Job Satisfaction among Academic Staff of Universiti Utara Malaysia: A Work Environment Perspective

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Abstract

Recognizing the importance of job satisfaction in organizations, many researches have been conducted and underway to explore and understand job satisfaction problems in developed as well developing world. Thus, job satisfaction became a topic that received a great attention by managers and researchers alike. It is related to feelings the individual has towards his job, and any employees who supposed to express high satisfaction in their job are likely to be more productive. The aim of this article is to describe descriptively level of job satisfaction among higher learning lecturer at one of the public universities in Malaysia, i.e. Universiti Utara Malaysia. Results of the analysis show that most of the participants have a moderate level of job satisfaction. Of the 21 lecturers who responded to the survey conducted, 13 of them have a moderate level of job satisfaction. Only eight of all respondents have a high level of job satisfaction of their work environment in the school. None is included in a low level of job satisfaction. Thus, it can be said that most of the lecturers is satisfied with the work environment in the School of Social Development, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Keywords: Employee's commitment; organizational goals; social needs; psychological needs

1. Introduction

Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), situated in the northern part of Malaysia, is one of the public universities in Malaysia. Established in 1984, the primary objective of the setting up of this unique sixth public university has till this day been to train and produce professionals in the areas of business and management. UUM main campus is located at Sintok, 48km to the north of Alor Setar, the state capital of Kedah, and 15km from Bukit Kayu Hitam, a town close to Malaysia-Thai border. The 1,061 hectares campus is surrounded by beautiful scenery of a tropical rain forest and hills. With the Sintok and Badak rivers run through the campus, it is one of the most beautiful campuses in the region (Postgraduate Academic Handbook, 2012.2013 Session). Malaysia has 20 public universities with their own strength and niche area. The mission of the university is to be a prominent management university in Malaysia. This paper presents the results of a survey conducted to explore the level of job satisfaction among the academic staff at School of Social Development, UUM.

2. Objective of the Study

This article aims to describe descriptively the level of job satisfaction among academic staff at UUM. More specifically, the objectives of this paper are: (1) to examine quantitatively the level of job satisfaction of the lecturer at UUM, and (2) to explore qualitatively the reasons behind the level.

3. Literature Review

Job satisfaction has been a central role in any organizations, and has attracted scholars to examine this issue since decades. It is a topic that received a significant attention by managers and researchers alike (Gautam, Mandal, and Dalal, 2006; Qasim, Azam-Cheema, and Nadeen A Syed, 2012). Job satisfaction has also received considerable attention in academic research as a consequence of the complex relationships within competing spheres such as work, family,

leisure, and social network (Gamboa, Garcia-Suaza and Rodriguez-Acosta, 2011). It influences academis's staff commitment and performance in their job. Recognizing the importance of job satisfaction, an array of theories is available to explain the motivational contents and cognitive process that constitute the issue of job satisfaction (Saif, Allah Nawaz, Ali Jan, and Imran Khan, 2012), and a huge body of research has been conducted as well underway to explore and understand job satisfaction problems in developed world (Abdul Sattar, 2014), and developing world as well (Gamboa, Garcia-Suaza and Rodriguez-Acosta, 2011). Names, such as Hoppock, (1935), Vroom, (1964), Davis and Nestrom, (1985), Clark-Rayner and Harcourt (2000), Abdul Sattar (2001), Ellickson and Logsdon (2001), Rocca and Kostanski (2001), Furnham, Petrides, Jackson, and Cotter (2002), Grebner, Semmer, Faso, Gut, Kalin, and Elfering (2003), Statt, (2004), Amstrong, (2006), Nguni, Sleegers, and Denessen, (2006), Gautam, Mandal, and Dalal, (2006), Nelson, Tonks and Weymouth (2006), Hiroyuki, Kato, and Ohashi (2007), Kaliski, (2007), Gamboa, Garcia-Suaza and Rodriguez-Acosta, (2011), Qasim, Azam-Cheema, and Nadeen A Syed, (2012), as well as Xuong-Kiet Vuong and Minh-Quang Duong (2013) just to name a few, have explored various aspects of job satisfaction such as level of job satisfaction, determinants, relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, links between psychological contract and job satisfaction, turnover among workers, personal characteristics of workers, working conditions attitudes, as well as interrelationships between morale and work satisfaction.

In Malaysia, names such as Fauziah Noordin and Kamaruzaman Jusoff, (2009), Nilufar Ahsan, Zaini Abdullah, and David Yong Gun Fie (2009), Zainudin Awang, Junaidah Hanim Ahmad, and Nazmi Mohamed Zin (2010), Aziri, (2011), Triantoro Safaria, Ahmad Othman, and Muhammad Nubli Abdul Wahab (2011), Aida Mehrad (2011), Khairunneezam Mohd Noor (2013), Noraani Mustapha, (2013), and, in UUM itself, names such as Rusnifaezah bt Musa, Nik Kamariah Nik Mat, Chia Po Li, Yusrinadini Zahirah Md. Isa Yusuff, and Rosni Suib, (2013) have also examined the same issue in their research. Every person has his own need to fulfil, and they joint organizations for certain motives. There is an employee who joints organizations for income; others might be for better prospects, social or psychological needs. Job satisfaction is basically related to how the employees perceive their job whether it is happy or unhappy one. If the employee perceives his job as a happy one, he may express a high degree of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction represents a combination of positive or negative feelings that workers have towards their work. It is a worker's sense of achievement and success on the job, and it is generally perceived to be directly linked to productivity as well as to personal well-being (Aziri, 2011). However, there is still no general agreement regarding what job satisfaction is, and thus, different authors have different approaches towards defining job satisfaction (Aziri, 2011; Xuong-Kiet Vuong and Minh-Quang Duong 2013).

