

# Determinants of Employee Job Satisfaction in a Public Organisation in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal

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**Abstract:** This study assesses factors that determined employee job satisfaction at the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) in the Pietermaritzburg office of the KwaZulu-Natal Province. The intention of this study is to recommend workable strategies and mechanisms that can be considered by SASSA as they enhance their organisational development and employee standards. The two-factor theory of Herzberg was applied to comprehend the motivating issues that might determine the fulfilment and discontentment of workers at work. The case of SASSA is used to fill a gap in the literature regarding work values and to provide lessons that can be learnt by other organisations that aspire to improve employee job satisfaction. In order to respond to the aim of this study, the data was collected and analysed using a mixed research methodology. A purposive sample was drawn from the employees who had interest and understanding of job satisfaction using mainly interviews and questionnaires. The findings that the political and socio-economic factors have a potential to limit SASSA from offering a suitable and viable healthy working environment, hence job satisfaction might not be realised. Even though it was revealed that some employees were dissatisfied with their working conditions, none of them were planning to leave their jobs. The findings of this study contribute towards the understanding of job satisfaction aspects of human resources management.

**Keywords:** Employee relations, job satisfaction, job performance, working environment.

## INTRODUCTION

Organisational resources are imperative for an organisation's success and growth in the changing and globalised world of work. The employees, being one of the key assets of an organisation, need to be valued; as certain factors can impact on their work adversely or positively. Employees have more flexibility to seek for jobs that motivate them to increase growth and profits of the organisation they work for. However, they can also have an adverse effect on the input of employees' work in an organisation. Mafini (2018) states that there is a need to assess employee attitudes towards work in South Africa in order close the existing gap in the research that probes employee values in South Africa. According to Javed (2014), organisations must make sure that the morale of employees is in a healthy state and it is of great significance for every organisation, in that happy employees can be productive at work when they take rests and when they are not over-worked.

Knowledgeable employers would do well to note the various features of individuals which when expanded, will keep the individual's fulfilment great and get them to perform their best. Inuwa (2016) in his study asserted that organisational success hinges on how effective and well-organised the individuals are.

Individual capacity to comprehend employees' contentment relating to their daily responsibilities and duties can have a great impact on individuals' output and performance. In addition, the current business environmental changes in South Africa compel organisations to investigate diverse strategies that can improve the productivity and performance of employees at work. Iwu, Gwija, Benedict, Tengeh and Robertson (2013) note that highly improved employee job satisfaction is imperative to improve employee performance which can enhance organisational development.

Anju and George (2011) are of the view that companies which are looking at various ways to respond to the global changes and business competitiveness do so by managing human resources and making employees feel worthwhile. Organisations are also compelled by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and globalism to respond to the competitive environmental factors and internal factors that to some extent influence how companies can manage their human resources. This study reports on the extent to which employees at the SASSA offices in Pietermaritzburg are valued by assessing factors that contributes towards employee job satisfaction. This study conceptualised job satisfaction, surveyed literature on current studies on employee job satisfaction, discussed and analysed data thematically, provided conclusions and suggested recommendations.

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**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Conceptualising Employee Job Satisfaction**

Employee job satisfaction is concerned with the way workers feel about their work. Job satisfaction can be referred to as an individual’s opinion on how his/her job is worth in as far as his/her physiological and monetary needs are met. When the individual’s needs are met, the employee will have a sense of satisfaction in as far as his or her job is concerned (Ganesan, Ling and Mun, 2017). Different organisations are challenged to determine the extent of the potential employee satisfaction, communication and inducement levels among staff, and how these affect them in their work tasks and in achieving their overall organisational goals. According to Javed, Balouch and Hassan (2014), employee job satisfaction depends on numerous structures in their employment and working environment. The extent to which an employee is satisfied can be observed through his/her general feeling about work and the working environment. Job satisfaction measures his or her approach towards the job and how it rewards the employee’s physiological desires. In order for the organisation to be successful the management must make sure that their employees are satisfied.

