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**THE RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND WORK
SATISFACTION IN THE DOMAIN OF CONSTRUCTIONS**

Marina Stoian (a)*, Helmuth Köber (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Technical University of Civil Engineering, B-dul Lacul Tei 124, Bucharest, Romania, carinastoian@yahoo.com

(b) Technical University of Civil Engineering, B-dul Lacul Tei 124, Bucharest, Romania, koberhelmuth@yahoo.de

Abstract

Human beings learn, understand and change during the educational process. Work satisfaction represents a set of attitudes about work influenced by one's own beliefs and values. The main objectives of this paper are: - the evaluation of a group of students in the final years of study, in order to assess the influence of education on work satisfaction; - how can satisfaction be generated by education in the students' work so that the students fulfil their intermediate and final objectives; - how performance is determined and perceived; - the implications of cultural models in education; - how to reach intermediate objectives or a final goal. A group of 100 students from the Technical University of Civil Engineering was studied: 50 students from the fourth year and 50 master students. The main factors during the educational process which influence work satisfaction or dissatisfaction were studied. The interviewed students have worked or were still working in a construction company during the summer practice period or in parallel with their study time. The influence of several factors on the evaluation of satisfaction in the educational or working process were considered: knowing the day to day routine at the work (study) place, the possibilities to handle stress at work (school), the opportunities to combine useful things with reasons of satisfaction or pleasure in order to obtain optimal work efficiency, the motivation to overcome obstacles and exceed own limits.

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1. Introduction

The study in this paper is dedicated to students, future graduates in constructions. A declining interest of students in applying for construction colleges or dropping out of such colleges results in a lack of skilled staff in constructions. A lack of attraction of students in this field affects construction companies. Investments in human resources is necessary if the company aims to stay competitive in a permanently changing environment.

Human beings understand and change through education. “Man can only become man by education” (Kant, 2002). The purpose of education is “to raise man, the ethnic community and humanity to nobler heights of life by cultivating the values of the spirit” (Cucoş et al., 2005).

The results that people expect from work depend on their system of values. Professional satisfaction comes from economic, work and psychosocial satisfaction. The sources of work satisfaction are determined by facilities, physical conditions, content of work, organisational environment, human relations at work.

Work satisfaction is a set of attitudes about work resulting from a person’s beliefs and values. Satisfaction means contentment.

2. Problem Statement

At the moment in Romania a lack of qualified people working in constructions and a declining interest of students in applying for construction and architecture colleges can be noticed.

The main research objectives of this paper are:

- analysis of a group of students in their final years of study to assess satisfaction and dissatisfaction with work and the role of education in this process;
- how to achieve an objective, how to accomplish a personal project;
- how to determine performance;
- what can cause work satisfaction for future graduates in construction.

3. Research Questions

A group of 100 students of the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest, last year of study, and 50 master students was studied for two years to analyse work satisfaction and dissatisfaction. These students worked in a construction company during summer practice or in parallel with their studies.

The questionnaire contained 60 questions with selection of the answer between: never, very rarely, sometimes, often, very often, always. The questions were asked in the course of the semester. Some of the questions from the questionnaire, designed to determine work (or learning) satisfaction and dissatisfaction from a student’s point of view, were:

1. Do I like what I do at work?
- 5% never, 25% very rarely, 50% sometimes, 10% often, 6% very often, 4% always.
2. Do I like what I learn?
- 2% never, 6% very rarely, 21% sometimes, 59% often, 9% very often, 3% always.
3. Do I know my strengths, talents, skills, qualities?
- 3% never, 6% very rarely, 19% sometimes, 47% often, 24% very often, 1% always.
4. Did the grades obtained in school, high school, university matter at the workplace?

- 7% never, 42% very rarely, 39% sometimes, 8% often, 4% very often, 0% always.
- 5. Did I choose my professional path based on my wishes and known skills?
 - 4% never, 23% very rarely, 52% sometimes, 11% often, 5% very often, 5% always.
- 6. Is communication good within the organisation/enterprise?
 - 0% never, 2% very rarely, 8% sometimes, 20% often, 64% very often, 6% always.
- 7. Is communication good within the educational establishment?
 - 2% never, 4% very rarely, 11% sometimes, 31% often, 48% very often, 4% always.
- 8. Do I like the people I work with?
 - 3% never, 9% very rarely, 31% sometimes, 39% often, 12% very often, 6% always.
- 9. Do I like my colleagues at the university?
 - 2% never, 4% very rarely, 9% sometimes, 24% often, 54% very often, 7% always.
- 10. Do I like my professors/the teaching staff at the university?
 - 3% never, 8% very rarely, 21% sometimes, 44% often, 23% very often, 1% always.
- 11. Are you rewarded for achieving your objectives at work?
 - 12% never, 20% very rarely, 27% sometimes, 30% often, 10% very often, 3% always.
- 12. Are you rewarded for achieving your objectives at the university?
 - 2% never, 7% very rarely, 19% sometimes, 32% often, 26% very often, 14% always.
- 13. Are good relations at work important?
 - 0% never, 2% very rarely, 10% sometimes, 14% often, 19% very often, 55% always.

