

## **PROFESSIONAL CONTENTMENT IN A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

There have been many studies conducted to determine variables that affect professional contentment. Some of these studies have looked at factors such as organizational involvement and commitment to organizations. Several of these studies found that a larger percentage of unemployed and employed personnel expressed dissatisfaction with their work commitment. The implications of those studies suggested that unemployed could reflect underlying adjustment disorders which have an impact on someone's potential for successful employment. However, for those who are contented with their performance, in the long run these workers would have a higher gratification. They would give more attention on the quality of their work, more committed to the organization, have a higher retention rates, and would be more productive. Reflecting on these findings and how severe this issue may render, this study is conducted to identify the level of

professional satisfaction of the academic staffs in a research university in the southern part of Malaysia. This paper will present the findings of the study which aimed to determine the level of satisfaction based on factors such as pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefit, contingent reward, operating condition, co-workers, nature of work and communication.

**Key Words:** *Professional, Contentment, Organization, Satisfaction*

**JEL Classification:** 123

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

On June 11, 2010, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has been promoted as Malaysia's fifth Research University (RU) under the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia plan. This recognition is not just a mere success, but also a significant move proving that the institution has surged to a new phase. This is when the center of attention will focus more on research activities and the academic staffs will take a bigger role than before. In fact, their increase responsibility and how well they perform are crucial in the development of the institution. However, the main question is how satisfied are they with their job? According to Zainudin *et al.* (2010), academic staffs who are satisfied with their profession will performance highly in their work, which include teaching, conducting research, writing, as well as administrative job.

Job contentment or job satisfaction has been described in numerous ways by many researchers. Adenike (2011) describes job contentment as the satisfaction feelings of employees with their job. Meanwhile, Akpofure *et. al.* (2006) depicts job satisfaction as the overall feeling of a worker on his job and how it affects the organization output, productivity and performance. Literally, an employee is said to reach satisfaction when he achieved significant success in his career. Locke (1976), on the other hand, defines job satisfaction as a feeling of pure happiness when one is appreciated over one's assessment. This positive feeling can be an indicator to determine one's performance and productivity. However, if dissatisfaction creeps in along the way of one's career, it can create a negative setback to the organization and will affect the performance of the company.

Concurrently, Begley & Czajka (1993) emphasize on the important of job satisfaction because indirectly it is connected to job performance and also worker's motivation. Therefore, this study is significant due to similar reason. Job satisfaction among UTM academic staffs may look so simple, but in reality it

can give a bigger repercussion if not handle very early in the formation of the RU status gained by the institution recently. If the satisfaction level is high among its academic staffs, problems such as employees not coming to work, prolong criticism or complaints, unnecessary termination or other related problems can be avoided. As stated by Syptak *et. al.* (1999), in order for an organization to reduce these problems, first it should focus on the job satisfaction or contentment of its employees because this can help sustain its skilled workers.

### **1.1. Objective**

Specifically, the objective of this study is to identify the job satisfaction level among academic staffs in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

## **2. LITERATURE**

### **2.1. The Two Factor Theory**

This theory by Herzberg (1959) discusses two important elements in job satisfaction mainly motivation and hygiene. According to him, factors such as accomplishment, rewarded performance, job awareness, responsibility and progression become key motivator factors to boost employee's performance. However, he believes that without these motivational factors an employee would still complete his job. In contrast, elements in hygiene may pose as a serious threat to an organization because without it an employee may become dissatisfied with his work and it may affect his work progression. Factors that are critical in this classification include job security, wages, work place environment, quality of management, organization guidelines and rapport with co-workers.

### **2.2. The Goal Setting Theory**

This theory by Locke (1968) explains that employees not only focus on their needs alone but also on what they dreams, want and value. They would not accept a task given to them without evaluating it first. They would analyse whether the assignment is worth the time and effort that they have put into. They would also look at the condition and surrounding of the workplace, the facility given, increment, value and the significant of the job to the organization. Specifically the employees would assess five steps which include Environmental Stimuli → Cognition → Evaluation → Intention/Goal Setting → Performance. The implication of this theory is that, even though employees understands the significant of money in their life, they would want their employer to appreciate

their effort and recognized their potential and reward what they have invested in the organization accordingly as a justification for a job well done.

### 2.3. Job Characteristic Model

This model by Hackman and Oldman (1976) focuses on three type of variables as the central issue of employee's job satisfaction or contentment level. The first variable is the employee psychological state which needs to be in good or stable condition, so that individual motivation factor can be identified and rectified accordingly. The second variable is the job characteristic itself that produce this psychological state, and the third variable is the attributes or features of an individual. How he responds either positively or negatively on a specific, multifaceted and intricate task given to him.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Sample, Instrument and Data Analysis

The population of this study is the academic staffs in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. A random sampling method has been used and a sample of 200 staffs from various faculties participated in this study. This study utilizes the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) instrument developed by Paul Spector (1987) which contains 36 items. This questionnaire uses two languages mainly English and Malay language to ease understanding. Factors that can affect job satisfaction are divided into nine categories including; Pay, Promotion, Supervision, Fringe Benefit, Contingent Rewards (performance based rewards), Operating Procedures (required rules and procedures), Co-workers, Nature of Work, and Communication. According to Spector (1987), although this instrument was designed to be applied in human service organizations, the factors identified are also applicable to other organizations. The SPSS PASW version 18.0 is used to identify the job satisfaction level using the mean score which is divided into three categories of High, Moderate and Low.

