

## **DETERMINANTS RELATED TO JOB SATISFACTION AND POSITIVE EMOTION: EVIDENCE FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to identify affective events theory (AET) determinants which have a strong correlation with job satisfaction or positive emotions. The research approach of this study was quantitative and the research design was correlational and cross-sectional. The units of analysis were municipal senior and middle managers and non-managerial employees, with a population size of 1 495. The primary data were collected by means of a closed-ended questionnaire which consisted of two sections, namely biographical information and determinants (i.e. autonomy, participation, supervisory support, and work overload), and job satisfaction and positive emotions. The coefficient of supervisory support and job satisfaction is ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $p = 0.01^{**}$ ) and for supervisory support and emotions it is ( $\beta = 0.28$ ;  $p = 0.002^{**}$ ), which were low and in the opposite direction. The other results showed that no other comparisons in the strength of the correlations between the remaining AET determinants (autonomy, participation, and workload) with job satisfaction versus positive emotion were made, given a lack of significant correlations between the AET determinants with both job satisfaction and positive emotions.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Employees who work for the selected municipality are in contact with customers who are sometimes rude and hostile, which affects the job satisfaction and emotions of the former (Mafini, Surujlal and Dhurup, 2011: 145). Moreover, the experience of emotional displays (e.g. feeling angry but expressing willingness to complete the task) is one stressor that is prominent within high customer contact work environments in the municipality (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003: 369). Despite the aforementioned demands, the said employees are still expected to perform exceptionally well.

Recent authors argued that there is a relationship between certain determinants and job satisfaction (Mohsin, Maira and Amit, 2015: 350). Research has shown that employees who have the autonomy to make decisions have a higher level of job satisfaction than those who have little or no autonomy (Abdullah and Shaw, 2007: 51; Al-Hamdan, Bawadi, Bawadi and Mrayyan, 2013: 271; Britnell, 2007: 19; Mafini *et al.*, 2011: 151; Papathanassoglou *et al.*, 2005: 160). In addition, municipality employees who are empowered to participate in decision making of their work activities are more

likely to have high levels of job satisfaction (Jermias and Yigit, 2013: 33; Maleka, 2012: 115; Stefanovska-Petkovska, Bojadziev and Mucunski, 2015: 75). It has been found that supervisory support is positively associated with job satisfaction (Masum, Azad and Beh, 2015: 01), and the study conducted by Cortese, Colombo and Ghislieri (2010: 35) showed that if an organisation has supportive management, employees' job satisfaction will be high (see also Hyrkäs, 2005:536; Okediji, Etuk and Nnedum, 2011: 31). Other scholars have found a positive correlation between work overload and job dissatisfaction (Beham and Drobnic, 2010: 681; Pearson, 2008: 57).

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

It can be deduced from the above discussion that municipality employees who have frequent contact with customers work under stressful conditions. Other authors have found that employees in South African municipalities were not happy and satisfied because they worked under bellicose supervisors, they were not given autonomy to use their skills to make decisions, and they did not participate in scheduling their work (Dywili, 2015: 03). However, what is lacking in the South African literature is a study that investigates which AET determinants are strongly related to job satisfaction or positive emotions. Thus, the research question of this study is the following: Which determinants have a stronger correlation with job satisfaction than with positive emotions?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Affective events theory**

The theory that is relevant to investigating how determinants are related to job satisfaction is the affective events theory (AET) developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) (Dasborough, 2006: 164; Robbins and Judge, 2015: 135; Walter and Bruch, 2009: 1435). Using confirmatory factor analysis, Wegge, Van Dick, Fisher, West and Dawson (2006: 248) ascertained that the AET variables of autonomy, participation, supervisory support, and job satisfaction are distinguishable. The AET has been validated by scholars in the fields of organisational behaviour (Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011: 215), business management (Butts, Becker and Boswell, 2015:765), and industrial psychology (Yu, 2016: 22).

Below are definitions that indicate that AET determinants are distinguishable:

**Job satisfaction:** Locke (1976: 1304) defined job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences.” Job satisfaction can thus be explained as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job and job experience (Alessandri *et al.*, 2012: 2).

**Autonomy:** Benson (2013: 2) defined autonomy as the capacity to take control over one’s own learning, and as an attribute of the learner’s approach to the learning process. Autonomy is the freedom to make independent decisions on behalf of clients, but in their interests (Britnell, 2007:18). In clinical settings, autonomy means acting independently without being restricted by bureaucratic rules of hospitals, or receiving orders or permission from others (Papathanassoglou *et al.*, 2005:154).