4. Purpose of the Study

Work is not just a means to earn money, it is also an environment where knowledge and creativity should be used and developed continuously.

The aim of the questionnaire used in this paper was to answer the question whether “Satisfaction determines performance?” or “Performance determines satisfaction?” which is a subject matter found in the relevant published literature (Johns, 1998; Maslow, 2013).

4.1. Satisfaction determines performance?

The questionnaire shows that good relations at work are very important. On the one hand, colleagues and superiors with team spirit usually contribute to creating a good environment for performance. On the other hand, nice colleagues and superiors may determine that more time is devoted to social interactions than work. Therefore, work satisfaction does not necessarily lead to performance.

4.2. Performance determines satisfaction?

If a student learns a lot for an exam and she/he is rewarded with a good grade, she/he is satisfied with her/his effort. In this case, performance is linked to satisfaction, since there is a reward. Similarly, if you work hard with good professional results, the reward brings satisfaction. Many times, however, there is no balance between performance and satisfaction, since in many cases high productivity is not always followed by promotion, bonuses or more interesting tasks.

When an institution, be it an employer or a faculty, appreciates only performance, the students/employees answered that such institution lowers self-esteem and ruins the good mood. They feel uncomfortable in their activity. Therefore, respect, appreciation, reward are incentives for contentment, work satisfaction, performance.

5. Research Methods

The methods recommended for increasing work satisfaction proposed in this paper are:

1. Reaching objectives, finishing a personal project;
2. Achieving performance;
3. Cultural models - Influence of organisational culture on work satisfaction.

5.1. Reaching objectives, finishing a personal project

For a student, achieving a professional goal may be finding a job, changing a job, passing the exams, starting a small business or a better relation with the colleagues - she/he may have all sorts of objectives, small or big, which are extremely important for each individual. The starting point is to have clear ideals and goals, as well as to establish concrete action plans. In the case of a personal project, the plan consists in planning and organising one's mind, a deep analysis of personal wishes and abilities, an implementation method. Achieving one's personal objectives is not a certainty, not even for those who know their innate strengths and weaknesses well ahead, namely their personal talents and skills. One needs will and perseverance to reach a goal, and a sustained effort to develop one's talent and skills.

Optimists, with a more realistic thinking process, are more likely to be satisfied with work. The drive in increasing satisfaction and contentment of an individual in any field and aspect is happiness. Good mood and optimistic thinking result in positive events and circumstances (Figure 01).



Figure 01. Optimistic attitude (Maxwell, 2015)

Researches in the field on character and work satisfaction focused on two traits of character (Johns, 1998):

1. general tendency of a person to respond negatively or positively to the environment;
2. dysfunctional thinking process characteristic of depression.

Research shows that being negative prevents people from feeling good and causes work dissatisfaction and a decreased motivation in anything they do. The pressure to be perfect and the need to be appreciated by the others result in work dissatisfaction. Figure 02 illustrates the main factors that may determine students/employees to fail in achieving their goals (Ionescu, 2017).

5.2. Achieving performance

Satisfaction with what you do (learning, work) and motivation contribute to achieving performance. Work satisfaction is the psychosocial factor that determines performance and overcoming of your own limits. You only have to know how. According to Henry Ford, “There is no man living who isn’t capable of doing more than he thinks he can do” (Ford, 1940). Work satisfaction comes when the results of their work are fair, comparable to those of others, and when the employees feel that their results have been fairly determined. The importance of cultivating passion and giving up fear (fear of grades, fear of failure, fear of failing classes, fear of anything). “School does not teach them where they can be more helpful because it does not insist on their qualities. It should reveal their qualities and use them in the community. This automation with grades and school curricula does not encourage the manifestation of their qualities” (Colceag, 2017). There are many people who are “highly motivated” but who do not seem to do very well. They work hard and long, but they do not accomplish much. They may be motivated, but they do not enjoy what they do, they find it hard.

Thus, a person’s performance may be low despite the fact that she/he is highly motivated - low skills, undeveloped abilities, poor understanding of the task or chance may reduce the performance of the most motivated person. Also, we can encounter an opposite effect: an individual with low motivation may understand the task so well that a certain compensation may be visible - however small his/her effort is, he/she is very efficient in reaching his/her goal. Also, there are people with low motivation and satisfactory performance due to luck or a contributing factor that improves performance. A professor or employers who is truly concerned with the prosperity of professional results will permanently assess his/her students or employees. We often ask questions such as:

- Why does A learn/work more than B under the same conditions of study/work?
- Why does C change attitude toward study/work when the conditions change?
- Why another student/employee is satisfied with the results of his/her work?



