Revisiting the applicability of classical and contemporary theories on employee satisfaction in today's work environment: a theoretical perspective

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic work environment, enhancing employee satisfaction is a challenge due to the ever-changing individual, cultural and organisational experiences. This theoretical paper seeks to determine the applicability of the classical and contemporary theories of employee satisfaction in addressing challenges that hamper employee satisfaction in today's workplace. The paper commences with an overview of the classical and contemporary theories suggesting that each theory on its own is incomplete and its degree of applicability varies. The paper then compares various theories and from a theoretical viewpoint indicates the importance of the different theories in dealing with employee satisfaction. Finally, the paper makes suggestions towards the most appropriate theories that can collectively provide a conceptual framework for employee satisfaction in today's work environment.

INTRODUCTION

Employee satisfaction has enjoyed a significant attention from researchers over many decades (Ahmad, Mustafa, Ahmad, & Ahmad, 2012; Okanya, 2008; Rafiq & Chishti, 2011). Therefore, various definitions of employee satisfaction have emerged in research. According to Labuschagne, Bosman, and Buitendach (2005: 27), employee satisfaction refers to the individual's perception and evaluation of the job and the organisation, which are affected by his or her unique circumstances such as needs, values, and expectations. Mafini and Pooe (2013: 2) support the idea that employee satisfaction entails a positive or negative attitude, while Zhu (2012: 294-295) contends that only employees' positive and pleasant feelings in work define employee satisfaction. Otherwise, the negative and unpleasant feelings in work are defined as employee dissatisfaction. In this paper, employee satisfaction is viewed as the perceptions of employees on all aspects of the job and the organisation in relation to addressing individuals' circumstances.

The study of employee satisfaction has been given two rationales, namely the humanitarian and instrumentalist arguments. First, the humanitarian argument emphasises attempts to increase the quality of work life. Second, the instrumentalist argument regards employee

satisfaction as an industrial malaise that produces diverse problems crystallised in the company's balance sheet. No rationale seems to be superior to the other. Rather, they are complementary in nature. Therefore, studies on employee satisfaction seem to be relevant for scholars, managers, and employees alike, due to its effect on organisational activity, outcomes, and employees (Kumar, 2013: 1; Martins & Proença, 2012: 1; Mudor & Tooksoon, 2011: 41). The next section examines the problem investigated and the literature regarding theories and models used to explain the motivational and cognitive processes pertaining to employee satisfaction.

PROBLEM INVESTIGATED AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Today's work environment has dramatically changed if compared to the 19th century, during which most employee satisfaction theories were developed. But low employee satisfaction in the workplace is still a challenge today (Kamara, 2008: 2; Overseas Development Institute, 2009: 13) and various studies emphasise a need to satisfy employees at the workplace (Aksoy, Şengün, & Yilmaz, 2018; Mafini & Pooe, 2013; Sykes, 2015). Recent studies maintain that employee satisfaction is still important to an organisation's success (Aksoy, Şengün, & Yilmaz, 2018; Gebremichael & Rao, 2013; Hrnjic, Pilav – Velic, Djidelija, & Jahic, 2018; Kour & Sudan, 2018; Qureshi et al., 2013) and needs further research. This is due to the positive outcomes of organisations that have been linked to employee satisfaction and the consequences that organisations face due to little attention or inadequate practices on dealing with this concept (Ijigu, 2015; Newton & Teo, 2014; Sykes, 2015).

Therefore, this theoretical paper seeks to determine the applicability of the classical and contemporary theories of employee satisfaction in addressing challenges that hamper employee satisfaction in today's workplace. Most theories about employee satisfaction are also regarded as motivation theories because work motivation is linked directly to employee satisfaction; therefore, these theories are applied to the work context to explain and improve satisfaction of employees (Evans & Olumide-Aluko, 2010: 75; Mosikidi, 2012: 20). Theories that provide knowledge on employee satisfaction were developed between the 1940s and 1970s. These theories have been classified as classical and contemporary theories. The classical theories of employee satisfaction are generally content theories while contemporary theories are described as process theories (Ehiobuche, 2013: 25).

Classical/Content theories

Classical theories are predominantly concerned with the individuals' identification and priorities regarding specific needs, motives, or goals most conducive to satisfaction with their job and organisation. According to Makrygiannis (2013: 15) and Saif, Nawaz, Jan, and Khan (2012: 1385), the basis of these theories is that individual need deficiencies activate tensions in a person, and individuals reduce their intensity by formulating behaviour that will attempt to satisfy those deficiencies. The implication drawn is that, when individuals are not receiving what they see as their need, they will adjust their behaviour to a state of stability that can satisfy their need. Therefore, these theories emphasise need satisfaction. Some of the well-known classical theories are presented below.

Maslow's need hierarchy (1943)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has been used effectively for several decades to explain and address employee motivation in organisational management studies all around the world (Pulasinghage, 2010: 201). This theory has also been utilised in studies on employee satisfaction (Mafini & Pooe, 2013: 2; Pulasinghage, 2010: 202; Sadri & Bowen, 2011: 45) and has been regarded as the foundational theory for other theories of employee satisfaction. The theory identifies five levels of motivation in a person or an employee. Each level is characterised by needs that employees would like to be fulfilled. Maslow (1970) suggests that

these levels follow a hierarchy of human needs, commencing with physiological needs and progressing through to needs of safety or security, belongingness and love, self-esteem and self-actualisation.

