

Supervisory Support, Job Satisfaction, and Leadership development in Non-Profit Organizations

“Non-profits” has become shorthand for organizations trying to do good in the world. Indeed, non-profit organizations, as their name suggests, do not attempt to make money, but instead provide services they deem important to society, and can include political organizations, schools, churches, social clubs, and charitable organizations. Non-profit organizations frequently seek formal government recognition of their status, as in many countries (including the U.S. and Canada) such a status makes the money they raise tax exempt and donations to their organization can be tax deductible. When a non-profit does not share the same vision of public good as the larger population, their status can be called into question, such as is the case with the National Rifle Association. This paper, however, will focus on the large portion of non-profits that are charitable organizations, delivering human/social services, usually driven by mission statements, and centered on services to vulnerable populations such as providing meals, shelter, educational services, children and youth services, employment/financial services, and Human Emergency services to vulnerable populations in need. These organizations all have one thing in common, in that none of the organization’s net earnings go to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual hence the term, “non-profit” is the universally accepted name and description for such organizations.¹ Nonprofit organizations make use of volunteer staff and services, yet the focus of this paper is job satisfaction, and retention as it correlates to supervisory relationships among paid staff members. These non-profits are 501(c)(3) organizations commonly known as “true nonprofits” by those who work in the industry. A 501(c)(3) is a charitable organization that receives IRS tax exemption status. 501(c)(3) charities are the most popular type of nonprofit. There are more than 1.5 million registered 501 (c)(3) organizations in the

United States and they are funded primarily through charitable donations and government grants. Examples of these organizations include churches, public charities, educational organizations, scientific and literary organizations, child welfare organizations, organizations fighting homelessness, and public testing organizations. Some well known 501(c)(3) organizations include the American Cancer Society, United Way, Catholic Charities USA, ASPCA, and the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

Middle managers in non-profit organizations work directly with frontline staff that do the work associated with the vision and mission. Frontline staff are usually responsible for doing the work associated with organizations achieving their goals and objectives. In human/social service non-profits like child welfare agencies and organizations delivering services for homeless individuals and families, middle management supervisors of frontline staff have an inordinate amount of influence on the overall perceptions that frontline employees have of the work they were hired to do, as well as influencing employee perceptions on how the organization treats and values employees.

Supervisory leadership attracts research attention relative to its impact on job satisfaction, and “supervisory support” has been found to influence employee job satisfaction throughout a number industries.² An examination of the non-profit industry demonstrates that non-profit organizations, particularly “human service/social service” non-profit organizations in metropolitan areas with high levels of poverty servicing individuals at the community level, and who are in close proximity to the populations they serve, face a human capital crisis characterized by high turnover, low performance, and leadership deficits making the need for an emphasis to be placed on increasing and maintaining optimal levels of job satisfaction.

According to ExactHire.com, non-profit organizations have a voluntary turnover rate of 19 percent out pacing the all industry average of 12 percent. This retention problem has been known

for years. According to the 2017 Non-profit Employment Practices Survey, 81 percent of nonprofits did not have a formal retention policy, ultimately decreasing efficiency as recruitment was not optimized, monetarily and temporally, resulting in high turnover rates.

The 2018 Nonprofit Finance Fund State of Non-profit Sector Survey found that 86 percent of the organizations participating in the study reported increased demand for their services, with over half reporting a lack of labor and ultimately, lead to nonprofits overworking employees, thereby perpetuating the industry's reputation of over working and under paying employees. The Evans School of Public Policy and Governance in November 2020 reported that factoring in the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic, funding for non-profits was down 30 percent and volunteerism was down 30-50 percent, with revenue losses expected to continue trending for some time to come. This reduction in funding negatively impacts the ability of non-profits to offer competitive salaries, hindering their ability to recruit and retain qualified employees.³ Non-profits have higher voluntary turnover rates while overall turnover rates on par with business organizations in the for profit sector, yet community based non-profits earn poor employment reputations that make the non-profit retention issues seem more pronounced.⁴ Non-profits are not accustomed to evaluating their own performance metrics, are accustomed to working with too few staff doing too many jobs, lack solid recruitment and training plans, and compensate front line staff at low rates of pay.⁵

Considering these issues these organizations have with retention, performance and leadership deficits, the purpose of this paper is to explore past literature with regards to job satisfaction and supervisory support, and additionally analyze the literature to make recommendations to nonprofit leadership. Non-profit organizations make use of volunteer staff

and services; however the focus of this paper is job satisfaction, and retention in correlation to the supervisory relationship of paid staff members.

