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Teaching as a Job, Career or Calling: Empirical Evidence from Agricultural University, China

Abstract

Despite an emerging interest in work attitudes (job, career and calling), researchers know little about whether these attitudes matter in the workplace. We explore the under-examined relationship between work attitudes and work outcomes (work satisfaction and internal work motivation) among the teachers of Northwest A&F University China. Although some theory suggests that calling may be strongly correlated with work satisfaction, this study predicted that a career attitude is more positively associated with work satisfaction. The correlation analysis revealed a significant and positive relationship between career, calling and work outcomes as well as a significant and negative relationship between job and work outcomes. The multiple regression analysis indicated a significant impact of career and calling on work satisfaction but only calling has a significant impact on internal work motivation. Further, based on this study, we suggest that work attitudes as a predictor of work satisfaction can give very useful insights into redesigning jobs for the higher education sector in order to increase the level of job satisfaction and motivation of teachers.

Keywords: work attitudes, work satisfaction, internal work motivation

1. Introduction

Higher education has become a major source of economic competitiveness in the progressively knowledge-driven global economy. As higher education systems grow and expand, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of institu-

tions. Institutions may implement evaluation mechanisms in order to identify and promote good teaching practices. The environment of higher education institutions can improve the quality of teaching through several means. The most important factor in any organization is the satisfaction of employees and the main entity in the education system is the teacher. Therefore, the teacher's satisfaction plays an important role for the benefit of society. A teacher who is not satisfied with their job may have a negative impact on the student's learning process and ultimately affect their academic growth. A survey conducted in 2011 revealed that teacher job satisfaction had been at the lowest level in the last 20 years. The number of teachers who have left the profession in the last two years has increased from 17% to 29%. More than 33% of the teachers cited anxiety over job security. Some reports show that 50% of teachers leave within the first 5 years of teaching (Metlife survey, 2012). While these statistics point out that new teachers are often dissatisfied with teaching, it is still yet to be considered whether the teacher's work attitude may also have a significant impact on job satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the teacher's work attitude on job satisfaction.

The way individuals observe their work may be a function of stable behaviors, not just a reflection of the work itself (Straw et al., 1986; Staw & Ross, 1985). It is important to understand how individuals differ in their attitudes towards the work they do. There are three distinct attitudes people can have towards their work: Jobs, Careers, or Callings (Bellah et al., 1985). These three attitudes can indicate the level of satisfaction of individuals in their workplace. People who have Jobs are only interested in the physical advantages of work and do not seek any other type of reward from it. In contrast, people with Career decision-making minds have a great personal investment in their work and mark their achievements not only through financial gain, but also through advancement within their work. Finally, a person with a Calling works not for financial gain or career advancement, but for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the individual. Within any occupation, one could conceivably find individuals with all the three kinds of attitudes to their work. Although one might expect to find a higher number of Callings among teachers in particular (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997).

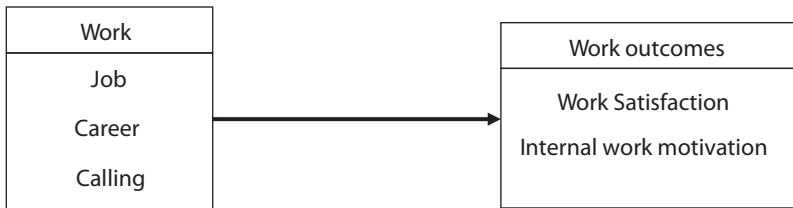
We believe that the Job–Career–Calling distinction improving job design has not previously been studied in the higher education sector. None of the previous research directions proposes or accounts for the association of the three distinct attitudes towards work with job satisfaction and motivation that are the focus of the presented study.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Framework and Hypotheses

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework of this study. We investigated relationships between teachers' work attitudes and work outcomes and also explored the impact of these attitudes on work outcomes.

Figure 1. Research framework



According to the research purpose and literature review, the theoretical structure for the past opinions of job, career, and calling, we propose that work satisfaction would be highest for callings and lowest for jobs. Furthermore, we presume that intrinsic motivation is more associated with Callings than Jobs and Careers and there is no association of jobs with work satisfaction and internal work motivation. The hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The teachers who have both career and calling attitudes are more satisfied with their work than the teachers with only job attitudes.

Hypothesis 2: The teachers having calling attitudes are more internally motivated than the teachers with job and career attitudes.

