58 with a standard deviation of 10.679. The average monthly income of employees was 753.24 with a standard deviation of 257.176.

3.4. Statistical Analysis

Missing values in the data were coded as -99. All items were analyzed in Exploratory Factor Analysis. This analysis was done to understand the pattern in the data to see which items share common variance. EFA resulted in 6 factors. All factors had Cronbach's alpha above 0.7, indicating high reliability and internal consistency.

3.4.1 Multivariate Normality

The histogram of residuals showed a moderate violation of normality.

3.4.2. PLS-SEM

Partial Least Squares SEM has been recognized as an emerging tool in business research and a sound technique that is suited for both formative and reflective measures (F. Hair Jr, J., Sarstedt, M., Hopkins, L., & G. Kuppelwieser, 2014). In situations where the small sample size is limited, PLS-SEM can result in higher levels of statistical power and better convergence in comparison to covariance-based SEM (F. Hair Jr, J., Sarstedt, M., Hopkins, L., & G. Kuppelwieser, 2014). We found PLS-SEM to be the appropriate technique in our study due to the relatively small sample size of 108, violation of normality, and the use of reflective measures.

The first step in PLS-SEM was model specification followed by outer model evaluation and inner model evaluation.

Model specification: This step dealt with specifying the inner model (measurement model) and the outer model (structural model). The measurement model checked how items fit with the described construct whereas the structural model tested the relationships between constructs. The exogenous (independent) variables in our study were job autonomy, networking, work-family conflict, and servant leadership whereas the endogenous (dependent) variables were sympathy and job satisfaction.

The relationships between the exogenous and endogenous variables (structural model) were designed based on theoretical background.

Outer model evaluation: Evaluation of the outer model comprised of testing both the reliability and validity of the outer model. The reliability (internal consistency) of the measurement items was tested using Cronbach's alpha which was above the recommended cut off of 0.7. Convergent validity of our outer model was supported as the outer loadings were above 0.7 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct ranged from 0.53 to 0.72. An AVE of 0.5 meant that more than half of the variance of the indicators could be explained by the construct. Discriminant validity tested how different each construct was from the other constructs empirically. Discriminant validity for our model was supported as the AVE of each construct was found to be higher than the highest squared correlation with any other construct.

Inner model evaluation: The inner model was evaluated using path coefficients, which were obtained after running the PLS model. The path coefficients give the strength of the relation between the hypothesized variables. The predictive accuracy of the model was assessed using R-square of the latent endogenous variables sympathy and job satisfaction.

Table 1: PLS-SEM Result

Hypothesized path	Unstandardized coefficient	T statistic	Result
H ₁ : Work-family conflict to Job satisfaction	0.184	2.029**	Supported
H ₂ : Job autonomy to Job satisfaction	0.503	5.797***	Supported
H ₃ : Networking to Job satisfaction	0.044	0.762	Not Supported
H ₄ : Servant leadership to sympathy	0.992	3.041***	Supported
H ₅ : Servant leadership to Job satisfaction	0.093	0.878	Not Supported
H ₆ : Sympathy to Job satisfaction	0.178	1.956*	Supported

Note: ***P<0.01, **P<0.05, *P<0.10

4. Results

Four of the six hypotheses were supported. The results indicated that work-family conflict had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction (0.184, P<0.05), job autonomy had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction (0.503, P<0.01), servant leadership had a significant positive impact on sympathy (0.992, P<0.01), and sympathy had a significant positive effect on job satisfaction (0.178, P<0.1). The effect of networking on job satisfaction and servant leadership on job satisfaction were in expected sign but were not significant (Table 1).

R-square of the latent endogenous variables sympathy and job satisfaction were 0.984 and 0.997 respectively, indicating a high predictive accuracy of the model.

