



Employees' Mindset and Staying Satisfied After Performance Evaluation

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Abstract: This cross-sectional study uses data from two sources within an organization in the sales industry. Data was collected from employees ($n = 75$) and their direct supervisors. The purpose of this study is to empirically examine how an employee's mindset and their most recent performance evaluation, both directly and indirectly, influence their job satisfaction. Results indicate that employees with a more fixed mindset were more sensitive to their recent job performance in terms of job satisfaction. At the same time, employees with a more growth mindset were more resilient in the face of poor recent job performance, as measured by job satisfaction. This study empirically tests, in a business setting, what has mainly been tested in other fields (e.g., education) or in experimental settings. This field study in a sales context allows us to confidently suggest best practices for both performance management and employee selection.

INTRODUCTION

As the business world becomes more dynamic and the competition for talent increase organizations are focusing on employee retention and development to keep pace. Therefore, establishing an environment conducive to employee satisfaction has become vital. Employees satisfied in their work will likely invest more physical and cognitive energy into their job performance (Katebi et al, 2022). Employee satisfaction improves performance and is associated with more robust employee development and retention (Aziri, 2011; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985). For these reasons, a deeper understanding of the antecedents of employee satisfaction, along with the best practices derived from this research, will be valuable to today's organizations.

Vital to employee satisfaction is to ensure employees perceive they have the resources to meet the demands of their jobs. Organizations can directly supply resources, or they can come from employees' personal attributes. Organizational resources can be aspects of the job, such as autonomy, job significance, and feedback. In comparison, personal attributes can be aspects of personality, such as achievement focus or employee mindset. Significant research examines organizational resources (Loher et al., 1985), and slightly less examines personal resources. In this study, I examine the direct effects of both types of resources and how they may influence employees' job satisfaction.

Specifically, I use a field sample in this study to examine how feedback from a recent performance evaluation (organizational resource) directly influences job satisfaction. In addition, I investigate how employees' mindset, one's belief in the malleability of human attributes (Dweck & Legget, 1988), (personal resources), may also directly influence employees' job satisfaction. A growing body of research has established the influence of employees' mindsets in achievement situations (see Dweck & Yeager, 2019, or Han & Sieha,

2020, for review). However, there are limited empirical studies in a work setting (Han & Stieha, 2020). Furthermore, research has proposed that an employee's mindset is related to engagement (Keating & Heslin, 2015). I know of only one empirical study (Yang et al., 2024) examining the relationship between mindset and satisfaction in a field study. While this study found encouraging results, a more rigorous test of this relationship is needed before best practices can be established. In this study, I used a field study from the sales industry and two data sources (employee and manager). The results of this study will make theoretical and practical contributions to fostering employee satisfaction and improving performance evaluations.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Job satisfaction is “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976). Research examining the antecedents of job satisfaction has often used the job demands-resource model (Mazzeti et al., 2021). In short, if an employee has the resources to meet the job's demands, that employee will likely be more satisfied with their job.

Significant research has examined how job characteristics influence an employee's level of job satisfaction (e.g., Loher et al., 1985; Judge et al., 2010). Feedback is a job characteristic that influences many workplace outcomes. Research has found that this relationship holds for job satisfaction outcomes. Studies have found that positive feedback is significantly related to job satisfaction (Ali et al., 2014). Annual performance reviews are organizational events where formal feedback is given. Therefore, a recent positive performance evaluation will likely improve subsequent job satisfaction. Consequently, I propose the following Hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 1: Employees' recent job performance will be positively related to employee job satisfaction.*

Both personal and contextual factors influence an employee's job satisfaction. Research has found that individual characteristics such as emotional stability and conscientiousness are related to job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002). Furthermore, research suggests that a person's implicit theories about ability or mindset are associated with job satisfaction. Mindset refers to the extent to which an individual's beliefs about human abilities are malleable. At one end of the spectrum are those who feel human attributes are fixed and cannot be changed, often referred to as a fixed mindset. At the other end of the spectrum are those who think human attributes are not fixed and increase with effort, frequently called a growth mindset. A significant body of research has established that an individual's mindset influences perceptions and responses to achievement situations. This body of research originated in the field of education but has been applied in the organizational context over the past decade. There have been several calls for researchers to continue examining mindset in business context (Han & Stieha, 2020).

