ABSTRACT

Values satisfaction can be a key strategy for employee retention and increased organizational effectiveness. Employee values satisfaction in their job role is important to retention and trust building in the recovering economy. Understanding how personal values satisfaction can be integrated into individual action planning to increase satisfaction with work activities can support talent retention efforts, organizational productivity, and increase the effectiveness of dollars spent on training and development. This paper will present a process which uses personal values identification for increased levels of job satisfaction based on an extensive literature review combined with personal experience.

Keywords: Action research, Organizational earning, Workforce acquisition, Planning and development, Experiential learning, Human resource management

INTRODUCTION

The talent wars are here. Even in an economic downturn, retaining talent should be a top priority for all business owners. “CEOs of the nation's fastest growing companies overwhelmingly cite retention of key workers as the most critical factor to plan for in the next year ahead (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2004)” (Frank, Finnegan, Taylor & Talentkeepers, 2004, p. 13). Martin in the 2012 article C-suite beware: This could be the year of the employee backlash, tells us that according to the Labor department, there has been an uptick in the number of Americans quitting their job since the 2007, the year the recession began. For small business owners, who represent over 99% of all firms in the United States and over the last 15 years have generated 64% of net new jobs (SBA, 2009), talent retention will be a key factor in continued growth and success.

Job satisfaction can be a key strategy for employee retention and increased organizational effectiveness. Diskienë, and Goštautas support this viewpoint “It should be noted that job satisfaction is a key factor to maintaining high performance and efficient service, which will directly increase the productivity of the organization (Gunlu et al., 2009)” (2010, p. 296). A key component to job satisfaction is the opportunity for employees to find some level of fulfillment of their personal values in daily job activities. Bradly, Meade, and Kroustalis (2006) cited Kristoff (1996) in asserting the applicants are attracted to work environments that are compatible with their values. A value based career development and employee satisfaction program developed by Blessing White, Managing Personal Growth, has been used in a business setting for a number of years. Blessing White has conducted this program worldwide for over 30 years,
supporting the hypothesis that people want to understand the link that exists for them personally in satisfying personal values in all aspects of life. The program materials stated, “A firm values framework gives you a sharper sense of self-identity (you know who you are), a greater self-assurance (you know where you stand), and a clearer sense of self direction (you know what you want)” (2003, p. 3). Researchers (Almeida & Pinto, 2003; Argandona, 2003; Brown & Crace, 1996, 1999, 2002; Connor & Becker, 2003; McLelland, 2000; Mosconi & Emmett, 2003) believed people of all ages use values as a basis for both personal and professional life choices and support the viewpoint personal values do have an important role in determining actions and goal setting. What are values? Gilmore’s 2008 interview with Dr. Ringler states “Ringler defines it as an intangible feeling, a personal preference that guides every decision an individual makes” (¶ 5). Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) research revealed that there are many common features about the definition of values, “According to the literature, values are (a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviors, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance” (p. 551). Schwartz (1994) added values serve as guiding principles in life.

Organizations that understand the power of values are on the rise. Posner and Schmidt (1992) stated, “Interest in managerial values is stronger today as the nation’s businesses have recognized the importance of corporate culture and how shared values (alignment between personal and organizational values) make a difference” (p. 80). The conclusions of Hyde and Williamson's 2000 study in the Solicitor’s Office of HM Customs & Excise support Posner and Schmidt. “First, people want to feel that the organisation they work for is in tune with their values. Secondly, value congruence is associated with higher satisfaction with the organisation as a place to work and with the work itself” (p. 10).