Methodology

The literature review is the key ingredient to this research analysis. Identifying relevant studies was a systemic process. To capture as many studies that were relevant to this analysis, Ebscohost and Proquest search engines were consulted with the following key words setting the parameters: Job Satisfaction, Abusive Supervision, Supervisory Support, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Social Exchange Theory, and Transformational Leadership. Articles selected on abusive supervision did not analyze studies exclusively in non-profit context, yet these were deemed relevant and served the purpose of helping to define and describe abusive supervisory behaviors, how they are exhibited, as well as highlight the social influences. Many of the articles used in this analysis researched contexts from across several industries and different countries. A review of articles revealed that there has been a global and generalized approach to job satisfaction research, with focus lacking on the specific aspects of the job with which staff are dissatisfied.⁶ This paper's analysis of supervisory support's impact on job satisfaction will examine early pioneering literature, and proceed to analyze contemporary research from eighty-seven scholarly articles allowing the audience to understand what is known about the subject matter and what requires more research. This paper will focus primarily on supervisory support's impact on job satisfaction, organizational functioning, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), as well as outline some characteristics of negative leadership and its impact the aforementioned. This paper will analyze and synthesize current research, and suggest ideas and recommendations for "non-profit" organizational leadership relative to training direct supervisors in areas of supervisory support. It will discuss and introduce a favorable leadership

style for nonprofit organizations that will correlate positively to job satisfaction, organizational functioning, and reduce unwanted and voluntary turnover.

Job Satisfaction

Despite the challenges mentioned above, the number of non profits is growing, particularly in big cities with high levels of poverty. These urban areas, such as Boston, which has the most non-profits of cities with a population of one million or more, followed by Washington D.C., and San Francisco, have more of a demand for services, and may have less struggles securing financing because of a bigger donor base. These non-profits are able to compensate employees and there is a greater likelihood these organizations are able maintain optimal levels of job satisfaction.⁷ Job satisfaction is simply seen as a perception and response shaped by interpretations of work conditions, wages, opportunities for advancement, fair evaluation of work, social relations and supervision.⁸ Job satisfaction once was viewed as mix of psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that lead to a person to state they are satisfied with their work.⁹ In 1976, Edwin Locke described jobs satisfaction as a positive emotional state derived from evaluation of a job or job experiences.¹⁰ Some researchers found that staff members were satisfied with their jobs when they achieve self-actualization, enjoy the work being done, and are being rewarded appropriately.¹¹ Individual job satisfaction is influenced by both intrinsic factors such as independence, acknowledgement, support, and personal growth, in addition extrinsic factors in the form of monetary rewards, fringe benefits and promotion.¹² Monetary rewards, fringe benefits such as tuition reimbursement, and health insurance, are less of a concern for employees who choose to work in non-profits because these employees are usually intrinsically motivated by a calling to serve, identify with the agency mission, and remain committed to quality performance as long as they perceive the agency is

living up to its stated mission.¹³ Aside from monetary satisfaction, job satisfaction has a direct impact on staff decisions to remain with a particular agency, to quit, or begin to start looking for other jobs.¹⁴ Staff with high levels of satisfaction with supervisors and management are less likely to leave their jobs, whereas staff with high levels of dissatisfaction with supervisors/management are prone to develop negative perceptions of job satisfaction leading to turnover intentions.¹⁵

Supervisory Support

Contemporary research describes supervisory support to be a key ingredient to job satisfaction.¹⁶ Based on social exchange theory postulated by Peter Blau in 1964, employees perceive organization support through interactions with their direct supervisor who is seen to personify the agency and its intentions toward employees.¹⁷ An indicator of the importance of supervisor support is evident in social exchange theory, which postulates that staff who feel supported will show reciprocal support towards the organization.¹⁸ Lower levels of burnout and decreased emotional exhaustion result from staff having good perceptions of the amount of supervisory support they receive.¹⁹ Staff perceptions on receiving ample support from supervisors is positively correlated to staff developing and having a healthy perception of support from the agency as a whole.²⁰ There are numerous studies suggesting positive relationships between supervisors and the staff help mediate and lower levels of job related stress.²¹

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) is defined as staff tendency to be helpful and supportive of the organizational goals and objectives, including engaging in extra effort activities to complete tasks.²² Perceived supervisory support positively impacts on OCB and job

satisfaction when leadership shows genuine concern for their employees and value their contributions.²³

