

**A Qualitative Analysis and Study of Job Satisfaction and Wellbeing of
Employees Working within the Irish Public Sector**

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to study and understand the concepts of employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. The Irish public sector currently is the largest job market in Ireland, employing over four hundred thousand people.

Research into wellbeing and job satisfaction is an important study as much of these public sector employees have individual desires and motivators that enable them to increase commitment and productivity within the business. For organisations to be successful, they require a happy and motivated workforce, especially in a era of increased supply and demand.

This dissertation sought to research secondary sources of literature, through books, journals, articles, e-journals and e-books. Secondary data will allow the reader to understand the context of the study and research and its relevance.

Qualitative methods of primary research were used in the form of focus groups to create original sources of data to highlight and trends, similarities or differences that currently exist within this given area of research.

This study highlighted in resulted in a greater understanding that employees require suitable working conditions within their organisation and within their role within the business to create higher levels of wellbeing and job satisfaction amongst employees. Training methods, opportunities for feedback, cases of autonomy were all factors of influence involved in this study that resulted in an overall positive outcome and understanding on how to benefit employees in the workplace.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the modern era, where business supply and demand is higher than ever, these ever-rising global dependencies on global market forces create a great burden that is put on to the global workforce in their delivery of services and products. This, in turn, has created increased attention on the wellbeing and job satisfaction of the employees carrying out these services and products, as there has been an increase in instances of negative psychological and physical effects on employees due to the increased demand for employee productivity, (Tehrani et al, 2007).

Negative effects on employee wellbeing due to work-related conditions and circumstances, such as longer working hours have led to higher numbers of anxiety and stress amongst employees (Helzer & Kim, 2019), and as such, results in high costs to businesses through employee absenteeism, with public-sector employees being absent for almost an average of ten days every year, (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005). There has been researching that has developed a close correlation between prolonged periods of employee stress and illness and days of work that the employee has been absent for, (Martin, 2012).

A similar factor of influence that has been researched to have a large impact on retention rates and levels of employee absenteeism is job satisfaction. Employees who possess higher levels of job satisfaction have a stronger commitment or bond to their place of work.

Possessing a strong organisational bond enables the employee to appreciate the values of the organisation by identifying and reaching organisational goals and objectives, (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982).

In Ireland, turnover rates were discovered to be lowest in organisations that had fewer than fifty employees, (CIPD, 2007), which broadens the scope of research and related research questions in this area.

These examples of the previously conducted research and related statistics highlight the critical importance that is the employer-employee relationship and the working conditions made available to an organisation's workforce as it often has a direct impact on the productivity, performance and overall costings of an organisation, (Neubert and Cady, 2001).

In this dissertation, research into potential factors of influence regarding employee wellbeing and job satisfaction will be evaluated as to their effects on employees within public sector organisations.

This dissertation seeks to add to existing literature in academia by gathering relevant secondary sources of data and also by conducting primary research in a qualitative research method.

Existing secondary sources gathered and mentioned in the literature review will outline and discuss several themes or areas researched to be relevant to the research topic of job satisfaction and wellbeing. These themes will also be refined and explored in an original detail through the gathering of primary data through the process of focus groups, a qualitative example of a primary data source.

1.2 Justification for Research

Research on employee well-being and job satisfaction within the workplace has been an area of increased study over the decades, with many researchers developing theories and frameworks that attempt to measure these levels and what motivates employees to work and be happy, whether it is through working conditions or an implemented reward system, including intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. However, as the global market expands and costs of supply and demand rise, organisations have discovered that employee motivation is not solely found in financial security and safe working conditions. A workplace-specific measure of satisfaction indicates that there are at fifteen distinctive features, including, amounts of responsibility, opportunity to use abilities, relations with management, variety of work and organisational management style, (Warr, Cook & Wall, 1979).

These varying inputs highlight the scope of motivational theory that has been researched in employees in the workplace. The large portion of the Irish workforce employed within the public sector highlights the relevance and importance of the working conditions provided and the subsequent commitment of these employees. The first quarter of 2019 saw official figures of over four hundred thousand people employed within the Irish Public Sector (CSO,2019), including semi-state bodies, making it the largest area of employment in Ireland. Since the 1950s, the Irish Government has sought the use of comparators from the Private Sector to set pay and salary scales to those in the Irish Public Sector, who perform 'like work', or work in a similar field or role, (Flannery & Turner, 2018).

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This dissertation aims to analyse second sources of existing research and data on studies based on the well-being and job satisfaction of employees around the world and to undertake primary research on this topic in the context of the Irish public sector. The purpose of this study is to add a portion of original research to Ireland's largest job market, the public sector, which employees roughly four hundred thousand people, (CSO, 2019). Through adding further relevant research in the hope of attracting further instances of research and awareness to organisations understanding the importance of their employees and consistently developing their organisation to reflect working conditions that have positive effects and benefits on employee motivation and productivity.

5 research objectives were developed to refine the area of research and to gain a better understanding of several factors of working conditions and other related areas of study, the 5 outlined research objectives are:

- An investigation of skill variety within a public sector organisation
- An investigation of the level of task identity within a public sector organisation
- To investigate task significance in the context of employee wellbeing and job satisfaction
- To identify and investigate autonomy within a public sector organisation
- To identify instances of feedback in a public sector organisation and its effect on employee wellbeing and job satisfaction.

1.4 Research Question

The dissertation aims to study: *What qualitative factors influence and have effects on job satisfaction and employee wellbeing in the Irish public sector.*

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This dissertation focuses on investigating existing literature based on employee wellbeing and job satisfaction, first on a global scale, to understand the globally recognised importance of the topic. Following this study, the research questions and associated research objectives will be solely focused on the employees of an Irish public sector

organisation in an attempt to evaluate any trends or developments made within the public sector to enhance the experience and working conditions of an Irish public sector employee. The developed research objectives aim to identify key aspects within the working environment that result in optimal working conditions and overall performance levels for the employee and the overall organisation.

1.6 Dissertation Structure

To gain a clearer understanding of the dissertation and its focus and objectives or research, there will be an outline of the chapters and their contents present within this study. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two investigates existing sources literature that investigate data relevant to the research question, including any factors that influence levels of job satisfaction and employee wellbeing. Chapter Three provides the methodological approach used, including the research philosophy, strategy and approach implemented into the study. Chapter Four identifies the findings of each of the research objectives and discusses them independently, but also, any results that correlate to existing research in Chapter Two. Chapter Five concludes the findings and contents of the dissertation, it's research and findings, while also establishing and discussing recommendations for potential future research in areas of relevance to this study. Following this, there is a bibliography and appendices section.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Satisfaction and Wellbeing defined

In recent years, research and studies on satisfaction and wellbeing have become increasingly important, especially in the context of job satisfaction, with more current research establishing job satisfaction and wellbeing's impact on a wider economic and psychological scale, (Fraizer, 2005). Since the financial and economic downturn of 2008, it became increasingly clear to employers and employees that organisations did not have large amounts of money to pay employees salary but needed to be productive and employee's needed job security. Organisations needed to hire people who are deemed a correct fit for the company and work at high levels of productivity. Maintaining high levels of employee performance and productivity was a critical factor in the success of the organisation, (Fraizer, 2005).

A historic definition of satisfaction by Locke (1976) defines satisfaction as an "attaining one's job values and these values help fulfil one's needs". These previously mentioned needs can come in physical or psychological form, however, the key factor of these needs for people is the opportunity for growth, (Locke, 1976). Hiring the correct fit for the organisation is further analysed by Newstrom (2007), where he discusses the needs and drives of people within an organisation and how it can affect their on-the-job performances. These needs are often difficult to achieve and vary greatly but they can create tensions which stimulate effort and increased levels of performance. Organisations attempt to establish that developing an understanding with their employees, that driving their needs and efforts into performance, in return for the satisfaction of rewards is crucial to the effectiveness of business operation, (Newstrom, 2007; Freeman, 2005).

