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# Assessment of Job Satisfaction for Designing Career Management Interventions

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## ABSTRACT

According to recent suggestions in the career literature (Frieztzsche & Parrish, 2005; Savickas, 2002), this study aims at exploring the advantages for career management, of a job-satisfaction comprehensive assessment plan. For measurement purposes it has been used: (i) the Revised Neo-Personality Inventory (NEOPI-R; Costa & Crae, 1992; Lima, 1997) and the 23 Stress Vulnerability Questionnaire (23QVS; Serra, 2004), to assess personality traits and affective dispositions; (ii) the Multi-Moti Scale (MMS; Ferreira, Diogo, Ferreira & Valente, 2006) to assess facet job satisfaction; (iii) and two job-life story episodes, to analyse thematic clusters in job-satisfaction/dissatisfaction narratives (Cunha & Alves, 2004; McAdams, 1985, 2002). This measurement plan was administered to the workers of a public services company, in the north-west of Portugal (N= 57; 33men and 24 women; with age ranging from 19-61 years old, with M=42,1, SD=10,06). The referred company requested the services to the local main University. Accordingly, four psychologists of University of Minho Career Counselling Centre administered the work satisfaction battery personally, to each worker, at the company setting. A final report of the results was elaborated and offered to administration and workers. Cluster analysis results (*K-Mean clustering*) identified three distinct groups of workers, according to their sex, age, personality dispositions, affective states toward job and work, and salience of Agency and Communion related with job satisfaction/dissatisfaction narratives. Implications for career management practices are outlined.

## INTRODUCTION

In this study, job satisfaction has been conceived as an important dimension of work adjustment, defined as a positive affective state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976, p.1300, in Lent & Brown, 2006). In general, this appraisal involves the comparison between one's desired and one's achieved job experiences, or the comparison of one's job experiences with those of other colleagues or some pre-established criteria. Research has demonstrated that person traits and dispositions (e.g., Big Five personality traits, positive-negative affect), along with job/work situational conditions, influence satisfaction in this life domain (Frieztzsche & Parrish, 2006). More recently, attainment and progress of personal goals and agency were also suggested, by vocational psychology researchers, as important factors of global and facet work/job satisfaction (see Lent & Brown, 2006). Following this line of research, we seek to analyze the simultaneous relationship of individual traits, perceived job conditions, and experienced work satisfaction, in order to cluster, into two or three groups, the participant workers, and derive conclusions for psychosocial intervention.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 57 workers of a public Services company in the north-west of Portugal (33 men and 24 women). Their mean age was 42,10,  $SD=10,06$ . The sample included 62, 2% administrative, engineering, architecture, science and information system managers, 22, 9% equipment operators, and 12,4% technical administrative officers. Their mean years of education was 15,1  $SD=1,55$  (high school and bachelor grades). Moreover, their mean time in the company was 2,1 years,  $SD=1,09$ , and their mean time in current occupational function was 2,2 years,  $SD=3,2$ . 49,1% of the workers sample had a stable work-contract with the company.

### Measures

**The Revised NEO Personality Inventory** (NEOPI-R; Costa & Crae, 1992; adapt. by Lima, 1997): a 60-item multidimensional scale measuring, in a concise mode, the five major Personality Traits of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (12-item per subscale). Each item was answered in of 5-category Likert-type response format, and rated with the help of a rating grid (with 0 or 4 = "Strongly disagree", and 0 or 4="Strongly agree", as the case).

**The Stress Vulnerability Questionnaire** (23QVS; Serra, 2004): a 23-item scale, measuring vulnerability to emotional and social adverse and stressful situations, and overall life satisfaction. Each item was answered in of 5-category Likert-type response format, and rated with the help of a rating grid (with 0 or 4 = "Strongly disagree", and 0 or 4="Strongly agree", as the case). The negatively worded items were reversed so that the higher scores indicated high stress vulnerability. QVS Total scores  $\geq 43$  can be interpreted as expressing high stress vulnerability.

**The Multi-Moti Scale** (MMS; Ferreira et al., 2006): a 28-item scale, assessing four dimensions involved in work/job involvement (with  $KMO=0,75$ ): work organization, work performance, work power and achievement, and work satisfaction (7 items per factor). Each item was answered in of 5-category Likert-type response format (with 1 = "Complete disagreement", and 5="Complete agreement"). High scores indicate high work satisfaction facet salience.

