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Fitting the Professional to the Job: Idealism and Realism

by
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This article examines a number of factors related to job satisfaction among financial aid professionals. How well the job matches the individual's expectations of employment, regardless of intrinsic or extrinsic job orientation, accounts for the greater proportion of explained job satisfaction. The implications of these findings for management of financial aid offices are discussed. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Southwestern Sociological Association.

The financial aid office performs a critical function on almost every college campus. In fiscal year 1982, 7.4 million students received over \$10 billion dollars in student aid from public sources (Griffith, 1986). Billions of dollars more in scholarships and other forms of institutional aid were distributed to students. Efficient functioning of the financial aid office is a critical factor for each student applicant receiving aid, for the institution educating that student, and for the society that requires an educated work force and electorate. Financial aid offices that have a greater number of satisfied workers are more likely to perform the functions on which so much is dependent for the individual student, the educational institution, and society. Job fit is a critical factor in determining how satisfied the staff in a financial aid office is going to be.

The social climate of the financial aid office is critical to an efficient and productive working environment. Job satisfaction is an important indicator of the degree to which office personnel work well together. Fitting an individual to the job may be a key element in creating a highly motivated and satisfied financial aid staff. The extent to which an available financial aid position fits an applicant's personal expectations of employment may be a critical factor in job satisfaction. Efforts to improve job satisfaction for existing staff may fail, if changes do not fit with staff expectations.

It is proposed in this paper that job satisfaction among financial aid professionals is dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic job characteristics (Herzberg et.al., 1959) and the degree to which the financial aid position fits with the needs of the individual. Are financial aid staff members with ideal extrinsic or intrinsic job orientations more or less likely to report satisfaction with their positions? Are ideal intrinsic or extrinsic orientations as important as job fit in determining job satisfaction? Answers to these questions will help with selection criteria for prospective financial aid professionals and efforts to improve job satisfaction for current professionals.

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Financial Aid and Job Fit: Recent Research

Job satisfaction for financial aid professionals, like other professionals, can be affected by a number of job-related factors. The extent to which the job fits with the expectations of the financial aid professional, the degree to which communication with superiors is perceived to be open or closed (Short and Matlock, 1984a, 1984b), clarity of job definition (NASFAA, 1983; Anton et al., 1981; Meyerson, 1981), and need satisfaction (Clement and White, 1983) are factors which have been identified in previous research. The large number of factors suggests that there may be an underlying dimension that may account for the diversity of variables associated with job satisfaction. Job fit, a variable that bridges ideal/real and intrinsic/extrinsic job characteristics, may be that underlying dimension.

The overall literature concerning job satisfaction and job fit of financial aid professionals is limited. Clement and White (1983), using the Porter Need Satisfaction Questionnaire, found that higher level managers tend to have more fit between basic job needs (esteem, autonomy, knowledge) and the perception that these needs were being fulfilled by the current job. "Generally speaking, directors and associate directors reported less difference in their response to what 'is' and what 'should be' than did the other positions surveyed" (Clement and White, 1983, p. 12). NASFAA (1983) data have indicated that some financial aid directors still devote a significant percentage of time to other university functions at the smaller schools. Anton et al. (1981) have discussed the multiple functions of financial aid operations in light of overall staffing problems. Meyerson (1981) has observed that financial aid officers often feel that they are not supported by their institutions and supervisors, and that the functions of aid operations are often poorly understood by others. Meyerson (1981) also states that financial aid professionals have "generated more self-pity than is healthy" (p. 21) in terms of their concerns about being overworked in the context of understaffed offices.

Although it has been widely held that professionals emphasize an altruistic orientation toward clients, the actual situation for professionals is much more diverse. On the one hand, many recognized professions in fact contain incumbents who are not necessarily altruistic or idealistic. Physicians, lawyers, and accountants, while in professions that have historically been associated with classical professional attitudes, nevertheless are interested in financial reward and supervisory status, as well as altruistic service to clients. On the other hand, those groups that often have low professional compensation, such as nurses, teachers, and social workers, score highest on attributes like belief in service to the public. These semi-professions are in reality more intrinsically oriented than their more professional counterparts.

The concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic job-related rewards, introduced by Herzberg et al. (1959) as a conceptual and research tool, describes the motivation to work associated with different occupations and professions. Individuals, who seek to serve others and who are highly motivated toward achievement, advancement, and meaningful challenge, are intrinsically oriented. Workers with an extrinsic orientation toward job-related characteristics focus on salary, supervision, and organization policies. Professionals, whether white collar or blue collar employees, vary in their degree of orientation toward, and satisfaction with, extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

Recent investigations of job satisfaction in other professions have used the concept of job fit, indicating that job fit should be applicable to a wide variety of professional workers (Caston and Braitto, 1985). Using nurses as a sample, Caston and Braitto (1985) measured overall job fit and re-introduced the idea of "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" rewards as satisfiers in the job context. Caston and Braitto (1985) hypothesized that nurses who emphasized intrinsic job rewards would be more

satisfied than those who emphasized extrinsic factors. This hypothesis, supported by analysis of data, demonstrates that the "types" of factors, emphasized as important by workers, play a vital role in work satisfaction.

The concept of job fit has been used by others (e.g. Mortimer, 1979) to examine the relationship between the objective characteristics of a professional position and the subjective meaning of those characteristics for an individual. The more there is an appropriate fit between a position's characteristics and an occupant's expectations for need satisfaction at work, the greater the degree of job satisfaction. Conversely, the more a workers' expectations are at variance with the rewards associated with a specific position, the greater the degree of dissatisfaction the worker will have with the job.

Among financial aid professionals, job satisfaction may be a function of intrinsic/extrinsic factors and the extent to which the job fits with individual expectations. Following Clement and White (1983), job fit, rather than intrinsic/extrinsic orientations, may be the principle factor in job satisfaction. As with the nurses in Caston and Braito's (1985) study, intrinsic job characteristics are predicted to have a greater effect on job satisfaction than extrinsic. However, since an individual's degree of satisfaction with either actual intrinsic or actual extrinsic job characteristics varies, the key predictor may be how closely the job fits with his/her ideal expectations. In practice, what may be critical to the financial aid employee selection process is not whether the individual is intrinsically or extrinsically oriented, but the perception of how well the job, with its actual mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, matches the candidate's ideal expectations.

Hypotheses

At a theoretical level, it is suggested that job satisfaction is contingent upon the fit that exists between an individual's actual job and his or her own conception of the ideal job. An ideal extrinsic or intrinsic orientation may directly effect job satisfaction, or both may indirectly effect job satisfaction through the individual's sense that the present job fits his or her expectations. The subjective dimension of job fit, regardless of intrinsic and extrinsic orientations, may operate independently to affect job satisfaction.

Based on the preceding analysis, the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. Job fit is positively correlated with job satisfaction of financial aid professionals.
2. Job satisfaction of financial aid professionals is positively associated with ideal intrinsic job factors.
3. Job satisfaction of financial aid professionals is negatively associated with ideal extrinsic characteristics.
4. The perception of job fit, regardless of reported ideal intrinsic or ideal extrinsic job characteristics, is predicted to be the variable accounting for the greatest proportion of explained variation in job satisfaction.

The testing of these hypotheses has clear implications for financial aid directors seeking to find qualified personnel. Previous literature indicates that what may be important for selecting employees, who are likely to be satisfied with their jobs, is how well the job, with its mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, matches the candidate's expectations. Similarly, innovations designed to improve job satisfaction will be most successful, when the innovations fit staff members' expectations.

Method

Survey Questionnaire and Sample

A questionnaire, two sections of which were germane to the present study, was

developed. The first part contained questions regarding standard demographic information. The second section of the instrument utilized the job satisfaction scale developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951). This section also asked respondents to list four characteristics of an ideal position and to evaluate how closely their present jobs fit these ideal characteristics.