Employee values satisfaction in their job role is important to retention and trust building in the recovering economy. The Maritz Research Hospitality Group 2011 Employee Engagement Poll (2011) cites Garlick “It is critically important for employers to connect with employees on a value-level to create a positive working experience, improve employee retention rates and increase trust in management” (p. 2). MacIntosh and Walker (2012) support the Maritz study, “Research has shown that job satisfaction is one of the most powerful predictors of why people chose to leave their organization (Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003)” (p. 123). If values do drive choices, a position supported by Brown and Crace (1996), “Values with high priorities are the most important determinants of choices made, providing that the individuals have more than one alternative available which will satisfy their values” (¶ 6), then creating an easy to implement process for employers to help employees increase satisfaction with their values on the job, can yield higher productivity greater organizational effectiveness. For small business owners who are often resource constrained and need to achieve the highest degree of productivity understanding the importance of employee satisfaction based on values fulfillment and focusing on keeping employees happy will increase the chances of growth and success. Smith, (2012) cites Miller (2012), who supports this view. “From both ends of the spectrum, an individual's happiness at work will create happiness throughout all areas of their life, and likewise a company with a happy, motivated workforce will see exceptional results in its products and services” (¶ 14).

The employer-employee workplace partnership dictates that both sides have a role to play in employee satisfaction. Employers need to provide a venue for employees to achieve greater satisfaction with work roles and tasks to ensure retention and high productivity. Employees will need to assume a self-leadership role in defining what will increase their satisfaction and
provide feedback to employers in a way that benefits both employee and business. Houghton and Yoho (2005) cited Manz (1986), Manz & Neck (2004), and Manz & Sims (2001) in stating, “Self-leadership is defined as a systematic set of strategies through which individuals influence themselves toward higher levels of performance and effectiveness” (p. 65). This paper will present a cost effective and easy to administer 3 step process (Figure 1) that I have developed over the course of many years of research and practical application for employees to assess their personal values and use this information to create a job satisfaction profile. Business leaders and owners can work with employees who have created this profile to increase job satisfaction, productivity and retention.

THREE STEP PROCESS - Dr. Ilene Ringler’s Three Step Process©

**Step 1 - Defining What I Want**

Why is Step 1 so essential to the success of this process? Having a clear picture of what is important is foundational to creating a realistic and fact based action plan for improvement. In many cases people start with Step 2 and or even worse go right to Step 3, are dissatisfied with the end results and do not know why. For the process to work optimally, employees must spend time assessing what work activities give them satisfaction “So the first step down the values-led track is to help staff clarify their personal values and then look at those in the context of their own work role and relationships” ("Work – a," 2006, ¶ 9). There are different methods to achieving this first step and the two which I have found to be most successful are discussed below.

One option is to encourage employees to work with a standardized instrument for defining values. This is a deductive reasoning based approach to Step 1. Trochim (2006) tells us that “Deductive reasoning works from the more general to the more specific. Sometimes this is informally called a ‘top-down’ approach” (¶ 1). The standardized instrument is a good first step to help employees put a name or title to those things which give them satisfaction. There are
many values based assessment instruments and tools that can be found both in books and on
the web, many free or low cost, so the choice of instrument can be left to the employee or a
standard one selected by the employer to achieve some degree of consistency. The advantage
to this deductive method is that is can be completed quickly and produce results that can be
easily seen.

In my work with employees and companies on this first step, I find that there are many who
have never taken the time to complete this important task and the results can sometimes be
surprising to them. One reason for this is may be societal bias, or other factors influencing
choice. Weiler and Schoonover (2001) advise that “When people prioritize their life values we
suggest they sort out any voices they might carry in their heads from other people telling them
what they should value” (¶ 12). Filtering out bias is not an easy task, so if employers choose
this method as the primary way of helping employees discover their values, then employees
should be encouraged to reflect on this list over the course of time and review it against the life
activities that actually give them satisfaction.

