

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SATISFACTION WITH ON-THE-JOB TRAINING AND OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION

Steven W. Schmidt

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between satisfaction with employer-provided workplace training and overall job satisfaction. Survey completion data were obtained from 301 customer and technical service employees in nine different organizations. Job duties for employees in these positions are employer specific. As such, these employees rely on their employers for initial and ongoing job training. Organizations represented included those in manufacturing, technology, service, and government. A significant relationship was found between job training satisfaction and overall job satisfaction. Time spent in training, training methodologies, and type of training were determined to be significant in their relationships to job training satisfaction. The methodology used in training made a significant difference in job training satisfaction. Most preferred by respondents were methodologies that involved face-to-face interaction provided by an instructor or job coach. Also found were significant interactions between job tenure and employment type (customer service representative or technical service representative) when examined with job training satisfaction. Based on these findings, recommendations were made for practitioners in the fields of training and human resource development, as well as for managers of employees working in customer and technical service occupations.

Introduction and Purpose

Opportunities for training and development are major factors in decisions regarding peoples' careers. They are factors evaluated in the job hunting process by prospective employees, are cited in surveys as to why workers accept jobs with certain employers, and are noted as reasons why employees stay with an employer and why they leave one employer for another. Despite the importance of workplace training, many research studies on job satisfaction do not address satisfaction with workplace training as an element of overall job satisfaction, and many job satisfaction survey instruments do not include a "satisfaction with workplace training" component. They include Wood's (1986) Job Satisfaction measure, which examines satisfaction with information, variety and freedom, the ability to complete tasks, and pay and security. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI), an index described by Buckley and Carraher (1992) as "...instrumental in advancing knowledge about the job satisfaction construct" (p. 534) defines overall job satisfaction using six subscales: satisfaction with the work itself, supervision, coworkers, pay, and promotions.

Should satisfaction with job training in relation to overall job satisfaction be studied? Should it be included as a construct of overall job satisfaction? Bartlett (2001) found a positive relationship between workplace training and organizational commitment, and concluded that his study "...suggests that human resource development professionals can ...adapt new research methods to demonstrate to organizational decision makers that training and development contributes to desired workplace attitudes...which may in turn influence behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover" (p. 349). Other researchers have come to similar conclusions, and several have noted the importance of future research on workplace attitudes in relation to training (Bartlett, 2001; Tannenbaum, 1991). In his study of new employee training, Tannenbaum (1991) noted that "...training can induce positive or negative impressions and attitudes (which) trainees carry with them into the workplace" (p. 767). So important are

workplace attitudes, Bartlett (2001) argued, that they could even be considered as outcomes of training. Nordhaug (1989) studied reward functions that are inherent in training (from the employee perspective), and found that “The extent to which training actually contributes to generating individual rewards has, however, been virtually absent on the research agenda” (p. 374). Tansky and Cohen (2001) noted that while considerable research has been conducted on organizational commitment, satisfaction, coaching, and employee development as individual or organizational outcomes, “... very little research has been done on the relationship between organizational commitment, employee development, satisfaction with employee development and coaching” (p. 287). “Future research could focus on the construct validity of satisfaction with employee development as a new job satisfaction facet” (p. 296).

This research study added to the body of research on job training and job satisfaction by examining the following issues:

- What is the relationship between job training satisfaction and overall job satisfaction for employees who learn their jobs while on the job.
- What is the relationship between time spent in training, type of training, training methodology and satisfaction with workplace training.
- What are the relationships between a variety of demographic variables, including employment status, specific job type, job tenure, age, race/ethnicity, and gender and satisfaction with job training.

Research Methods and Procedures

To answer the research questions, a convenience sample of 552 customer and technical service employees in nine major organizations in the United States and Canada were given the Job Training and Job Satisfaction Survey, a 55-item, nine facet scale to assess employee attitudes about aspects of the job and aspects of job training. The job satisfaction aspects of this survey originate, in part, from Paul Spector’s (1997) Job Satisfaction Survey. Additional questions measure employee satisfaction with on-the-job training. Nine demographic questions are also included.