**Participation:** This is defined as a process that uses the input of employees and is intended to increase employees’ commitment to organisational success (Robbins and Judge, 2013: 287). According to Wagner (1994: 313), participation can be defined as the process whereby influence is shared among individuals who do not hold the same hierarchical position.

**Supervisory support:** Kickul and Posing (2001: 335) explained that supervisory support may consist of communicating constructive advice and guidance while expressing empathy, actively listening, caring about the needs of employees, and providing tangible assistance and expertise that enable the employee to fulfil a responsibility or complete a task.

**Workload:** The job-demand resources theory posits those employees' work pressure results from excessive job demands with limited job resources (Demerouti, Baker, Friedhelf and Wilmar, 2001: 501). Work overload reflects employees' perceptions that the job places excessive work demands on them (Crafford *et al.*, 2006: 298).

**Positive emotions:** According to Robbins and Judge (2015: 125), emotions can be categorised as negative (i.e. rage, fear, frustration, and sadness) and positive (happiness, pleasure, pride, and enthusiasm). Robbins and Judge (2015) also defined positive emotions as mood dimensions consisting of excitement, self-assurance, and cheerfulness at the high end, and boredom, sluggishness, and fatigue at the low end (Robbins and Judge, 2013: 135).

Based on the above definitions, it can be surmised that AET determinants, job satisfaction, and positive emotions are distinguishable constructs. The following hypothesis is postulated:  
Hypothesis 1: AET determinants are distinguishable.

### **AET determinants relating to stronger job satisfaction and positive emotions**

Wegge *et al.* (2006: 248) revealed that autonomy correlated stronger with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.46$ ) than with positive emotion ( $r = 0.24$ ). The same study also showed that supervisory support correlated higher with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.50$ ) than with positive emotions ( $r = 0.29$ ), and work overload correlated stronger with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.58$ ) than with positive emotions ( $r = 0.32$ ). Wegge *et al.* (2006: 248) also found that participation correlated stronger with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.53$ ) than with positive emotions ( $r = 0.26$ ). Based on this finding, the following hypothesis is developed:  
Hypothesis 2: AET determinants relate stronger to job satisfaction than to positive emotions.

From the above literature review, it is clear that the relationship between the determinants and job satisfaction has been well researched over the past two decades. However, in the South African municipal context, it is not known whether the AET determinants have a stronger correlation with job satisfaction than with positive emotions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research approach and design**

In order to answer the research question of this study, the research approach was quantitative and the research design correlational and cross-sectional in nature. The researchers used this research approach because they were trained to analyse quantitative data and collect data from a large sample size (Msweli, 2011:64; Struwig and Stead, 2013: 89). The quantitative approach is strongly associated with the positivistic worldview or paradigm, which states that researchers must be objective when collecting and analysing data (Creswell, 2014: 07).

### **Population and sampling**

The population in this study comprised employees working at a local a municipality in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa, and the total population was 1 495. The authors used the Abraxas Energy Consulting tool with a margin of error of 6 per cent and a confidence level of 95 per cent. The sample size in this study was 227 participants. The researcher who collected data gave two

extra participants questionnaires and hence the sample size was 229. The convenience sampling technique was used because it is “usually quick and cheaper” (Maree, 2007: 177), and because of the “availability of the units of the target population” (Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole, 2013: 179). The biographical information of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**SUMMARY OF THE BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE RESPONDENTS**

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	105	46
	Female	124	54
Employment status	Permanent	184	80
	Part-time	45	20
Occupational level	Senior management	8	3
	Middle management	39	17
	Non-management	182	79
Education	Grade 12	44	17
	Certificate	37	16
	Diploma	57	25
	Degree	37	16
	Postgraduate	23	10
	Other	30	13
Age category	18 – 24	14	6
	25 – 34	78	34
	35 – 44	59	26
	45 – 54	62	27
	55 – 65	16	7

From Table 1, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents (54%) were female. In terms of employment status, most of the respondents (80%) were permanently employed. The majority (79%) of the respondents were non-managers, and many of the respondents (34%) were in the 25 to 34 age category. The minority (7%) of the respondents were in the 55 to 65 age category.

