

# LEADERSHIP SKILLS, JOB SATISFACTION, AND MOTIVATION IN THE WORKPLACE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH STUDY

Sharon M. Johnson and Subhashis Nandy

Corresponding authors:

University of Phoenix

Sharon M. Johnson 2030 N.W. 88 Way, Pembroke Pines, FL 33024, jsharon@bellsouth.net

University of Phoenix

Subhashis Nandy subasnandy@email.phoenix.edu

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of leaders and how their leadership skills may influence employees' job satisfaction and motivation in the workplace. Exploration of the perspectives of the leaders offers an understanding of the research questions in the study. A sample of 24 leaders participated in the qualitative phenomenological study. The analysis and findings of the qualitative phenomenological study established certain core themes. The themes emerged in the areas of leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction. The interrelation of the themes forms the foundation for optimizing leadership opportunities in the workplace. Recommendations include the improvement of motivation, leadership, and job satisfaction. The overall finding in this research study is that perception of leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction varies among the leaders. The responses revealed a significant relationship between motivation, leadership, and job satisfaction from the leaders' views and experiences. Leadership styles, qualities, knowledge, and skills are determinants in the relationship between the leader and the follower that impact motivation, leadership, and job satisfaction. The findings of the current qualitative phenomenological study lead to various recommendations regarding perceptions of leaders and how their leadership skills influence employees' job satisfaction and motivation in the workplace.

**Keywords:** leadership, motivation, job satisfaction, leaders, leadership skills, qualitative, phenomenology.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Good leadership is the application of emotional intelligence skills that leaders must learn to use effectively (Hess and Bacigalupo, 2013). The new direction of leadership theories is important when addressing leadership skills of leaders and how employees' job satisfaction and motivation are influenced (DeRue, Barnes, and Morgenson, 2010). Konorti (2008) postulated that other scholars' described leadership as a movement with traits and physical characteristics and determined no specific definition of leadership exists. To understand leadership is to understand how the elements of leadership work within organizational environments. According to Konorti (2008), leadership has interpretation as a complex and dynamic enigmatic process. de Jong and Hartog (2007) labeled leadership as an influential process to get desired results from followers. Lord and Dinh (2012) proposed a process approach that focused on the nature of emergent processes as a method to comprehend important characteristics of leadership theories. Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden and Hu (2014) further defined the emergent processes as global, compositional and compilational. These researchers elucidated global processes of leadership as that which influence the performances of teams as a whole unit. Dinh, et al. (2014) defined compositional processes of leadership as those processes that influence teams of different composition. Further, according to these authors, compilational processes of leadership allow the leaders to morph the individual performances into superior team performances.

Subramony and Holtom (2012) showed that poorly motivated and trained employees could increase costs for an organization. These increased costs come from employee attrition and turnovers, which could lead to lower customer satisfaction levels. According to Subramony et al. (2012), these situations would ultimately have negative

effects on customer outcomes and future financial performance of business. Molina, Gonzalez, Slorencio, and Conzalez (2014) documented that implementation of Balanced Score Card (Kaplan, 2010) by an organization was significantly related to positive employees' affective reactions. The implementation of Balanced Scorecard allowed the employees to be aware of the strategic factors that were crucial for the success of the organization (Molina et al. 2014).

Voluntary turnovers by poorly motivated employees had been associated with financial performance (Glebeek and Bax, 2004), decrease in unit-level efficiency (Morrow and McElroy, 2007), customer-service outcomes (Hausknecht, Trevor and Howard, 2009). Poorly motivated employees led to increased costs of operation of an organization Subramony et al. (2012). The general problem is that there is no documented study available in the existing literature showing a distinctive relationship between a leader's leadership skills and job satisfaction and motivation of the employees at the workplace in the United States.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Kreitner and Kinicki (2007) showed that job satisfaction occurred when employees adored their job. Job satisfaction was the compilation of moods and viewpoints that people feel about existing jobs (George and Jones, 2008). Robbins and Judge (2009) defined job satisfaction as an affirmative impression of tasks resulting from evaluating its characteristics. Nelson and Quick (2009) defined job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 56).

According to Klassen, Usher, and Bong (2010) job satisfaction was a significant construct in emotional and psychological wellbeing of teachers. Astrauskaitė, Vaitkevičius, and Perminas (2011) stated that job satisfaction as a research topic had generated significant interest among scientists, researchers, and practitioners.

Luthans (2011) defined job satisfaction by using three different dimensions:

1. Emotional response to a job
2. Results or outcome of a job
3. Different attitudes associated with job satisfaction.

These characteristics are of importance dealing with job satisfaction, such as the following: coworkers, salary, promotional opportunities, and supervision. The relationship between performance and job satisfaction has been deliberated substantially. The central point was to attempt and establish if employees' who were satisfied with their work performed better than those who were dissatisfied. Recent studies had shown that performance and satisfaction did not influence each other; however, there was some correlation that job satisfaction might have a larger influence over the improvement of organizations (Luthans, 2011).

Sledge, Miles, and Van Sambeek (2011) described job satisfaction as the foundation of widespread scholastic research, and it has interconnection to positive employee outcomes and productivity. Sledge et al. (2011) postulated that satisfied employees experienced motivation and work-related satisfaction - which contributed to life satisfaction. Belias and Koustelios (2014) documented that in the banking industry - job satisfaction was related to the employees' relations with their colleagues and superiors. Shurbagi and Ali (2014) showed from their empirical study conducted in the petroleum sector that the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction was positive and significant.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of leaders and how their leadership skills might influence employees' job satisfaction and motivation. Lussier and Achua, as cited in Mardanov, Heischmidt, & Henson, (2008) reported that approximately 77% of employees were unhappy with their current jobs in the United States.