Organizations chosen for this study employ customer service and technical service representatives who provide service and support to either end (retail) customers or wholesale customers who both purchase and/or service the products or services provided by these organizations. All these employees learned their jobs on-the-job rather than in their preparatory education before employment. The Job Training and Job Satisfaction Survey was posted on the Internet. Respondents with Internet access were asked to complete the survey online. Those without were given paper copies of the survey. A total of 301 customer/technical service employees completed the survey, for a response rate of 55 percent (Schmidt, 2004).

Findings and Conclusions

A major research finding in this study was the high degree of relationship between job training satisfaction and overall job satisfaction among employees in customer/technical service positions. What does this result mean to employees, to organizations, and to researchers? From an employee standpoint, it means that training received is related to a significant portion of the

satisfaction experienced on the job. It means that employees value training, and deem it a necessary part of the job. Examined on another level, those employed in customer contact positions are often motivated by the ability to please their customers. Satisfaction with job training may allow them to be better able to do exactly that, which ties into both job satisfaction, and ultimately, customer satisfaction.

From an organizational standpoint, this strong relationship clearly demonstrates the value that customer contact employees place on job training, and the importance of the powerful tool that is job training. Organizations can take advantage of this tool, and the results will be better trained, more satisfied employees, as well as employees who are more valuable to the organization. Job training ultimately benefits both the employee and the organization.

For researchers, this study adds to the body of research on job training satisfaction and overall job satisfaction, but the type of employee studied puts a slight twist on the two topics. The study confirms that job training satisfaction is related to job satisfaction among employees in a wider variety of employment situations than previously studied.

Training methodology was found to be an important factor in the job training satisfaction equation. Respondents whose preferred training methodology was used most often were more satisfied with the training they received than respondents who preferred a methodology other than the one used most often in their job training. Although respondents had participated in all five methodologies noted in the survey (instructor-led training; one-on-one training; computer-based training; job shadowing, and self-study or video-based training), the methodology preferred predominantly by employees in this study was instructor-led training. This was the methodology most often received by these employees as well. Is instructor-led training the most preferred because it is the most received and people are most familiar with it? There are several reasons why this may not be the case. In further categorizing the training methodologies noted above, one could argue that instructor-led training, one-on-one training, and job shadowing are fairly similar in that they involve an instructor teaching a single student (in the case of one-on-one training) or students (in the case of formal, instructor-led classroom training), or in the case of job shadowing, an employee learns by observing and questioning an experienced employee or coach. All have similar characteristics, and all involve a higher degree of human interaction involving a learner and an employee with experience (an experienced employee, coach or instructor, for example) than computer-based training, job shadowing, or self-study (including video-based training). It was found that the methodologies involving an instructor or coach were preferred significantly more than the more solitary type methodologies (computer-based training, or self study including video-based training). One survey category of commonly-used methodologies, those of self-study or video-based training, was even found to negatively relate to job training satisfaction. The presence of an instructor with whom to interact, question, and problem-solve is important in the training of these types of employees. This may be because of the nature of the occupation itself. People in customer or technical service positions are often employed in those occupations because they enjoy interacting with people. It does not seem to make a difference whether the human interaction is with the customers of an organization or with an instructor or trainer in a learning environment.

Employees in their first year of employment were significantly more satisfied with the training they received than employees with job tenure of more than one year (regardless of the amount of tenure beyond one year). New employees (those within their first years on the job) also received significantly more training than employees with job tenure of more than one year. There are several possible explanations for this finding. New employees often go through a "honeymoon period" at their new jobs. They are often excited to be starting a new job, working

with new people, and undertaking new responsibilities. That overall excitement may translate into more positive opinions about all aspects of the job, including the job training they receive.

It is understandable that new employees receive more training than employees with more job tenure. New employees have much more to learn about the job itself than experienced employees, and as a result, there is more training-related attention focused on them. After some time on the job, the employee becomes seasoned, the training focus often moves to the next new employee, and satisfaction with job training for the existing employee wanes. This could ultimately affect the employee's job satisfaction, and possibly even the satisfaction of the customers with whom that employee interacts.