Non-profits

For more than a decade it has been known that non-profit organizations had problems with retaining qualified employees, while having higher rates of turnover than public and private sector employers.³⁸ Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) which involves staff supporting agency goals by engaging in “unpaid” extra effort activities to complete tasks, is an important component to nonprofit organizational effectiveness.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in analyzing components of nonprofit organizational efficiency, it is evident that nonprofit employees who are satisfied with their jobs show more commitment and willingness to engage in OCB.⁷¹ Examples of OCB include helping peers with job related issues, volunteering to perform extra duties without complaint, maintaining punctuality, and observing organizational rules and regulations.⁷² OCB is an essential component of nonprofit efficiency, and therefore nonprofit leadership needs to ensure that transformational leadership methods are applied to supervisory relationships because transformational leadership methods are positively correlated to staff exhibition of OCB. Transformational Leadership is positively co-related to OCB because it is a style that motivates subordinates to put the needs of the organization over their individual interests, additionally, transformational leadership positively co-relates to employee trust for supervision.⁷³

Transformational Leadership is a style focused on inspiring, motivating, and encouraging employees to exceed levels of performance for the long term benefit of the organization with a centered emphasis on enhancing job meaningfulness, which positively correlates to improved job performance.⁷⁴ Enhancing job meaningfulness is therefore another factor in helping non-profit organizations offset their historical problems regards to staff retention.

Discussion and Recommendations

There are limitations in this analysis which center on a bulk of the studies using small sample sizes, personal accounts subject to bias, gaps in research on specific aspects of job dissatisfaction faction leadership, as well as a lack of detailed accounts on specific aspects of supportive and abusive supervisory relationships. Despite these limitations, the reviewed literature effectively points to positive outcomes associated with supportive supervision as well as the negative outcomes that result from a lack of supportive supervision, and abusive supervision. The following discussion results from an analysis of the literature on supervisory support, abusive supervision, job satisfaction, OCB, and transformational leadership. Recommendations result from an analysis of literature on the transformational leadership's positive correlations to OCB, jobs satisfaction, and overall organizational efficiency, particularly where transformation is needed.

Nonprofits need transformation by creating conditions that foster job satisfaction in order to help offset and mediate problematic retention issues. The survival of nonprofit organizations is in great part dependent upon supportive supervisory/middle manager relationships with staff because they are the ones with frequent and direct contact, while being responsible for implementing the organizations, goals, and objectives.⁷⁵ Job satisfaction has a direct impact on employee intention to leave and turnover, and because of this dynamic nonprofit leaders need to ensure that middle managers and direct supervisors are applying supportive leadership methods in their professional relationships with staff.⁷⁶ Nonprofit leaders need to ensure that middle managers/direct supervisors know how to foster relationships with their staff that are conducive to staff engagement in OCB. This is critical because these unpaid, extra role behaviors, as well as the commitment to, and support of organizational goals (OCB), along with

job satisfaction, are necessary components for nonprofit efficiency.⁷⁷ Nonprofit leadership needs to ensure that middle managers/direct supervisors understand how to create and maintain inclusive work environments, as these work environments have positive correlations to job satisfaction, commitment, and retention.⁷⁸ Transformational Leaders are social architects focused on changing attitudes, fostering relationships that produce effective change, in addition to facilitating knowledge sharing and innovation by applying intellectual stimulation.⁷⁹

Changing attitudes and fostering proper relationships may foster harmonious work environments in non-profits which in turn may help maintain optimal levels of job satisfaction. Creating innovative and knowledge sharing work environments, could help enhance non-profit work meaning in addition to helping stimulate and motivate employees to perform exceptionally towards achieving organizational goals and objectives.⁸⁰ Transformational leaders appeal to follower intrinsic motivation and commitment to agency mission, yet the widely used and traditional “Transactional” style of leadership is centered on a leader’s legitimate power and authority, based on leaders exacting rewards and penalties, appeals to extrinsic motivation primarily by suggesting monetary rewards, recognition, and promotions.⁸¹ Transactional leadership has its place and time for use in non-profits, but non-profit organizations are more driven by employee teamwork and commitment to agency vision and mission, and thereby better suited for Transformational leadership methods focused on inspiration and motivation. It has been recommended that nonprofits undergo transformation to enhance job satisfaction and reduce retention problems by creating supportive and inclusive work environments. Thereby, Transformational Leadership is the leadership style that nonprofit leadership needs to invest in. Nonprofits need to invest time and create the space for training of middle managers/direct supervisors who have direct contact with subordinates responsible for performing tasks leading

towards the accomplishment of organizational goals and objective, in Transformational Leadership methods. Transformational leadership has proven to be positively correlated to organizational outcomes since 1978.⁸²

ENDNOTES

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