

Chapter 2

Improve Job Satisfaction With Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Katherine Jones

Kansas State University, Polytechnic Campus, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explains the process of using cognitive behavioral therapy to improve workplace satisfaction via the reframing of employees' internal perspectives regarding their work environment. The author details common points of dissatisfaction among employees in higher education and explains how these issues might be handled via the use of CBT techniques. Applied CBT interventions in workplace and higher education environments are discussed in order to provide suggestions of how these techniques can be used at the individual and institutional level. Finally, the direct results of CBT application are discussed, including general day-to-day satisfaction, improved work ethic, and a more comprehensive and obtainable approach to long-term career goals.

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is a multifaceted sense of professional wellbeing determined by internal perception as much as external influences. Some factors negatively impacting job satisfaction for faculty and staff working in academia include increasing workloads, concerns about salary, and conflicts with co-workers and supervisors (Kohli & Sharma, 2018; Stankovska, Angelkoska, Osmani, & Grncarovska, 2017; Webber, 2018). Any of these issues could have a detrimental impact on the job satisfaction. However, many of the complex obstacles faced in higher education are exacerbated by the negative, internalized perceptions employees have built about themselves, their co-workers, and their work environments (Webber, 2018), increasing the detrimental effect of these elements on the individual. Identifying and countering distorted thought patterns and the unhealthy behaviors they inspire is a skillset that requires training and practice to learn.

According to a recent Gallup poll, 53% of U.S. employees are passively unengaged and 13% are actively disengaged with their work (Harter, 2018). Worldwide, 66% are passively unengaged and 18% are actively unengaged; only 15% percent of global employees report being actively engaged and enthusiastic

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about their work (Gallup, 2017). Although professional satisfaction rates in the U.S. are higher now than they have been in previous studies, the results remain concerning, especially when considering rates of job dissatisfaction in other countries, which are often lower.

Programming based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can have a positive impact on employee perception, which can in turn positively impact employee job satisfaction (Kohli & Sharma, 2018). CBT training in the workplace is a beneficial technique that can provide dissatisfied employees with the means to take control of the emotional impact of their worktime experiences (Ojala, Nygård, Huhtala, Bohle, & Nikkari, 2018). The objectives of this chapter are the following: outline prevalent obstacles to job satisfaction and the mental/emotional well-being of employees in academia; define CBT as a mental health theory; explain how CBT can improve job satisfaction; and provide insights on how to apply CBT techniques in a workplace setting to best address cognitive distortions and perceptions of existing workplace obstacles in a way that may improve faculty and staff morale.

BACKGROUND

Job satisfaction is broadly defined as “a perceived relationship between what one wants from his/her job and what one perceives it as offering. Job satisfaction is the collection of feelings and beliefs that employees have about their jobs” (Stankovska, Angelkoska, Osmani, & Grncarovska, 2017, p. 160). It is worth noting the language used in this definition; perceptions, feelings, and beliefs all feature heavily. These internal concepts fall under the control of the individual regardless of what the external realities of an employee’s workplace conflicts and obstacles might be.

Researchers and scholars (Kohli & Sharma, 2018; Stankovska, Angelkoska, Osmani, & Grncarovska, 2017; Webber, 2018) have identified the elements that influence academic job satisfaction as the following: salary and promotion, working conditions, relationships within the institution, and relationships outside the institution (work-life balance). Job satisfaction in academia includes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. Intrinsic factors include things like teaching activities and responsibilities related to the classroom environment. Extrinsic factors are more typically associated with salary and promotion, perceived support from supervisors and co-workers, and the availability of resources provided by the institution (Stankovska, Angelkoska, Osmani, & Grncarovska, 2017). Job satisfaction is a necessary piece of the puzzle that makes up an employee’s mental health and emotional stability. Job satisfaction also leads to a higher level of overall life satisfaction, which feeds back into job satisfaction in a loop (Duffy et al, 2013). Employees who are satisfied with their work and life find it easier to relax and recover from difficult work situations on their off hours, retain high work engagement without becoming overly invested in their work to the detriment of all else, and maintain high levels of job performance and well-being (Upadyaya, Vartiainen, & Salmela-Aro, 2016). Individuals who are satisfied with their work are less prone to work burnout and more likely to experience strong levels of work engagement. Faculty and staff who are engaged in their work environment have a positive state of mind regarding their work; they experience high energy, are dedicated to their tasks, and become easily absorbed with their work, causing “time to fly.” Individuals with high work engagement have more resources than those who do not (Schaufeli, Salanova, Lez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). These resources may include personal resources such as self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience (Upadyaya, Vartiainen, & Salmela-Aro, 2016), all of which can be improved using CBT techniques.

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