To develop an improved understanding of the leaders' lived experiences and perceptions of leadership skills and how they might influence the job satisfaction and motivation of employees in the workplace a qualitative research method was adopted. A quantitative research method was not considered for this study, because it would not have been as effective as the qualitative method in collecting rich responses from the participants.

The population for this study employed 24 leaders, who were in attendance at a conference in the Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The population included managers, directors, administrators, chairperson, and supervisors. Experience in leadership for 5-10 years managing people and projects is the core requirement for leaders' to participate in this research study. All participants had 8 or more years of experience managing people and projects in leadership positions and were 21 years of age or older. Participants did not receive any monetary offers for participating in the study.

The basis for selecting these leaders as the sampling group was their experiences, perceptions, knowledge of leadership behaviors, motivational factors, and job satisfaction when working with employees. Leadership roles include managers, CEO, directors, administrators, supervisors and officers who have dealt with leadership, motivation and encountering employees with job satisfaction. The population group provided a diverse cross-spectrum of lived experiences and perceptions of leadership in their positions.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This qualitative phenomenological research study posed three significant questions to address lived experiences of leaders who have managed people and projects for approximately 5-10 years. The intent of the research questions is to explore, describe, and interpret perceptions of how their leadership styles and behaviors might influence employees' job satisfaction and motivation in the workplace and are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of leaders on leadership styles and behaviors that influence employees' levels of job satisfaction?
2. How do the perception of leaders on leadership styles and behaviors influence employees' motivation?
3. What are the perception of the leaders on relationship between leadership behaviors and motivational factors that influence job satisfaction?

## DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through data analysis four dominant themes emerged (Table 1) from this research study. In the descending order of response frequencies from the interviewed leaders these are as follows: working with people, education and effective training, leadership style, and sacrifices. The perception of leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction varies among the leaders. The responses show that there is a significant relationship to motivation, leadership, and job satisfaction from the ways in which leaders view their position and experiences. Leadership styles, qualities, knowledge, and skills are determinants in the relationship between the leader and the follower that impact motivation, leadership, and job satisfaction.

Table 1 - *Themes*

<b>Themes and Descriptions</b>
1. Working with people was mentioned by some of the leaders as important to motivate employees.
2. Education, experience, and training are all important to motivate employees to perform well in their jobs.
3. Leadership styles are significant and influence how leaders influence employees' motivation and job satisfaction.
4. The three sacrifices revealed by the leaders that they had to make are family time, long hours, and time.

Sakiru, D'Silva, Othman, DaudSilong, and Busavo (2013) documented that transformational leaders enhance job satisfaction of employees from their study conducted in Nigeria. The findings from the current qualitative study are in agreement with the research findings from the study of Sakiru et al. (2013). Khuong and Hoang (2015) conducted research in auditing industry in Vietnam and observed a strong influence of leadership styles in retaining and developing employee motivation. The results obtained from the current research work is in agreement with the results from the research work of Khuong et al. (2015), which. Rawat (2015) showed from a study conducted in India that transformational leaders motivate their employees to exceed performance expectations.

Rawat (2015) also documented that there was significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee's morale and motivation. The results from the current study were along the lines of the findings from the research work of Rawat (2015). The importance of the current research is that a significant relationship between leadership styles, qualities, knowledge, skills and employee job satisfaction has been obtained from a qualitative research work completed in the United States, which did not exist in the literature prior to this study.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS ON LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Results of the study can be used to improve leader qualities in leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction. Increased job satisfaction could lead to positive effects on customer outcomes and future financial performance of business (Subramony et al. 2012). Leaders can use similar studies as an opportunity to create innovative perspectives on leadership skills to improve relationship with employees. New knowledge gained from this study will help human resource and other organizational leadership understands the importance of leadership skills in the workplace. Leaders can consider using assessment tools to understand the effectiveness of leadership styles. Leaders can develop more interactive sessions to understand employee's needs. Incorporation of the themes can expand and maximize the understanding of the impact of leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction. Leaders can institute an open communication platform to establish ways to appreciate and recognize employees.

Limitations of this study include the number of participants in the study. Other limitations include the selected group of participants and the timeframe that the participants had to participate in the interview sessions. Some of the participants might have needed more time to express their lived experiences and perceptions about their leadership skills and how those skills might influence employees' job satisfaction and motivation in the workplace.

A future study could explore leadership training and evaluations on job satisfaction. Study could also include exploring the factors that could impact motivation and job-satisfaction. More research questions could focus on what types of leadership training are more effective to motivate leaders to be more influential. Future research can focus on the comparison of the leaders and employees perceptions of leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction.

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Dr. Sharon Johnson has been working for the federal government for over 20 years. She is an adjunct professor, a certified motivational coach, speaker, and trainer with the John Maxwell Team, and a certified Human Behavior Consultant. She has received a Doctorate degree in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix.

Dr. Subhashis Nandy is a faculty member with the School of Advanced Studies at University of Phoenix. He teaches courses in Quantitative Methods, Strategic Management, and Operations Management. He is the author of several research papers published in refereed professional journals.