An alternative method of discovering values can be based on the inductive reasoning approach.
Trochim (2006) tells us that “Inductive reasoning works the other way, moving from specific
observations to broader generalizations and theories. Informally, we sometimes call this a
‘bottom up’ approach” (¶ 2). In this approach employees can keep a record of events and tasks
that give them the greatest satisfaction and then analyze those for trends. Gilmore (2008) cites
Ringler, who states “When you are satisfying your personal values, those things are usually
seen as strengths or talents on the job,” (¶ 9). I recommend that the employee keep this list both
at home and at work to see where they are getting the most satisfaction. It may be helpful to
courage employees to create an easy to use form to capture this information or provide
support from your human resources department if you have one. One method that I have found
helpful is called the STAR process, Situation/Task, Action, Result, commonly used in evaluating
a candidate’s fit for a particular job (Uddin, Tanchi & Alam, 2012). As employees collect these
examples, they can then conduct a trend analysis to see where their values are satisfied. The
results of this analysis will become very important when employees continue working through
the process. The advantage to inductive method is that employees gather the information over
time and analyze later, possibly reducing the bias that may be inherent in the deductive process
mentioned above. The possible disadvantage to this method is that, without additional guidance
and structure, employees may have a difficult time analyzing the data they have gathered. One
possible solution is to combine the approaches and let the employee use a standardized
instrument to provide more structure to the data analysis.

To complete Step 1 and prepare for Step 2, employees will be using completing the final tasks
listed below. An example follows.

- Selecting their top 5 or primary values (Crace, 2006), or ones that are of critical
  importance to satisfaction in life at this current time.
- Creating a personal values statement or credo. Williams (n.d.) cites Kouzes and
  Posner (1993) in supporting the creation of this credo so that it can be shared with
  others, or used as a tool to help clarify your values choices.
- Developing a first draft job profile, or a future state that will represent maximum
  satisfaction with their values and by implication, their talents or strengths. Gilmore
  (2008) cites Ringler who states “Looking at that profile, [employees] can ask
  [themselves] the question: If I had job nirvana, if I could be maximally satisfied with
these values on the job, what would that look like?” (¶ 12). Kerns (2010) supports this approach stating that “This step helps to focus and further optimize the individual’s work in managing his or her strengths” (p. 73).

Sample Output for Step 1

Values - Creativity, Inner Harmony, Independence, Change and Variety, Knowledge

Statement

• My creativity is one of my most treasured possessions and I look for the opportunity to be creative in every facet of my life.
• Inner harmony is important to me because I feel that spending time with friends and family restores my balance in life.
• I need a great degree of independence in both my professional and personal life which helps me satisfy my need for change and promotes my desire for continuous learning.

Job Profile

• Lots of chance to create new things
• Little direct supervision
• Lots of different things to do
• Good Work/Family Life Balance

To summarize this first and most critical step in the process, the employee has completed an initial analysis of his/her most important values, selected the top 5 or primary values and used this information to create a credo and job nirvana profile. As we explore Step 2, the importance of this foundational work becomes evident.

Step 2 –Understanding What I Have

Why is Step 2 important to the success of this process? Step 2 builds on the foundational work completed in Step 1 provides the answers to these questions:

1. What areas in my current state are satisfying me?
2. What areas in my current state are dissatisfiers for me?
3. What do I need to do next to create a higher level of satisfaction?

The completion of this step will take some time as the employee works his/her way through enough life and work events to be sure of the results. A typical timeframe to complete this step would be two work weeks with examples gathered from all aspects of life. The STAR process described in Step 1 will also be valuable here so that they employee can see what parts of the daily work and home life bring satisfaction and which ones don’t. During this part of the process, it is recommended that the employee review these examples against the initial selection of the primary values to see if there are any changes that need to be made. In my experience working through this process with employees and those individuals seeking a career change, there are many times when the initial selection of primary values undergoes some revision during this step. The collection of examples may uncover information that was not apparent due to bias or other factors. If this happens, it is a good thing, as greater clarity can be achieved for Step 3 which is action planning.
Once this initial data analysis is done, the employee will need to determine what to do next in preparation for Step 3 - Creating an Improvement Plan. Here are some questions that may provide good thoughts for next steps:

- Do I have enough information to complete my picture?
- Which of these factors is a Show Stopper?
- What are the next steps I should take to increase my confidence with this information?