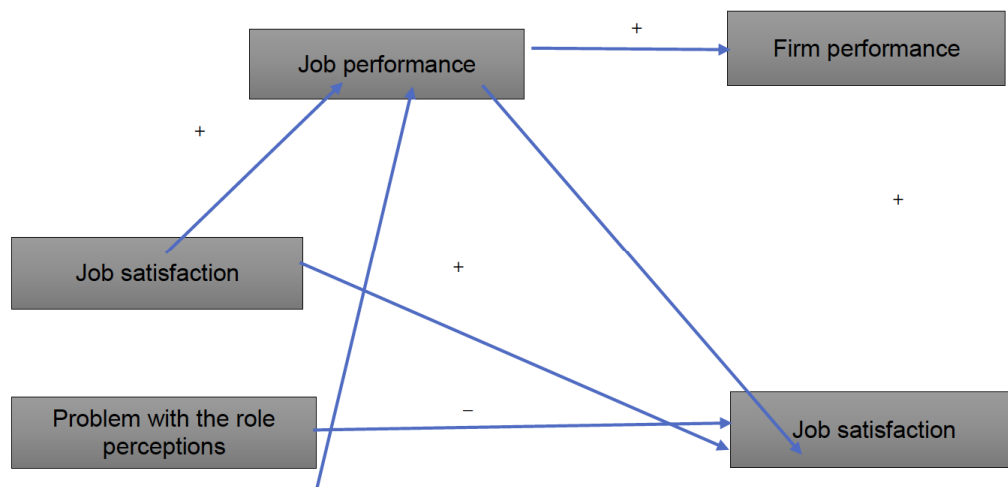
McPhail, Patiar, Herington, Creed and Davidson (2015) revealed that the importance of job satisfaction is linked with some major organisational factors. Some of the significant factors resulting from employee job satisfaction include self-confidence and loyalty which in turn lead to employees having a positive attitude towards their work. Jing, Keasey, Lim and Xu (2019)

believe that lower satisfaction levels can result from a deteriorating work–life balance and some other factors like a lack of career progression. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors can affect job satisfaction and can have either positive or negative effect on the organisational performance, thus having consequences for the employees.

Education is one of the elements that can have an impact on employee job performance. Having theoretical knowledge can improve the way one makes decisions and relate to people, and this can create strong optimism and consequently improved employee job performance. If an individual has been placed in the right job, there is room for a direct relationship to performance. Some employees are committed and motivated when they can relate well with others and with the entire organisation (Shmailan, 2016). Workers can further create a bond with an organisation when they are connected to their career, interacting better with colleagues and the organisation (Shmailan, 2016). Profits and losses of the organisation can be determined by job performance. Hence, most organisations are emphasising development and boosting the performances of individuals at work in order to secure their income (Ahmad, Ing and Bujang, 2014).

A job satisfaction model is presented in Figure 1 below.

Aziri (2011) posits that job satisfaction epitomises a combination of optimistic and non-optimistic or negative feelings experienced by workers in their line of duty. Job satisfaction signifies the extent to which



**Figure 1:** A Typical Job Satisfaction Model.  
 Source: Christen, Iyer and Soberman (2006:138).

opportunities and desires at work are matched with the outcomes and indicators that are linked to the individual's behaviour at work.

**Motivational Factors**

Motivation is an important aspect that drives employees to work and acquire desired efforts from them and realise their own goals and that of the organisation. Urošević, Milijić, Maljković and Karabašević (2016), are of the view that motivational aspects are supposed to be linked to the desires of the individual's needs at different levels at work. At the level where employees are challenged by various factors, they need more motivation than ever.

Employees are generally demotivated when management does not value them or provide enough recognition to them. Hence, their achievements are limited, and employees may not progress to better positions. This reduces their feeling of belonging to the organisation and thereby results in negative productivity at work. Employees influence the social arrangement of an organisation since they are social beings that affiliate to various social structures like families and workers' unions. According to Dartey-Baah (2010), nowadays workers have more knowledge about their rights and how they can socially organise themselves to protect their interests. Based on Herzberg's motivation theory, the job itself must be the focus in order to respond to the challenge of motivation. Herzberg's and Maslow's motivation theories have similarities in as far as survival or basic needs are concerned. The Herzberg hygienic factors are similar to Maslow's basic needs. Motivation factors have two categories known as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Nel, Wener, Haasbroek, Poisat, Sono, and Shultz, 2009). Extrinsic motivation can take the form of external factors, and they can be resolute in financial terms, benefits, bonuses, incentives and promotions, while the intrinsic motivation can be regarded as the internal factors that include responsibility and accountability, job satisfaction and freedom to act.

**Table 1: Comparison of Herzberg and Maslow Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs	Herzberg two-factor theory
Self-actualisation	Motivators
Ego	Hygienic
Social	
Safety	
Physiological	

Source: Nel et al. (2009).