Studies have proven that high levels of satisfaction have a direct correlation to the overall levels of success on the organisation and a result in a decreased level in negative factors, such as turnover and absenteeism as well as lowering the cost of labour, (Carpitella, 2003). The importance of employee and job satisfaction and other variables that link to organisational performance was understood even in the 1960s, where Likert (1961), provides a human resources perspective, that satisfied workers are productive workers,

(Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960). As mentioned by Locke (1976) and Likert (1961), satisfaction is gained through the fulfilment of physical, psychological and socio-economical needs.

2.2 Factorial Effects on Satisfaction and Wellbeing

2.2.1 Leadership

In recent years, there has been an increased acknowledgement and awareness of the importance of leadership research, with evidence, gathered to suggest that effective leadership is an integral component to the overall effectiveness of an organisation, (Muchiri, et al, 2011). Furthermore, an indicator used to measure leadership effectiveness can predict the overall level of performance within an organisation, further indicating the importance of the existing working relations between employers and employees, (Muchiri, 2011).

According to the U.S. Department of Labour statistics, employees, on average, remain in their working position for only around 2 years. Surveys designed to investigate this trend in employee mobility found that the number one reason for employee's exiting an organisation was due to a disagreeable workplace, (Soupios & Mourdoukoutas, 2015).

The presence of a toxic workplace environment does not occur spontaneously or at random, but has a resounding negative impact upon the individual employees and upon the entire organisation, as the time, capital and resources put into the recruitment of employees do not yield profits due to their short-term departure from the organisation as there are not effective working relationships implemented or reinforced, (Soupios & Mourdoukoutas, 2015). In terms of the employee, abusive and negative managerial stances have a negative effect on the employee resulting in their leaving from the organisation.

Leadership within context of the public sector often presents unique difficulties to other areas, as often, public sector organisations are operating in the best interest of the general public, as well as answering to their respective Government and ensuring they stick within regulation and laws. Despite these external pressures, there has been a sustained governmental focus on boosting effective leadership within public sector organisations, through methods of policy-making and changing, with a focus on improving the overall performance of public sector based organisations, (Anderson, 2009). Research has been

conducted to build upon this initiative and it has suggested that it would be in the public sector's best interest to extend knowledge gained from private sector leadership research to the public sector, (Currie et al, 2009). Leadership style studies showed that a transformational leadership style had a positive correlation on the levels of employee satisfaction, job performance, commitment and citizenship behaviours, (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Transformational Leadership can be defined as "satisfying basic needs and meeting higher desires through inspiring followers to provide newer solutions and create a better workplace", (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

2.2.2 Creativity

Employee wellbeing is fundamental, to not only the individual but also their respective organisation, as it is shown to result in increased rates of creativity amongst employees, (Amabile, 1996). Through having an understanding of creativity and its processes and results and how these can benefit the organisation, (Kern, 2010), by promoting an 'outside the box' mindset, it leads to the preceding area of interest; how does an employee become a creative asset to the organisation and be in a suitable state of well-being. Varied levels of wellbeing amongst employees have been studied and shown to have a direct correlation, with not only positive effects on levels of creativity but also with negative aspects on well-being, such as stress is said to inhibit creative thinking and similar aspects of thought, such as attention, (Najmi, Kuckertz and Amir, 2012) and the speed of general thought processing, (Staw, Sandelands and Dutton, 1981). Feelings and emotions of creativity and stress are 2 psychological states that result in different outcomes on multiple levels of influence.

The definition of creativity has a long history behind it, its standard definition was bipartite; stating that creativity required both originality and effectiveness, (Runco & Jager, 2012). While originality is undoubtedly an important coefficient to results of creativity, it is not deemed sufficient alone, as an original result of creativity may lack substance or any meaning to it at all, or may not be placed in a suitable context, (Runco & Jager, 2012). This vacancy leads to the concept of effectiveness, which can also be taken in the form of value, which can be a perspective of economic circumstance, as original and creative ideas often depend on the current state of the market to maximise their effectiveness or value.

In a contemporary setting, the competitiveness within the market environment has rapidly increased due to developments in globalisation, shortened product life cycles and technological changes, (Qi et al, 2019). Globalisation, (Gonzalez, 2016), sees an era of an increased global interchange between individuals and organisations. Mancini, (2012) describes Globalisation as a change brought about by "...rapid growth of knowledge-intensive economies/firms and the resulting advent of global e-commerce businesses through the use of the worldwide-web...". In this era of competition amongst markets, decisions and reactions to changes are often the lines between success and failure in the operations of organisations and its services and products, (Daft & Marcic, 2009).

The importance of creative thinking within organisations reverts to the concept and understanding of its relationship with employee wellbeing discussed by Amabile (1996). In a similar vein to creativity, both that and innovation have been thoroughly researched and are understood as important, (DeVanna & Tichy, 1990; Van Gundy, 1987) and crucial facilitators in enabling and preparing organisations to respond to sources of external change and competition through reaching high levels of performance, (Qi et al, 2019). While earlier research into creativity focused on an individual's level and its association as an individual-based trait, (Barron & Harrington, 1981), more modern approaches to studying and research has an increased focus on how contextual factors can affect individual levels of creativity, (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). These factors can range from the receipt of rewards, (Eisenberger & Armeli, 1997) to the complexity of jobs, (Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

2.2.3 Motivation

Motivation refers to "the reasons underlying behaviour", (Guay et al, 2010). Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation that is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure. Satisfaction has a close relation to motivation, as Deci et al. (1999) mentions "intrinsic motivation energizes and sustains activities through the spontaneous satisfaction inherent in effective volitional action".

These examples can be referred to as inputs of an established model that has established outcomes of job satisfaction, wellbeing, creativity and innovation amongst employees within an organisation. Hackman and Oldham's (1974) Job Characteristics Model suggests that five core job dimensions affect and can result in these outcomes. They identified five core job dimensions are as follows; autonomy, feedback, skill, variety, task identity and task significance. Each of these dimensions creates a positive incentive for employees to work and complete given tasks, creating the outcome of employee job satisfaction, (Gostautaitė & Buciuniene, 2010). Upon achieving these outcomes of satisfaction and wellbeing, as previously researched by Qi et al (2019), this results in higher levels of creativity, and thus, overall increased the effectiveness of the organisation's performances.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, despite its dated theory, is "the most widely mentioned theory of motivation and satisfaction", (Wehrich & Koontz, 1999), and can be viewed as a theoretical predecessor to the Job Satisfaction Theory.

A primary example of a global organisation with a large workforce with a massive supply and demand is Apple, who have identified the importance of innovation, creativity and motivation in employees as contributory factors to the overall success of the organisation. This example indicates the importance of fostering and developing a systematic incentive scheme for employees to maintain high levels of motivation amongst employees, (Tidd and Bessant, 2009). Years of understanding and research has yielded varied results in terms of what incentives motivate employees more than others. Initially, it was believed that financial gain was key to motivating employees, (Wallace & Szilagyi, 1982).

Instances of extrinsic rewards that were deemed satisfactory methods of motivating employees were much more centralized and prevalent in the 'compliance era', which saw tall hierarchies with high levels of supervision focus on employee obedience and behaviour, with no desire or awareness for employee initiative or personal commitment, (Thomas, 2009).