Members of the Texas Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators were asked to anonymously complete the questionnaire. In the first round, members of the association who attended the state meetings of the association were given copies of the questionnaire. As a follow-up, after the convention, copies were sent to members using the association's mailing list. Individuals who had already completed the questionnaire at the meeting were asked to ignore the mailing. The possibility of duplicate questionnaires was not considered a problem due to the time-consuming nature of the task and the clarity of the instructions. One hundred thirty-four usable questionnaires were returned, representing roughly 25% of the TASFAA membership. Directors of financial aid were well represented in the sample. Sixty percent of the respondents were directors, while 39% were associate directors.

Comparison of the Texas sample to national data presents additional evidence of the representativeness of the respondents. As shown in Table 1, the Texas sample closely mirrors the national organization's demographic and educational characteristics. The sample's mean age is 40; nationally, NASFAA membership's mean age is 37. Not surprisingly, the Texas sample contains a larger proportion of hispanics and a smaller proportion of whites. Females are the majority in the Texas sample, while males are the majority nationally. Overall, the close match with the national membership's profile and the significance of Texas as one of the nation's largest higher education systems, in terms of student enrollment, suggest that the sample provides an important starting point for analysis.

Table 1. Comparisons for the Texas (TASFAA) and National (NASFAA) Samples

	Texas (1986) TASFAA N = 134	National (1981) NASFAA N = 2440
Mean Age	40.0	37.0
Ethnicity*		
% Anglo	80.0	87.0
% Black	8.0	7.4
% Hispanic	12.0	2.3
Sex		
% Male	46.0	53.0
% Female	54.0	47.0
% Master's	38.0	50.0
% Directors in sample	60.0	66.0

*The NASFAA Tables contain an "other" category for ethnicity.

Findings

Job satisfaction, the dependent variable, was measured with the Brayfield scale. This standardized, Likert-type, 18-item scale has been widely used to assess job satisfaction in a number of settings. The Brayfield scale can be summed to produce a single measure of job satisfaction. For the complete cases, the maximum score on the Brayfield job satisfaction scale was 87 and the minimum was 34 with mean score of 67.2 and a standard deviation of 11.18. A reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .91 was produced, suggesting high consistency in responses.

Due to the layout of the questionnaire, 24 of 134 (18%) respondents failed to complete a portion of the scale, leaving 110 complete cases. There are three ways to cope with missing data: delete cases with missing data; delete variables with high proportions of missing data; substitute values for missing data that do not skew the distribution. Cohen and Cohen (1983) recommend estimating missing values using means substitution for missing data, as opposed to omitting variables or cases. Substituting the means of existing values for those that are missing does not effect existing values, and it has the advantage of retaining the full sample. If the 24 cases with missing values on the Brayfield scale are dropped from the sample, the remaining cases would be less representative of the population of financial aid professionals in Texas. Instead of a sample of 124, only 110 cases would be left; reducing the variability of the total sample and limiting the generalizability to the population of financial aid administrators in Texas. Substitution of existing case means for the cases with missing values retains the use of all cases and variables with no more distortion to the sample than deletion of the cases with missing values or deletion of the variables with a high proportion of missing data. Following Cohen and Cohen (1983), means substitution is used to cope with missing values.

The intrinsic/extrinsic predictors of job satisfaction were assessed by asking the respondents to list five characteristics of an ideal position. These five ideal characteristics were content analyzed by one of the researchers with training in applying Herzberg's extrinsic/intrinsic criteria. Twenty-two did not list any extrinsic characteristics, while 28 did not mention any intrinsic characteristics. Sixty-five percent of the respondents listed two or more extrinsic characteristics, while 55 percent listed two or more intrinsic characteristics as ideal characteristics of a professional position.