It should be noted that there are diverse aspects that can impact on the business productivity positively and negatively when some of the above-mentioned factors are not well attended to. This could be due to intended or unintended stimulation of the motivation factors towards employee wellbeing in the socio-economic dimension of his/her life that is sometimes not manageable through a job that is not meaningful to the employee.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

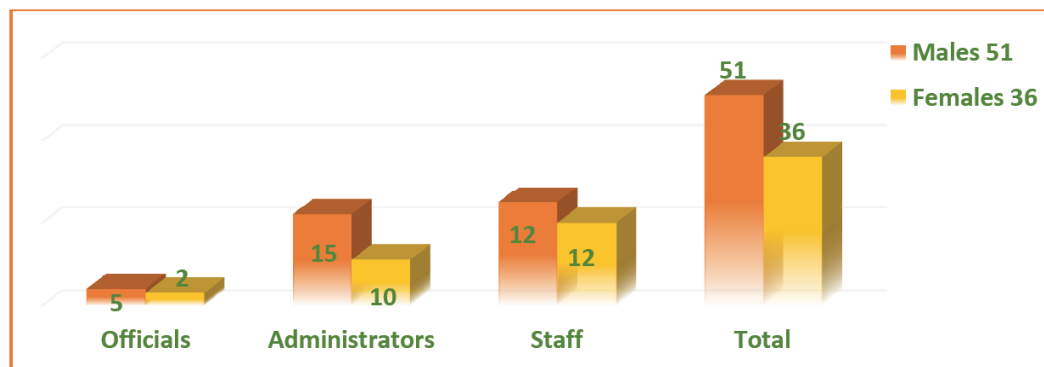
This study adopted a case study design to examine factors that influence the job satisfaction of SASSA employees with the intention to assess strategies that can improve how the organisation can assist employees to achieve job satisfaction and improve their performance at work. The researchers received ethical clearance and permission from the university ethics committee and the management at SASSA to conduct this study. The data was collected using mainly semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The SASSA Pietermaritzburg office was the study's location from where the population and sample were drawn. The researchers distributed 100 questionnaires and performed semi-structured interviews with ten participants composed of SASSA managers and officials, staff and administrators, experts and secretaries. The intention of using a deductive approach was not to generalise the findings but to offer some insights that could serve as lessons for other organisations to learn from. Maree (2011) is of the view that the use of a case study approach offers a practical view of the real world, especially when the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clearly defined. The researcher tested the validity of the instrument used for collecting data by conducting a pilot study which also confirmed the suitability of using interviews and questionnaires for data collection in this study. A mixed research method was adopted to collect data which was later thematically analysed. A convenient sample was drawn from the target population of SASSA employees. In keeping with ethical requirements, during this research, researchers protected the identity and privacy of participants. Participants were not exposed to any danger or harm. This research report considered ethics such as truth and honesty during all the phases of conducting this study.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

A case study design fits well to this study since its aim is to understand the phenomenon using both a

**Table 2: Overview of Completed Questionnaires**

Classifications	Distributed	Returned	Spoilt	Analysed
Public officials	10	7	0	7
Administrators	45	33	0	33
Staff	45	38	22	38
Total	100	78	22	78

**Figure 2:** Biographical details.

natural setting and descriptive approach (Maree, 2018). A mixed methodology was adopted to collect data, which was later thematically and statistically analysed. Out of 100 questionnaires that were distributed, 78 were returned, and that constituted 78 per cent of the overall responses. According to Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2014), a sample size can be determined by the nature of the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, they advise researchers to draw an aggregate percentage of 45 per cent if a sample is composed of 200 individuals.

Out of 87 participants, 51 were males and 36 were females. Even though the gender is not balanced, according to the overall score of the participants, it was interesting to note that both males and females are concerned about job satisfaction.

### Factors Determining Job Satisfaction

Participants were probed on the factors influencing job satisfaction at SASSA, and they responded differently by relating how they understood job satisfaction and their experiences at work. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse data and some of the responses were grouped into themes. Khalaf, Hmoud, Obeidat (2019), reveal in their study that, Herzberg (1968) advocates that intrinsic job satisfaction elements include achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, growth, and the job itself. In the interviews and questionnaires, aspects such as

the working environment, leadership styles, relations at work and employee growth and promotions were ranked by the interviewees as they were considered to contribute to job satisfaction.