**Job Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction Narratives**, according to McAdams (1985, 2002) suggestions: Two autobiographical episodes, one of job questionnaires and one of 114 episodes, were collected from each participant, through a life-narrative open questionnaire (N=114 episodes). For each event, subjects were asked to describe, in writing, what happened in the event itself, who was involved, what the subject was thinking and feeling during the event and what the event means in the context of the subject's own self-defining job life story. In coding, the scoring unit is the episode itself. Each episode is coded for the presence (score=1) or absence (score 0) of eight different themes, four under the heading of *Agency* (Achievement /Responsibility-AR; Power/Impact-PI; Self-Insight-SI; Status/Victory-SV) and four under the heading of *Communion* (Love/Friendship-LF; Dialogue-DG; Caring/Help-CH; Unity/Togetherness-UT). The coders (two independent coders per each subject's narratives) determined whether or not the story contained evidence for each of the eight themes. A theme is scored only once per episode. Theme scores were then summed across agency and communion categories within an episode, with summary scores ranging from 0 to 4, for each episode. Results of score episodes with inter-score reliability coefficients  $r \geq .50$  are presented. In Agency themes, the protagonist in the story reports substantial individuality, formation of separations, and aloneness, as well as self-protection, self-assertion, self-expansion, and urgency to master at work. Communion themes manifest itself in the sense of being at one with other persons, lack of separations, openness, union and contact, and non-contractual cooperation at work. Both themes are conceived as fundamental modalities of existence and important thematic clustering's in autobiographical events.

### Procedures

Workers were recruited for participation in the assessment by December 2006. There were a total of 60 workers in the company studied. One of the participants did not volunteer to produce the two narratives. Other two workers did not participate in the assessment due to their head administrative and directive functions in the company. The remaining 57 workers completed all the assessment procedures and constitute the sample of the present study. The testing occurred at the company's head office installations, individually with each worker, by a psychologist, during approximately 30 minutes. The participants were distributed by four different psychologists. It was used the interview technique to initial relationship establishment, followed by the response to questionnaires and the autobiographical narrative episodes writing. Workers were told that individual results would be kept strictly confidential. The assessment process occurred with normality and workers collaboration, whose, many times, demonstrated confidence and curiosity about the procedures used, adhering promptly to the system proposed. Some participants, however, were interested in knowing and understanding better the impact of these types of job satisfaction assessments in the daily company's work and in their particular activity. This fact was related with the impact of job satisfaction assessments adopted in the past in the company. In many cases, workers also demonstrated insecurity about the confidentiality insurance of their individual results. These aspects could have negatively affected the spontaneity and honesty of the workers responses in the present study. However, the variety of psychological assessment forms used could have contributed to attenuate such undesirable effects.

## CONCLUSION

Results suggest the importance of considering diversity of workers' personality dispositions, coping styles, and subjective experiences, in job satisfaction and dissatisfaction assessments. The knowledge of such specific aspects may help defining demands and rewards in companies that might fulfill, more adequately, diverse groups of workers. The management of confidence in problem solving, work orientation, quality of relationships, and level of emotionality emerge as salient areas of intervention with the workers. Clime and communication inside the organization, and the nature of the work relations are important factors in both satisfaction and dissatisfaction experiences, and especially on those of dissatisfaction.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics results evidence average levels of Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, and Agreeableness, and high levels of Extraversion and Conscientiousness (see Table 1). Low levels of Stress Vulnerability were also registered. Involvement with work and tasks' Performance, satisfaction with Work Organization, and Power and Achievement at job organization (by decreasing order) registered with high values. Moreover, descriptive results for Agency and Communion (by decreasing order) registered/dissatisfaction episodes (see Table 2) evidence a predominance of Agency themes, especially in job satisfaction narratives.

The specific type of events that have stimulated *job positive affective experiences* by the workers were, by decreasing order: (i) recognition and respect demonstration for one's work, by a proximal or distant supervisor, in private or public settings; (ii) promotions and career advancement; (iii) autonomous resolution of daily problems; (iv) work accomplishments, wages increase, and the conviviality with work colleagues; (iv) assisting and understanding colleagues, the friendship with certain colleagues, the relationship with the supervisors, the growth of the company, the performance in a specific function, one's work effectiveness, and the access to the present job or its maintenance.