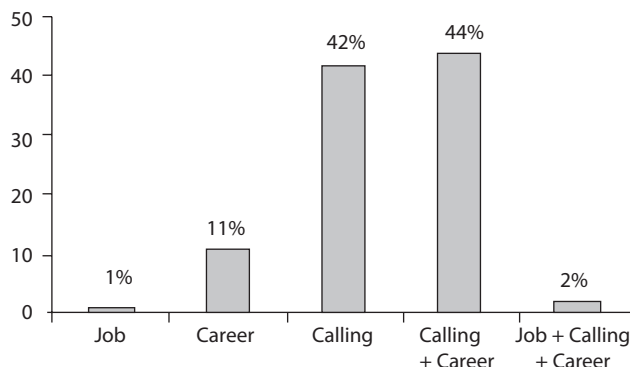
Hypothesis 3: Job attitude is not associated with work satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Job attitude is not associated with internal work motivation.

2.2. Measures and Procedure

Work Attitude measures

The questionnaire for this study was designed to find out the impact of the Job–Career–Calling distinctions on work outcomes. For this purpose, fifteen items were selected and finalized according to the concept of job, career and calling defined by Wrzesniewski, et al. (1997). We used a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “would like to have this only a little (1),” to “would like to have this a lot (7)”. We made such a type of scale to find out which kind of attitude teachers want to adopt towards their work.

Figure 2. Categorization of respondents according to job, career and calling

Job satisfaction and Internal work motivation measures

This study adopted the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) to measure job satisfaction and internal work motivation. The JDS is the most recognized instrument in measuring job characteristics due to its frequent utility and widespread reports on its construct validity (Fried and Ferris, 1987; Marchese, 1998). The scores were summarized to represent a single generic item of general satisfaction and internal work motivation. The higher the score is, the higher the satisfaction and internal motivation.

2.3. Samples and data Collection

We conducted the study in order to reveal which work attitude has a greater impact on job satisfaction and internal work motivation and what the relationship is between job satisfaction and internal work motivation. The data was collected from the teachers of Northwest A&F University Yangling, China. A total of 100 answers were collected through a questionnaire survey.

The survey questionnaires were distributed to 150 faculty members (lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors and professors) from almost all the departments, institutes and colleges of Northwest A&F University. Multiple modes of communication such as email, post and in-person contact were used in order to get the maximum response rate from the study participants. Out of 150 distributed questionnaires, overall usable response rate was about 67% (100 samples).

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of the Respondents

Out of 100 respondents, 25% were female teachers and 75% were male teachers. The maximum number of respondents fell in the age group of “30-39” years and the minimum number of respondents fell in the age group of “50 and above” years. In terms of percentage, 6% of the teachers were of the age of 20 to 29 years, 43% of the teachers were of the age of 30 to 39 years, 41% of the teachers were of the age of 40 to 49 years, and 10% of the teachers were of the age of 50 and over. In terms of education, 4% were bachelor’s, 45% were master’s and 51% were PhD degree holders. Thus, most of the employees held the “PhD” degree. Moreover, the teachers having at least one year experience were selected for this survey. In terms of experience, 39% of the teachers had the experience of 1 to 10 years, 42% had the experience of 11 to 20 years, 17% had the experience of 21 to 30 years and only 2% had the experience of over 30 years.

3.2. Categorization of Respondents

Figure 2 presents the percentage of those respondents who viewed their work as a job or career or calling or a combination of these three. From the sample of 100 employees, only 1% of the respondents viewed their work as a job, 11% as career and 42% as a calling. Furthermore, 44% of the teachers were those who viewed their work as both career and calling and only 2% of the respondents were those who considered their work as a combination of these three attitudes. So, conclusively it can be said that two dimensions of attitudes (career and calling) are mainly present in the teachers.

3.3. Reliability Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, it is required to check internal consistency and reliability. When multiple Likert questions were used in a survey, Cronbach’s alpha analysis is the most common measure of internal consistency. In Cronbach’s alpha reliability analysis 0.7 is an acceptable reliability coefficient but lower thresholds are sometimes used in the literature (Nunnally, 1978).

The job attitude consists of four items with Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.71, while the career and calling attitudes consist of five items each and have Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.77 and 0.84, respectively. These values indicate a high level of internal consistency for our scale. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix among competencies, indicating a strong correlation.

3.4. Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested with the use of correlation and multiple regression analysis. Both the career and calling work attitudes were correlated ($p < 0.01$) positively with satisfaction. Furthermore, the magnitude of correlation between career and satisfaction was greater than the magnitude between calling and satisfaction (Table 1). Conversely, the job attitude was correlated ($p < 0.01$) negatively with satisfaction (Table 1). It was also confirmed in Table 2 that the career and calling attitudes both have significant and positive effects on satisfaction, while the job attitude has no significant effect on satisfaction. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was fully confirmed by these findings. The career and calling work attitudes are also positively correlated ($p < 0.01$) with internal work motivation. Moreover, the magnitude of the correlation between calling and internal work motivation was higher than the magnitude between career and work motivation (Table 1). On the other hand, the job attitude was not correlated with internal work motivation (although the relationship headed in the negative direction). It was also confirmed in Table 3 that only the calling attitude had a significant impact on internal work motivation. Thus Hypothesis 2 was also fully supported by these results. Although the Job attitude had no significant effect on satisfaction (Table 2) it was correlated ($p < 0.01$) negatively with satisfaction (Table 1). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was rejected. There was no significant correlation between the job attitude and internal work motivation (Table 1), which supports Hypothesis 4.