Maslow suggests that these needs must be satisfied in the order listed in order to be operative. Therefore, outcomes satisfying a particular need will be attractive only once the lower-order needs have been satisfied first. Mosikidi (2012: 24) states that these needs are predominant until they are gratified. Higher-order needs are not completely satisfied and require longer periods to be satisfied (Sahoo, Sahoo, & Dias, 2011: 25). The application of this concept at the workplace implies that each employee of an organisation would be at a given level of the hierarchy of needs and always would prefer to achieve the next level (Pulasinghage, 2010). For instance, below a certain level of occupational hierarchy, a job provides for subsistence needs, while above this level, higher intrinsic needs will be satisfied. However, not all individuals conform to this hierarchy. These needs only provide a framework on the common needs of human beings; therefore, this list cannot be conclusive and comprehensive with regard to all needs experienced by people in all specific contexts. Again, some individuals may not add value to all the above- mentioned needs due to their living conditions and personal circumstances.

In today's workplace, human needs do not always follow the hierarchical order as indicated by the theory (Pulasinghage, 2010: 202). Therefore, attempts to address the above-stated needs of employees must be flexible enough to cater for distortions in the expected hierarchy. For instance, higher-order needs such as recognition and job security and a lower-order need may be addressed simultaneously through praise and long-term contracts respectively. This implies that inversions or reordering of needs for particular individuals at particular turning points is possible. In addition, the idea of equating lower-order needs with inferiority and higher-order needs with superiority cannot be valid in all situations (Sahoo et al., 2011: 26). Sometimes, the importance and priority of needs may depend on the individual and cultural contexts. To reiterate, Western societies regard individuality and individual needs as more important than collectivism and collective needs. This importance is also reflected in Maslow's theory (Sahoo et al., 2011: 26). This shortcoming indicates the inadequacy of the theory in terms of dealing with employee satisfaction across cultures, especially those found in developing continents, such as Africa and Asia. Therefore, in today's workplace, Maslow's theory must be considered as a framework for understanding and action rather than a rigid prescription governing all human activity. Meaning, the theory can be used to understand employees' needs at the workplace and may be utilised with flexibility in the formation of intervention strategies on improving employee satisfaction. In line with this idea, the theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be used as a framework to identify the various benefits organisations can offer to satisfy their employees' needs and, in turn, increase revenues and reduce expenses (Sadri & Bowen, 2011: 45-48).

Herzberg's two-factor theory (1959)

The two-factor theory, also called the motivator-hygiene theory, which was developed by Herzberg, is seen as one of the most quoted and optimistic theories on employee satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968: 120; Townsend, Sundelowitz, & Stanz, 2007: 29; Zhu, 2012: 297). According to this theory, motivators, also known as intrinsic factors or job content factors, cause employee satisfaction at work. On the other hand, hygiene factors, also regarded as extrinsic or job context factors, cause job dissatisfaction (Purohit & Bandyopadhyay, 2014: n.p). The motivating factors address issues such as the work itself, achievement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth, and advancement. If met in a job, these factors produce employee satisfaction. Maintaining good levels of these motivators over time would result in sustained high employee satisfaction. On the contrary, hygiene factors include company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, job security, personal life, and status (Evans & Olumide-Aluko, 2010: 75). Mosikidi (2012: 31) and Purohit

and Bandyopadhyay (2014: n.p) maintain that hygiene factors describe the job factors that are considered to be just the maintenance factors that are important to avoid dissatisfaction with work, but do not necessarily provide satisfaction or positive motivation. This idea excludes a minority of individuals who are hygiene seekers and may be motivated by hygiene factors (Evans & Olumide-Aluko, 2010: 75). Despite this idea, not all individuals react to these factors hygienically, as the environmental factors and individual circumstances can also affect employees' perceptions of needs. For instance, the issue of categorising pay as a hygiene factor may not be applicable to the context of developing countries that are characterised by harsh economic conditions and poor living standards (Evans & Olumide-Aluko, 2010: 75).

Although the two-factor theory is used widely to conceptualise employee satisfaction, Herzberg's methodology was criticised for its failure to account for individual differences, its ignorance of situational variables, its inability to utilise an overall measure of satisfaction – a problem posed by two continua – and its inability to explicitly account for cultural diversity (Mosikidi, 2012: 35; Townsend et al., 2007: 29). In reality, people have a cultural tendency to attribute their satisfaction and achievement to themselves and their failure or dissatisfaction to the extrinsic environment. In this case, the paper argues that in today's reality, employees may attribute their satisfaction to factors in the work environment, such as company policies and supervision, which the theory says are associated only with dissatisfaction and no dissatisfaction.

To explain the concept of satisfaction versus dissatisfaction, Herzberg's theory inherently assumes that there are two separate continua on which values of employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction should be placed, because the factors that enhance employee satisfaction are very distinct from those that lead to job dissatisfaction. Despite its general acceptance, the issue of two continua can be complicated by the fact that some hygiene factors may be regarded as the motivators in some cases, as previously argued in this paper. Hence, the components or the number of influential factors within these continua may vary from one context to another, depending on their surrounding circumstances. For instance, Bowditch et al. (2008) explain that some studies have shown that needs for salary, recognition, and responsibility actually function as both motivators and maintenance factors. However, this theory has the significant contribution and positive implications towards improving employee satisfaction.

