

## **Work Satisfaction Starts with Early Attitudes**

Jeffrey Landine

Recent studies appear to indicate that Canadians are generally happy with their lives (OECD, 2012) and satisfied at their workplaces (Environics, 2010). In a study undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012) 78% of respondents said that they were satisfied with life, something the study identifies as a measure of happiness resulting from the presence of positive experiences and feelings, and the absence of negative experiences and feelings. A national study commissioned by the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (Environics, 2010) found that a representative sample of 1,202 adult Canadians felt that they were somewhat or very satisfied with their jobs and that Canadians tend to like the work they do (86%) and the people they work with (88%). With anecdotal examples of dissatisfaction at work found to be common, these results beg the question, why do such a large number of Canadians say that they are satisfied at work? This paper addresses the nature of work satisfaction and the implications of this concept on education and the work of school counsellors and teachers.

The answer to the above question posited here is that Canadians have been able to develop an attitude of satisfaction at their jobs that allows them to be happy with work even if the environment is less than satisfying. This argument is based on the premise that satisfaction from work and satisfaction at work are not synonymous. One way of approaching one's job is to see it as a means to satisfaction; in other words, it is the responsibility of my job and workplace to make me satisfied. Most workplaces

provide numerous factors that can contribute to satisfaction, including opportunities for achievement, competency, status, personal worth, and self-realization. They also provide job-related factors such as company policies, supervision, technical problems, salary, interpersonal relations on the job, and working conditions that can lead to job dissatisfaction. These two categories of factors (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1967) do not function on a continuum with one increasing as the other decreases. Rather the factors related to what a person does tend to help foster satisfaction while the work environment factors that are negatively assessed by individuals tend to lead to dissatisfaction. It could be said that, to a great extent, job satisfaction is influenced by the expectations people have for the job and the workplace. Expectations are related to how one sees the role of work in one's life (Lowe, 2000). Some people have higher expectations for the role of work in their life than others and one's level of expectation can directly contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction at work.

The literature has identified numerous factors that contribute to work satisfaction and dissatisfaction and these suggest implications for how students are prepared by the school system for the world of work. Some are related to the nature of the work itself such as job challenge, variety and scope (Saari & Judge, 2004) while others are related to the degree a worker experiences autonomy. Conversely, those aspects of work that are controlled by others can often lead to dissatisfaction and negative consequences such as burnout (Fernet, 2013). In terms of the implications for students, they need to leave secondary school with three abilities: 1. to be able to identify, realistically, the individual purpose work fills in their lives, 2. to be able to find balance between work and other aspects of life, and 3. to have developed what might be referred to as second order

employability skills. The first of these abilities speaks to the need to educate about the role of purpose or meaning in their work and life satisfaction. Counselors and teachers can play an important role in assisting them in making meaning out of their current work or academic responsibilities and finding purpose that can transfer into later employment contexts (Adams, 2012). An important aspect of addressing meaning or purpose for work is the recognition of the benefits, physical and mental, of achieving balance between work and life roles and tasks. Counsellors and teachers need to not only instruct students in this area but model effective strategies for achieving balance. Finally, students need to be aware of what this author terms ‘second order employability skills’. Employability skills in the areas of academic, personal management and teamwork skills are based on an international consensus about the generic skills that all workers must have (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006). These skills tend to be concrete and tangible and lend themselves fairly easily to instruction. Second order employability skills are more closely related to attitudes and values and include curiosity, the ability to work independently, and the development of perspective. These skills are more likely to be learned via experience and modeling.

It is important for students to have realistic expectations for work. There are aspects of all work that can cause a sense of dissatisfaction and no job should be expected to provide complete satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The importance of educating youth about work satisfaction and addressing their expectations for what work can and cannot fulfill in their life should be an integral part of their secondary education. In a practical sense, the most effective counsellors and teachers help them focus on the purpose of work and identify employability skills that relate to a worker’s potential for satisfaction at work rather than just a history of past work experience.

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Jeff Landine is an assistant professor at the University of New Brunswick, where he teaches and researches in the areas of career development and issues related to counselling/counselling psychology.

Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to [jlandine@unb.ca](mailto:jlandine@unb.ca)