Table 1. Correlation between work attitudes, internal work motivation and job satisfaction (N = 100)

Variables	Mean	Std	Gensat	Workmot	Job	Career	Calling
Gensat	5.113	0.725	1				
Workmot	5.142	0.755	1.549**	1			
Job	3.318	0.782	-1.279**	-0.112	1		
Career	4.678	1.179	1.725**	0.570**	-0.260**	1	
Calling	5.288	1.102	1.644**	0.760**	-0.169	0.695**	1

** $p < 0.01$ Two-tailed tests.

Std, standard deviation; Gensat, general satisfaction; Workmot, work motivation

Table 2. Multiple regression results for work attitudes and general satisfaction

	Variables	Beta	t-value
Independent variables	Job	-0.100	-1.449
	Career	0.510	5.389**
	Calling	0.272	2.932**
R-square		0.573	
Adjusted R-square		0.560	
F		42.961	
Sig. F.		0.000	
* p<0.05; ** p<0.1			

Table 3. Multiple regression results for work attitudes and internal work motivation

	Variables	Beta	t-value
Independent variables	Job	0.030	0.446
	Career	0.090	0.961
	Calling	0.702	7.647**
R-square		0.582	
Adjusted R-square		0.568	
F		44.468	
Sig. F.		0.000	
* p<0.05; ** p<0.1			

4. Discussion

The results of the presented study provide evidence concerning the links between the sense of calling and workplace outcomes. However, it is important to note that given the low response rate, the presented sample may be a more job and career oriented subset of the teaching faculty we surveyed. The significant and positive relationship between calling and work satisfaction in our study is supported by the previous findings of Bunderson and Thompson (2009), Davidson and Caddell (1994), Peterson et al. (2009) and Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), stating that calling relates favorably to work satisfaction and commitment. People in similar jobs can

bring different approaches and attitudes to their work. Individuals who viewed their career as a calling were more likely to be motivated and satisfied with their jobs.

Based on previous research (Watt and Richardson, 2008, Bunderson and Thompson, 2009, Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Serow, 1994; Steger et al., 2010), we explored whether job and career attitudes had any relationship with work outcomes and also whether the sense of job, career and calling had any influence on work outcomes. Generally speaking, the results supported our hypotheses. Based on the magnitude of the relationships of calling and career with satisfaction and internal work motivation (Table 1), it is understandable that the teachers with the calling attitude are more internally motivated than the ones with the career attitude, whereas the teachers with the career attitude are more satisfied than the ones with the calling attitude. Experiencing a calling in a particular career is likely to lead one to becoming committed to one's line of work, finding a specific job that allows one to fulfill that commitment and in turn be committed and happier with that specific job (Duffy et al., 2011). But a notable result in this study is that teachers want job satisfaction that comes with the career attitude.

In short, this study revealed very important results which will be helpful for improving the work-related job design in the future. Most of the teachers in northwest A&F University are working with a "calling" mindset and others are working with "career" instead of "job". Teachers are an important part of society so their jobs should be designed in the way which can be appealing to any type of work attitude to gain maximum employee satisfaction. If employees are satisfied then, in turn, they will give better output to society. People with the calling attitude perceive their work as a positive end in itself. They feel good about what they are doing. They invest more in their work. They want to make things happen and to be excellent in their fields, not just because of potential growth in their company but because they believe those things are intrinsically worthwhile. In this study, the people presenting the calling attitude are less satisfied than the people presenting the career attitude. The reason can be that they may consider career advancement, pay and prestige as an important factor and they must be advancing at their desired pace. They need to be in the role they deserve regardless of being internally motivated. Therefore, it can be recommended that there should be job redesigning especially for the people who see their work as merely a job or career. Tasks should be redefined in the way they think they can work to put greater emphasis on service and on craftsmanship. It can be suggested that during job interviews human resource departments should consider employees' work attitudes when matching the right candidate with the position. They should conduct a survey for

already hired teachers to find out the teachers' attitude towards their work. Work is a financial necessity for almost everyone, along with the sacrifices demanded by it. But work also can be fun and exciting. Identifying their outlook towards work can help human resource departments to define what they need and want in their professional life and redesign their jobs to increase motivation and satisfaction in employees. This in turn will increase performance and reduce absenteeism and the turnover rate.

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