Contrary to this, more contemporary studies and organisational structures have highlighted the limited and short-term effect that monetary rewards have on an employee's level of motivation, (Herzberg, 2003).

As previously discussed, the ever-widening sources of motivation were outlined by Warr, Cook & Wall (1979), as motivation and satisfaction could emerge from a number of conditions and incentives, such as levels of responsibility, the success of relationships between management and employees and the level of work and skill variety in the role of an employee.

2.3 Models and Theories on Job Satisfaction and Well-Being

To accurately highlight the development of job satisfaction and well-being models and theories, early models will be addressed and outlined before proceeding to more contemporary models and theories. Herzberg's two-factor theory, (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959) suggests that there are two sets of circumstances that operate independently of one another that drive employee motivation and satisfaction, these sets are hygiene (dissatisfier) and motivator factors. Each factor respectively results in employees feeling needed and satisfied in work, (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). This early model raised job enrichment awareness and set the benchmark in terms of shaping employee needs to increase their levels of satisfaction and wellbeing, (Grant et al., 2010).

Just as researched by Najmi, Kuckertz and Amir (2012) on the effects of productivity in employees who are displaying symptoms of stress, the 'Effort-Reward Imbalance Model' (ERI) investigates and assumes where there is an imbalance between effort and reward will lead to feelings and instances of stress among workers, (Walster, Waltser & Berscheid, 1978). The effort mentioned refers to extrinsic factors, such as demands of the job as well as intrinsic factors of motivation to meet the demands in question. The reward can come in monetary or non-monetary forms, such as salary, job security, promotional opportunities and esteem, (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Similarities between each of these theories discuss a series of inputs and outcomes that have an effect on employee wellbeing and job satisfaction and thus, has a direct impact on the level of performance achieved. Despite similarities, there are date-related critiques to be made, most notably, the level of change that has occurred in the last 50 years, (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

2.4 Barriers to Creativity and Innovation in the Public Sector

The difficulties in displaying and implementing examples of creativity and innovation can be difficult in a public sector organisation, especially when they are very centralised. This is often the case for the public sector as they are often centralised, closely tied to the government, with a lack of a management framework that can shed light on innovation processes, (Bloch & Bugge, 2013). A primary example of a barrier to effective organisational innovation is the old and out-of-date working models that are present within the public sector, (Moussa et al, 2018), which refers to the centralised organisational structure, with a top-down communication approach that focuses on authority and control as opposed to facilitating change and creating a lack of creativity and innovation within the public sector, (Golembiewski & Vigoda, 2000).

In the private sector, the main source of business and profits was found and gained through organisation's' innovation and creativity, (Vigoda-Gadot et al, 2005) which perceived by public sector organisations, was deemed far less important to the success of the business. A series of obstacles to developing a creative and innovative framework was identified by Mulgan and Albury (2003), with the main areas of obstacles referring to inadequate time to develop such frameworks due to organisational pressures, a lack of sufficient incentives to promote innovative and creative thinking and lastly, resilience to change, (Mulgan & Albury, 2003). Many public sector organisations are heavily centralised and thus, unfamiliar instances of change are often dismissed due to differing from the current culture of the organisation.

Alternatively, the laws and regulations present within the public sector are not always the cause of the lack of innovation and creativity, it can be said that the initiative is not being taken by public sector organisations or civil servants. (OECD, 2017). The reasons behind this are not always clear and may vary from a lack of imagination present in the public sector or the cultures present in organisations may not place much value or emphasis on innovative and creative thinking, (OECD, 2017). Newstrom's (2007) idea of driven motivation with a return of rewards to satisfy employees may be much smaller in the public sector, or perhaps the price of rewards is outweighed by potential sanctions of trying and failing to become

innovative, (OECD, 2017) and even if there was room beyond regulations to place and allocate resources into promoting an innovative and creative mindset in the public sector, the external pressures of public sector organisations would drive civil servants away from this idea. For public sector innovation to occur, deep-rooted problems must be identified and developed into projects that can be implemented, on a smaller scale first, and then diffused throughout the sector. Additionally, this requires identifying processes and structures that enable the support of the promotion of innovative practices, (OECD, 2017). Ideas can be generated through effective use of leadership within these public sector organisations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research and the method of selecting a research strategy, or methodology can often be varied and expansive but remains a very important process to the researcher, the methods can vary from an experiment to a survey or a case study, (Saunders et al, 2009). How the strategy or in this case, the methodology is chosen is underpinned by the area of research that has been identified, the objectives of the research and the existing resources and knowledge that is available to the researcher, (Saunders et al, 2009).

3.2 Research Methodology

The method research is essentially a process or means of gathering data, (Bryman, 2007), that can enable the researcher to either support or reject the research question posed by evidence gathered and involves an "analysis of the assumptions, principles and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry", (Schwandt, 2001). This research study is based on a qualitative analysis of public sector employees' levels of job satisfaction and wellbeing and what inputs and outputs are involved in achieving and maintaining these positive levels of satisfaction and wellbeing as well as any subsequent consequences involved. The proposed research methodology for this dissertation is based on Saunders' 'Research Onion' model, (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The benefits of adopting this methodology are it's a layer-based structure which creates a more refined and structured basis of research.

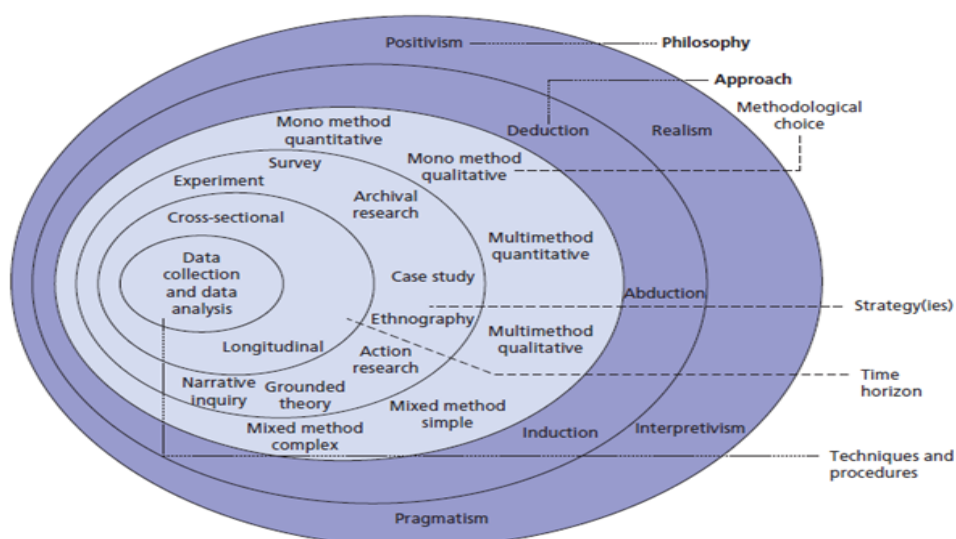


Figure 1: Source - Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012) "Research Methods for Business Students" 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited

As shown by the image, the outer layer of the model refers to the different types of research philosophies. The centre layers refer to the chosen methods and strategies involved in the researching process. Finally, the inner layer involves the data collection and analysis of this data, which can involve a mixture of primary and secondary data sources.

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), there are three major ways of thinking about research philosophy are studied. There are three different position types, which are ontology, epistemology and axiology. Each type has its differences that need to be accurately considered when choosing a research procedure. It is the theory that is used to direct the researcher to develop and conduct the procedure of research, the research design, research strategy and processes of information gathering, (Malhotra, 2009). Ontology concerns itself with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with that “constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study” and axiology involves studies about “judgements of values” within research, (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

This dissertation involves an epistemological approach concerning its study and research of satisfaction and wellbeing in the workforce which constitutes as widely acceptable knowledge. Also, the method of primary research gathering through the use of questioning people and taking their opinions into account in the form of data analysis constitutes as an example of acceptable knowledge within the field of research.

