

ATTITUDES

Attitudes are evaluative statements—either favorable or unfavorable—concerning objects, people, or events. They reflect how one feels about something. When I say “I like my job,” I’m expressing my attitude about work.

A person can have thousands of attitudes, but OB focuses on a very limited number of job-related attitudes. These include job satisfaction, job involvement (the degree to which a person identifies with his or her job and actively participates in it), and organizational commitment (an indicator of loyalty to, and identification with, the organization). Without question, however, job satisfaction has received the bulk of the attention.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to a collection of feelings that an individual holds toward his or her job. A person with a high level of job satisfaction holds positive feelings toward the job; a person who is dissatisfied with his or her job holds negative feelings about the job. When people speak of employee attitudes, more often than not they mean job satisfaction. In fact, the two terms are frequently used interchangeably.

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What Determines Job Satisfaction? What work-related variables determine job satisfaction? The evidence indicates that the most important factors conducive to job satisfaction are mentally challenging work, equitable rewards, supportive working conditions, and supportive colleagues.¹⁵

Employees tend to prefer jobs that give them opportunities to use their skills and abilities and offer a variety of tasks, freedom, and feedback on how well they’re doing. These characteristics make work mentally challenging. Jobs that have too little challenge create boredom, but too much challenge creates frustration and feelings of failure. Under conditions of moderate challenge, most employees will experience pleasure and satisfaction.

Employees want pay systems and promotion policies that they perceive as being just, unambiguous, and in line with their expectations. When pay is seen as fair, based on job demands, individual skill level, and community pay standards, satisfaction is likely to result. Similarly, individuals who perceive that promotion decisions are made in a fair and just manner are likely to experience satisfaction from their jobs.

Employees are concerned with their work environment for both personal comfort and facilitating doing a good job. They prefer physical surroundings that are safe, comfortable, clean, and with a minimum degree of distractions.

Finally, people get more out of work than merely money or tangible achievements. For most employees, work also fills the need for social interaction. Not surprisingly, therefore, having friendly and supportive coworkers leads to increased job satisfaction.

Satisfaction and Productivity Few topics have attracted as much interest among students of organizational behavior as the satisfaction/productivity relationship.¹⁶ The question typically posed is: Are satisfied workers more productive than dissatisfied workers?

The early views on the satisfaction/productivity relationship can be essentially summarized in the statement “a happy worker is a productive worker.” Much of the paternalism shown by managers in the 1930s through the 1950s—for example, forming

company bowling teams and credit unions, holding company picnics, and training supervisors to be sensitive to the concerns of employees—was initiated with the intent to make workers happy. But the happy worker thesis was based more on wishful thinking than on hard evidence.

A more careful analysis indicates that if satisfaction does have a positive effect on productivity, that effect is fairly small. The introduction of moderating variables, however, has improved the relationship. For instance, the relationship is stronger when employees' behavior is not constrained or controlled by outside factors. An employee's productivity on machine-paced jobs, for example, is going to be much more influenced by the speed of the machine than by his or her level of satisfaction.

Currently, on the basis of a comprehensive review of the evidence, we would conclude that productivity is more likely to lead to satisfaction rather than the other way around. If you do a good job, you intrinsically feel good about it. In addition, if we assume that the organization rewards productivity, your higher productivity should increase verbal recognition, your pay level, and probabilities for promotion. These rewards, in turn, will increase your level of satisfaction with the job.

Satisfaction and OCB It seems logical to assume that job satisfaction should be a major determinant of an employee's organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).¹⁷ Satisfied employees would seem more likely to talk positively about the organization, help others, and go beyond the normal expectations in their job. Moreover, satisfied employees might be more prone to go beyond the call of duty because they want to reciprocate their positive experiences. Consistent with this thinking, early discussions of OCB assumed that it was closely linked with satisfaction.¹⁸ More recent evidence, however, suggests that satisfaction influences OCB, but through perceptions of fairness.

There is a modest overall relationship between job satisfaction and OCB.¹⁹ But satisfaction is unrelated to OCB when fairness is controlled for.²⁰ What does this mean? Basically, job satisfaction comes down to conceptions of fair outcomes, treatment, and procedures.²¹ If you don't feel like your supervisor, the organization's procedures, or pay policies are fair, your job satisfaction is likely to suffer significantly. However, when you perceive organizational processes and outcomes to be fair, trust is developed. And when you trust your employer, you're more willing to voluntarily engage in behaviors that go beyond your formal job requirements.

Reducing Dissonance

One of the most relevant findings pertaining to attitudes is the fact that individuals seek consistency. **Cognitive dissonance** occurs when there are inconsistencies between two or more of a person's attitudes or between a person's behavior and attitudes. The theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that people seek to minimize dissonance and the discomfort it causes.²²

In the real world, no individual can avoid dissonance completely. You know that "honesty is the best policy" but say nothing when a store clerk gives you back too much change. Or you tell your children to brush after every meal, but *you* don't. So how do people cope? A person's desire to reduce dissonance is determined by the importance of the elements creating the dissonance, the degree of influence the individual believes he or she has over the elements, and the rewards that may be involved in dissonance.