Employment status and position, when examined with job tenure, were important variables in job training satisfaction. Contract/temporary employees were significantly more satisfied with the job training they received when compared to permanent employees. Those in contract/temporary positions may be more satisfied with job training than permanent employees for several reasons. There were a disproportionate number of contract employees with job tenure of less than one year. The majority of permanent employees had been at their jobs for between 1-3 years. As such, a larger portion of contract employees, like all employees in their first year of employment, were more satisfied with the training they received than employees who had been on the job for more than one year (more of whom were permanent employees). The difference in satisfaction may also be based on the intentions of the contract/temporary employee. In some organizations, contract/temporary employees who perform at an exceptional level may be hired as permanent employees of the organization. Enthusiasm for training may be an employee's way of proving himself or herself to the organization and of showing interest in a permanent position with the organization. Contract employees, like all other employees, also may go through a "honeymoon period" when they start their jobs, during which time everything is exciting and new. This too may explain the greater satisfaction they receive in their job training. On the other end of the job tenure spectrum, the finding again highlights the need for training opportunities for experienced employees.

When examined with job tenure, there were significant differences in job training satisfaction between employees in customer service positions and employees in technical service positions. Customer service employees and technical service employees spend approximately the same amount of time in training. Differences in job training satisfaction between the two groups were not significant until job tenure is factored in to the equation. Technical service representatives have more dramatic differences in job training satisfaction based on their job tenure. This points to the importance of lifelong learning at all levels of job tenure, and to the different needs of employees at different levels of job tenure. Time spent in training may also be a factor to consider. One may not think that time spent in training would be a reason for this difference, but the fact that both groups spend the same amount of time in training may be an issue. Technical service representatives must be very familiar with the workings and the mechanics of their organization's products. They must be up-to-date on the latest remedies and solutions for addressing customer needs. The issues they face on the job can depend on their organization's manufacturing efforts, which may continuously be changing. As such, employees in these positions may require more training than their customer service counterparts.

Recommendations

Recommendations based on this research can be made to those involved in the training, development, and management of employees in call center customer/technical service occupations.

- Satisfaction with job training should be considered as an aspect of overall job satisfaction. Practitioners interested in improving job satisfaction among their employees should, in part, focus on job training as a way to improve job satisfaction.
- Employees at all levels of job tenure should be given opportunities to learn and grow. Those opportunities may be specifically related to the job, or they may be related to personal or professional development. Longer-tenured employees have different training needs than inexperienced employees. They may require more advanced or in-depth training. Strategies should be developed that ensure that all employees continuously learn and grow throughout their careers.
- The importance of experienced workers can also be examined from a diversity standpoint. Although this research study showed no significant differences in satisfaction with job training among employees of diverse populations, demographics show that there are very few older workers in customer/technical service positions. A majority of respondents were also female and Caucasian. As the general population becomes more diverse so too should organizations that provide products and/or services to the public. This is especially important to those in customer/technical service occupations, who deal directly with an organization's customers. Organizations are continuously expanding their markets and targeting to different market segments. In order to best meet the needs of diverse customers, a workplace of diverse employees is important.
- Customer contact center managers have a great deal of influence regarding the job training of their employees. They are in good positions to recommend training and to act as coaches for their employees. Managers should make job coaching, and training and development coaching, a priority. Results will benefit the employee, the manager, and the organization.
- Managers should be sure that the training provided to customer and technical service employees meets the individual needs of each group. This study showed that those needs may be different based on job description as well as employment status. Training for all customer contact employees should not be entirely the same. Those who are expected to know more technical aspects of an organization's products may require more (and different) training in order to meet customers' needs.
- Managers should do whatever they can to make outsourced or contract employees feel they're part of the organization. Contract workers may work harder at their positions in hopes that they will eventually become permanent employees of the organization. Managers can make good decisions about hiring their contract workers as permanent employees based on how they perform in the contract employee role.

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Steven W. Schmidt, Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (414) 343-4660; steve.schmidt@harley-davidson.com

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