The decision to choose an epistemological approach refers to the influence that this area of research influences the methodology, as methodologies justify research methods and in turn, these methods produce knowledge, which highlights the epistemic content that is present in methodologies, (Carter & Little, 2007).

The three research positions, ontology, epistemology and axiology are highlighted in types of research philosophies, which are shown in Saunders’s ‘Research Onion’ model as the first layer, and are Positivism, Realism, interpretivism and Pragmatism.

The chosen research philosophy in this dissertation is Interpretivism, and its position with epistemology is that interpretivists believe that reality is multiple and relative, (Hudson &

Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivists adopt more flexible frameworks than other research philosophies, which allow for an increased capacity for interpreting human interaction, (Black, 2006). An interpretivist researcher enters an area or field of study and research with a background and context of information, however, they feel that this is insufficient and remains open to new and additional information throughout the course of research and allows others to provide added perspectives of information, (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The benefit of this interpretivism research philosophy in the context of this dissertation is that each person questioned in the process of primary data gathering could theoretically possess different levels of job satisfaction and personal wellbeing, in addition to different needs and wants that motivate them and fulfil these personal needs.

This opportunity for interpretation effectively rules out the implementation of quantification of data and study, thus, the inclusion of a qualitative research approach seems more fitting as it can refer to information and knowledge gained about job satisfaction and related factors of influence in a more personal and in-depth manner. Qualitative research refers to finding meaning and research into the lives of people, and the participant's behaviours, emotions and feelings, (Denzin, 1989) on a personal level or on an organisational level, which could involve culture or social movements, (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As previously discussed, qualitative research methods present a benefit and advantage regarding the information gathered is deeper and more insightful.

3.2.2 Research Approach

When undertaking and tackling a research question, there are two primary types of approaches to conducting research. The two primary approaches are deductive and inductive reasoning.

A deductive driven research approach can be defined as developing an assumption based on any existing theories and forming a research plan that is used to test out the validity of this assumption, (Wilson, 2010), or in other words, a deductive approach is used to deduce the results from the premises. Regarding the validity of research, a deductive argument is either valid or invalid, with no degree of validity included.

In comparison, an inductive research approach begins with specific criteria based observations, which can then formulate a larger scale conclusion which can be a generalised conclusion for any similar groups and conditions. However, these generalisations need to be tested and can either become verified or rejected, dependant on their outcome, (Zalaghi, 2016).

Generally, a deductive research approach is often accompanied with quantitative methods of collecting and analysing samples of data, whereas, an inductive research approach is accompanied by a qualitative method of data collection and analysis, (Neuman, 1997). Per this dissertation, an inductive research approach was chosen, and to reflect that a qualitative method of gathering data from a small sample of participants was chosen, instead of investigating a larger population.

Choosing an inductive approach using a qualitative method was justified as the process of adopting an inductive approach means that a framework is not necessary before the information gathering stage, thus it allows the research to have more flexibility in their data gathering and analytics. It is only following the gathering of data are patterns and trends made and developing a theory for these patterns through the formulation of hypotheses, (Bernard, 2011).

3.2.3 Research Strategy

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's 'Onion model', the next segment of the research method process was the 'research strategy', which is an introduction to methods used by the researcher to gather primary sources of data and information to incorporate to the overall findings of the research study. The decision on a research strategy takes the previous approach and philosophy into account, and as the research will be conducted in a qualitative method, it was decided that gathering information and data through the use of focus groups would suit the research method. Cornwall and Jenkins (1995) define focus groups as an assembled group of individuals to discuss a specific topic or expressing their beliefs and perceptions regarding an area of interest or relevance to the researcher. While the focus group is sometimes seen as very similar to an interview process, especially semi-structured 'one on one' interviews, (Parker & Tritter, 2006), the primary difference is the researcher takes a step back from the centre of the discussion in replacement for a group discussion between the assembled group of individuals, (Hohenthal, Owidi, Minoia &

Pellikka, 2015). The concept of job satisfaction and employee wellbeing can often be complex and as such, it is best for the qualitative focus group method of gaining an insight into public sector employees. As focus groups can be difficult to control as the researcher is not centred to the answering of questions, a structural emphasis will be placed on a time limit per question asked to allow for a mixture of concise and detailed answering.

3.2.4 Secondary Data Collection

As there has been pre-existing research and literature on the chosen area of study for this dissertation, varied sources of secondary sources of data were carefully gathered, analysed and referenced accordingly. Hakim (1982) has described a secondary source of research and data analysis as “...analysis of an existing dataset which presents interpretations, conclusions or knowledge additional to, or different from, those presented in the first report on the inquiry as a whole and its main results.” As research has increased and with it, literature based on the study and findings of these researchers, it means that there are increasing numbers of secondary sources of research and data available through various means.

The majority of secondary data was collected through a series of online sources (e-books, online sourced articles and e-journals). Hard copy books were also used in the process and compilation of information gathering during the course of this dissertation.

3.2.5 Qualitative Data Primary Collection

Introducing qualitative research introduces multiple ways of conducting research. As previously discussed by Denzin (1989), Qualitative research involves personal feelings, opinions and emotions, on a personal scale, it is much more in-depth, which was believed to be more effective in discussing the research question’s topics of satisfaction and wellbeing regarding the jobs of public sector employees.

The qualitative approach that was chosen was semi-structured focus groups which was found to be appropriate as focus groups capture the experiences and opinions on a larger basis than interviews and considering that the Irish public sector is the largest job market in Ireland, currently employing over four hundred thousand people as of 2019, (CSO, 2019). Having an increased number of candidates would benefit the researcher and provide a

larger insight into the experiences and opinions of those employed in the public sector which is done through communication between participants to create discussion and data, (Kitzinger, 1995).

While quantitative research methods, such surveys, were considered, they were eventually decided against using as the primary method of data collection. The main reason for rejecting a quantitative research method was due to time constraints and lack of information depth available to the researcher. If a survey was used for a large population and sample, the researcher would have to identify those who are currently employed or have experience within the public sector to be eligible for the research gathering.

Another rejected method of data collection was interviewing individuals on a one-to-one basis, while the data collection began with this method, the researcher and participants believed that a group setting discussion will allow for better time efficiency and greater depth in answering as there will allow for direct insight and comparison between employees of different departments.

The types of questions asked in a qualitative research method are important as it effectively results in the answers given and the produced data that needs to be managed, and management of data needs to be good as it is "necessary of facilitating the coherence of a project", (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The research method consisted of a semi-structured focus group session that allowed for a degree of probing amongst questions, which involved participants to expand upon their initial answers, which is important to tie back into the interpretivist epistemology that has been adopted for this research, (Saunders et al, 2012). Through the use of probing candidates further, it allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the feelings of participants in answers to questions.

There were approximately 5 research objectives created and developed, with 21 interview questions in total, with 4 or 5 questions tying into a research objective.

3.2.6 Population

The researcher interviewed a total of 15 participants, that consisted of 3 groups of participants, each group containing 5 participants. No group interviewed consisted of the same person twice. The focus group session candidates were recorded through a computer-

based application "Otter.ai" that audio recorded them and automatically transcribed what was being said by each candidate. All candidates were interviewed in-person. The candidates were all employees of the same undisclosed organisation who operated in the public services sector. Candidates were sourced from different departments and directorates from within the organisation to provide a variety of opinions and experiences. Candidates had a variety of skills and experiences between them which allowed for an insight into wellbeing and satisfaction within different established departments. Candidates were a part of finance, communications, information systems, human resources, strategy and research departments. Focus group candidates were numbered one through five in each of the three focus groups to maintain anonymity.

