The role of participatory management in fostering job satisfaction among public administration employees

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Abstract

The concept of job satisfaction has intrigued a debate that has extended outside the academic community and into the business and government sphere. Both academics and public managers agree that the existence of participative management improves job satisfaction of public administration employees. Being challenged with the goal of creating a high-performing, accountable and goal oriented government service, public management professionals have utilized strategic planning and participative management. The goal of this research is to explore the role between participative management and job satisfaction among public administration employees. More specifically, the research investigates the use of participative management by the managers, existence of strategic participatory planning process and the communication between the manager and employees. A total of 532 public administration employees, from four cities in Republic of Macedonia were involved in the survey. The research results from the multiple regression analysis indicate that there is a positive association between positive levels of reported job satisfaction by employees and their reporting of participatory management style and participatory strategic planning processes. In addition the research results suggest that the effectiveness of supervisory communication has a significant effect on the level of reported job satisfaction by the employees. The significance of this research is in its contribution to the understanding of the role of participative management in creating a satisfied public administration workforce. Based on the research results, recommendations will be discussed both for managers of public administration and academic researchers in the relevant field.

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Both business and government leaders and managers agree that an essential ingredient to organizational success is employee's job satisfaction (Voon et al, 2010). This can be defined as s a positive or pleasing emotional state from the appraisal of one's job or experience (Locke, 1976). By affecting the overall performance of the organization, job satisfaction affects the reported levels of job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, grievance expression, tardiness, low morale, high turnover and participatory decision making (Lee and Ahmad, 2009). Taking all of this into account, the shift to participatory management in the public sector is almost inevitable and has long been recognized as a critical ingredient in the creation of a more satisfied public administration workforce (Lichtenstein, 2000). However the review of the relevant literature uncovers that there is limited evidence of how participatory management influences the levels of job satisfaction among employees in the public sector. In addition, participatory management and levels and determinants of job satisfaction among public administration employees in developing countries remain scarce.

Participatory strategic planning process and job satisfaction

Recent research has indicated that strategic planning is one of the most widely used productivity improvement strategies both for government and non-governmental organizations (Kim, 2002; Bryson, 2001; Gordon, 2013) According to Bryson (2011) *strategic planning is the deliberate, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does and why* (p.8). It is referred to as "the way of knowing" (Bryson et al, 2009) that helps managers and leader address major issues and challenges that their organization is confronting. However it is a very complex process as different patterns of strategic decision making may appear in different organizations or within the same organization. Research indicates that government agencies show increasing efforts to utilize participatory strategic process by including lower level employees in the development of strategic plans for the organization thus giving them the opportunity to influence management decision and contribute to the organizational improvement (Berry and Wechsler, 1995; Armstrong, 2006). Through this process, employees do not just participate in management decisions, but are also given opportunity to articulate individual dissatisfaction, act as a countervailing power source for the management and achieve long term feasibility for the organization as a whole (Marchington et al. , 2001)On individual level it results with higher levels of job satisfaction, motivation and work morale, as well a professional self confidence (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991; Spence-Laschinger and Finegan, 2004). Several academic studies have shown that organizations which foster employee participation have higher productivity and performance rates, increased levels of job satisfaction, while at the same time are characterized with lower absenteeism and turnover rates (Verma, 1995; Rainey, 1997, Daniels and Bailey, 1999; Kim, 2002; Abdulkadir et al., 2012). Dunham et al. (1994) conducted nine studies that examined the influence of participatory management and supervisory feedback on 2734 employees. They found that when supervisors provided feedback about performance and allowed employees to participate in decision-making, employee reported that they 'want to stay' with the organization, rather than 'need to' or 'feel' that they have to stay. This indicated a rise in the affective commitment towards the organization. Support for the argument that by increasing employees empowerment results in stronger affective reaction towards work is provided by other researches as well (Locke, 1976; eby et al, 1999; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Rainey, 1997). In addition, a study done by Gamage et al. (1996) indicates that utilizing participatory management style increases employee's sense of ownership of change initiatives thus increasing their chances for successful realization.