The final task in this step is to have the employee create some next ideas for improvement that will be a good balance of a win for the employee and a win for the organization. The sample below shows ideas to increase satisfaction are based in both + and – areas. Increasing satisfaction with areas that are already deemed positive will yield greater results than primarily focusing on those areas of dissatisfaction. Buckingham and Clifton (2001) in their groundbreaking book, Now Discover Your Strengths support this focus, “you should focus your training time and money on educating him about his strengths and figuring out how to build on these strengths rather than trying to plug his 'skill gaps.' ” (p. 217). While the advantages of this approach may seem evident, in practice, I have had difficulty convincing organizations and individuals of the worth of working this way. For those who do try it, the results convince them of the superiority of this method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Needs</th>
<th>Current Role</th>
<th>+/-</th>
<th>Ways To Increase My Satisfaction</th>
<th>Benefit to Me</th>
<th>Benefit to the Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy/Independence/ Little direct supervision</td>
<td>Makes own schedule and can work from home if needed</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>4 day work week when needed with longer work day</td>
<td>Can be at my kids school events</td>
<td>More focus on priority tasks to thank the organization for the flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands on Boss</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Meet with my manager to determine what I need to do to gain trust</td>
<td>More freedom to get work done in a timely fashion</td>
<td>Reduced roadblocks to getting work done. Increased trust with manager allows for greater productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/Intellectual Challenge/ Lots of chance to create new</td>
<td>Ongoing new opportunities to learn new things and apply them</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Ask for a project that would “stretch” my mind</td>
<td>Keeps my mind fresh and active</td>
<td>Learning and growing always adds value to the organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To summarize our work so far, Step 1 - Defining What I Want, has employees engaged identifying and selecting primary values, creating a values statement and job nirvana profile. Step 2- Understanding What I Have, continues the values journey for the employee by assessing the current state of satisfaction and creating an initial draft of ideas for increased satisfaction. As we move onto Step 3 - Creating An Improvement Plan, we will explore the role of the company culture in the ultimate success of this process.

**Step 3 - Creating An Improvement Plan**

There are many challenges associated with leading an organization where employees come to work with different requirements for fulfilling their values. This is not to say that the employees values are different than those of the organization, they may just need different methods of satisfying those values on the job. These challenges rise as the company grows from a small size where everyone knows each other to one that exists in multiple time zones and locations. The temptation is to create guidelines and rules that make managing consistent and standardized. Buckingham and Clifton (2001) present a different view by stating “The great organization must not only accommodate the fact that each employee is different, it must capitalize on these differences” (p. 5).

To implement this process effectively, the culture of the organization must truly encourage employees to feel comfortable bringing suggestions for improved job satisfaction and provide tools and processes that facilitate the change. When working with companies considering this process, one key fear that I hear often is that employees will ask for large or unreasonable changes, i.e., salary increases, promotions, non-standard work schedules that interfere with the daily operations of the organization. In my experience, this has not been the case. More often, employees ask for small changes which can include requests for special projects and more involvement in helping make the organization successful and profitable.

There are a few ways that Step 3 can be implemented easily. Here are a few of the more common ones that have been successful. Encourage employees to schedule structured meetings. Using the sample outputs seen in Step 2 can serve as a foundation for these
meetings, making them simple and easy to work with. Gilmore (2008) states that Ringler recommends employees approach the meeting with an agenda which includes discussing their values, how they are being satisfied on the job and some suggestions for how to increase satisfaction which would increase their productivity. If an organization already has a standard performance management process which includes ongoing meetings, weekly, monthly or quarterly, conversations on employee satisfaction and suggestions for improvement should be integrated into these meetings as a regular agenda item. It is not recommended to wait until the annual appraisal meeting to discuss these items.