The respondents were then asked to indicate on a scale of from one to four, whether their present position had little or a great deal of resemblance to the ideal job characteristics that the respondents had listed. Of the 127 respondents who answered this question, only 8 (6.3%) said that their present job had little resemblance to the ideal characteristics that they had just listed. Twenty, or almost 15%, said that their present position had all of the ideal characteristics that they wanted. Almost 75% of the respondents said that their present position had some or quite a bit of resemblance to the ideal characteristics that they had listed.

The bivariate product moment correlation matrix between the three independent variables and job satisfaction produced results that addressed hypotheses 1-3. As shown in Table 2, the correlation between job satisfaction and the respondents' perception that their present position closely matches their ideal job characteristics was .50 ($p < .01$). This finding provides strong support for hypothesis one, which states that job fit is associated with job satisfaction. As predicted in hypothesis two, an ideal intrinsic orientation to work, emphasizing serving others and career advancement, was positively but weakly correlated (.23 $p < .01$) with job satisfaction. Hypothesis three, which predicts a negative association between ideal extrinsic job factors and job satisfaction, is weakly supported. The correlation (-.17 $p < .05$) suggests individuals oriented to extrinsic rewards will be less satisfied in their jobs. Even though it is known that extrinsically motivated individuals are somewhat less

satisfied, it is impossible to determine, using only bivariate analysis, whether extrinsically motivated individuals are equally unhappy under various conditions of job fit.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

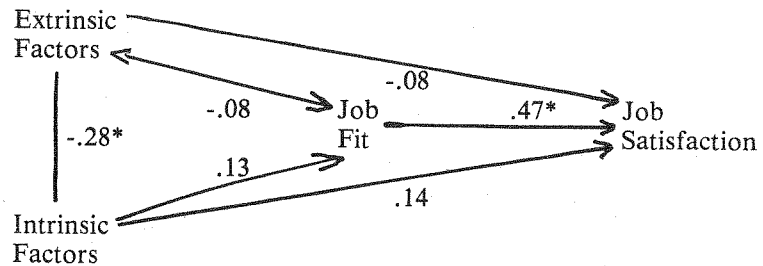
	Job Satisfaction	Job Fit	Extrinsic Factors	Intrinsic Factors
Job Satisfaction	1.0			
Job Fit	.50*	1.0		
Extrinsic Factors	-.17**	-.12	1.0	
Intrinsic Factors	.23*	.15	-.28*	1.0

* $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

Testing of hypothesis four, which tests the strength of the relationship between job fit and job satisfaction in conjunction with intrinsic and extrinsic factors, was accomplished using multiple regression analysis. Figure 1 displays the effects of the three predictor variables on job satisfaction. As expected, the overwhelming proportion of the explained variance (25%) is accountable by job fit. Intrinsic factors do contribute to the explained variance, but add only 2.5%, while extrinsic factors contribute less than one percent to the explained variation in job satisfaction. The complete model produces a multiple r of .53 and a total explained variance of 28%. How well the job fits, with the financial aid professional's conception of what it ideally should be, accounts for the overwhelming proportion of job satisfaction variance explained by the three independent variables, confirming hypothesis four. In other words, valuing extrinsic factors does not decrease the level of job satisfaction when the job is well-fitted to the individual's ideal expectations. Similarly, being intrinsically oriented contributes little to overall job satisfaction in comparison to the importance of fitting ideal job expectations to the real job. The fit of ideal job expectations is more important for understanding job satisfaction than the intrinsic or extrinsic nature of the characteristics valued by the individual financial aid professional.