Interviewed candidates were appropriate as they are current employees within the Irish public services sector, employed within the same organisation, however, they came from a variety of backgrounds and ages, allowing their answers to provide a range of perspectives into perceived levels of employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. Their opinions were based on five key research objectives that were introduced and discussed during the research gathering stage.

3.2.7 Analysing Qualitative Data

Participants of the focus group discussion were audio recorded by a computer programme that was monitored and analysed both during and after the focus group discussions had taken place. Questions were based on research objectives, with each question grouped to a theme or research objective to facilitate the analysis of answers following the focus groups. The audio recordings were instantly transcribed into an electronic file that outlined the discussions taken place during the interviews. These transcripts were then analysed for any potential discrepancies and saved for further analysis.

The transcription programme accounted for the distinguishing voices of participants and as such, highlighted each candidate under a different colour theme. This method of audio recording was effective and appropriate due to the lack of control a researcher has over the answers provided by focus group participants, it allows for large volumes of answers to be instantly transcribed and analysed.

3.2.8 Ethical Issues

Ethical principles must be established and adhered to over the course of research gathering. Establishing good ethical principles as a framework can be used to ensure excellent standards of ethical research are researched, which include respect for the participants of the study, asking the participants fair and equal questions and that they have the right to anonymity and confidentiality, (Polit and Beck, 2004). These principles of Ethics are important to follow during the research process to prevent causing influence or misleading answers amongst the participants in this study.

Concerning this research study, the researcher presented participants with an information sheet and consent form, that informed participants of their rights during this study that are in line with the ethical code of conduct. During the qualitative study, participants were informed that their consent was required to participate and that they had the right to refuse any question and had the right to remain anonymous. Participants were also informed that any data gathered during the research process will only be used for the submission of the dissertation and will not be distributed amongst any external sources for any other reason.

3.2.9 Limitations of Research

The limitations of research is an important area for the researcher as it demonstrates to peer-reviewers of issues that can arise, in this case, in the instances of a qualitative inductive study and analysis. Addressing limitations also provides the opportunity for the researcher to discuss what methods of overcoming these limitations were available, and if there were none present, then why and what could have been done better, (SAGE Publications, 2017). In this instance, it was no different, as limitations were encountered by the researcher. The primary limitation was the population sample used in primary research. The total population of those eligible for participating in the research study is very large and varied. In comparison to this, the population who partook in the qualitative research study were all from the same organisation within the public sector, and as such, their answers were not truly reflective of the wider population within the public sector.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

A qualitative analysis within the context of employee wellbeing and job satisfaction within the public sector was designed with a model framework to keep the questions derived from the framework and research question relevant, as well as the answers easily identifiable to research objectives created for this research question.

The objectives and questions composed of an implementation of the five primary inputs from Oldham and Hackman's 'Job Characteristics Model', with sub-objectives or derived questions based on areas of studied literature during the research questions. The researcher used this pre-planned framework and template of questions to analyse any correlations and trends amongst participants that leads to a decisive outcome of the research question.

4.2 Findings of the qualitative research

The five model-based objectives consisted of four to five questions that were relevant to areas of studied literature. The five research objectives and their subsequent focus group questions were outlined to each focus group and their respective participants. The objectives and findings were primarily focused on gathering data and information that correlated with the research objectives, although additional information was allowed to be drawn upon through participant discussion.

4.2.1 – Research Objective 1:

“To investigate skill variety in the context of job satisfaction and employee wellbeing in public sector employees”

The purpose of this objective was related to participant's opinions on skill variety, which is essentially the level and range of skills required to operate effectively within a position or role. Participants were asked their preferred method of working, as well as for any advantages or disadvantages that correlated with high skill variety. They were concluded with a summary of its effect on wellbeing and satisfaction within a position.

4.2.1.1 Preferred skill variety within a job position

Gathered research indicated that skill variety is an important factor in developing the career of an employee, irrespective of the current skillset that an employee possesses. Taking on a challenging career move is seen to pay dividends as it is viewed that most skills are transferrable, and those that are not can be placed as a priority to adapt to and learn. While the benefits of skill variety were seen by the majority of participants, the current stage of an employee's career acted as a factor of influence as those who were in more junior positions believed that it was important to work in a role that required more fundamental and restricted skills, before having the confidence and motivation to transfer to a position requiring a larger skill variety.

4.2.1.2 The values of skill variety

Primary research gathered indicates that there is a perspective on skill variety as an example of a non-monetary, intrinsic reward system, that can allow for an opportunity for employee creativity, by combining newly learned skills with previously learned skills and being able to enhance these even further.

The secondary research by Oldham and Cummings (1996) highlighted that there had been previous research done into the correlation between job complexity and skills required for the levels of creativity produced amongst employees. The main findings were based upon positive outcomes of job and skill advancement through a lack of repetitive work which was deemed as an inhibitor to career development. Additionally, better understanding and preparation for future tasks through skill variety were analysed to be other valued outcomes.

4.2.1.3 The shortcomings of skill variety

The research findings indicated that the main negative aspects found in skill variety were the time that needs to be invested in acquiring new skills and developing them, which can be done primarily through instances of training. The success of the training is also a relevant factor in the overall motivation gained through learning skills as if there is a lack of evident improvement in the short-term, it may affect employee motivation and productivity.

“Because you might lack some skills, you might feel unproductive or incapable of doing certain tasks on a day to day basis.” (Candidate 2, focus group 1).

This feeling of unproductivity that can emerge through a surplus of skill requirements is an interesting contrast and comparison to also feeling unproductive in the context of repetition found within a job or position with a more restricted need for skill variety.

4.2.1.4 The importance of creativity and innovation

The research participants found that demonstrating instances of creativity and innovation within a position that requires a large skill set can lead to positive changes in emotional and motivational states of the employee. Using innovation can be used to bridge gaps in learning that may not have been covered in formal training. Demonstrating these instances should also be recognised by the employer as it shows the employee's willingness to learn and aid the organisation, as it may lead to cost-effective solutions. As previously discussed by Amabile (1996), levels of creativity amongst employees have a direct correlation with their feelings of wellbeing in the workplace, further indicating that employees demonstrating creative and innovative instincts should be recognised positively.

4.2.1.5 Effect of skill variety on employee wellbeing and job satisfaction

The research participants concluded that the correct conditions and workplace environment to support skill variety needed to be in place to create the maximum levels of output in the form of positive employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. The organisational structure needs to allow for performance management for the employee to be effectively conditioned in performing a role requiring a wide skill variety. The job description must be clear in highlighting the varied skills needed within a position for a suitable candidate who thrives in busy workplace situations and shows their initial motivation and wellbeing in their application for a skill varied position.

Fraizer (2005) discusses the importance of employee productivity and performance to the overall levels of success within an organisation. This reaffirms the opinions and inputs by the

focus group participants on the presence of a performance management system within the position, that takes an employee's wellbeing into account also.

4.2.2 – Research Objective 2: “ To investigate task identity in the context of public sector job satisfaction and employee wellbeing”

According to Oldham and Hackman's job characteristics model, task identity refers to the ability for an employee to be able to see the importance of a task to the overall success of an organisation and to be able to visualise the outcome at any stage of a task. Task identity was to enable employees to view the meaningfulness of the work they did, irrespective of the level or scale of a task.