Herzberg's theory, just like Maslow's theory, has drawn attention to the importance of job design in order to bring about job enrichment. Herzberg's theory emphasises the importance of the quality of work life and advocates the restructuring of jobs to give greater emphasis to the motivating factors at work, to make jobs interesting, and to satisfy higher-level needs (Sahoo et al., 2011: 26). For instance, managers should increase autonomy at the job by ensuring more employee participation in decision-making processes relating to how the work should be done. Additionally, managers should expand human resource management by ensuring that it mainly focuses on increasing motivational factors present in the job, instead of concentrating only on hygiene factors (Mosikidi, 2012: 58). However, owing to the complexity of identifying hygiene and motivators that is caused by individual differences, the significance of these factors on employee satisfaction can first be determined, measured, and then summed up to determine the overall satisfaction.

Notwithstanding the centrality and importance of Hertzberg's two-factor theory to the concept of employee satisfaction (Townsend et al., 2007: 29) and its applicability in today's work environment, the above-mentioned limitations mean it cannot on its own address all issues pertinent to employee satisfaction.

McClelland's theory of needs-achievement (1961)

McClelland's theory postulates that some people strive to succeed based on their need for personal achievement rather than their need for rewards of their success (Saif et al., 2012: 1387). According to this theory, an individual's needs are the result of learning, which is influenced by an achievement motive (Makrygiannis, 2013: 19). Hence, the theory emphasises an achievement motive by individuals and regards this motive as being founded by three motivators, namely achievement, power and affiliation (Raeisi, Hadadi, Faraji, & Salehian, 2012: 1232). Satisfaction of these motivators at the workplace is associated with increased employee satisfaction. These motivators are not inherent; people develop them over time through cultural, work, and life experiences. According to the theory, people will have different characteristics depending on their dominant motivators (Saif *et al*., 2012: 1387). Hence, an achievement motive or need may be fulfilled by the individual's ability to meet challenging goals, ability to influence others, and/or high affiliation with colleagues. These motivators are similar to those identified by Herzberg's two-factor theory and are associated with employee satisfaction at the workplace.

McClelland's theory also has similarities with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. People who are satisfied by the fulfilment of their achievement needs according to McClelland's theory are the same people who focus on self-actualisation and growth according to Maslow's theory. In today's work environment, McClelland's theory suggests fulfilment of higher-order needs or motivators at the workplace, which has the potential to address the achievement motives of individual employees and improve their satisfaction at the workplace. The achievement of employees can be addressed by creating opportunities for training, responsibility, compensation, feedback, and goal setting (Makrygiannis, 2013: 19). On the other hand the theory can address only few of the factors of employee satisfaction. To understand and manage employee satisfaction fully, all possible factors of the concept must be identified; hence, there is a need to review other relevant theories.

Theory of work adjustment (1964)

The theory of work adjustment (TWA), developed by Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1964), has proven to be fundamental to the study of employee satisfaction. In agreement, Mosikidi (2012: 2) maintains that employee satisfaction is a function of the fit between the employee's vocational needs or values and reinforcers provided by the work environment. In fact, this theory proposes that satisfaction with work promotes a harmonious relationship between an employee and the environment. Eggerth (2008: 64) adds that TWA work is an interactive and reciprocal process, implying that there is mutual benefit between the employee and the environment and that the needs of the work environment must be met by the employee and vice versa. Ultimately, employees and their work environments impose requirements on each other. For instance, employees are required to have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the work, and the work environment should fulfil employees' expectations about compensation. On this note, the subjective assessment of the extent to which employees' needs or requirements are met by the work environment is pertinent to employee satisfaction.

This idea necessitates good career choices to be made by matching individuals and jobs based on attributes such as abilities, interests, and values (Eggerth & Flynn, 2012: 77). For this reason, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire was developed to measure 20 work-related reinforcers (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). Notably, these reinforces are categorised into intrinsic and extrinsic components of satisfaction, similar to what Herzberg's two-factor theory refers to as motivators and hygiene factors. However, the main difference between TWA reinforcers and Herzberg's factors is found in the perceived effect on employee satisfaction. The former are all linked directly to satisfaction, while the latter are linked to satisfaction and dissatisfaction on different continuums (Eggerth & Flynn, 2012: 81; Purohit & Bandyopadhyay, 2014: n.p).

The theory of work adjustment has advantages in that it acknowledges individual differences with regard to preferred work reinforcers (Eggerth & Flynn, 2012: 79) and also makes it possible to identify certain variables that, among a large group of people performing similar jobs, may contribute to employee satisfaction across the organisation. TWA is comprehensive enough to be applied to career choice, selection, training, and organisational interventions, although it may not necessarily be adequate to cover all -this by placing equal emphasis on satisfying the worker and the workplace and by using symmetrical processes to describe both. However, a worker who is well satisfied with a job may still perform at an unsatisfactory level from the perspective of the employer and be at risk of termination. Conversely, an employer may be well satisfied with a worker's performance, but the worker might be dissatisfied with the job and choose to seek other employment.