### Work Environment and Job Satisfaction

Of the participants who were asked to rate how they agree with the statement that the working environment is motivating them to work, 42.3 per cent of them agreed that there were adequate conditions relating to work, while 30.8 per cent of participants indicated that they were not certain about whether the environment was conducive and motivating them to work or not. When participants were asked to rate the statement that the Leadership Style affects them at work, 12.8 per cent of the participants also indicated that they strongly agreed, and 9.0 per cent disagreed, while the minority of 2.3 per cent of respondents strongly disagreed with the above statement. The figures show that employees at SASSA are working under a favourable environment which can boost their level of performance. It is believed that the more encouraging the environment is, the better the worker performance and productivity will be. Nanzushi (2013), confirms this as he states that the elements of the work environment affect employee performance. Since the employees' satisfaction contributes towards accomplishment of the business objectives, it is vital to ensure that they have healthy working conditions.

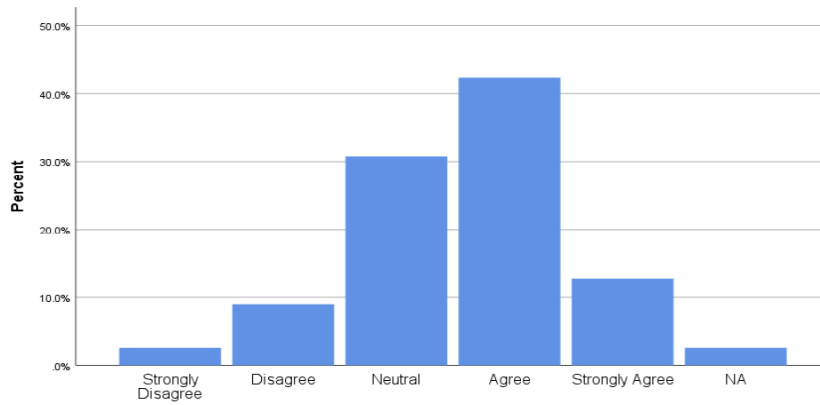


Figure 3: Work environment.

The 40 per cent of respondents who were surveyed revealed that they were exposed to a healthy environment at SASSA as opposed to the ten per cent that disagreed with that. However, a few respondents that were probed through interviews revealed mixed feelings about their working environment. The working environment that is conducive is said to motivate employees at work and is regarded as adding value to the individual’s life. When employees enjoy a higher level of job satisfaction, then it enhances the morale of individuals in the organisation and, in turn, boosts the self-confidence of other employees. Unhappy workers influence other employees negatively and can also ‘demoralise’ the organisation. Mishra (2013) is of the view that when working conditions are improved, individuals feel less tired and their job satisfaction level increases. Consistent with this view, Mafini (2014) suggests that organisations conduct surveys to track employee satisfaction-life binary in order to improve how employee can be valued at work.

The participants were surveyed on how leadership style affects employee satisfaction. Of the respondents, 60 per cent agreed with the statement that leadership styles can influence the way employees work and get

motivated at times, and 20 per cent of the respondents also strongly agreed with the statement that leadership styles have an influence over job satisfaction. Alegre, Mas-Machuca and Berbegal-Mirabent (2015) agree that the leadership style of an employee’s supervisor and manager’s behaviour absolutely affects the employee’s perception about the job expectations and rewards. When managers and supervisors provide support that is cheerful to their subordinates and show their subordinates that they care, a solid determinant of the employee’s assertiveness in the direction of his or her job can be achieved. Participants also explained how SASSA offered services to improve their wellbeing and thereby helped them to cope with the working environment. Some of the support services offered at SASSA included employee’s wellness programmes from Human Capital, online leave policies, counselling and opportunities for furthering their studies.

**Relationships and Job Satisfaction**

The interviewees at SASSA were not open enough about the state of their relationships with the managers and with one another when they were interviewed. A few respondents indicated that relationships were

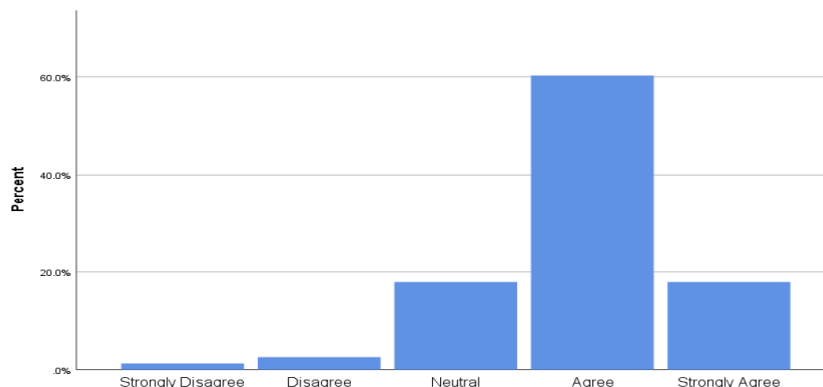


Figure 4: Leadership style.

inconsistent between them and the managers since they were organised workers that affiliate to a workers' union. The reason for such reaction emanates from their roles during negotiations for fringe benefits since managers and employees can sometimes show conflicting ideas in decision-making when bargaining for fringe benefits even though they are all working towards achieving the organisational goals.