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If the elements creating the dissonance are relatively unimportant, the pressure to correct this imbalance will be low. But, say a factory manager—Mrs. Smith, who has a husband and several children—believes strongly that no company should pollute the air or water. Unfortunately, because of the requirements of her job, Mrs. Smith is placed in the position of having to make decisions that would trade off her company's profitability against her attitudes on pollution. She knows that dumping the company's sewage into the local river (we'll assume the practice is legal) is in the best economic interest of her firm. What will she do? Clearly, Mrs. Smith is experiencing a high degree of cognitive dissonance. Because of the importance of the elements in this example, we can't expect Mrs. Smith to ignore the inconsistency. Besides quitting her job, there are several paths that she can follow to deal with her dilemma. She can reduce dissonance either by changing her behavior (stop polluting the river) or by concluding that the dissonant behavior is not so important after all ("I've got to make a living and, in my role as a corporate decision maker, I often have to place the good of my company above that of the environment or society"). A third alternative would be for Mrs. Smith to change her attitude ("There is nothing wrong with polluting the river"). Still another choice would be to seek out more consonant elements to outweigh the dissonant ones ("The benefits to society from manufacturing our products more than offset the cost to society of the resulting water pollution").

The degree of influence that individuals believe they have over the elements will have an impact on how they will react to the dissonance. If they perceive the dissonance to be an uncontrollable result—something about which they have no choice—they're not likely to be receptive to attitude change. If, for example, the dissonance-producing behavior was required as a result of the boss's directive, the pressure to reduce dissonance would be less than if the behavior was performed voluntarily. Although dissonance exists, it can be rationalized and justified.

Rewards also influence the degree to which individuals are motivated to reduce dissonance. The tension inherent in high dissonance may be reduced when accompanied by a high reward. The reward acts to reduce dissonance by increasing the consistency side of the individual's balance sheet. Because people in organizations are given some form of reward or remuneration for their services, employees often can deal with greater dissonance on their jobs than off their jobs.

These moderating factors suggest that just because individuals experience dissonance, they will not necessarily move directly toward consistency, that is, toward reduction of this dissonance. If the issues underlying the dissonance are of minimal importance, if an individual perceives that the dissonance is externally imposed and is substantially uncontrollable, or if rewards are significant enough to offset the dissonance, the individual will not be under great tension to reduce the dissonance.

What are the organizational implications of the theory of cognitive dissonance? It can help to predict the propensity to engage in both attitude and behavioral change. For example, if individuals are required by the demands of their job to say or do things that contradict their personal attitude, they will tend to modify their attitude in order to make it compatible with the cognition of what they must say or do. In addition, the greater the dissonance—after it has been moderated by importance, choice, and reward factors—the greater the pressures to reduce the dissonance.

The Attitude/Behavior Relationship

Early research on the relationship between attitudes and behavior assumed them to be causally related; that is, the attitudes people hold determine what they do. Common sense, too, suggests a relationship. Isn't it logical that people watch television programs they like or that employees try to avoid assignments they find distasteful?

In the late 1960s, however, this assumed relationship between attitudes and behavior (A/B) was challenged by a review of the research.²³ On the basis of an evaluation of a number of studies that investigated the A/B relationship, the reviewer concluded that attitudes were unrelated to behavior or, at best, only slightly related. More recent research has demonstrated that there is indeed a measurable relationship if moderating contingency variables are taken into consideration. The most powerful moderators have been found to be the *importance* of the attitude, its *specificity*, its *accessibility*, whether there exist *social pressures*, and whether a person has *direct experience* with the attitude.²⁴

Important attitudes are ones that reflect fundamental values, self-interest, or identification with individuals or groups that a person values. Attitudes that individuals also consider important tend to show a strong relationship to behavior.

The more specific the attitude and the more specific the behavior, the stronger the link between the two. For instance, asking someone specifically about her intention to stay with the organization for the next 6 months is likely to better predict turnover for that person than if you asked her how satisfied she was with her pay.

Attitudes that are easily remembered are more likely to predict behavior than attitudes that are not accessible in memory. Interestingly, you're more likely to remember attitudes that are frequently expressed. So the more you talk about your attitude on a subject, the more you're likely to remember it, and the more likely it is to shape your behavior.

Discrepancies between attitudes and behavior are more likely to occur when social pressures to behave in certain ways hold exceptional power. This tends to characterize behavior in organizations. This may explain why an employee who holds strong anti-union attitudes attends pro-union organizing meetings; or why tobacco executives, who are not smokers themselves and who tend to believe the research linking smoking and cancer, don't actively discourage others from smoking in their offices.

Finally, the attitude/behavior relationship is likely to be much stronger if an attitude refers to something with which the individual has direct personal experience. Asking college students with no significant work experience how they would respond to working for an authoritarian supervisor is far less likely to predict actual behavior than asking that same question of employees who have actually worked for such an individual.

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PERCEPTION

Perception is a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment. Research on perception consistently demonstrates that different individuals may look at the same thing yet perceive it differently. The fact is that none of us sees reality. What we do is interpret what we see and call it reality.