In today's work environment, the theory of work adjustment (TWA) has the potential to influence policies and decision making on a national level due to its practicality in addressing employee versus work environment issues (Eggerth, 2008: 63). More so, the theory offers specific, valuable recommendations for helping clients who struggle with job dissatisfaction and quitting decisions. It also offers active and reactive strategies that clients might adopt to improve their work circumstances, and it has proven useful for helping a diversity of client types ranging from teenagers entering the workforce to older adults moving on to retirement (Dahling & Librizzi, 2015: 218). The TWA can also be utilised across different cultures and organisational contexts to determine and address individual employees' perceptions about their satisfaction at the workplace (Lyons, Velez, Mehta, & Neill, 2014: 474), though some noticeable deviations can be seen in the results obtained when the theory is applied in diverse settings. Meanwhile, other classical theories on employee satisfaction can be reviewed to determine their applicability to the management of employee satisfaction in today's work environment.

Other classical theories

According to Lawter, Kopelman and Prottas (2015: 85), McGregor's X and Y theory that is based on two distinct assumptions about human beings has substantial implications for employee satisfaction. In these assumptions, one is fundamentally negative and labelled Theory X and the other is fundamentally positive and labelled Theory Y. McGregor's X and Y theory remains a valid basic principle from which to develop positive management style and techniques. This theory relates managers' assumptions about human nature to their behaviour towards employees. In this context, Theory X assumes that most individuals are dominated by lower-order needs. Consequently, managers believe employees have to be motivated by pay and punishment to improve their productivity. Alternatively, Theory Y assumes that employees' satisfaction is enhanced when employees' higher-order needs are fulfilled.

The theory posits that employee satisfaction can be enhanced if employees are involved in decision-making processes, if they experience their work as meaningful, challenging, and making room for creativity (Mosikidi, 2012: 37). Both theories can be applied in today's work environment, which is very dynamic in nature. The implication derived from this theory is that managers should be aware of their pre-assumptions about their employees and avoid using unsystematic assessments of what motivates their employees. Thus, paying attention to this view would mean that the right means of addressing employees' needs would result in improved employee satisfaction.

Lastly, Alderfer's ERG theory of motivation has some links to the study of employee satisfaction. The ERG theory is viewed as a variation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Mosikidi, 2012: 30). Compared with the theory of Maslow, the ERG theory includes the same needs concentrated in three categories (Sahoo et al., 2011: 26). On this note, Alderfer (1972) insists that human beings have existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth needs. According to the propositions of this theory, relatedness needs emerge only after existence

needs have been satisfied, and growth needs follow the fulfilment of relatedness needs (Li, 2011: 84). All the above needs are arranged on a continuum rather than a hierarchy (Makrygiannis, 2013: 19); thus, the shortcomings of the hierarchy proposed by Maslow do not exist in this theory. The idea of a continuum avoids the implication that the higher up an individual is in the hierarchy, the better it is (Sahoo *et al.*, 2011: 26). This means that the ERG theory caters for individual differences and multiple complexities in dealing with human needs. Thus, different types of needs can operate simultaneously, and their satisfaction may come at different times, depending on individuals and their circumstances. Despite the relevance of this theory to the study of employee satisfaction in today's work environment, it is not comprehensive, as it does not cover the possible variety of factors that can hamper or promote satisfaction of employees at the workplace. However, it provides some insights with regard to flexibility and complexities, which must be addressed when dealing with employee satisfaction in today's workplace.

Notably, the knowledge of employee satisfaction that is derived from discussing and analysing classical theories can be enhanced further by reviewing coexisting contemporary/process theories on the phenomenon.

Contemporary/Process theories

Contemporary theories go further than identifying basic needs that motivate people. They focus on the individual's dynamic thought processes and how they produce certain types of behaviour, attitudes, or satisfaction (Makrygiannis, 2013: 15). In view of these theories, dealing with employee satisfaction necessitates an establishment of goals to direct behaviour and programmes that are perceived as equitable and deliver desirable outcomes the employee expects to achieve. There are various contemporary theories of employee satisfaction in the literature but this paper focuses on the well-known contemporary theories, which are most used in management studies.

Equity theory (1963)

Adam's theory of individual equity has enjoyed significant attention by researchers in the field of organisational behaviour and human resource management. Mainly, the usefulness of the equity theory emanates from its relatively greater scope in comparison with many of the other available theories, with its applicability to a wide range of employee outcomes including stress, turnover, absenteeism, performance, and employee satisfaction (Disley, Hatton, & Dagnan, 2009). The focus of this theory is on describing perceptions of employees with regard to organisational justice and social justice (Disley *et al.*, 2009: 56; Siegel, Schraeder, & Morrison, 2008: 64).

Adam's equity theory assumes that individuals value and seek social justice in how they are rewarded for their productivity and work quality (Adams, 1963). This theory states that employees compare their input to outcome/outcome received or their input-outcome ratio with the input-outcome ratio of comparable others. When these ratios are perceived as equal to those of others, a state of equity exists and the employee is satisfied (Mosikidi, 2012: 47). Thus, the equity theory proposes that satisfaction is a function of how fairly an individual is treated at work. In this case, employee's perception of the fairness of compensation is more important than the actual amount received. Inequity can be either positive or negative. Whether positive or negative, inequity creates tension or distress in the individual that can manifest as anger when the person feels under-benefited, or guilt when he or she feels over-benefited (Perry, 1993: 565). Individuals experiencing this tension or distress usually aim to reduce or eliminate the inequity (Disley *et al.*, 2009: 57). While previous research has provided some evidence that inequity that is more positive lowers employee satisfaction than negative inequity does, Perry (1993: 568) argues that the equity group experiences higher satisfaction than the negative-inequity group does, and lower employer satisfaction than the positive

inequity group does. This idea means that the relationship between equity and employee satisfaction yields an ordinary linear regression.

