

Chapter 2

Personality Type and Job Satisfaction

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Key Points

- Dispositional factors (how you think, feel, and act) are important determinants of job satisfaction.
- Personality and the employment environment have a reciprocal relationship.
- The quality of the match between your work environment and personality will dramatically impact your overall job satisfaction.

Introduction

The vocational choices in our society are amazing, but the process of choosing can be ambiguous at best. Throughout this chapter three points will be discussed in varying ways, and deserve mention at the start, because of their impact on the successful attainment of job satisfaction by much of the information reviewed: [1] Dispositional factors; how you think, feel, and act, are important in determining job satisfaction; [2] there is significant data indicating that a reciprocal relationship between your personality and the employment environment exists; and [3] the quality of the match between your personality and the work environment you chose will dramatically impact your chances for job satisfaction. Keep these three points in mind as we briefly explore the traditional ways that we choose professions, and then examine a combination of resources, structures, and strategies to make the process less chaotic and more productive.

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When you ask people why they chose to go into medicine or dentistry, or any other discipline you will find an astounding array of answers. Influence can range from strong familial input, to varying degrees of school influence, to the effect of a positive relationship in the community, to no advice at all. Of course we do know that a great deal of self-selection goes on in this process. We may start out adopting mom's view of us as a surgeon, until we have difficulty with anatomy. We tend to follow paths supported by things we excel in. How do we choose something that will make us happy? And even more problematic, how do we know that a particular job, or specialty will be a good fit with our talents and or, temperament, and is that necessary anyway? The caveat is that past methods of choice can be improved upon, and this chapter's purpose is to delineate some of the resources that are available to make the process less confusing.

You are probably wondering why is this important to me now? I'm an adult and I've made my vocational choice. Why the historical backdrop? Here's the reason. Sometimes we get it completely right the first time and feel 100% satisfied with what we are doing with our lives. Other times we need to find more to challenge ourselves as we garner greater competence in our respective fields. In some cases, we start on a career track and discover half way down the path it isn't what we expected, like the second year surgical resident who thought to himself "oh my God what have I done, and what am I going to do now!" Confusion can be a problem, especially when you begin a rigorous stair-step training program like most medical schools provide, and are expected to have some idea of where your interests will lie in the future. Yes I want to help people, but how? Under what parameters? Pathology is very different from general medicine! How am I suppose to know what will fit my personality? On the other hand, we may find we need completely different outlets to balance what we do professionally. We may have a passion that only an avocational pursuit can accommodate. Like the Internist, who enjoyed the practice of medicine, but found hospital politics difficult to manage. He discovered painting landscapes helped him to dissipate some of the tension and relax; or the Orthopedic Surgeon who wanted to have more involvement with his community, and ran for political office. A newly developed passion can nurture our sense of purpose on multiple levels, making us more satisfied and hence more present in our daily routines, as well as satisfy a need for stretching ourselves beyond our current limits. Adding a new skill set can benefit a person in a way that was dreamed of (I always wanted to be part of Speakers Bureau), or of ultimately fulfilling dreams that they didn't know they had, or were going to have. This is especially true in adults who want to transition from one field to another, but don't know specifically what to look for, just that something is missing. Like the Psychiatrist who said "I love treating my patients, and I'm happy working with them, but I just feel itchy. There must be more!" "How do I figure out what that more might be?" A great starting point is knowing your strengths and weaknesses. Not just in a concrete way, like I loved calculus but hated neuroanatomy. But instead knowing yourself in a global sense, your personality and its unique features. To do this you need to look at ways of formulating personality, and then discover how your particular personality profile might intersect with job satisfaction, and some facts related to increasing its optimal occurrence.

The purpose of this chapter is to begin to address some of these issues. We will look at two different personality type systems, and some of the most cogent ideas

available about what makes job satisfaction likely. We will end by giving you several references so that if you are interested, you can obtain more information on your own. Let's get started!

Personality Type, Just What is That?