4.2.2.1 Accessibility of public sector tasks

In the instance of the organisation where the research participants are currently employed, the excellent management in place allows for employee's to align their tasks or contributions to the overall level of the organisation's performances. However, task identity in itself is viewed as being a skill that needs understanding and development, as an employee must first understand and develop their immediate skills and tasks before being able to draw on and evaluate their overall impact on the organisation.

Participants indicated through their public sector experience, that organisational structure allows for effective task identity, as teams often work closely with one another and their work is often published, with the published work acting as a reflective piece and shows evidence of the collaborative nature of public sector tasks.

4.2.2.2 Task identity and levels of motivation

Candidates found that ownership of work tasks provided a non-monetary, intrinsic form of reward, through a feeling of meaningfulness of their work within the organisation, which in turn, increased their satisfaction and motivation to continue their levels of performance and task involvement. Levels of task autonomy was also a contributing factor to a candidate's understanding of the meaningfulness of their tasks. Performance reviews within the organisation on a bi-yearly basis also allows for respondents to reflect on and discuss their

list of completed tasks during this time indicating their overall success and contribution to the immediate team and in turn, to the performance levels of the business.

4.2.2.3 Creativity and innovation in task identity

While creative and innovative approaches are seen as an indicator in employee wellbeing in the context of task identity, these requirements are varied in circumstance. Within the focus group participants organisation, there are a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that tie-in with task identity to keep deviation from a task's result to a minimum and effectively reduces the overall need or opportunity for creativity and innovation.

These examples of Standard Operating Procedures tie in with the secondary data collected that refers to the common centralised organisation structure often found in public sector organisations that features a more top-down approach, preventing any facilitation of creativity and innovation among employees.

It was also noted that where instances of creativity and innovation were more accessible highlighted that either there was a lack of training in this area or that there was a deviation from the standard hierarchical organisational structure.

4.2.2.4 Qualities of leadership in task identity

Instances of effective leadership within the public organisation is an essential skill as it requires directing and influencing the organisation to create working relations within the organisation and its associated teams. Also, due to the collaborative nature of the public sector, demonstrating leadership qualities amongst designated senior management, as well as through staff, creating task involvement with external departments and agencies is a key factor in the success of the business.

"I believe leadership is essential to running an organization or having a defined leader in charge of the departments on individuals having their individual, goal orientated mindset, helping to self-motivate and self-actualize their goals." (Candidate 1, focus group 1)

This data ties in with secondary data by Muchiri et al (2011) in the increased awareness of the importance of effective leadership within members of an organisation plays in the overall levels of success and performance, as a disagreeable workplace is a prime inhibitor for performance levels. Allowing for instances of leadership qualities to emerge and develop amongst employees is also a reflection of the benefits of task ownership has on employee motivation and job satisfaction.

4.2.3 – Research Objective 3:

“To investigate task significance in the context of job satisfaction and employee wellbeing”

While task significance is often assumed to be an indication of performance levels, this is not the case due to limitations of experimental design that results to ultimately demonstrate a correlation between task significance and job performance, (Dodd and Ganster, 1996). A primary limitation is a reliance on cross-sectional experimental design, that essentially rules out the possibility that task significance can act as a consequence of job performance, (Mathieu, Hofmann & Farr, 1993). These limitations were taken into account and questions asked were neutral and open-ended in nature to prevent bias towards task significance.

4.2.3.1 Private and public sector comparative perceptions of task significance

The research participant’s concepts of task significance primarily related to the impact and level of influence a task has on the wider organisation and the public. This generally the case where there was a direct comparison and association with task significance with social influence, rather than organisational performance. This acted as a key insight into the public sector’s aims and objectives towards Irish society, in comparison to private sector organisations where the meaningfulness of work is not as widely felt among employees.

“I’ve worked in the private sector where I felt like tasks were quite insignificant, and you were just a cog in the wheel... whereas my current position with designing policy, I feel like the tasks are more significant because you have a greater impact on our society.” (Candidate 4, focus group 1).

The correlation with societal impact and the meaningfulness of work through task significance was summarised in the primary data collection as a direct comparison as to the core motives and objectives of the public and private sector:

"In terms of the private sector, their objective is to make a return on shareholder's investments, and a lot of their motivation would be with regard to their shareholders. Whereas in the public sector, it's more managing how you are utilizing taxpayers money." (Candidate 2, focus group 2).

4.2.3.2 Influence of task significance on levels of motivation

Directing task significance to a smaller scale and more personal level, participants felt that been provided with a significant task was an indicator of the levels of trust that people have in you, which leads to an increased level of motivation. Your current level within the organisation was another factor that influences your positive reception to personal involvement in tasks of significance as a more junior level employee may feel the value in their involvement on a larger scale than someone in a more senior position would due to the fact that they are more used to the pressures and understandings of significance in the organisation.

4.2.3.3 Opportunities in participating in organisation-wide tasks of significance

Data gathered from the opinions and experiences of candidates was varied in nature, although a key influential factor was management, as data provided referred to organisational structure and management style as the area that dictated employee accessibility and involvement to tasks of significance.

"I think that's dependent on the team, whether you're part of a smaller or larger team, and potentially your role and what the hierarchy above you is. A number of the tasks could be administrative in nature, and so potentially having access to very significant tasks and deliverables might be harder to achieve." (Candidate 3, focus group 1).

Secondary sources of gathered data complement the primary sources of data, as it indicates the centralised nature of a public sector organisation, in regards to a need for formal authorisation on certain areas and aspects of task involvement.

4.2.3.4 Do instances of quality leadership correlate directly with an organisation's performance levels?

As previously discussed by Muchiri et al (2011), effective leadership has emerged as a primary indicator of an organisations level of performance, this indicates the importance of the working relations between employees and employers. The importance of management style must find a balance between authoritative leadership and delegation, as focus group participants highlighted the positive effects on employees when they are given their opportunities to lead on task or objective. As a decision such as this creates a stronger link of trust of the work rate between employer and employee, it adds a further substance that instances of leadership on an organisational level and an individual level strengthen an organisations level of performance and productivity.

4.2.4 Research Objective 4:

“To investigate autonomy in the public sector and its effect on job satisfaction and employee wellbeing”

As work ownership amongst employees has a positive correlation with their overall job satisfaction and wellbeing, autonomy is an important contributing aspect in this context, as we have also gathered from sources of primary and secondary sources of data that the organisational structure is hierarchical and centralised, with fewer opportunities of work flexibility amongst junior-level employees. Autonomy and associated factors were discussed amongst candidates to gain insight into the accessibility and outputs of autonomous work environments.

4.2.4.1 Autonomy in the public sector

Accessibility to autonomous work is said to vary, depending on your role or level of seniority in the organisation, as any potential micromanagement influences can decrease the further you progress in the organisational structure. In saying this, Standard Operating Procedures are referred to again as inhibitors to autonomy, which is beyond the control of other factors

of influence such as the style of management. Personal influences can also act as an input into the levels of autonomy that an employee can engage in or want. Certain employees may not have autonomy as a workplace motivator as they may be content with other sources of influence, such as extrinsic, monetary rewards, which again, can vary and depend on the employees level or grade within their place of work.

4.2.4.2 Motivations in autonomous work

Furthermore to what was said in the previous question, research gathered informed the researcher that autonomous working has a positive effect on an employee's motivation, however, there has to be a dedicated management system in place for autonomy to operate effectively. Participants agreed that a performance management system, with regular interval check-ins, should be implemented to ensure that whilst the employee is working autonomously, that their work is relevant to the task given to them. This data highlights a combined need for autonomy and work ownership needs to be balanced with a strategic management system.