Since Adams' (1963) equity theory focuses on employee perceptions, it seems relevant in determining the kind of inputs for which employees believe they deserve rewards and the type of rewards they deserve. These perceptions can then help researchers to establish important factors of the employee, the organisational environment, and the work that can be linked to the satisfaction of employees (Siegel *et al.*, 2008: 64). Identifying and understanding these factors may assist decision makers to develop and implement policies or strategies that can improve and manage employee satisfaction in their organisations. For instance, Mosikidi (2012: 60) asserts that Adam's equity theory is important because it enlightens managers about the fact that employees prefer salary systems and promotion policies that they regard as being just, unambiguous, and in agreement with their expectations. In this case, it also assists managers to realise that each employee's perception of the equity of those factors really matters. Therefore, Adam's equity theory provides fundamental understanding to employees' perceptions of what can satisfy them, although it has a shortcoming in that employees' perceptions of their inputs and outputs or those of others may be incorrect. This means that the theory is very essential in managing employee satisfaction in today's work environment, but its practical application in identifying real factors of employee satisfaction may be complex.

Expectancy theory (1964)

Employees' satisfaction depends on how they perceive the relationship between what they put into the job and what they get out of it. The expectancy theory developed by Vroom (1964) attempts to explain the output performance of employees by considering their expectations about obtaining desired outcomes after performing at higher levels of effort and productivity. This theory claims that the strength of certain perceptions about abilities, actions, and outcomes determines whether people will act or exert effort (Johnson, 2009: 275). In support of this notion, Liao, Liu, and Pi (2011: 252) suggest that expenditure of an individual's effort will be determined by expected outcomes and the value placed on such outcomes in a person's mind. For instance, employees will be more productive when they realise that their efforts are recognised, they are given opportunities to excel, they are expected to do so, and there is an adequate reward for good performance (Johnson, 2009: 274). To explain the relationship of inputs and expectations, the expectancy theory proposes that motivation to act rests on three causal linkages that exist in a perceptual chain between making an effort and achieving satisfaction. For someone to be motivated to act, all three linkages must be perceived to have a high degree of potential (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1:

Perceptual linkages of Vroom's expectancy theory
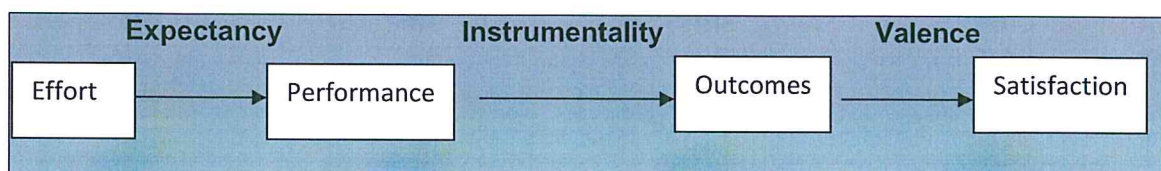
Source: Adapted from Hamington (2010).

The arrows in Figure 1 represent the perceptual linkages. The first linkage pertains to expectancy and characterises the perceived relationship between effort and performance. In this case, the individual must believe that his or her effort will lead to a desired performance. Instrumentality is the second linkage, which reflects the relationship between performance and outcomes. With regard to this linkage, the individual must believe that if he or she achieves a certain performance, it will trigger certain outcomes. Finally, valence is identified as a link

between outcomes and satisfaction. This perceptual linkage implies that people will not be motivated to act if they fail to view the outcome as valuable. This means that satisfaction emanates from valuable outcomes. Vroom's theory emphasises that actions depend upon the individual perceiving all three causal relationships as positive (Hamington, 2010: 681). Put together, the three causal relationships imply that the decision about the amount of effort people exert is based on a systematic analysis of the value of the rewards expected from outcomes, the likelihood that rewards will result from these outcomes, and the likelihood of attaining these outcomes through actions and efforts (Liao *et al.*, 2011: 253).

Practically, Slocum and Hellriegel (2011: 176) assert that individuals have their own varying needs and ideas about what they value or desire from their work. Therefore, people are affected by these needs and ideas when taking decisions about which organisation to join and how much effort to exert in their work. Again, if employees expect their job to be challenging or well paying and it is not, they will be dissatisfied, but if employees expect their job to be dull or less paying and it turns out that way, their frustration may be minimal (Kumar, 2013: 1). In today's workplace context, the expectancy theory holds that employees are rational beings who will be motivated to put more effort into their work when they believe that their efforts will lead to a good performance appraisal, that a good appraisal will enable them to reap organisational rewards like bonuses, promotions, or salary increases, and that these rewards will actually gratify their personal goals (Mosikidi, 2012: 59). This implies the necessity for managers to aim at improving the perceived link between performance and outcomes. The idea can be implemented by tying outcomes more directly to performance by employing incentive plans, commissions, merit raises, or merit-based promotions. These attempts will address the factors of employee satisfaction that seem to be emphasised by this theory, namely ability utilisation, activity, compensation, and recognition. To address employee satisfaction holistically in this century, the expectancy theory may serve as an add-on to other theories.