To some degree personality type will depend on the system that is being used. A traditional way to frame personality is that it is both “ingrained and habitual ways of psychological functioning that emerge from the individuals entire developmental history” [1]. There are many personality measures that have been used historically. We will look at two systems that are still being used a great deal, and that might be useful in a practical way, to help you understand your individual personality type, and how it relates to job satisfaction. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the work of Dr. John L. Holland. It is important to note that both of these systems are complex and rich in detail, and the breadth and depth of this chapter does not allow for a critical analysis, but is meant to give you the essence of each as a starting point.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a personality theory that was developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katharine Briggs, and has been in use for over 60 years [2]. It has received a resurgence of interest, due in part, to its widespread use in the competitive world of business. The MBTI was an outgrowth of the initial work of C.G. Jung's theory of personality, most particularly his theory about introversion and extraversion. The concept is a dichotomy revolving around how individuals deal with energy in their world. The extravert engages the world in direct ways and takes pleasure in doing so; their energy comes from those interactions. The introvert is more reserved, taking pleasure in the world of ideas, the interior of the self is their favored domain, and it is the joy of this world that provides the source of most of their energy. The Myers-Briggs family expanded on Jung's theory of introversion-extroversion, and found a way to practically apply this theory [3]. Unlike many personality theories, the MBTI is based on the assumption that people prefer a certain way of being. It is about preferences, not pathology. During development each individual acquires a preference for certain styles of thinking or relating to others that affects their interpersonal relationships, both in the workplace and privately. The major focus of the theory is the interaction of four basic preferences, making each personality dynamic in nature [2]. A good way to explain these may be to list them and then describe each with an example. These include the dichotomies listed in Table 2.1.

Each of these dichotomies represents a preferred style that the individual has adopted over the course of their development. Some people are more introverted or extraverted than others. There is always a continuum. When taken together, these dichotomies represent 16 personality types. The goal of the MBTI is to identify

Table 2.1 The four basic dichotomies of Myers-Briggs

Introversion-Extraversion (I or E) <i>Where is the energy coming from, interior or exterior?</i> Introversion = focus on the world of ideas Extraversion = focus on the exterior world in an active manner	Sensing-Intuition (S or N) <i>How is information gathered?</i> Sensing = need for exact information Intuition = casual approach to information
Thinking-Feeling (T or F) <i>How decisions are made</i> Thinking = objectively Feeling = subjectively	Judging-Perceiving (J or P) <i>How do you deal with daily life?</i> Judging = need to plan carefully Perceiving = spontaneous approach

which of the opposing dichotomies each person prefers on each of the four categories. A label is assigned, like INTJ, once the person's preferences are known. This is an indication of their "habitual choice," [2] but because there is inherent flexibility in the system, a person may choose the opposing pole choice on occasion. There is a dominant process that is usually in charge, and there is the auxiliary process that compliments, and takes care of issues that must be dealt with, but are not necessarily favored. Let's use an introverted librarian as an example. Most of the time his dominant process (I) is utilized, but on occasion, when the need arises, (say some unruly people burst into his library), he will raise his voice and let the auxiliary process of extraversion (E) take over. A great deal of work has been done to compile data on what different combinations mean in terms of personality style, and how they are represented in different fields in the workforce. [2] This is fascinating reading, and interesting data is available. For example, most dentists, cross culturally, have very similar dominant personality types on the MBTI [4]. It is important to keep in mind that each combination represents a different set of strengths and no one combination is viewed as superior over another.

The Holland Personality Assessment

Dr. John L. Holland developed several assessment measures helpful for a wide range of client populations; from the high school, college or graduate student, to adults in transition. His instruments are designed to assist in decision-making about personality type, as well as how an individual's unique qualities might best fit into the workforce. There is a significant body of research indicating that people do best at work, and are happiest when there is a "good fit between their personality type and the characteristics of the environment." [5] He developed a personality type system called the Holland Codes. It is in fact a theory revolving around career and vocations, and is represented by six personality and work environment types. I'll list them with an example: (see Table 2.2).

Each of these is called a sub-type, and a person's unique profile can be made up of some of them or all of them, to varying degrees. The system is frequently referred