4.2.4.3 Leadership and innovation in autonomy

Leadership and innovation are two personal skill traits that can be used in understanding an autonomous task in a case where there is not a performance management system in place to aid the employee, an employee can rely on their self-belief to prioritise and undertake the task(s) at hand most effectively and efficiently possible.

4.2.4.4 Autonomy and stress

The perception of autonomy in the context of the research question bred a debate that mentioned the previously mentioned opportunities that autonomy can aid and produce, provided that the organisation placed emphasis and a support system on it. In comparison, participants discussed autonomy within the individual is potential positives or negatives that can occur in the form of stress.

Secondary research data suggests that stress acts as an inhibitor to employee performance and general thought process, as Staw, Sandelands and Dutton (1981) had researched.

Participants input that autonomous work suited some people naturally due to traits and

their personalities and also suited people who were at a capable grade or level who were competent in undertaking tasks without regular supervision.

“I think, ironically, it depends on how well the levels of resources, support and autonomous work is managed by the managers.” (Candidate 2, focus group 2).

Although, data findings from participants resulted in a lack of resources dedicated to autonomous work to be more stress-inducing than the concept of autonomous work itself.

4.2.5 Research Objective 5:

“To investigate feedback in the public sector and does it affect employee wellbeing and job satisfaction”

Feedback in the context of an employee’s performance can be used for a variety of reasons, including, management decision making, (Bogart, 1980), management control, (Hackman, 1976), performance appraisal, training and motivation, (Herold & Greller, 1976). These are only a small portion of uses and reasons for feedback, indicating it’s many inputs, however, it also can produce many outputs in the context of the employee, such as increased or decreased motivation, adding meaningfulness to their work or constructive feedback to ensure the quality of their work is improved upon the next time around.

4.2.5.1 The values of employee feedback

Primary research data informed the researcher that feedback is a crucial component in improving the performance levels of employee, and thus, resulting in increased performances by the organisation. It was discussed as being able to identify skills gaps amongst employees, which can then be prioritised in-company training programmes. Feedback opportunities can also provide a forum for employees to express any concerns, meaning that it can act as a two-way process of the flow of information, and is not just for the benefit of just the employer or the employee. Organisations should implement a structured feedback process that is widely known amongst staff as to avoid any issues, such as lack of trust that may potentially occur if feedback sessions are isolated to a select few employees.

4.2.5.2 The shortcomings of employee feedback

Researched shortcomings based on employee feedback found that there wasn't any necessarily poor examples or shortcomings to feedback, but there can be a lack of resources or attention given to the feedback process, such as a lack of goal-orientated change that follows up from a feedback session, that effectively results in a waste of time for both employer and employee. As mentioned, to build on a lacklustre feedback process is to implement and expand upon a dedicated feedback system that is timely, relevant and outlines the goals of both employer and employee, that will essentially strengthen the working relationship and increase employee performances in the organisation.

4.2.5.3 The concept of negative feedback

The findings for the concept of negative feedback differentiated amongst several participants, showing that the concept of negative feedback and the reasons behind it may be misunderstood or that a portion of those does not perceive any feedback as negative. It was discussed that negative feedback should be reserved for rare instances of employee gross misconduct, where instances of bullying are demonstrated. An alternative insight was that negative feedback was a useful tool, provided that it was made constructively with a next step process discussed, which refers back to the previously mentioned importance of a feedback management system. Finally, a participant perceived negative feedback as an important input for employee growth, as consistently positive feedback may decrease its effectiveness if used too often.

4.2.5.4 Feedback in the public sector

Research gathered found there were clear systems in place with the public sector organisation in the form of performance and interim performance reviews, that occurred on a bi-yearly basis, in which objectives and progress are discussed and training requests are acknowledged by management when including future staff training programmes. Despite a positive response outlining the clear feedback designs currently in use, participants still felt that it is not being utilised to its full extent and that employees also value their inputs to feedback sessions. This can be developed in the form of 360 feedback sessions where an

employee is openly encouraged to give their opinions to management and the organisation as a whole. However, there is further evidence that public sector organisations still adopt a more top-down hierarchical approach to work processes, that includes feedback opportunities.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Over the course of this duration, definitions of wellbeing and satisfaction were introduced and placed into the context of organisations within the global market which has historically seen an increase in supply and demand by consumers and stakeholders. These pressures have highlighted a focus on the employees situated within these organisations and how these pressures can have an effect on their livelihood, in forms such as negative psychological effects of stress and anxiety. These negative effects subsequently have an effect on the wider teams and the organisation as a whole, contributing to increased costings due to instances of absenteeism and lack of employee productivity. By studying and researching these examples and concepts of wellbeing and job satisfaction, further research emerges as to the methods and examples that best serve employees in contributing towards positive working environments, which again, leads to increased performances and levels of organisational success due to employee performances and productivity. Factors of potential influence in the context of employee satisfaction and wellbeing were researched and compared with primary data gathered in a selected job of the Irish public sector. Collected primary data from participants within the Irish public sector indicated their knowledge of the importance to the research topic. Overall, there was a positive agreement amongst participants that inputs of job design and continual support and involvement encourage employees and create more instances of wellbeing amongst employees and develop an overall higher level of job satisfaction, commitment and productivity.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommendations for future academic research

Despite the large volumes of pre-existing academic studies in the various forms of secondary data, there are still opportunities and methods to be explored and made by future researchers of academia. Refining the scope to a more tailored list of research participants may provide the opportunity to yield more detailed results. This may be carried out by developing focus groups or interviews that are more distinctly based on demographics,

such as their age or levels of experience within employment in the public sector. By segmenting participants together based on prearranged eligibility based on demographics, it may prevent unconscious bias or influence developing amongst the group of participants, should one well-informed and experienced member of the research provide their opinions that may affect the answer or opinion of someone less experienced in the area of research as they may feel that their answer isn't as relevant or valued to the research topic.

Another recommendation should future research be conducted in the future would be to evaluate and develop a comparison through a mixed qualitative and quantitative research method as the eligible population within the Irish public sector is large and while quantitative research methods cover a larger sample and population, they do not provide the emotional insight that qualitative research offers, which is a critical component in research in the context of employee wellbeing and job satisfaction.

5.2.2 Recommendations for industry practitioners

The opportunity to collect and analyse primary data provides a uniquely personal insight that facilitates the researchers understanding of the research topic and its pros and cons. In undertaking this, the opinions and experiences provided by those participants raise examples of issues that are, to an extent, unresolved as they were brought forward by employees of the public sector. It is recommended for industry practitioners to investigate an implement strategic management training programmes for employees, where training sessions have been decided upon due to skill gap identification in the workforce. This prevents capital and resources being wasted on employees who possess this knowledge and skills before the training and those who do not possess the relevant skills are not missed out on. Identifying these requests can be done through interim performance management sessions, which can allow for a 360 feedback system which allows for both employers and employees to voice their opinions and raise any concerns, such as requesting training that may be viable to the organisation and its employees.

5.2.3 Costings of recommendations

The costings of the recommendations are dependent on whether an organisation chooses to source methods of training internally or externally through agencies and suppliers.

Training requirements need to be carefully identified to the organisation and evaluated strategically as to how this can act as a benefit in the long term to the employees of an organisation and the entire business. Should a public sector organisation identify a suitable skill gap or request that allows for an opportunity for training which is chosen to be held internally, this will save on costs of paying external suppliers to either carry training on-site which will save costs, or travel off-site for training. Carrying out internal training will also save further costings to the organisation through increased commitment and job satisfaction by employees and better wellbeing which has been shown to lessen the number of absent days taken by employees.