Figure 1. Job Satisfaction Model for Financial Aid Officers



$r^2 = .53$
 $r^2 = .28$
 $F = 16.63$
 $df = 3$
 $*p = <.01$

A separate examination of the effect of ideal extrinsic and intrinsic job characteristics directly on job fit does not yield any statistically significant measures. Even though our initial bivariate analyses indicated significant associations between intrinsic and extrinsic factors with job satisfaction, multivariate analysis shows the statistically insignificant contribution of these factors on job satisfaction when job fit is included in the analysis. Examining the beta coefficients for both intrinsic and extrinsic orientations on job satisfaction (Figure 1), no statistically significant relationship exists. In other words, there is no real difference in job satisfaction between individuals who are extrinsically and those who are intrinsically motivated in terms of job fit. The key to job satisfaction is not whether an individual is intrinsically or extrinsically oriented, but whether the position he or she occupies fits with the financial aid professional's job-related expectations.

Discussion

Job satisfaction in financial aid, like other professions, is important, not only for the personal benefit of the financial aid staff, but also for the efficient and productive operation of the office. A number of factors contribute to job satisfaction. This study has examined the effect of ideal intrinsic and extrinsic job orientations and the sense of how well the present job fits with what the individual desires. Like the nurses in Caston and Braito's (1985) study, financial aid professionals, who are satisfied with work, are more intrinsically than extrinsically oriented. An extrinsic orientation to work is weakly but negatively correlated with job satisfaction. These findings, taken alone, suggest that individuals who are intrinsically motivated will be more likely to be happy working in the financial aid office. This is not necessarily true.

The key finding in this study is that job satisfaction is overwhelmingly and directly

dependent on the financial aid professional's sense that his or her job fits or fails to fit with each staff member's conception of ideal job characteristics. Financial aid professionals, who report a good fit between their ideal job and their real job, tend to be more satisfied. This finding is true whether or not the staff member is extrinsically or intrinsically oriented to the job.

There are two important possible applications of these findings for the management of financial aid offices. The first application is for supervisors of financial aid offices. When examining job satisfaction and morale problems, supervisors need to address the fit between staff members' expectations and the existing job. In some offices, providing opportunities for staff members to exercise initiative or to assist others with problems, may be an unsuccessful strategy for improving job satisfaction. In other situations, it might work, depending on the staff's ideal intrinsic or extrinsic orientations. How well the office staff's expectations fit with an existing and/or considered reward is critical to the effectiveness of those rewards in improving job satisfaction. Financial aid managers, who fail to examine job fit in their offices, may find their efforts to improve staff morale doomed to failure, if, for example, extrinsic rewards are offered to a staff that is intrinsically oriented. Job fit is an important factor, that should and can be managed to enhance job satisfaction.

A second possible application of the findings on job fit and job satisfaction may be in the process of selecting new financial aid office staff. A suggestion for further research, based on the findings of this study, is to develop and test an instrument to assist financial aid managers and their supervisors in staff selection. A standardized list of characteristics associated with financial aid office operation and career paths of financial aid professionals could be developed and normed using characteristics drawn from an adequate sample of financial aid offices. Scales, measuring intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of financial aid operations, would be an outcome. Each office would determine its own position on the scales. Applicants would take the inventory of characteristics and be compared to the characteristics of the specific office to which they have applied. This additional tool, a job fit analysis (JFA), would supplement a financial aid director's and professional staff's own experience and judgment in the job interviewing process, enhancing the probability of building a professional team which works smoothly and effectively with a minimum of conflict. Obviously, the JFA would be used in conjunction with other important criteria, such as affirmative action requirements.

From the point of view of the supervisor of the financial aid office, knowing that intrinsic and extrinsic job factors in themselves are not critical to job satisfaction should be useful. Instead, assessing the types of factors that are available in one's work setting, through job fit analysis, and then ascertaining whether or not incumbents or applicants for positions possess similar job factor orientations appears to be an important tool for employing and managing a well-satisfied office staff. On the one hand, how much staff members are paid, the generosity of their benefits, or the supervisory style operative in the office may have little effect on professional employees, who may be much more concerned with intrinsic rewards derived from assisting individual students. On the other hand, some employees, who may do a good job, may be more highly motivated by extrinsic rewards of pay and other benefits. What appears to be critical is the extent to which the individual fits within the institutional aid office environment.

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