Aziri (2011) through his literature review on job satisfaction, quotes some of the most commonly cited definitions on job satisfaction, among which are from Hoppock (1935), Vroom (1964), Davis and Nestrom (1985), Kaliski (2007), Statt (2004), and Amstrong (2006). From their definition, it can be concluded that job satisfaction represents a combination of positive or negative feelings that workers have towards their work. It is closely linked to that individual's behavior in the work place, and it is a worker's sense of achievement and success on the job. Job satisfaction is also perceived to be directly linked to productivity as well as to personal well-being (Aziri, 2011). Locke (Nguni, Sleegers, and Denessen, 2006), as well as Xuong-Kiet Vuong and Minh-Quang Duong (2013) also described job satisfaction as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of job he or she experiences. In other words, job satisfactions is an asset, because it influences the performance of any organizations, and more over it may has a crucial impact in determining whether the employee will remains in certain organizations. In sum, job satisfaction is related to the feelings that individual has about his job, and employees who express high satisfaction in their job are likely to be more productive (Qasim, Azam-Cheema, and Nadeen A. Syed, 2012).

Research on the determinants of job satisfaction revealed that there are many factors affecting the level of job satisfaction of the employee. Telman and Unsal (Xuong-Kiet Vuong and Minh-Quang Duong, 2013) believe job satisfaction is influenced by factors such as internal, external and personal factors, and according to these authors the internal, includes sub factors such as characteristics related to the basic nature of work. External factors, on the other hand, include sub factors such as the conditions of physical work, promotion conditions, relationships with superiors and co-workers, job security, organizational structure and culture. Factors such as demographic characteristics, personal traits and incentives, knowledge and skills are sub factors for personal factors. Besides, the job satisfaction of the academics staff is also greatly influenced by sub factors such as leadership, collegial and student relationship, as well as climate and culture of the university (Hagerdorn, 2000; Grunwald and Peterson, 2003; Zhou and Volkwein, 2004; Xuong-Kiet Vuong and Minh-Quang Duong, 2013).

More recently, survey conducted to examine job satisfaction among academics staff in Malaysia revealed the results that there was a significant negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction (Nilufar Ahsan, Zaini Abdullah, and David Yong Gun Fie, 2009), there was a significant relationship between job satisfaction and work

commitment (Zainudin Awang, Junaidah Hanim Ahmad, and Nazmi Mohamed Zin, 2010), there was a significant relationship between income and the amount of job satisfaction (Aida Mehrad, 2011), there was a positive relationship between financial reward and job satisfaction (Noraani Mustapha, (2013), and empathy was a significant negative antecedent of job satisfaction (Rusnifaezah bt Musa, Nik Kamariah Nik Mat, Chia Po Li, Yusrinadini Zahirah Md. Isa Yusuff, and Rosni Suib, 2013).

Most of the factors revealed from the above studies are derived from various theories, such as affect theory, discrepancy theory, equity theory, two-factor theory (motivator-hygiene theory), dispositional approach, and job characteristic model. Reading on these theories and writing using such theories, it seems that the most widely accepted theory relating to job satisfaction is Herzberg's two-factor theory (motivator-hygiene theory). Aziri (2011) for instance, believe that Herzberg's Two Factor Theory is probably the most often cited point of view. The main idea from this theory is that employees in their work environment are under the influence of factors that cause job satisfaction (motivators) and factors that cause job dissatisfaction (hygiene factors) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Job Satisfaction Factors (Herzberg, 1976)

Hygiene Factors	Motivators
Company Policies	Achievement
Supervision	Recognition
Interpersonal Relations	Work Itself
Work Condtions	Responsibility
Salary	Advancement
Statuses	Growth
Jon Security	

Source: Aziri (2011).

4. Materials and Method

This study is basically used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, a term famous known as mixed method. A main justification of using mixed method is that of comprehensiveness, that is using such method allows an issue to be addressed more widely and more completely because of the strengths of different methods (see, Morse, 2003). In recent years, mixed method has become increasingly popular and considered a stand-alone research design (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, 2003). Mixed method design refers to a procedure of collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research problem, and the researcher has to be familiar with these two designs in conducting this research (Creswell, 2005). This kind of design is suitable when the researcher has both types of data. It is also very suitable if the researcher wish to provide a better understanding of the issues. When both quantitative and qualitative data are included in one study, it will allow researchers to simultaneously generalize results from a sample to a population and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Hanson, Clark, Petska, Creswell, and Creswell, 2005).