In what concerns *job dissatisfaction*, specific events include, by decreasing order: (i) less positive communication and interpersonal situations in the work's relationships, involving improper communication and conflicts, lack of cooperation; (ii) hygiene and security factors, involving problems related to the job, atmospheric and ambient conditions, small work accidents; (iii) lacks of one's work recognition or lack of concern about one's work efforts, with relating focus on the instructions obedience rather than in the process-results strategy, lack of reliance or consideration in one's job decision-making; (iv) absence of career progression, lack of planning, competitiveness increase, rebukes in public; (v) disagreement with performance evaluation, perceived injustice based on self-comparison with other company workers' career development, changes in established rules, dissatisfaction with own performance.

**Table 1.** Job Satisfaction: Descriptive statistics for Personality Traits, Stress Vulnerability and facet Work Satisfaction (N=57)

Personality Traits						Stress Vuln. & Life Satisf.		Work Satisfaction dimensions											
Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness to Experience	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness		M	SD	Organization	Performance	Power and Achievement	Work Involvement								
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
21,2	7,05	31,5	4,34	30,1	4,38	33,9	5,36	38,5	5,29	33,2	7,89	25,6	2,97	26,7	3,09	24,9	2,39	27,4	2,29

**Table 2.** Job Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction Narratives: Salience of Agency and Communion (N=57)

Job Satisfaction Episodes				Job Dissatisfaction Episodes			
Agency	Communion	Agency	Communion	Agency	Communion	Agency	Communion
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1,0	0,61	0,6	0,75	0,6	0,62	0,5	0,57

**Table 3.** Job Satisfaction: Cluster means for Personality Traits, Stress Vulnerability, facet Work Satisfaction, Agency and Communion

CLUS	N	Sex	Mean Age	Personality Traits					Stress SV	Org	Work Motives				Sat. Narratives		Dissa. Narrativ	
				N	E	OE	A	C			Perf	PA	Inv	Agen	Comm	Agen	Comm	
1	11	Men	51,1	16,2	28,7	29,8	34,2	38,2	28,3	27,0	26,6	25,1	28,3	0,8	0,9	0,2	0,1	
2	18	Women	28,6	16,9	33,9	31,6	35,9	41,2	26,5	25,3	26,6	25,3	28,1	1,1	0,6	0,6	0,6	
3	28	Men	28,6	26,0	31,1	29,3	32,5	36,9	39,4	25,3	26,9	24,7	26,6	1,0	0,7	0,7	0,7	

Table 3 presents cluster analysis results. Three groups of workers were identified, according to their sex, age, and personality traits dispositions, and job satisfaction:

**Cluster 1:** Composed by 11 workers (19,2%) presenting the highest mean values of satisfaction with the organization and of work involvement, and the lowest salience of agency in job satisfaction episodes, as well as the lowest levels of agency and communion in dissatisfaction ones. This group is composed mainly by men and older workers, around 50 years old, who registered the lowest levels of neuroticism but also of extroversion.

**Cluster 2:** Composed by 18 workers (31, 6%) presenting the highest values of power and achievement motivation at work, and the highest salience of agency and the lowest values of communion in satisfaction episodes. This cluster includes mostly women about 30 years old, with the highest values in extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness, and the lowest stress vulnerability.

**Cluster 3:** Composed by a total of 28 workers (49%), presents the highest values of satisfaction with own performance and the lowest values on power and achievement goals and on work involvement. This group registered also high values on agency related to satisfaction narratives. This cluster includes mostly men about 30 years old, with the highest values of neuroticism and of stress vulnerability.

Agency salience in job satisfaction episodes is mainly composed by Achievement /Responsibility, Self-Insight and Status/Victory themes, while Communion salience is firstly based on Love/Friendship at work, followed by similar incidence of Dialogue, Caring/Help and Unity/Togetherness themes. Dissatisfaction episodes are mainly related with Status/Victory and Power/Impact agency themes, and also with Caring/Help and Dialogue communion ones (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Cluster frequencies for Agency and Communion dimensions in job satisfaction and dissatisfaction episodes (N=57)

CLUST	JOB SATISFACTION EPISODES										JOB DISSATISFACTION EPISODES									
	Agency					Communion					Agency					Communion				
	AR	PI	SI	SV	LF	DG	CH	UT	AR	PI	SI	SV	LF	DG	CH	UT				
1 (N=11)	6	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0				
2 (N=18)	14	0	2	4	2	0	6	3	1	4	0	6	0	3	7	1				
3 (N=28)	19	0	7	3	9	1	4	6	4	5	2	8	2	6	5	2				
Tot (N=57)	39	2	10	7	18	10	10	10	7	9	2	14	2	10	12	3				