### Data collection

Primary data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire, which comprised two sections: Section A comprised variables described in Table 1, and Section B comprised five items from the determinants, job satisfaction, and positive emotions scales. The autonomy scale was taken from the study conducted by Patterson *et al.* (2005: 406), which had an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.67. The supervisory support scale was taken from Patterson *et al.* (2005: 406), which had an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88. The participation scale was also taken from Patterson *et al.* (2005: 406), which had an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.87. The work overload scale was taken from Riggs, Warka, Babasa, Betancourt and Hooker (1994: 797), which had an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89, and the job satisfaction scale was taken from Spector (1985: 693), which had an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89. The emotion scale was adopted from Burke, Brief, George, Roberson and Webster (1989:1102). The scale has three positive items and two negative items and an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.84. In this study, a continuous Likert scale from 1 to 7 was used, where 1 = strongly

disagree and 7 = strongly agree. After the questionnaire was developed, a pilot study was conducted with ten respondents. Thereafter, data were collected from October to November 2015.

### **Data analysis**

The collected data were captured in Excel and exported to STATA version 13 for data analysis. Categorical variables were summarised through frequencies and percentages and the mean and standard deviations were produced for the continuous variables. CFA and structural equation modelling (SEM) were used to test the two hypotheses of interest. A model with a p-value greater than 0.05 from the chi-square test indicated a good fit; whereas a value below 0.08 for the RMSE and a value above 0.9 for the CFI indicated a good fit (Maree, 2016: 246). The independent variables in the study were autonomy, participation, supervisory support, and workload, and the dependent variables were job satisfaction and positive emotions.

### **Validity and reliability**

Face validity was attained by piloting the questionnaire with ten respondents. In order to achieve content validity, the research instrument was presented and approved by five human resources scholars of the researchers' university's departmental research committee. CFA was performed to determine convergent validity. The instrument's reliability, measured using Cronbach's alpha values, as indicated in Table 2, were in the range 0.6 to 0.9, as recommended by Maree (2016: 239).

### **Ethical considerations**

Prior to the data collection, respondents were given a consent form to complete. In addition, respondents were not coerced to participate in the study, and to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, they were not requested to write their names on the questionnaire. The researchers were given ethical clearance by the ethics committee of the researchers' university.

## **STUDY RESULTS**

The descriptive and inferential statistics are presented in this section. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and factor loadings.

**TABLE 2**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND FACTOR LOADINGS**

Construct and scale item	Mean	Standard deviation	Standardised loadings	P>  z	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Autonomy</b>					
I am allowed to give input into everyday decision making in the organisation	3.60	2.25	0.78	0.00	0.8
I am encouraged to give feedback about work activities	4.50	2.16	0.73		
I am consulted before decisions are made	3.21	2.12	0.69		
I am involved in changes that are made in my department	3.39	2.22	0.75		
<b>Supervisory support</b>					
I have confidence in the ability of my supervisor	4.46	2.26	0.86	0.00	0.9
My supervisor listens to what I have to say	4.43	2.22	0.88		
I can rely on my supervisor to give me good advice	4.66	2.23	0.82		
My supervisor supports me with regard to work-related challenges	4.50	2.16	0.84		
My supervisor treats me fairly	4.53	2.40	0.73		
<b>Participation</b>					
I am able to modify what I am supposed to accomplish	4.54	2.02	0.81	0.00	0.7
I have control over the scheduling of my work	4.74	2.11	0.70		
<b>Work overload</b>					
The job that I am doing is too difficult for me	2.59	2.09	0.76	0.000	0.5
There are tasks that I have to perform that I cannot do well	2.94	2.14	0.66		
<b>Job satisfaction</b>					
I like the kind of work that I am doing	5.05	2.19	0.84	0.00	0.6
My work gives me a sense of personal accomplishment	5.10	2.03	0.84		
<b>Positive emotions</b>					
I feel proud of the work that I do	5.32	1.99	0.80	0.00	0.6
I am happy to come to work	4.92	2.17	0.63		

As can be observed, three out four mean scores of autonomy were below 4, suggesting that respondents disagreed that they were not given the opportunity to deliver inputs in decision making, they were not encouraged to give feedback, were not involved in the changes made in the department, and were not involved in the decision making in the department. Work overload mean scores were below 4. The results suggest that the respondents were not given difficult tasks. On the contrary, the mean scores of supervisory support and participation were above 4. The data suggested that the respondents agreed that they had confidence in their supervisors' ability, their supervisor listened to them, their supervisor supported them, and that their supervisor treated them fairly. With regards to participation, the data seem to suggest that respondents agreed that they were allowed modification on what they were supposed to accomplish and control over the scheduling of their work.

