

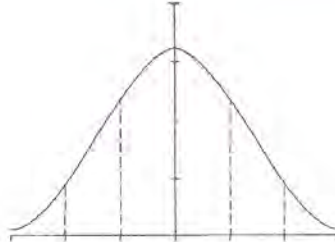


16 PF Newsletter



The 16PF - Stress and Satisfaction

*Dr Rob Briner examined
these familiar concepts at
our June meeting.*



Anyone remember the Hawthorne 'experiments'? Not from first hand knowledge of them, you understand, but as a topic that was regarded in the 50s and 60s as *de rigueur* in any occupational psychology course. No? Well they came to mind when Dr Rob Briner spoke on the subject of Stress and Satisfaction: Alternative Approaches to Understanding Psychological Well-Being at Work". The Hawthorne experiments showed that output rose when physical working conditions improved. More startlingly, output also rose when they deteriorated, leading to the conclusion that improved performance was the result of the attention given to the operators by the team of investigators. It also emphasised the importance of the working group on individual performance. In more recent times work effectiveness has been assumed to be directly connected to stress (poor performance), or satisfaction (good performance) These two approaches, argued Rob Briner, are too simplistic. (Is a happy ship necessarily a good ship?). A stressed worker can still turn in a good performance - at least in the short term - and a satisfied worker can underachieve, but the theoretical bases of the constructs of stress and satisfaction are in themselves weak, and fail to take into account broader psychological knowledge about the causes and effects of various psychological states.

Puzzling

Psychologists have studied a wide and varied range of psychological states such as specific emotions and longer term moods, so it is puzzling that over the past 30 years occupational psychologists have tended to focus almost exclusively on the two broad constructs of stress and satisfaction. These two notions are now inadequate both from a theoretical and a practical aspect. Not only are they self-limiting, but they have not incorporated developments in thinking about affect from other areas of psychology. A common denominator of most definitions of stress and satisfaction is that they arise from the cognitive appraisal of conditions at work. Negative feelings result from negative appraisals and these feelings are then referred to as stress. Positive feelings are assumed to arise from positive appraisals and these feelings are then referred to as satisfaction. This tells us nothing about how and why stress or satisfaction are produced. Researchers seem to have been more concerned to produce rankings of those job

features which are more or less associated with stress or satisfaction rather than specifying how or why such feelings arise. In other words they appear to have been more interested in finding correlates of stress and satisfaction rather than understanding the nature of the relationships between work conditions and negative or positive feelings. Stress and satisfaction are circular notions. If we do not like

something it produces negative feelings and if we like something it produces positive feelings. In this sense it is difficult to have feelings of stress or satisfaction as such.

Good Feelings, Good Work?

The idea that good feelings will produce good work and that negative feelings will lower work performance has a strong superficial appeal, but on closer inspection it makes less sense. For example, feeling particularly happy may make it difficult to concentrate on a complex task, while a person's performance in a repetitive, machine-paced job may not depend on how they feel. There is little research evidence to support such links. Also there is no strong link between stress, satisfaction, and performance.

Briner went on to say that this should not be taken to mean that there are no links between people's feelings and how they behave. There is a wealth of evidence showing links between short-term feelings such as moods and emotions, and specific behaviours such as the inclination to engage in social interaction, altruistic behaviours, and thought processes such as memory and judgment.

One reason then to go beyond stress and satisfaction in our thinking about work feelings is that they are inadequate as descriptive tools and do not predict work behaviours. So if they are inadequate, what other approaches can be taken?

Feelings

First, we need to specify what is meant by feelings. There are four categories of feeling states: Moods: these are feelings that are with us all the time and they change

FUTURE MEETINGS AT IARC

- ① 26th November - 16PF5 - latest developments
- ② 21st Jan - Comparative review - 16PF and CPI
- ③ 14th April - Career Guidance

relatively slowly. They are not necessarily reactions to events, but are shaped by factors such as time of day and activity. We may not feel "in the mood" to attempt a particular task, or our mood may make us feel we can tackle any problem. Emotions: these are more short-term and more intense than moods, and arise in reaction to specific events. Basic emotions include happiness, sadness and anxiety. Others could be envy, pity, embarrassment, delight or affection. During a typical working day, we may experience many events that provoke strong emotional reactions. Emotions may therefore feed into mood states, but can also lead to emotionally laden judgements. Emotionally laden judgements: These are views about a particular situation, event or person that are strongly shaped by emotions or contain a strong element of feeling. Feeling emotionally safe in an organisation, may for example, enable us to respond to questions or criticism positively. Likewise a specific event may make us feel unappreciated, which in turn makes us think twice about putting extra effort into the job in the future.