However a popular question emerges on who can be given the attribute of a participatory manager? By investigating this question, Greiner found the dominant 39 characteristics of participatory managers. Among the top ten was the managers ability to communicate effectively with subordinates and the inclusion of subordinates in the decision making processes (Mokoena, 2012). In line with this, academic studies suggest that the social interaction with colleagues and supervisors significantly influences workplace attitudes and job satisfaction (Hackman and Oldham, 1975, 1976; Emmert and Taher, 1992; Voon et al, 2011). In a research done by Pincus (1986) a strong positive relationship was found between employees satisfaction with supervisory communication and job satisfaction. According to the findings from this research supervisor communication, communication climate, and personal feedback—were found to be most strongly related to both job satisfaction and performance. Oldhan and Cummings (1996) also find that employees are most creative when they are engaged in complex jobs under supportive and non-controlling supervision. Therefore the goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction and supervisory communication.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between participative management and job satisfaction among local government employees. More specifically the paper will contribute to the existing research, by analyzing participative management in terms of strategic planning, supervisory communication and the use of participatory management style, accounting for their influence on employees' job satisfaction.

Research methodology:

The questionnaire used in the survey was consisted of 20 items organized in three main sections. The first part of the questionnaire assessed the utilization of participative management style. More specifically it analyzed whether the manager used participative management style (four items), whether participative management style was integrated into the organization's strategic planning process (three items) and the effective communication with the manager. These were the independent variables in the research. The *practice of participative management by the manager* was assed trough the following items: (1) My department manager has allowed me to improve the work process related to my job (2) The manager of my department has made a positive change in his management style (3) My department manager has improved his/her employee communication (4) My department manager makes effort to include employees opinions in the strategic planning process. The *existence of a participative strategic planning process* was asses trough three items: (1) I am familiar with the department mission (2) My opinion is considered in the strategic planning process of the department (3) I have a clear understanding about my role in achieving the strategic goals of my department. *Communication with the manager* was assessed (1) I have a clear understanding of what my manager expects from me (2) My manager effectively communicates with employees about related topics (3) My manager is easily approachable to listen to employees suggestions. The dependent variable is *job satisfaction* and is built on four items from the questionnaire (1) My current job provides me with better career opportunities compared to other places I could work; (2) Overall satisfaction with current job and (3) My current job provides me with a sense of accomplishment and (4) I receive appropriate recognition for the work I do.

The responses to each of the questions were measured on the five-point Likert-type scale tailored to the questions (eleven questions were measure on scale ranging from 1-strongly agree to 5-strongly disagree, while three items on a scale ranging from 1-excellent to 5-poor)The performed factor analyses indicated that the items intended to measure the three independent variable loaded in three separate factors. The items used to measure the dependent variable loaded into a separate factor as well. Table 1 below presents the reliability results for each of the extracted factors.

Table 2- Results of PCA analysis with Varimax rotation

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
My department manager has allowed me to improve the work process related to my job	0.82	0.21	0.19	0.28
The manager of my department has made a positive change in his/her management style	**0.81**	0.25	0.21	0.33
My department manager has improved his/her employee communication	**0.8**	0.22	0.22	0.19
My department manager makes efforts into including employees opinions in the strategic planning process	**0.78**	0.29	0.26	0.15
I am familiar with my departments mission	0.19	**0.82**	0.13	0.22
My opinion is considered in the department's strategic planning process	0.26	**0.8**	0.22	0.24
I have a clear understanding of my role in achieving the departments' strategic goals	0.32	**0.71**	0.18	0.17
I have a clear understanding of what my manager expects from me	0.18	0.13	**0.91**	0.13
My manager effectively communicates with employees about relevant topics	0.23	0.14	**0.85**	0.29
My manager is easily approachable for employees suggestions and ideas	0.3	0.21	**0.65**	0.25
My current job provides me with better career opportunities compared to other places I could work	0.13	0.17	0.3	**0.79**
Overall satisfaction with current job	0.33	0.22	0.17	**0.82**
My current job provides me with a sense of accomplishment	0.21	0.25	0.15	**0.8**
I receive appropriate recognition for the work I do	0.19	0.3	0.24	**0.77**
Eigen values	5.12	2.2	1.8	**1.9**
% of common variance	44.7	12.4	8	11.3