Table 1: The Mean Value

Mean Value	Satisfaction Level
1.00 – 2.67	Low
2.68 – 4.35	Moderate
4.36 – 6.00	High

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Job Satisfaction Level

Table 2 shows the result of the job satisfaction level among UTM academic staffs based on Pay, Promotion, Supervision, Fringe Benefit, Contingent Reward, Operating Condition, Co-workers, Nature of Work and Communication.

Table 2: Job Satisfaction Level

Factor	Mean	SD	Job Satisfaction Level (n=200)					
			HIGH		MODERATE		LOW	
			<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Pay	3.77	1.046	58	29	114	57	28	14
Promotion	3.84	1.046	60	30	110	55	30	15
Supervision	4.06	1.223	117	59	74	37	9	4
Fringe Benefit	3.62	.9228	39	20	134	67	27	13
Contingent Reward	3.73	.9965	49	25	127	64	24	11
Operating Condition	2.91	.6586	3	2	159	80	38	18
Co-workers	4.21	.7661	81	41	116	58	3	1
Nature of Work	4.95	.7118	154	77	46	23	0	0
Communication	3.88	1.012	65	33	120	60	15	7
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>1.012</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>

The results of this study indicate that the job contentment or satisfaction level of academic staffs at UTM is at a moderate level with the mean value of 3.89. The findings also point out that the two most satisfying factors among the nine factors measured are nature of work and co-workers, whereas the two least satisfying factors are operating condition and fringe benefit (refer to Table 2).

As stated by Spector (1987), operating condition refers to the policies, procedures, rules, regulations and perceived red tape in an organization. The result of this study shows that this is the least satisfying factor among academic staffs. The reasons could be due to the structure or some aspects of the policies, procedures or process put into practice at UTM which are not favorable to the academic staffs' opinion or some of the rules and regulations have unclear scope or proper guidelines. In their opinion, the institution is also believed not to perform proper planning on certain issues and this generates dissatisfaction among the academic staffs. If an individual does not feel comfortable or at ease because of the inefficiency and unsystematic structure of an organization, he would feel less happy and this would jeopardize his productivity, performance and his satisfaction

level destructed. This is shown in the Two Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959), which state that a good working condition is needed to ensure that an employee achieves his expected satisfaction level. For example, in UTM the administrative policy involving the management aspect such as vision, mission, aims, rules and regulations should be stipulated clearly so that academic staffs do not perceive the regulations as imperfect. In order to overcome this problem, it is suggested that a more effective, efficient and systematic dissemination of information is implemented so that academic staffs are made known of the institution policy. At the same time, the institution should make them feel comfortable in performing their job by reducing their workload and less paper work which seem to impede their current performance. This is crucial before they can become innovative and creative workers as time constraint seem to be endless among academic staffs. Rectifying these issues would indirectly enhance their performance, boost the institution productivity and commit them to the institution. Similarly, UTM authority should be more open in receiving criticism or suggestions specially that would benefit academic staffs and the institution rather than just dismissing their ideas.

Result also points that fringe benefit is the least satisfying factor in this study. Fringe benefit refers to the benefits that an employee receives in his work place including insurance, bonuses and others. The overall mean for this factor is 3.62, which is at a moderate level (refer to Table 2). The moderate result demonstrates that the benefits receive is not sufficient and does not match the expectation of the academic staffs. As Spector (1997) explains, job satisfaction is the evaluation of feelings about one's job that consists of few factors including benefits. This is also consistent with Locke theory (1968), which exemplifies how a person's goal is mainly resolved by what benefited him. The reason behind this result could be due to the lack of benefits increment obtained by academic staffs in UTM. For many years the benefits the academic staffs received have not been reviewed despite the growth in students' enrolment especially the international students. Academic work load increases at a tremendous rate but benefits received are not equivalent with the job done which might result in the slightly lower job satisfaction level. This issue if not evaluated quickly could result in a 'man drain' situation where academic staffs would suffer from burnout, would feel exasperated, not appreciated and motivated. This might affect their performance and productivity. In the long run this could have greater impact especially towards students' satisfaction. Therefore, it is recommended that the UTM

authority reviews this issue by throwing in more attractive and lucrative benefits to retain the highly skilled and qualified academic staffs.

On the other hand, the two most satisfying factors among academic staffs in UTM are their nature of work and co-workers. Nature of work means the enjoyments received by the workers on task given to them and also refers to the environment of the workplace. The result indicates that the academic staffs are happy and do get pleasure from their job. This would strengthen their work performance and contribute towards the productivity of their tasks. Meanwhile, co-workers are people who work together with us at the same level in an organization. A study by Morgeson, *et. al.* (2002), found that, relationship with co-workers are crucial in workers performance because they support one another. This study proves that the academic staffs in UTM practice good and healthy relationship with co-workers. Quality relationship with co-workers could motivate and provide indirect support to an employee so that he could intensify his work productivity which would result in high satisfaction level. Cooperative co-workers can redouble one's performance and provide inner support and encouragement. According to Maslow theory, social need is the requirement to have friends who like, love and support each other. Good association with co-workers in an organization is necessary as the organization is the link between co-workers. The result of this study is similar with the study conducted by Fauziah and Kamaruzaman (2009) which specifies that the job satisfaction level among academic staffs at a public university in Malaysia is also at a moderate level.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

As a conclusion, the finding of this study shows that the job satisfaction level among academic staffs at UTM is at a moderate level. Majority of them are satisfied with the nature of their work and believe that their co-workers are supportive of their job. On the other hand, dissatisfied feeling appears with operating condition and fringe benefit receives in UTM. This indicates that the Research University status is affecting their job satisfaction level which could lead to a negative effect. The result of this study if not resolve quickly in a positive ways can affect academic staffs job performance and productivity.

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