Job satisfaction and positive emotions mean scores were all above 4. In terms of the former, the data seem to suggest that respondents agreed that they liked their jobs, and the work they did gave them personal accomplishment. In terms of the latter, the data seem to suggest that respondents felt proud of the work they did and they were happy to come to work.

To test Hypothesis 1, CFA was conducted to test whether AET determinants, job satisfaction, and positive emotions were uni-dimensional, and the model that fitted the data best ( $\chi^2$  251.128;  $p < 0.001$ ; RMSEA = 0.079; CFI = 0.928), and as it can be observed from Table 3, items on loadings on their corresponding construct were high (i.e. ranging from 0.63 to 0.88) and significant at 0.05, demonstrating convergent validity. Based on this data, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Structural equation modelling was performed to test Hypothesis 2. The coefficients of the correlation between the determinants and job satisfaction and positive emotions are presented in Table 3:

**TABLE 3**  
**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AET DETERMINANTS AND JOB SATISFACTION AND POSITIVE EMOTIONS**

<b>Job satisfaction</b>			
<b>AET determinants</b>	<b>Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>P &gt;  z </b>	<b>Standardised coefficient</b>
Autonomy	0.23	0.07	0.22
Supervisory support	-0.28	0.01**	-0.30
Participation	-0.11	0.54	-0.10
Work overload	-0.21	0.09	-0.18
<b>Positive emotions</b>			
<b>AET determinants</b>	<b>Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>P &gt;  z </b>	<b>Standardised coefficient</b>
Autonomy	-0.23	0.04**	-0.25
Supervisory support	0.28	0.00***	0.34
Participation	0.59	0.00**	0.61
Work overload	0.12	0.23	0.11

**Notes:** \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

In total, one significant correlation was found between the AET determinants and job satisfaction, while three significant correlations were found between the AET determinants and positive emotions (see Table 3).

No significant relationships emerged between the determinants of autonomy, participation, and work overload with job satisfaction. The coefficient of supervisory support and job satisfaction is ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $p = 0.01^{**}$ ) and supervisory support and emotions is ( $\beta = 0.28$ ;  $p = 0.002^{**}$ ), which were low and in the opposite direction. Thus Hypothesis 2 cannot be supported.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether determinants related higher to job satisfaction than to positive emotions. From the findings above, only one AET determinant was seen to be significantly correlated with both job satisfaction and positive emotions. This finding is not similar to the study of Wegge *et al.* (2006: 240), where it was found that AET determinants correlated stronger with job satisfaction than with positive emotions. The results also showed that the mean scores of job satisfaction and positive emotions were above 4, suggesting that the respondents were happy to come to work and they were satisfied with the kind of work they were doing. The AET determinant that had low mean score was respondents' of autonomy. The data also showed a low positive correlation between autonomy and job satisfaction with ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $p = 0.073$ ), which was not significant. In the literature it was argued that employees who are given autonomy display job satisfaction (Abdullah and Shaw, 2007: 51; Al-Hamdan *et al.*, 2013: 271; Britnell, 2007:19; Mafini *et al.*, 2011: 151; Papanthanasoglou *et al.*, 2005: 160).

Using CFA, the study validated theoretical propositions that independent (i.e. autonomy, supervisory support, participation, and work overload) and dependent variables (i.e. job satisfaction and positive emotions) are distinguishable. This finding is similar to the study of Wegge *et al.* (2006: 248).

## STUDY LIMITATIONS, THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

The study had limitations. The convenience sampling technique inhibits the generalisability of sample findings to the greater population (Neuman, 2014: 168). When the researchers developed the research instrument, especially for emotions, only two items were selected. Hence, when conducting CFA, the items did not load as a factor. The other limitation was that the data-collection technique used was a self-completion questionnaire, and as a result participants could not ask the researchers questions if they did not understand some of the items.

In terms of future research, the researchers recommend that a similar study be conducted in other municipalities using probability sampling techniques so that their results are more generalisable. In terms of the municipal management, the following are recommended:

- Employees should be empowered to make decisions on their own;
- Employees should be involved when changes are made in the department and should be consulted before decisions are made; and
- Employees should be trained to perform difficult tasks.

The implication for management is that they might have disgruntled employees if they do not give them autonomy. The data showed that 24.89 per cent of the respondents had a diploma and 16.16 per cent had a degree. Dywili (2015:09) argued that more educated municipal workers displayed higher job satisfaction because they participated in the decision making about envisaged changes in their departments.



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