Finally the third part gathered information on the tenure at current department, personal experience in team work, employee age and managerial position. Tenure at current department was measure with the questions *Please state the number of years that you work at the current department?* and four options were provided: 0-3 years, 4-7 years, 8-10 years and over 10 years). In regards to team work experience, the respondents were asked to indicate how many times they participated in team work activities in the last year (1, 2, 3 or 4 and more).The questionnaire represented an adapted version of a research instruments originally developed to assess the levels of job satisfaction among public administration employees (Kim, 2002; Smerek and Peterson, 2007).

Population and Sample

The survey was administered among 650 employees from the Macedonian public service sector. All of the employees were working local administrations of municipalities in four cities in Macedonia. A total of 532 questionnaires were returned completed to the researchers, resulting in an overall response rate of 85.8%. The survey was distributed in person among the public administration employees. The survey was anonymous and no marks were printed on the questionnaires that could identify the respondent.

Research findings

The descriptive analysis of the research findings showed that the majority of the respondents did not hold a managerial position (89%). The distribution of respondents according to tenure at current department is as follows: 0-3 years (43%), 4-7 years (37%), 8-10 years (13%) and more than 10 years (7%). Only 13.5% of the respondents had participated in teamwork more than four times in the last two years. The majority of respondents we in the age group 31-40 years (38%) followed by 31% of respondents aged under 30 years. The performed correlation analysis showed that the manager's use of participatory management style is positively correlated with job satisfaction and the existence of a strategic participatory planning process (table 2). In addition, the effective communication with the supervisor is positively correlated with the employees' job satisfaction and strategic participatory planning process (Table 2).

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics and Correlations

	Variable (measure)	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Job satisfaction (1-5)	2.57	1.03	1							
2	Use of participative management style (1-5)	2.98	0.91	.63*	1						
3	Participative strategy planning (1-5)	3.01	1.04	.61*	.53*	1					
4	Communication with supervisor (1-5)	3.59	0.87	.57*	.65*	.49*	1				
5	Managerial position (0-1)	0.017	0.11	-.13*	-.19*	-.21*	.25*	1			
6	Tenure (1-4)	2.42	0.19	.90*	.06*	.02*	.01*	-.18*	1		
7	Team work experience (0-4)	0.89	1.13	-.11*	.10*	.20*	.15*	.70*	.1	1	
8	Age	2.52	1.32	.13	.12*	.12*	.11*	.10*	.15*	.09	1

The results of the OLS multiple regression analysis showed that 53% of the variance in the dependent variable job satisfaction was explained by the independent variables, thus the model provides a statistically significant prediction of the outcome variable (*F =155.93; p<0.01*). The results presented in Table 3, indicate that the use of participative management style by the manager (*β=0.058, p<0.01*), is significantly associated with job satisfaction of employees in local self government. Other relevant studies done in the field, have also found the positive effect of participatory management style and employee job satisfaction (Emmert and Taher, 1992;Bernstein, 1993; Upenieks, 2003; Wright and Davis, 2003; Kim, 2002, 2004; Wright and Kim, 2004; Bhatti and Qureshi, 2007;Bright, 2008). Therefore these results provide support to the already existing academic research.

Furthermore the results from the regression analysis suggest that employees who perceive that they are part of the strategic planning process report higher levels of job satisfaction (β=0.076, p<0.01). Although this findings support relevant studies from the academic literature (Blackburn and Rosen, 1993; Oswald et al, 1994; Ugboro and Obeng, 2000), other studies have failed to demonstrate a consistent relationship (Cotton et al, 1998). Finally employees who perceived that they have an effective communication with their supervisor, report higher levels of job satisfaction (*β=0.016, p<0.01*). This is in line with other research that explored the relationship between supervisory communication and job satisfaction (Wheeless et al., 1984; Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Petit et al., 1997).). In addition, only the age of the respondents and their tenure in the department showed significant relationship with job satisfaction. This means that employees who are older and have longer tenure in the department are more satisfied compared to younger employees with shorter department tenure.