Figure 02. Why people give up their goals (Ionescu, 2017)

5.3. Cultural models - Influence of organisational culture on work satisfaction

Attitudes depend on what we think of the world (our beliefs) and feel about the world (our values). Attitudes are important because they influence our behaviour (Johns, 1998). The way a child is raised and educated varies from one culture to another. Satisfaction with work and with the learning process vary from one country to another, from a cultural model to another. Traditions, customs, country history, attitude towards change, commitment to effort, social life, state institutions, the church, family, responsibilities and obligations, they all shape an individual's work satisfaction. Several characteristics of different cultural models are presented below (Stoian, 2011):

A. The German cultural model known as the monochronic model (one thing at a time):

- one thing at a time; difficult to interrupt;
- give exclusive priority to the task;
- punctual (it is very important when she/he starts and when she/he finishes);
- methodical; - she/he guides in time by a rigorous plan.

B. The Romanian cultural model, known as the polychronic model:

- tendency to begin many things at the same time;
- several priorities at the same time (priority to the task, but also to family, friends and clients);
- is easy to interrupt;
- is rarely punctual when he/she starts and when he/she finishes;
- is eager to do things quickly;
- often changes the plan.

C. The Japanese cultural model:

- a tradition of long work;
- ability to make intense and long efforts;
- spirit of initiative and tenacity in achieving something (will not give up until he/she achieves an objective or result);
- traditional relation of subordination. Very long stability of a hierarchical structure. Each has a role.
- very strict morality principles;
- a high sense of honour and dignity;
- the spirit of family is very advanced, attachment to the family. This spirit was transferred from family to the company (the paternalistic Japanese concept);

The work and learning processes are differently estimated from model to model and country to country, each with a different approach to life, learning and doing business. The following aspects should be taken into account for an efficient multicultural communication (Emck & Fountain, 2018):

1. Punctuality is subjective. The Germans, Flemish, Anglo-Saxons, Swiss love and respect punctuality in most cases. The Chinese usually arrive at meetings earlier than planned, while the French, Spanish, Italians, Romanians have a more relaxed attitude toward punctuality. Meeting time rules and conventions may vary a lot. Be aware of this and show up on time.

2. Time is relative. One may believe that an hour has sixty minutes in all situations, no more, no less. A teaching hour (actual teaching time followed by a short break between classes) may differ a lot from one school to another and from one cultural model to another. The same applies to business meetings.

3. Rules, conventions and rituals related to business meetings may be very different, the same as the educational process. Be aware of this and show up on time.

4. Body language is not universal. In different cultures, the same gesture – like a smile, handshake or colour of clothing - may be interpreted in very different ways. In certain cultural models, body language and non-verbal messages are more important than in other regions of the world. Thus, if you are going to teach or have a business conversation in a multicultural context, observance of the values and beliefs of each cultural model, conditions your work or learning process satisfaction. Not knowing or disregarding the same may create tensions in human relations, discontent at the workplace (or in the educational environment) and, consequently, dissatisfaction.

6. Findings

Students believe that their work satisfaction and professional performance can be achieved in a strong construction company where they feel protected by salary, benefits, status. Thus, a company has now the role of assuring the wellbeing and safety of its staff.

The questionnaires show that students had different reactions to income, for some the financial (material) aspect is a priority, for others it is not. For some students (future employees), being respected and dignified are more important than the need for security guaranteed by a steady job.

Our study shows that few students are excited about their job, few love what they do and few are passionate about the subject matters learned in college or about their job in constructions. This explains the poor grades in college and most of the discontent with their work. It is hard to motivate those who were and are unsure of what they want, who have not chosen their professional path of out passion for their job. It is wrong that they are adults who do not know what they want to do with their lives, who chose a faculty under the influence of parents or other circumstances and now are dissatisfied with their job.

Working with passion and loving what you do are essential, they are the key factors that determine performance and work satisfaction.

7. Conclusion

The main conclusions of this paper concerning the evaluation of satisfaction in the educational process are:

- knowing the day to day reality routine at the working place, the possibilities to handle stress at work, the opportunities to mix useful things with reasons for satisfaction or pleasure in order to obtain optimal work efficiency, the motivation to overcome obstacles and own limits;

- the existence of cultural models during child or student education with implications on the future working activities of the future adult;

- involving students in different companies in activities specific to their future profession (with themes adapted to the studied branch of knowledge), observing how the knowledge accumulated in school is used in practice;

- the importance of knowing all intermediate steps in reaching your goals, constantly focused on what you want to obtain. Each step along the way and each overcome obstacle brings satisfaction and gets you closer to your objective.

- the importance of work satisfaction in all aspects of day to day life, the importance of good relations at the work place, the importance of team work, the importance of loving what you do.

The questionnaire shows that the subjects analysed believed that satisfaction at work, wellbeing and the determination to achieve performance depend on three factors:

- rewarding of those who achieve their goals;
- acknowledgement, appreciation of values (objects, relations);
- human relationships.

The best conclusion in obtaining work satisfaction, performance and educational motivation is Steve Jobs' quote: "The only way to get great work is to love what you do!" (Jobs, 2006)

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