Thoughts and Feeling about Feelings: These are considered by some psychologists to be as important as, if not more important than, the thoughts and feelings themselves. In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman suggested that the two key aspects of emotional intelligence are knowing one's feelings, and managing them. This is achieved largely through thoughts and feelings about feelings. In a work context, the consequences of say, becoming angry will depend largely on what we think and feel about our anger. It is clear therefore that there is more to people's feelings at work than is adequately covered by concepts of stress and satisfaction theory. So where do work feelings come from and how do these explanations differ from those we have for stress and satisfaction?

Passive Employees

First, feelings can be explained in relation to what people are trying to do. One of the weaknesses of the "stress and satisfaction" approaches is that employees are often portrayed as relatively passive - that is, simply reacting to whatever good or bad event happens to come along. It is more helpful to think of employees as active and attempting to meet certain goals. In this way, anger can be explained when an important plan is frustrated by a person or situation, while happiness can result from the attainment of certain goals. Similarly, a positive mood can result from a situation where an employee is moving towards attaining their goals at, or faster than, the rate they expect. For example, feeling in a positive mood at the end of a working day is often the product of having attained personal goals. Second, feelings are influenced by the group or team context. Many of us will have experienced working with a group of people where the mood, whether good or bad, seems to be infectious. Such processes have been seen as emotional contagion, as if we can sometimes catch a mood or feeling from another person.

Third, feelings are influenced by the work role. Arlie Hochschild, in *The Managed Heart*, coined the term 'emotional labour' to describe jobs in which displaying and feeling emotion is an integral part of the role. People engaged in service work, such as call-centre staff or flight attendants, who deal with customers and clients for much of the day, must display certain feelings, such as appearing enthusiastic, involved, and interested. Lastly, feelings are influenced by organisational norms. It is often noticeable how some

organisations seem to implicitly discourage, or even prevent, employees from feeling and displaying negative emotions, whereas others seem to encourage them. Culture change programmes in organisations often aim to promote certain feelings, such as dedication, enthusiasm or respect for one's colleagues,

Problematic Behaviour

One of the problems with attempts to link stress and satisfaction with employee behaviours such as performance and absence, is that those behaviours are problematic both to measure and define. It is notoriously difficult to obtain adequate measures of performance, particularly in complex jobs. Absence, for instance, is not in itself a behaviour, but rather the absence of a behaviour, which makes it extremely hard to predict in terms of a single explanation. Many different factors are likely to contribute to someone's decision not to turn up for work.

More recently, a new generation of behaviours has been identified. They include conflict resolution, organisational citizenship behaviours (contributing to the general good of the organisation rather than to the individual role), and extra-role behaviours (being prepared to take on tasks outside their normal roles). In each case these behaviours are thought to be influenced by specific types of mood and, most importantly, to occur over a relatively short time. In other words, it is easier to predict and explain a piece of behaviour that occurs in a particular context than to predict performance or absence in general. Equally importantly, the consequences of work feelings depend on the specific kind of feeling state we are considering. Moods, emotions, and emotionally laden judgements and thoughts about feelings are all likely to produce different consequences. Specific emotions may produce shorter-term behavioural reactions and lead to emotionally laden judgements. For example, a common reaction when employees feel that they have been undervalued or exploited in some way is to decide that they will no longer "put themselves out" for their boss or the organisation as a whole.

Beyond Stress and Satisfaction

Rob Briner suggested that the traditional approaches to employees' feelings, which focus on stress and satisfaction, fail both to help us understand feelings and to predict the consequences of those feelings. By moving beyond stress and satisfaction to consider a broader range of more specific feeling states and work behaviours, it is possible to begin to understand how feelings are produced by work experiences, and how those feelings in turn affect employees' behaviour. We have only just begun to scratch the surface of issues surrounding work feelings. For some, this may provoke a feeling of despondency; for others, the work of bringing about major developments in our understanding of work feelings is both exciting and daunting. If organisations wish to understand and intervene in this arena, it is time to move beyond the tired format of annual satisfaction surveys and stress audits, to a more in-depth consideration of the causes and consequences of work feelings.

