

Job Satisfaction of School Psychologists in Kansas

P.D. Wilson

Department of Counseling, Educational, and School Psychology, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas 67260, U.S.A.

1. Introduction

School psychologists have historically provided an array of integral services to children and schools, and the role of school psychological services continues to expand. In spite of continued growth in the number of school psychology practitioners, the shortage of school psychologists which has existed for most of the past century will likely continue (Fagan, 2002). In order to staff the school psychology profession, it is crucial to address not only the recruitment of new school psychologists but also the retention of those working in the field. Extensive research has identified the relationship of job satisfaction to work-related behaviors such as retention, attitudes towards work, and commitment to the organization.

Frederick Herzberg's (1968) Motivation-Hygiene Theory directly addresses satisfaction and dissatisfaction on the job. Herzberg describes two types of needs of humans as (a) extrinsic, relating to animal nature and the built-in drives; and (b) intrinsic, relating to unique human characteristics such as achievement and psychological growth. Herzberg suggests that job dissatisfaction is caused by deficits in the extrinsic "hygiene" dimensions of a job, such as salary, job security, and working conditions. These dimensions, although they can cause job dissatisfaction if deficient, do not result in job satisfaction if present. Rather, it is the "motivation" dimensions intrinsic to a job such as achievement, responsibility, advancement, and the work itself that have the power to increase job satisfaction.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

A random sample of 300 Kansas licensed school psychologists was chosen from a list of 476 obtained from the Kansas State Department of Education and were invited to participate in the study. A two-page questionnaire was mailed to potential participants. Demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, highest degree obtained, primary role, number of years of experience, and the type of community in which the participant was currently working was elicited. A cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope were included. A follow-up letter was mailed to potential participants who had not returned the questionnaire after 4 weeks.

Relative to Herzberg's (1968) theory on job satisfaction, the questionnaire elicited information about both hygiene and motivation dimensions of work. Hygiene-related information included the number of other school psychologists employed in the district; the number of buildings served; the number of students served; and the background and training of the immediate supervisor. Respondents were also asked to rate the adequacy of other hygiene-related work dimensions including competence of supervisor; contact with colleagues; clerical assistance; availability of test materials; technology; and salary and benefits. Motivation-related information was elicited which included the percent of work time spent at the preschool, elementary, middle school, and high school levels; and the actual percentage of time spent on professional activities of assessment, consultation, intervention, counseling, training and staff development, research, administrative duties, and clerical duties. The desired amount of time spent on these activities was also requested in order to determine the discrepancy between actual and desired time spent at each activity. Other motivation-related dimensions assessed included the adequacy of opportunity for advancement and the degree of control over the types of professional activities performed, how the activities are performed, and the policies which govern how duties are performed. Finally, participants were asked to rate their degree of satisfaction with their current position and with being a school psychologist.

Of the 300 packets mailed, a total of 180 were returned for a return rate of 60%. This represented approximately 36% of the school psychologists in Kansas. The sample was similar in proportion to school psychologists nationally in terms of gender and ethnicity. Nearly half of the respondents (43.3%) reported that they

serve rural communities, with suburban (29.2%) and urban (26.3%) work settings also well represented in the sample. Only those school psychologists who indicated that they work primarily as practitioners in school settings (not post-secondary) were included in the final sample.

Respondents rated their satisfaction with their current position and with being a school psychologist using 5-point Likert scales. Respondents generally reported being satisfied with their current positions ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .99$) and with being a school psychologist ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .91$). Approximately three-fourths of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their current job (71.4%) and with being a school psychologist (77.2%). Responses to both questions are significantly correlated, $r = .72$, $p < .01$, and were combined additively for the purpose of regression analysis into an overall job satisfaction variable.

Regression analyses were used to identify significant predictors of overall job satisfaction. In separate stepwise regression equations, Hygiene variables, Motivation variables, and demographic variables were presented as independent (potential predictor) variables with overall job satisfaction as the dependent measure. No demographic variables were found to be significant predictors of job satisfaction. Those variables which were significant predictors in the Hygiene and Motivation groups were used in a stepwise regression analysis to identify the best predictors of overall job satisfaction.

The overall regression equation accounted for 39.9% of variance in job satisfaction, $F(1,158) = 18.61$, $p < .001$. Significant regression coefficients ($p < .05$) were found for the Motivation variables of opportunity for advancement and degree of control over how duties are performed (positive correlations). Significant regression coefficients ($p < .05$) were also found for the Hygiene variables of competence of supervisor, availability of test materials, and salary and benefits (positive correlations), and for number of students served (negative correlation).

The Motivation variable of opportunity for advancement was the best single predictor of overall job satisfaction, accounting for 17.9% of the variance at Step 1. Degree of control over how duties are performed, also a Motivation variable, entered the equation at Step 2 and accounted for a significant increment (12.7%) of variance. The remainder which entered were Hygiene variables: Competence of supervisor entered at Step 3 accounting for a 3.6% increment in variance; availability of test materials entered at Step 4 accounting for a 2.4% increment in variance; salary and benefits entered at Step 5 accounting for a 1.9% increment in variance; and number of students served (negative correlation) entered at Step 6 accounting for a 1.4% increment in variance.

3. Conclusions

The results of this study demonstrate that, as suggested by Herzberg's (1968) Hygiene and Motivation theory, Motivation dimensions of the job which are intrinsic to the work itself contribute most to job satisfaction, although certain Hygiene dimensions related to working conditions must also be present. Specifically, opportunities for advancement and the degree of control over how one performs his or her professional duties were the strongest predictors of job satisfaction for school psychologists in this study. Variables related to working conditions which contributed to overall job satisfaction include the perceived competence of one's supervisor, the availability of test materials, perceived adequacy of salary and benefits, and fewer numbers of students served.

The results of this study have important implications for school psychology, especially in a predominantly rural state with a shortage of practitioners. Although, according to Herzberg's (1968) theory, compensation alone would not be sufficient to increase job satisfaction, it does need to be at an adequate level for satisfaction to occur. Autonomy, the opportunity to play a meaningful role in decision-making, quality supervision which is sensitive to the needs of school psychologists, and advocacy to improve opportunities for professional recognition and advancement are needed. Managing the shortage of school psychologists requires creative solutions and attention not only to the needs of the children who are served but also to the needs of the professionals who serve them. A system of not only recruitment but retention of school psychologists which allows for sufficient compensation, a manageable workload with the best possible use of valuable human resources, and a plan for professional recognition and growth are of utmost importance to staff the school psychology workforce in the 21st century.

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[1] Fagan, T. K. (2000). *School psychology: Past, present, and future* (2nd ed.). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

[2] Herzberg, F. (1968). One more time: How do you motivate employees? *Harvard Business Review*, 46, 53-62.