5.2.4 Timeline for implementation

An organisation that wants to carry out a training programme must first identify the needs and types of training required and what is currently offered in the market. Requests can be encouraged through staff performance reviews which allow the organisation to allow for the identification of skill gaps amongst employees. The training must be measured in terms of how many require it, how much is the training if it is performed through an external supplier and finally, if the training can be conducted through current designated staff who possess the knowledge and skill to train other employees internally. Depending on the variety of training required, what is offered and how many employees are requesting or eligible for the training programme, full implementation may take a few weeks to a couple of months to fully complete the process.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – A self-reflective approach to learning

1.1 Introduction

The final discussion of this dissertation consists of a self-reflection piece where the researcher uses the dissertation's conclusion to analyse and provide insight into what they learned personally and academically over the course of undertaking and completing the dissertation. For this self-reflective approach to learning, the learning styles model published by David Kolb in 1984 will be used as the model structure.

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p.38).

1.2 Learning style theories

Kolb’s learning theory (1984) illustrates the experience of learning as a four-stage cycle, as shown in figure 2 below.

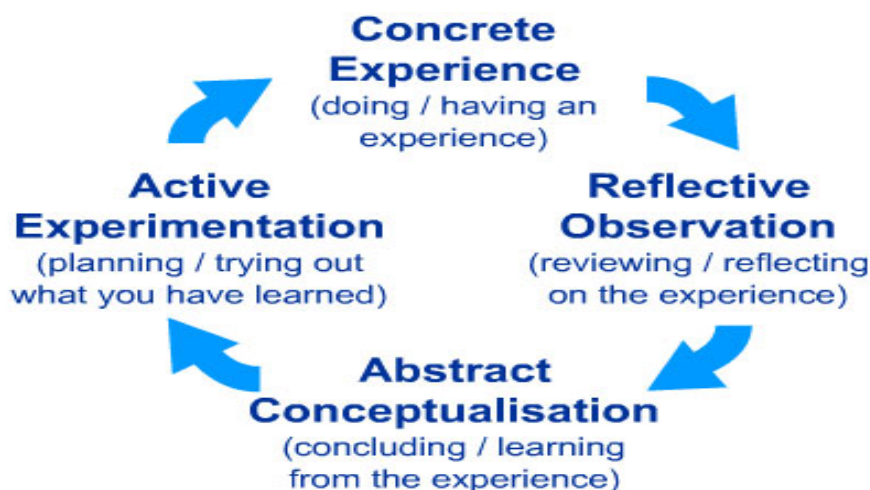


Figure 2: Kolb’s (1984) experimental learning cycle

As shown by the above figure, the learning cycle has four key stages, which are:

- Concrete Experience: where experience has been recently encountered
- Reflective Observation: Post-experiences thoughts and early understanding
- Abstract conceptualization: Understanding and reflection allows for a new idea
- Active experimentation: A new idea or modified knowledge is developed

Kolb's learning style was further developed by Honey and Mumford (1986) who expanded Kolb's design and definition by defining learning as, "learning has happened when people can demonstrate that they know something they did not know before (insights and realizations, as well as facts and when they can something they could not before (skills)". Their expanded theory paralleled each of Kolb's four stages in which their psychological framework defined four different types of learners which were listed as activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist. Each learner type is described as follows; an activist is a dynamic learner, a reflector is thoughtful and tactical, a theorist is rational and direct in their thinking approach and a pragmatist can be described as someone open to exploring options and experimentation.

This model and theory bring a unique awareness to learning and understanding the differentiation present in people's ability to tackle and solve issues. Based on Honey and Mumford's (1986) learner styles, the researcher has acknowledged that the strongest links are towards the activist and pragmatist styles.

The research process indicated examples of these styles when the researcher explored numerous methods of data collection before creating a wide, varied list of questions to ask participants at first, before having to refine questions of relevancy. An activist approach was shown in the researcher's enthusiastic approach in deciding upon a qualitative method to be used in the dissertation. While this was the more suitable option in the context of the research study, potential quantitative exploration and ideas were not largely considered from the start point of the study.

1.3 Experiences and skills developed during the research process

The researcher had no previous experience at this academic level or depth of study, therefore, there was an inclined learning curve, which allowed for the introduction and enhancement of both new and present skills of the researcher. Organisational and people skills were greatly developed through commitment and planning in the focus group sessions which took place to gather primary sources of data to be used in the study. Prior planning in organising a venue, mutually agreeable time and eligible list of participants required a prolonged period. Creating a maintaining a structure to the sessions to ensure the purpose, questions and answers of the session remained relevant and on track required management skills to have greatly developed over the course of the master's in human resource management course.

In line with the previously mentioned learning theories and styles, being introduced so many new areas and concepts of studied learning, restricted the researcher's overall time to initially reflect on each individual area of skill learning, although, over the full course, repetition in skill usage allowed for the researcher to refine and enhance their abilities in utilising these skills through a collective and prolonged period of reflection. These stages lead up to final stage which saw the 'active experimentation' stage discussed by Kolb (1984), where the researcher utilised a wide range of introduced and developed skills in beginning and working over the course of this dissertation to investigate and introduce a segment of collected primary research to already existing academia and ensure its completion by its due deadline date.

Beyond organisational and management abilities and skills that were developed throughout this dissertation, additional skills that are considered transferable in the field to utilise throughout the researcher's future career prospects include listening and analytical skills that were developed over the primary research gathering and personal motivation skills that were consistently developed by setting personal deadlines during the course of this dissertation.

1.4 Conclusion

To conclude this personal reflection section, the researcher was able to revisit the key values, insights and skills that were introduced and developed throughout the course of this dissertation. The overall experience of the research and development involved in this dissertation was both challenging and rewarding to the researcher, but there is a strong sense of belief that this study enhanced the researcher's academic knowledge and boosted their level of interest and insight into areas related to the topic of study. There is genuine value and appreciation found in a self-reflection as it really puts everything in perspective, such as the time and work used in constructing an academic dissertation.

Appendix 2 – Focus group information form

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information.

The following will take place in the form of a focus group. I am conducting this focus group to gain relevant information and opinions in order to complete my dissertation as part of my Master's degree requirement in Human Resource Management.

By taking part in this focus group, you will be asked to discuss areas of employee well-being, job satisfaction, job feedback, skill variety, workplace motivation, qualities of leadership skills and the values and shortcomings of skills of creativity and innovation to name a few! The information and discussion involved in this research method is fully separate from your current organisation of employment, which will not be named. You are free to use your names, although this is optional and requires prior consent from the participant.

I plan on audio recording the focus group session for my own benefit to later transcribe and summarise each group's answer to a question. Quotes from participants may be sparingly used with prior consent.

I have asked each of you to take part due to your experience of employment in the Irish public sector, making your opinions and experiences relevant to the data collection for this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question and withdraw from the study at any time.

By keeping the participants' place of employment confidential and separate to the collection of information, I have attempted to minimize any risks. I have also phrased the questions in a manner that is not misleading or cause for conflict or backlash on the participants. Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in the National College of Ireland and by myself and my supervisor, David Hurley until after my degree has been

conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legalisation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

The results of my dissertation will be solely to submit the National College of Ireland for grading and I will not be using the data gathered and stored for any other reasons.

If you require additional information you can contact the researcher, Jamie Johnston or supervisor, David Hurley.

Consent to take part in Research: A Qualitative Analysis on Job Satisfaction and Employee Wellbeing in the Irish Public Sector

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves answering questions and being involved in a focus group discussion.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher's dissertation.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained by the researcher and their supervisor until the exam board has issued results, following this the consent forms and audio recordings will be deleted and destroyed.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 2 years.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Jamie Johnston, Student of National College of Ireland, Masters in Human Resource Management

Signature of research participant and date of research involvement

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study