Job characteristic model (1976)

Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model (JCM) is among the most widely researched models in organisational behaviour and human resource management and best links employee satisfaction to the objective nature of the work environment (Crede *et al.*, 2007: 517). Indeed, Hackman and Oldham (1976) are pioneers in the study of employee satisfaction as a psychological work construct in determining employee fulfilment in their work (Kumar, 2013: 3). This model creates a dominant framework for defining task characteristics and determining their relationship to employee motivation, performance, and satisfaction. In addition, this model advocates for job redesign activities such as job rotation, job enlargement, job enrichment, and self-directed work teams to ensure employee satisfaction and attainment of organisational goals. The premise of this model is that goals are set jointly with management and employees, with employees being accountable for attaining these goals (Maniram, 2007: 18).

Hackman and Oldham (1976) suggest that motivating jobs are characterised by five core characteristics that affect employee satisfaction directly. These are task identity (how closely the employee can relate to his or her part of the task being completed), task significance (the importance of the employee's contribution in the task being completed), skill variety (whether the employee has a variety of responsibilities or not), autonomy (the amount of control that the employee has over the job), and feedback (how confident the employee is that his or her job is done well) (Coelho & Augusto, 2010: 428; Kumar, 2013: 3; Maniram, 2007: 19). These characteristics coincide with Maslow's higher-order needs and Herzberg's motivators, which are regarded as most influential in improving employee satisfaction.

In view of the above-mentioned notion, Maniram (2007: 19) states that individuals who perceive their jobs to rank highly on the five core characteristics would enjoy higher levels of

employee satisfaction, and vice versa. Maniram (2007: 19) further argues that the first three dimensions, namely skill variety, task identity, and task significance, are unified to ensure that the job is more meaningful. If these characteristics are evident in a job, the employee will interpret the job as more valuable and worthwhile; in turn, this improves employee satisfaction. Additionally, the jobs that include autonomy will equip employees with a sense of personal responsibility and self-fulfilment. Likewise, a job that provides for feedback will create sensitivity about performance and effectiveness among employees. To reiterate, enriching the five core characteristics should in turn allow employees to experience three motivating psychological states, namely experienced meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of the work outcomes. Ultimately, high levels of motivation, creativity, and quality of work performance, organisational commitment, and employee satisfaction will be produced (Coelho & Augusto, 2010: 426). These relationships are illustrated in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2:

The Hackman and Oldham model of job redesign and motivation
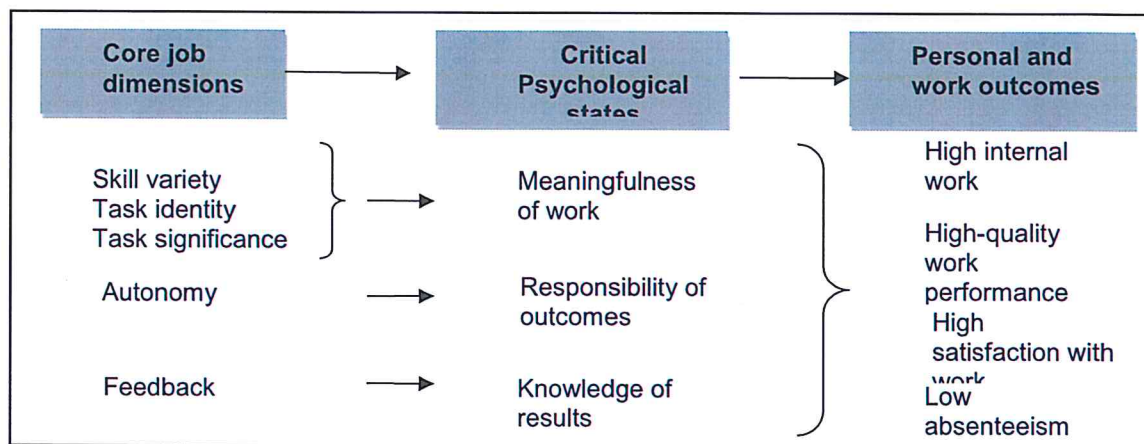
Source: Adapted from Casey and Casey (2014)

Further, the JCM emphasises stable and enduring characteristics of the job environment that are constant across employees in the same job (Crede *et al.*, 2007: 517). In today's work environment, this theory provides some knowledge on how managers can design and redesign jobs over time to ensure that employees are engaged in motivating tasks that induce employee satisfaction. Despite general agreement about the JCM, it has been criticised for ignoring other individual characteristics and demographic variables that may act as moderators or influencers of employee satisfaction (Crede *et al.*, 2007: 518). More contemporary theories on employee satisfaction are discussed below.

Other contemporary theories

Other common theories associated with employee satisfaction include Locke's (1968) goal-setting theory and Porter-Lawler's (1968) expectancy model. The main idea of the goal-setting theory is that the primary source of motivation and satisfaction at the workplace originates from the desire of an employee to achieve a particular goal that has adequate intensity and content (Makrygiannis, 2013: 23). Thus, the significance of the goal, the degree of commitment it demands and its level of complexity are likely to influence the level of satisfaction of an employee with regard to that particular goal at work.