Table 2.2 Holland code sub-types – RIASEC

Realistic (R) = practical	Social (S) = cooperative/nurturing
Investigative (I) = analytical	Enterprising (E) = leadership
Artistic (A) = creative	Conventional (C) = organized

to as RIASEC. Holland thought that an individual could utilize more than one type, and the idea was to prioritize the person's preferences numerically to ascertain which were strongest. Usually the highest three codes were used for assessment purposes. People with comparable codes have similar profiles of vocational preferences and seem to do well in the same sort of occupational environments [6]. Like the MBTI, one code or type was not seen as superior to another. Holland believed that occupational choice made a very strong statement about an individual's personality, and for optimal job satisfaction, the individual's code profile must be congruent with their work environment. For example, if your top three codes were AES (artistic, enterprising, social), you wouldn't be a good candidate for a work environment that was too conventional and restricting, so anything resembling the environment of a research lab probably wouldn't be a good fit for you. Holland stated that vocational identity, the adoption of a consistent ideal of one's self in the vocational world, was critical to job satisfaction, and had been demonstrated to be highly correlated ($r=0.70$) with it as well [7]. He reasoned that an individual with vocational identity had a clear sense of what their skills were, what reasonable career goals might be, as well as occupations that might be compatible. That sort of self-awareness coupled with knowledge of resources made it likely that they would find work that was a good fit, or congruent with their needs [5].

Holland also developed The Self-Directed Search, an assessment tool used to measure an individual's similarity to the RIASEC personality types [8]. It is made up of six scales, and is one of the most widely used interest inventories available. It is designed to be user friendly, and the test can be taken and scored without assistance. You simply fill in the answers in the booklet, score it, take your three highest codes, which comprise your code profile, and compare that with the one that most closely approximates it on the occupation finder. In addition, the dictionary of Holland occupational codes [9], which lists over 12,000 occupations, is a tremendous resource guide. Both of these instruments have been invaluable in the career guidance of thousands of people in this country. A plethora of research has documented the capacity of Holland's instruments to be both appropriate and useful in academic and vocational settings.

The Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Personality

One thing seems clear; our jobs are never done in a vacuum. There is always a relationship between the holding environment that supports us, and the dispositional factors we bring to bear as individuals. You might ask, what about those dispositional factors? They are the way we think, feel and behave [10], and have the capacity

to influence most everything we do. Research by Watson and Slack concurred that dispositional issues can influence job satisfaction [11]. Recently, a study of Dutch Nurse Anesthetists was done with the MBTI to study personality dimensions and job satisfaction in an effort to predict factors that might help aid nurse retention. The author's reported two factors, "easy going, ($r=0.18$)" and "orderly, ($r=0.11$)," as both correlating positively with job satisfaction [12], but predictive value using the MBTI was reported as minimal.

In a meta-analysis article focusing on the five factor model of personality and job satisfaction, Judge and his collaborators found that Neuroticism ($\rho=-0.29$) Conscientiousness ($\rho=0.26$) and Extraversion ($\rho=0.25$) were most strongly correlated with job satisfaction¹ [13]. By definition, if you are high on the Neuroticism scale, you are likely to carry a rather negative world view that permeates most everything you do, making you less likely to be happy in general, and more specifically in the workforce. Conversely, the higher you were on the Conscientiousness and Extraversion scales the more likely you were to be satisfied in your work. Anecdotally, it follows that if you are engaged in an active way (Extraversion), and put great effort into your work product (Conscientiousness), your chances of success and satisfaction go up.

Studies on the relationship between job and life satisfaction have found support for the Spillover Hypothesis [14], which states that the affective valence from both sides of the equation, job and life, are equally important and affect each other. *If your personal life is going well, the positive affect attached to that experience will follow you into the workplace, creating a similar impact.* You can see there is quite a bit of data suggesting a reciprocal relationship between your personal life and your job [15]. This clearly ties in with what we know about Holland's work regarding the critical need for congruence between our work environment and personality type for job satisfaction. Equally important is Holland's concept of vocational identity, which we defined previously, and which we know is highly correlated with job satisfaction [7], and when well developed, is relatively consistent and stable across time.

Summary

We've seen that there are many dispositional factors that potentially influence our interpretation of our employment settings, and can therefore affect job satisfaction. It also seems clear that a reciprocal relationship exists between the personality of an individual and the job setting, so that how well they are matched becomes critical for job satisfaction. Equally important is the concept of vocational identity, because it can serve as a guide to aid you in your search, whether you are a student or a seasoned professional looking for an outside interest or to make an important professional transition.

¹ ρ =estimated true score correlation.

Lastly, what seems crucial to the success of anyone searching for a new beginning is that they know where to start, with themselves. You may not know exactly which job or volunteer position you want, but you know your strengths; capitalize on them. Understanding your uniqueness through personality type, if it resonates, or therapy, or any way you choose, is a good place to begin. Then use the resources that are available to create some structure, and a plan. Remember, if you can visualize a plan, you can likely achieve it as well.

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