Table 3. Regression analysis of participative management and job satisfaction

Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	Beta		
(Constant)		5.129	.000
Participative management style	.058	10.05	.000
Participatory strategic planning	.076	10.48	.000
Communication with supervisor	.016	7.52	.000
Age	.001	4.03	.000
Tenure	.006	2.98	.000
Managerial position	-.005	-1.63	.697

Teamwork	.002	2.68	.348

Dependent variable: Job satisfaction

Interpretation of findings and implications for management practice

Employees are the most important asset in an organization and researchers have argued that empowered employees have more intense affective reactions toward the organization and experience higher levels of job satisfaction, lower absenteeism and turnover rates. This study sought to investigate the relationship between participative management and job satisfaction among local government employees by analyzing participative management in terms of strategic planning, supervisory communication and the use of participatory management style, and accounting their influence on employees' job satisfaction. The results indicate that managers use of participative management style , effective communication with supervisor and the existence of a participatory strategic planning process   significantly predict job satisfaction of employees in public administration. This means that managers who engage employees into strategic planning and decision making will be rewarded with a more motivated and higher performing staff. In addition, the avenues of manager-employee communication play and important role in fostering job satisfaction. The respondents who reported that they have an effective communication with their supervisor were more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction. In comparison with others the findings from this study are in line with similar studies done in the field. In example Kim (2002) in his study on participative management and job satisfaction found that the existence of a participatory planning process increases the level of employees job satisfaction. Wong and Laschinger (2013) found that employees who perceive that they have access to workplace empowerment structures, demonstrate higher levels of job satisfaction and report higher performance.

The study also found that age and tenure were significant predictors of job satisfaction. Earlier research has also examined the role of age in employee job satisfaction. As an example Herzberg et al (1957) suggested that the relationship between age and job satisfaction was U-shaped. Although disputed at first due to methodological issues, other studies have also confirmed this relationship (Janson and Marin, 1982; Kacmar and Ferris, 1989; Clark, Oswald and Warr, 1996). One of these studies found that the relationship between age and job satisfaction is U shaped - bottoming at the age of 31years, then increased in linear manner until the individual is 60 years old (Clark, Oswald and Warr, 1996). This means that with the increasing of age of workers expectations decline, thus making them easier to satisfy .In addition, older workers less interested in work alternative compared to younger workers (Pond and Greyer, 1987; 1991). Sarker et al (2005) found that employee age is not significantly associated with overall job satisfaction level, but that tenure is.

Considering the importance of the previously stated, public administration management should traditional hierarchical structure to participative management and employee empowerment. Managers should identify the variables that foster job satisfaction of their employees and engage them as key stakeholders in the creation and realization of the organizations' strategic plan. In

addition government agencies should build the skills of managers by incorporating techniques of employee empowerment and communication skills in managerial training programs.

The limitation of this study should be discussed. First, the research carries a risk of social desirability bias. Although the research implemented instruments that were previously validated among the same target group, there is till a risk that respondents may not have been completely honest and provided an honest answer. The second is the self-selection bias risk, since it is not known whether the respondents in the survey are representative of the total population of public administration employees. Although the research was implemented in four cities in Macedonia among public administration employees working in local municipalities, still there is not certainty that they are representative of their colleagues working in the other government bodies. And finally, previous research has emphasized the influence of demographic variables such as education, age, gender or family status on job satisfaction. However this research only investigated the role of age. Therefore further studies should collect and analyse such variables.

Conclusion

The research findings suggest that participatory management, supervisory communication and participative strategic planning may increase job satisfaction among public administration employees. Improved job satisfaction among the public administration is important for many reasons, however in the context of this study it is linked with decreasing absenteeism and turnover rates and increasing motivation, satisfaction, morale and self esteem. If public administration managers are concerned with having a stable long-term workforce that promotes effective organizational goal accomplishment , then participative management strategies incorporating the predictors of job satisfaction should be implemented to promote a more satisfied public administration.

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