Saif *et al.* (2012: 1390) state the importance of Locke's goal-setting theory in that difficult goals demand focus on problems, increase sense of goal importance and encourage persistence to achieve goals. Paying attention to this notion, when planning all work-related goals and activities, would likely result in improved overall satisfaction in today's work environment.

However, it must be noted that employee satisfaction may decrease when goals are so difficult to the extent that employees perceive them as impossible. Again, if there is a lack of feedback from supervisors and managers, employee satisfaction may be hampered. Indeed, the goal-setting theory emphasises that feedback in the process of pursuing a goal improves creativity and satisfaction (Makrygiannis, 2013: 24), while feedback after attainment of goals may enhance self-efficacy, employee satisfaction, and a will to succeed in future organisational endeavours.

On the other hand, Porter-Lawler's (1968) expectancy model emphasises that effort (force or strength of motivation) does not lead directly to performance, but it is rather moderated by the abilities, traits, and role perceptions of an employee. Again, satisfaction is not dependent on performance but relies on the employees' perceived probability of receiving fair rewards (Saif *et al.*, 2012: 1389). Additionally, an employee should have the ability to understand the requirements of his or her job clearly and be capable of acting upon them and giving adequate effort (Makrygiannis, 2013: 24). Notably, this model enriches Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory on recognising the role of personality characteristics of an individual (e.g., abilities and skills) in enhancing employee satisfaction. Otherwise, this model relates effort, performance, rewards, and satisfaction as the key variables, similar to Vroom's theory. Applying this theory at the workplace in today's dynamic work environment would mean that the personalities of employees must first be understood and measured before developing any strategies of enhancing employee satisfaction.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All the theories discussed above provide background knowledge on the factors of employee satisfaction (see Table 1) and possible approaches that can be utilised in managing employee satisfaction. With regard to the factors of employee satisfaction, Table 1 depicts that not all theories address the same factors and that some theories have a wider coverage of factors that are linked with employee satisfaction than others have.

TABLE 1:

Summary of Employee Satisfaction Theories

Factors of employee satisfaction	Classical Theories (Need satisfaction)				Contemporary Theories (Thought and perception)		
	Maslow (1943)	Herzberg (1959)	McLelland (1961)	Dawis et al. (1964)	Adams (1963)	Vroom (1964)	Hackman & Oldham (1976)
Ability utilisation	x	x		x	x	x	x
Achievement	x	x	x	x		x	x
Activity	x	x		x	x	x	x
Advancement	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Authority		x	x	x			
Company policies and practices		x		x			
Compensation	x	x	x	x	x	x	

	Classical Theories (Need satisfaction)				Contemporary Theories (Thought and perception)		
Co-employees	x	x	x	x			
Creativity		x		x	x		x
Independence	x	x		x			x
Moral values	x	x		x			
Recognition	x	x		x	x		
Responsibility	x	x	x	x			x
Security	x	x		x	x		
Social service		x		x			
Social status		x	x	x	x		
Supervision – human relations		x		x	x		
Supervision – technical		x		x	x		
Variety		x		x			x
Working conditions	x	x		x	x		

Source: Researcher's own conceptualisation

Logically, theories with a wider range of factors are likely to provide a holistic understanding of the satisfaction phenomenon than otherwise. Despite this difference, all these theories suggest that managers are expected to play the most critical role of supporting and developing employees at the workplace.

In dealing with employee satisfaction, classical theories focus on the content of what motivates and satisfies employees at one point in time and do not predict behaviour (Casey & Casey, 2014: 2; Saif *et al.*, 2012: 1394). This suggests that managers should be able to identify employees' needs that are met and those that are not. From these findings, managers may develop, modify, and implement policies or programmes to enhance employee satisfaction. In contrast, contemporary theories consider what employees are thinking about when they decide whether or not to put effort into a certain activity, and how employees choose behavioural actions to meet their expectations (Casey & Casey, 2014: 2; Saif *et al.*, 2012: 1394). This implies that managers should determine employees' perceptions of organisational issues such as policies, the work itself, or working conditions and establish how these perceptions influence their behaviour, in order to come up with decisions that will lead to improved employee satisfaction.

Despite their differences, most classical and contemporary theories try to represent global views of workplace reality, although they do not consider culture, religion, or other factor differences. Surprisingly, most of these theories were developed in the United States of America and therefore match closely with the American culture. Therefore, applying these theories in different contexts requires an understanding that the same employee needs may have different meanings and prioritisation, and employee perceptions are likely to vary. This implies that prioritisation and importance of employees' needs in today's workplace, especially in developing countries, may not be the same as postulated in these theories. Again, employees' needs, thoughts, and perceptions may differ from one point in time to another,

thus requiring assessments and interventions at reasonable intervals throughout the life span of an organisation.

Notably, the classical theories have had the greatest effect on management practice and policy, while in the academic circles, they are not accepted widely due to criticisms such as their little empirical support and stability over time. On the other hand, contemporary theories have received the most supporting data and are regarded as strongest in defining and dealing with employee satisfaction (Makrygiannis, 2013: 24). The contemporary theories of employee satisfaction are more relevant today than the classical theories since they have greater flexibility but cannot be utilised without classical theories. Therefore, all classical and contemporary theories are generally important in dealing with employee satisfaction in today's work environment, as they provide a foundation and lens through which the concept can be studied.