1 The Hawthorne Experiments, conducted by Elton Mayo at the Western Electric plant, Chicago, USA from 1927 - 1932.

Dr Rob Briner is with the Department of Organisational Psychology, Birkbeck College, University of London. His talk was based on a paper he presented to the 1997 BPS Occupational Psychology Conference at Blackpool.

The Armchair Critic

We know that book reviews are popular with our readers. You told us so in a survey carried out around 1995. We would be happy to publish reviews of books likely to be of interest to User Group members. How about someone starting with a review of *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman, mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter?

Editor

THE INDETERMINATE RESPONSE

Brian Sullivan ponders a problem that has engaged us all at some time ...

Have you ever been daunted, when you examine the answer sheet, to find that your respondent has checked a good number of "?" responses, and wondered what it might mean?

I confess I have doubted the validity of the resulting profile. But for me, more intriguingly than the issue of the profile validity, (though I am glad the test publishers worry about that), has been the question as to whether the tendency to resist agreeing to one preference or the other, and not to respond with either the "a" or the "c" answer, is indicative of a particular psychological trait? If so, what might that trait be? Is it indicative of the more *discerning* mind? If so, should it perhaps correlate with an ability to convey fine shades of meaning in their communications? Or is it rather more a degree of defensiveness? If so, would a high incidence of "?" answers correlate with Factor N? Or is it that the person is simply lacking in self-insight and unsure of how they do or would behave? Or is it that the person may be wishing to "fake good", and is unsure of what the employer - I use the instrument in an industrial context - is really looking for and is hence holding their fire? In that case should the incidence of "?" responses correlate with Factor IM? Or is it a reflection of *indecisiveness*, of a reluctance to commit oneself? If so, one might hypothesise that such a person may be happier in a functional, support role - rather than shouldering a direct, line decision-making accountability? In extremis, one might wonder about a person's capacity to invest mega bucks in an acquisition if they cannot decide on a simple 16PF question? Or, on the contrary, would one argue that such a person may make a more discerning investment decision? Or is it perhaps more simply a certain cautiousness in their "thinking style"? If so, one may find reflections of that same cautiousness in their way of responding to certain ability tests. Or is it merely a certain suspicion of such tests, of psychologists, a doubting of others' intentions? If so, might it then correlate with Factor L? Or is it none of these and might be something else altogether? Now, it may be that the frequency of the "?" response is a factor of the administration conditions and that the frequency will vary between administrators. I am sure that is true, but to my mind, that is not the interesting issue. Whether an administrator's influence is high or low, there is still influence at some level and the question remains as to what it might mean. My experience is that I do get a certain number of candidates who have a tendency to

prefer the "?" response. The frequencies I have obtained on a sample of 287 are listed below.

Frequency	Number	%age	Frequency	Number	%age
Less than 5	103	36	45 but less than 50	7	2.4
5 but less than 10	64	22	50 but less than 55	4	1.4
10 but less than 15	44	15	55 but less than 60	2	0.7
15 but less than 20	24	8	60 but less than 65	0	0
20 but less than 25	13	4.5	65 but less than 70	0	0
25 but less than 30	9	3.1	70 but less than 75	1	0.3
30 but less than 35	10	3.5	75 but less than 80	0	0
35 but less than 40	4	1.4	80 but less than 85	0	0
40 but less than 45	1	0.3	85 but less than 90	1	0.3

As can be seen, a very few people use it a lot of the time. That said, the overall pattern is what one would expect - a J curve with most people steering fairly clear of too many "?" responses.

But ...

41.8% of respondents are using the "?" response more than 10 times. 18.1% are using it more than 20 times and 5.2% are using it 45 or more times which represents a "?" response every four questions.

If only for that 5% for one person in 20, it is a phenomenon I have wondered about.

I have no answers to these questions save one. ASE kindly ran a correlation for me about a year ago when the sample was 150 or so and found that the incidence of the "?" response did not correlate significantly with any of the individual factor scores. So, a few of the hypotheses mentioned above were exploded.

Perhaps it is just an error phenomenon, a piece of randomly occurring behaviour that has no place in the psychology of individual differences and hence can be ignored.