The objectives of the current survey are two; to determine the level of job satisfaction, and to explore the reasons behind it. The first objective will be determined and described quantitatively, while the second objective will be explored qualitatively. To meet these objectives, 21 academic staffs at the psychology and social work program, UUM were chosen conveniently as respondents. Team of researcher used a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data, while unstructured informal interview was used to gather qualitative data. To determine the level of job satisfaction, respondents were given seven items related to the working environment, i.e. physical environment, salary, staff relations, career development, scope of work, workload, and promotional opportunities. All items were matched with a 5-point Likert scale from very dissatisfy to very satisfy. Unstructured interviews were primarily revolved around the reasons why they feel satisfied or vice-versa.

5. Results and Discussion

The ultimate aim in this survey is to determine the level of job satisfaction of the academic staff at School of Social Development, UUM, and to explore the reasons behind the level of job satisfaction. The result of the survey only covers these two aspects. No attempt will be made to measure to what extend some of the predictors as shown in the literatures

explain their influence on the job satisfaction. This section will discuss these two aspects.

5.1 Level of Job Satisfaction

Scores obtained from the scale employed are categorized into three categories, namely (1) low level of job satisfaction (7-16), (2) moderate level of job satisfaction (17-26), and (3) high level of job satisfaction (27-35). For qualitative data, in-depth interview conducted revolved around what do they feel about their job, and the reasons why do they feel like that. All the information gathered is analyzed using thematic approach. Results show that most of the participants (lecturers in psychology and social work program) have a moderate level of job satisfaction (Table 2).

Table 2: Level of Job Satisfaction among Lecturer at Psychology and Social Work

Level of Job Satisfaction	Number	Percent
Moderate	13	61.9
High	8	38.1
Number	**21**	**100.0**

Of the 21 lecturers who responded to the survey conducted, only eight of all respondents have a high level of job satisfaction of their work environment in the school. Thirteen (13) of them have a moderate level of job satisfaction. None of them is included in a low level of job satisfaction. Thus, the majority of the psychology and social work lecturers are satisfied with the work environment in the School. Result of this survey is in line with the result of the survey conducted by Fauziah Noordin and Kamaruzaman Jusoff (2009) who indicates that overall academic staff of the university lecturer participated in their study has a moderate level of job satisfaction.

5.2 Reason behind the Level of Job Satisfaction

To explore the reason behind the level obtained, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview with some of these participants. It is found there are four main reasons were reported, namely (1) the nature of staff relationships, (2) career development, (3) scope of work, and (4) salary. All participants agree that the social relationship with their peers is very supportive. For them peers are very important as they can give them a sense of social belonging and a sense of social and psychological needs. University is also seen as an organization that can gives them opportunities for career development so that they feel they will have better prospects working at the university.

Besides these two reasons, some of the participants agree that the nature or scope of work as lecturer is exciting. They like teaching, research and writing as well as giving community service where all these tasks are daily tasks of the academic staff. Participants of the survey agree that they satisfy with the salary obtained. Personal observation on the daily interaction of participants in school reveals that most of them are satisfied with the salary they get. This is particularly true because all the participants who participated in the survey have worked at UUM for a long time, and most of them are senior lecturers, and thus have a good salary.

Through the unstructured interviews, it is found that this pattern of attitude developed by these lecturers because they feel the environment of the university and job conditions as pleasurable. They are basically perceived their job as a happy one, thus have a high or moderate level of job satisfaction. The pattern of this analysis is not differs from the analysis conducted by other scholars outside Malaysia who concluded that most employee joint organization as they feel the organization can fulfil their motives such as income, better prospects, and social or psychological needs (see, for instances, Gautam, Mandal, and Dalal, 2006; Qasim, Azam-Cheema, and Nadeen A Syed, 2012). Xuong-Kiet Vuong and Minh-Quang Duong (2013) who analyzed job satisfaction level of the faculty members of Vietnam National University of Ho Chi Minh City also found the same phenomena in the university.

6. Conclusion

In sum, this article presents the result of a cross-sectional survey on the level of job satisfaction among academic staff at UUM through working environment perspectives. Job satisfaction is important to explore as it plays a crucial role for the employee's commitment and performance. The employee who experiences a high level of job satisfaction may decide to remain in the organizations. This survey is conducted to determine the level of job satisfaction of the academic staff at UUM and to explore qualitatively the reasons behind it. There was no effort to measure to what extend some of the

predictors explain their influence on job satisfaction. Result shows the majority of the respondents have a moderate level of job satisfaction. These lecturers feel the environment that the university and their job conditions as pleasurable, and perceive their job as happy. There are four main reasons behind it, i.e. staff relationships, career development, scope of work, and salary. The result is in line with the result of other survey conducted outside Malaysia who also claims the majority of employee joints organizations because of income, better prospects, and social or psychological needs. As the majority of respondents have a moderate level of job satisfaction, there is a space for job improvement as well as academic culture in the university.

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