In view of individual theories, the two-factor theory, the theory of work adjustment, and the job characteristic model are regarded as the most appropriate theories that can collectively provide a conceptual framework for employee satisfaction in today's work environment. The two-factor theory and theory of work adjustment are more applicable since they succinctly yield a broad range of factors that are attributed to employees and logically integrate all relevant relationships between these factors and employee satisfaction. However, owing to the complexity of identifying hygiene and motivators that are caused by individual differences, the significance of these factors for employee satisfaction can be determined, measured, and then summed up first to determine overall satisfaction. Similarly, the job characteristic model is more applicable in today's workplace because it clearly elaborates job redesign activities that are likely to ensure improved employee satisfaction and also emphasises the attainment of organisational goals in a dynamic work environment.

In today's work environment that is dynamic, technology oriented and highly competitive; innovation has become a very vital factor for the success of organisations to overcome the extremely high degree of competition in different sectors of the economy. Even for those organisations that are not for profit making, innovation has become a necessary tool for utilisation of the limited resources. In all these situations, employees are key agents for optimal handling and implementation of innovations (Hrnjic, Pilav – Velic, Djidelija, & Jahic, 2018: 19). Therefore, the two-factor theory, the theory of work adjustment, and the job characteristic model are more applicable since they emphasise the need to address employee satisfaction through creation of challenging work, employee-job fit, working conditions and corporate culture that promote creativity and achievement, and compensation system, which all contribute to the promotion of an innovative work environment (Hrnjic, Pilav – Velic, Djidelija, & Jahic, 2018).

On this note, the paper suggests that the above-mentioned theories could be applied to create challenging work environment for the employees so that employees may maximise their potential and feel fulfilled. This approach requires redesign of jobs and creation of challenging tasks that have realistic, reachable goals and the performance of employees in completing these tasks must be accompanied by adequate feedback. Managers must pay attention to the importance of the quality of work life and advocate the restructuring of jobs to give greater emphasis to the motivating factors at work, to make jobs interesting, and to satisfy higher-level needs (Sahoo et al., 2011: 26). In addition, the theories could be utilised to work towards employee-job fit by matching individuals and jobs based on attributes such as abilities, interests, and values. For instance, employees must be required to have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the work, and the work environment should fulfil employees' expectations about compensation.

With regard to compensation, there is necessity for managers to aim at improving the perceived link between performance and outcomes. In today's context, the idea can be

implemented by tying outcomes more directly to performance by employing incentive plans, commissions, merit raises, or merit-based promotions that promote creativity and output. Similarly, the theories advocate for the fulfilment of higher-order needs or motivators at the workplace, which has the potential to address the achievement motives of individual employees and improve their satisfaction at the workplace. For instance, managers could increase autonomy at the job by ensuring more employee participation in decision-making processes relating to how the work should be done. Additionally, managers could expand human resource management by ensuring that it mainly focuses on increasing motivational factors present in the job, instead of concentrating only on hygiene factors (Mosikidi, 2012: 58). Therefore, managers need to be aware of the cultural complexities in their workforce and pay attention to the needs of individual employees and utilise holistic approaches for managing employee satisfaction.

The application of the stated employee satisfaction theories also requires improvement of working conditions and reinforcement of positive corporate culture by paying attention to workplace actions that promote relationships, autonomy and collective work. In these modern times of doing business, organisations need the knowledge, energy, creativity and ideas of every employee, where employees at all levels take the initiative and act in the collective interest of the organisation (Aime, Van Dyne, & Petrenko, 2011; Fontannaz & Oosthuizen, 2007). Such actions can promote positive attitude and professional competence that may significantly increase employees' innovative behaviour. Promoting this behaviour would lead to original solutions for on-going issues and organisational success (Hrnjic, Pilav – Velic, Djidelija, & Jahic, 2018: 19). Possibly, this milestone would lead to high levels of satisfaction among the employees in today's work place.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper is theoretical and the literature discussed in this paper was inadequate to do comparisons of the theories of employee satisfaction across different economic, cultural and technological contexts. For instance, empirical studies could be undertaken to compare the applicability of these theories in the developing and developed economies. Such studies could enhance understanding on the applicability of the theories of employee satisfaction in today's work environment. It is also suggested that future empirical investigation is imperative to validate the arguments posed in this paper.

CONCLUSIONS

In today's dynamic work environment, satisfying every individual employee people is a challenge for the simple reason that everyone is different and our workplace needs and expectations change from one moment to another. This environment makes it impossible for any single theory to fully describe human behaviour and workplace antecedents that could enhance employee satisfaction. The classical theories of motivation sought to explain human needs in general terms, while contemporary theories view an employee as an active participant in deciding how they will be motivated. Generally, contemporary theories are regarded as more applicable in today's work environment than classical theories. But each theory on its own is incomplete, which may also contribute to degree to which the theories are applied. Therefore, the two-factor theory, the theory of work adjustment, and the job characteristic model are collectively regarded as the most applicable theories for addressing employee satisfaction in today's work environment.

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