Once the employee and manager have discussed the suggestions for improvement and come to consensus on changes, then a tracking process needs to be put into place to be sure the changes are occurring and that they do result in increased satisfaction and productivity for the employee.

**Implementation Recommendations**

In my work with companies who choose to embrace this process, I have discovered that company culture is often the determining factor in final implementation. In this final section I will be discussing various options so that the company leadership can select the elements that best fit its needs.

For companies who have a deeply embedded collaborative culture then a team approach is often optimal. For example Step 1 can be completed in a workshop format, at least to create a first draft of the primary values. Williams, (n.d.) supports this approach but cautions that “Participants should approach the activity as a learning exercise and not as a performance or competition. No one should be made to feel self-conscious about having difficulty generating an elaborate or altruistic set of values” (¶ 14). Organizations who are team based can choose to encourage employees to complete Steps 1 & 2 in a group format or work with a peer coach, “Peer-to-peer coaching is fun, because it involves learning and solving real problems; it's free; and, I've found, just about anyone can do it” (Friedman, 2010, ¶ 6). Step 3 should be completed with the manager in a private one-on-one format to build stronger relationships and increase trust.

If the organization is built on a more traditional culture of interaction between manager and employee, this process may take on a different look, but will be just as successful if the organization is committed to supporting it. To complete Steps 1 and 2, the employee can have an initial meeting with the manager who assumes the role of mentor in supporting employee efforts. This mentor vs. manager distinction is important as the employee will be taking a self-leadership role as described earlier in completing the work. The mentor or, as the Online Etymology Dictionary states, “wise advisor” (n.d.) will be there to support these efforts so the employee can take charge of his/her own satisfaction improvement plan.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

This process is very powerful and can have an extraordinary effect on employee retention and organizational performance regardless of the organizations size or age. Research on the linkage between employee satisfaction and company profitability is ongoing as companies seek to identify and retain top talent. One report from the Corporate Executive Board (2003) cites several examples of companies who have measured the link between employee satisfaction
and customer service, resulting in revenue growth. One example cited in this report was Sears who “found that a five percent increase in employee satisfaction drives a 1.3 percent in customer satisfaction, which results in 0.5 percent increase in revenue growth” (p. 3). Reduced turnover was cited in this report as well with this example, “Just Born experienced a 48 percent decrease in turnover rate (from 50 to two percent) after developing an employee-focused culture that has been communicated to and embraced by employees at all levels of this Pennsylvania candy company” (p.4). Forbes magazine (2012) supports these thoughts by citing external research conducted by Towers Perrin and Kenexa. “In fact, according to Towers Perrin research companies with engaged workers have 6% higher net profit margins, and according to Kenexa research engaged companies have five times higher shareholder returns over five years” (¶ 5).

If your organization chooses to embark on a plan with this method, management must be prepared to visibly support it, or it will backfire, possibly resulting in higher turnover and the loss of employee confidence. Consideration should be given to training for both management and employees so everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in this important change. One important final thought about integrating a values satisfaction process into the organizational culture, it cannot be a one-time effort. There are research findings that indicate the primary values endure throughout life, with small changes. (Aliotta, 2002; Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Piirto, 2005; Rokeach, 1968-1969). There is an alternative school of thought that suggests values do change according to factors such as changes in societal values, attaining new knowledge about self or organizations (Almeida & Pinto, 2003; Argandona, 2003; Connor & Becker, 2003; Hague, 1993; MPG The Success Connection Workbook, 2003). Both schools of thought do imply that engaging employees in values satisfaction exercises can prove beneficial to the organization, the employee and ultimately the customer. Argandona (2003) suggested that the process of discussing and defining values must be repeated regularly or when major internal or external changes take place. In my work with organizations who embrace this concept, there is a dedication to ensuring employee values are satisfied on a continuous basis, even for those small changes in primary values, which encourages continuous satisfaction growth and commitment to the growth of the organization.
REFERENCES