5. Discussion

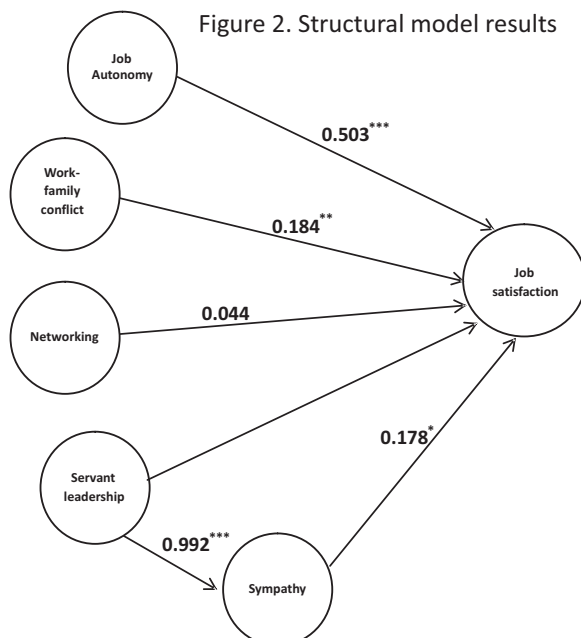
This study has several contributions to the field of organizational behavior. Organizational behavior in the airline industry has not been empirically investigated before.

The use of the work enrichment model and discussing the positive effects of work-family conflict answers the call of many researchers to discuss the positive impact of work-family conflict in the modern society (Lavassani et al., 2014).

5.1. Managerial Implications

The airline industry is considered to be one of the least profitable industries. Our findings can lead to increased job satisfaction, which can, in turn, lead to higher customer satisfaction and higher profits for the airline industry. The positive effect of job autonomy on job satisfaction suggests that the implementation of flexible work policies will be beneficial for the aviation sector.

Servant leadership should be encouraged in the airline workplace, due to the numerous benefits, as discussed in this study.



Note: ***P<0.01, **P<0.05, *P<0.10

In an era where airlines face increased scrutiny by the public and face a range of issues such as overbooking, poor customer service, just to name a few, one main take-away from the results of this study is that the airline industry use a more people focused approach, i.e. focus on the people that matter most to them, the employees and customers.

6. Limitations and future research

Our study has a few limitations which are common in any empirical study. The lack of controlled

environment and the use of survey for data collection can be a source of response bias. The use of cross-sectional data does not allow for causal inferences.

Future research can use a longitudinal study to collect data over a period of two to three years which will enable the researchers to tease out causal effects. Another extension can be the use of the demographic variables such as gender, age and income in our study as potential mediator/moderator on the direct effects shown.

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Appendix A

Scale development

Factor	Items
Work-family conflict	<p>My work interferes with my home and my family life</p> <p>Because of my job, sometimes I have to make changes in my family activities</p> <p>Sometimes I cannot finish my house activities due to my work</p> <p>I have very little control over the number of hours I work</p>
Job satisfaction	<p>Overall, I am satisfied with my work</p> <p>My work gives me a high level of personal satisfaction</p> <p>Overall, I like working in this organization</p> <p>Voluntarily I give my time to my colleagues when they need me</p> <p>I am always willing to help my colleagues</p> <p>I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization</p> <p>I tell my friends that this is a great organization to work for</p>
Job autonomy	<p>I have autonomy to determine how to do my job</p> <p>My job gives me opportunities to do my work freely and independently</p> <p>My job allows me to use my personal initiative and my own judgment to perform my duties</p>
Networking	<p>I participate in social events with other employees in the organization</p> <p>I participate in meetings with customers, suppliers or others associated with the organization</p> <p>I participate in social and community events</p> <p>I visit offices or jobs to greet my colleagues</p> <p>I participate as an active member of a working group with other employees in the organization</p>
Servant leadership	<p>I seek the help of my supervisor if I have a personal problem</p> <p>My supervisor makes me focus on supporting our community</p> <p>My supervisor realizes if something goes wrong</p> <p>My supervisor gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations as I see fit</p> <p>My supervisor gives priority to the development of my career</p> <p>My supervisor makes my interest his own</p>
Sympathy	<p>I talk about the positive qualities of my coworkers</p> <p>I am kind to my coworkers</p> <p>I avoid conflicts or arguments with my coworkers</p>

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