Social factors also have an impact on the satisfaction level of the employees. Based on the questionnaires, 31 per cent of participants indicated that recognition and approval were important for employee job satisfaction. Employees' relationships in an organisation play a vital role in the performance of each individual: 55 per cent of respondents indicated that employees relate well with each other and have healthy relationships, they are supportive, and their spirit of collegiality is very high. It is vital to create a positive atmosphere within the workplace, where co-workers are able to interact with one another in a pleasant and informal manner. It is noted that 50 per cent of the respondents indicated that their supervisors were approachable to discuss work related issues.

Inuwa (2016) agrees that relations affect the performance of employees in respect of their duties. He also mentioned that practices of compensation, performance appraisals and practices relating to promotion can influence the performance level of workers. According to Anitha (2013), the performance of a dissatisfied employee is detrimental to overall organisational performance. Furthermore, working conditions, compensation techniques, and engagement of an employee influence performance. The performance of an employee offers room for innovativeness among individuals and their general organisational performance, in such a manner that the good work accomplished yields ground-breaking concepts for newer services. It also increases the performance quality and satisfaction level of the workers as a whole.

### **Employee Growth and Promotion**

This study revealed that employee's growth is viewed as significant in the employee's life. Researchers found that the higher satisfaction of employee on career-paths is viewed as different from how they would be recognised as adding value to the organisations. Respondents from the interviews also revealed that each of the benefits is viewed to be different in their significance and how they serve the

organisation at times and that is not regretted. Similarly, Daud (2015), agrees that promotion and growth add huge value towards their contribution in the organisation.

It is important to consider individual characteristics/biographical information in this study. The individual characteristics that have been examined in relation to job satisfaction include, qualification, age, and years of experience, all of which have been found to have a positive association with job satisfaction. Higher academic qualification, age, and years of experience have also been found in this study to correlate strongly with greater job satisfaction.

Daud (2016), asserts that the relationship between managers and employees has a vital role in determining the individual's job satisfaction. The nature of work and responsibility is found to influence employee's job satisfaction as it is shown that 74 per cent of the respondents indicated that their workload is manageable and is also well understood by employees. In this study, the researcher found that organisation is concerned with diverse businesses that rewards its employees through salary which is well-matched to the employees' needs and that correlate with organisational mission. Salary that matches the employees' needs has been found to be a factor that adds value to the life of the individuals.

A total of 44 per cent of respondents indicated that fringe benefits influence the job satisfaction levels of employees. In addition, training and development in an organisation play a positive role for the success of the organisation and the well-being of the employee. Further, 36 per cent of participants also indicated that where knowledge and innovation in an organisation is very low, the organisation should enhance employee capacity to perform better in an organisation.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study assessed factors that impact on employee job satisfaction. It was revealed from the study that financial rewards, while important, were not ranked high as an important aspect that motivates workers to work at SASSA. Literature suggested that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors are driving forces for the employees' job satisfaction. Based on the responses from the empirical research, it was also noted that the employees would want to feel valued and included by their managers and leaders at work. Managers are also requested to communicate



constantly and relate better with their subordinates to improve work relations. Other values that appeared to be significant were associated with work environment and leadership support, growth and promotion. It should be noted that even though a few employees were dissatisfied with the way they were valued at SASSA, they did not mention any plans for leaving the organisation. As Maslow had identified in his Hierarchy of Needs theory and evident in this study, human beings have different needs at different phases of their lives.

This study offers lessons to be learnt by SASSA managers and employees on the emerging factors that can be considered for improving employee satisfaction and their performance at work. There is still a room for further research on each of the factors identified as influencing job satisfaction. This study recommends that managers should exercise an open-door policy so that employees are able to divulge their concerns about working conditions in order to improve organisational performance. The lack of motivational factors can be detrimental to the success of the organisation, hence managers must provide various ways to motivate employees towards achieving a good environmental climate to enhance organisational goals. Employees must be trained continuously so that they can improve their skills and do their job well. This study further recommends that the management engages with the employees to assess what satisfies them most at work. A survey can be conducted annually to assess what employees regard as adding value to them so that the managers can address dissatisfaction of employees regarding incentives and fringe benefits.

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