On the other hand it may be that, depending on the person, any one of the interpretations above could be true. Rather like the counselling client who turns up late on three consecutive occasions, no one interpretation would be universally valid but you can bet your life that the behaviour is really meaningful! Just as the "indeterminate response" could be. So, perhaps it is another piece of behaviour to be incorporated with the other data gained from any assessment process, and certainly not to be disregarded.

But perhaps one of our readers, more perceptive of the data on their clients than I, has noticed some associated recurring patterns that I have missed, and who would be prepared to use these columns to enlighten me and other interested readers.

Brian Sullivan is with Sullivan and Hurley, and is also Chairman of the 16PF User Group

SUBMISSION OF MATERIAL

The Editor welcomes contributions from members either as letters or as articles on the use of the 16PF.

Case histories, unusual assignments, as well as unusual profiles are welcome.

When submitting material, please enclose a 3 1/2" disk (Microsoft Word 7) together with the printed copy. This saves re-typing and minimises the risk of mistakes.

Your November Meeting

Helen Bradley of ASE on the very latest data on 16PF5 and imminent add-on products
also Ken Rawling on the validity of 16PF5

And the one you may have missed?

A summary of Rob Feltham's September talk on the

GLOBAL ISSUES OF SELECTION

will appear in the next issue

In the Psychiatrist's Chair with Dr. Anthony Blair

*An occasional column in which
readers are invited to contribute extracts from
a light-hearted profile of a public figure.*

This edition:

Mr John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister

BLAIR Thank you for completing the 16PF Questionnaire, John. I have now interpreted it - provisionally, I should say - and the purpose of our discussion today is to explore some of the salient points which might be of interest to listeners. At a later stage, I'll give you a comprehensive report, warts and all.

PRESCOTT That's fine. I shall be most interested in what you have to say. Particularly the warts.

BLAIR Let me first pick out one or two characteristics and get your reaction to them. You are firmly on the left of the party - cherishing such things as the NHS, and Welfare. Would you describe yourself as having a very traditional approach to life - to attitudes and problems?

PRESCOTT Certainly not.

BLAIR But haven't left wingers in the party always valued traditional concepts - the NHS, pensions, the welfare state...

PRESCOTT Of course. But that's not because they were traditional. They were introduced by people who were far from traditional. Aneurin Bevan. A world first with the NHS. Clement Attlee. People like Morrison, and Cripps. They were pioneers, innovators, lateral thinkers. We follow in their footsteps.

BLAIR That's my point exactly. You follow them. In emulating innovators, you become traditionalists, don't you?

PRESCOTT Of course not. Surely someone who is attracted to an innovator's ideas can hardly be described as a boring traditionalist.

BLAIR I didn't say anything about being boring ...

PRESCOTT That's what you implied.

BLAIR No, certainly not. I'm sorry if I've offended your sensibilities.

PRESCOTT Don't worry about it. I'm not supposed to have any of those according to some colleagues.

BLAIR Well let's get back to the point. I was saying ... let me see ... where were we ...

PRESCOTT You were saying that I'm a traditionalist because I endorse the work of innovators.

BLAIR I don't think I put it quite like that, surely?

PRESCOTT Well let's put it in more scholarly language. Are you saying that the social radicalism of one decade can be the conservatism of the next?

BLAIR Why, yes. That's just what I was going to say. I think.

PRESCOTT Well many others have said it before you. And now I come to think of it, this questionnaire I completed ... it must need to be revised frequently, if it's to keep up with changes in attitude. Did you give me the latest version?

BLAIR Of course. The People's Questionnaire, you might call it. And on Q₁ you scored very low. One, in fact.

PRESCOTT And your point?

BLAIR That you have respect for traditional ways of solving problems. Let me quote a former Labour Minister. He said that the left have always refused to change their old clothes however unsuited they are to the actual climate.

PRESCOTT But now the climate's changed in our favour - a sort of political global warming if you like - we find it well-suited to our old clothes.

BLAIR Let's move on to something else. Would you describe yourself as tough-minded?

PRESCOTT Certainly.

BLAIR And imaginative? Kind of reflective? Coming up with ideas?

PRESCOTT Of course.

BLAIR (GLEEFULLY) Well you can't have both. You see, on Reflectiveness you've only scored 2. Together with your low score for warmth, and your reluctance to accept new ideas...

PRESCOTT You make me sound like Atilla the Hun.

BLAIR But without the warmth. Sorry. I always find feedback sessions difficult. Let's defer this to another day.

FADE OUT

David Roberts

Acknowledgement

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