One of those extensions of mindset research into the business context examines an employee's mindset and the relationship with work satisfaction. Keating and Heslin (2015) proposed that employees' growth mindset positively affects job engagement, which is often related to job satisfaction. Only a few studies have empirically tested this relationship in a business context. Specifically, a growth mindset was positively associated with job

satisfaction among nurses in China (Zhang et al., 2025) and in job and life satisfaction (Kondratowicz, B. 2022). I propose that this relationship will also be found in a sales environment in the United States. Therefore, I present the following Hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 2: Employees' growth mindset is positively related to employees' job satisfaction.*

It is likely that mindset and recent job performance directly affect job satisfaction and interact to influence it. This interaction effect is most likely when recent performance is low. This interaction effect is due to mindset influencing response to setbacks and motivation to develop. Individuals with a growth mindset respond to setbacks or failures with a mastery response. They will likely see overcoming a setback as possible with increased effort (Dweck et al., 1995) and pursue development opportunities (Hong et al., 1999). Therefore, a low-performance evaluation would have a less adverse effect on job satisfaction for employees with a more growth-oriented mindset.

In contrast, those with a more fixed mindset respond to setbacks or failures with maladaptive responses. That is, those with a more fixed mindset are likely to see a setback as indicative of their fixed level of ability (Dweck & Yeager, 2019), decline to pursue development opportunities, and reduce effort (Mangels et al., 2006). Therefore, a low-performance evaluation would substantially reduce job satisfaction among employees with a more fixed mindset.

- *Hypothesis 3: Employee's growth mindset moderates the relationship between recent job performance and job satisfaction. That is, the relationship is weaker when the employee has a growth mindset and stronger when they have a fixed mindset.*

METHOD

Procedure

In a cross-sectional design, I collected data from two different sources, employees and their managers, in the sales division of a company in the Northeast of the United States. I obtained access to the organizations through my professional contacts and collected all data on-site and through an online survey for two weeks. I gathered data in the first quarter of the fiscal year, so all employees have received a formal performance evaluation within the last six weeks. I collected employee performance data from the managers during a quarterly managers' meeting. In total, 26 managers rated 2.43 employees each. In addition, at this meeting, I presented the Qualtrics survey and distributed it to their employees via email. Seventy-five (out of a possible 93) employees completed the survey, which included measures of mindset and work satisfaction (response rate: 80.6%).

Sample

More than half of the employees were male (59%). On average, they were 27 years old ($SD = 4.43$). Most target employees were white (70%), 8% were Latin American/Hispanic, 17% were Asian American, and 5% were African American. On average, employees had 2.9 years of job tenure and had been with their current supervisor for 1.3 years.

Measures

Individual Mindset

I used the eight-item domain-general kind of person scale (Dweck, 2000). Individuals responded to each item using a 6-point Likert scale. I averaged the items so that higher scores indicate a more growth mindset ($\alpha = .76$).

Manager Rated Recent Job Performance

Managers rated each target employee's job performance by responding to five modified items from the core task performance sub-scale of Ferris et al.'s (2001) job performance survey. All items began with the stem "According to the latest performance evaluations." Managers responded to each item using a 5-point scale and rated employees as "weak or bottom 10% of employees" (1), "fair or next 20%" (2), "good or next 40%" (3), "very good or next 20%" (4), or "best or top 10%" (5). A sample item from the core task performance sub-scale is "Applies the highest level of skill in completing his/her work." ($\alpha = .73$).

Job Satisfaction

Was measure with a single item "I am satisfied with my current job. Individuals responded on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Research has found that a single item measure of job satisfaction is valid as a multi-item measure (i.e., Wanous et al., 1997; Van Saane et al., 2003).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables. Employees' recent job performance is positively correlated with their job satisfaction ($r = .38, p < .01$). However, it was not significantly correlated with employee's mindset ($r = .03, n.s.$) or time with the company ($r = .01, n.s.$). Furthermore, employees' mindset is significantly correlated with their job satisfaction ($r = .53, p < .01$) but not with their time with the company ($r = -.17, n.s.$). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Job satisfaction	.44	.98					
2. Recent job performance	.89	.98	.38**				
3. Employee Mindset	.49	.06	.53**	.03			
4. Time with company	.49	.64	.04	.01	-.17		

Note. N = 75. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 1 predicts that employees with higher recent job performance would also be more satisfied. As shown in Table 2, those with higher recent job performance also had a significantly higher level of job satisfaction ($\beta = .35, p < .01$). Therefore, I found support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that employees with a stronger growth mindset would also be more satisfied in their jobs. As shown in Table 2, those with a more growth mindset also had a significantly higher level of job satisfaction ($\beta = .53$, $p < .01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 2: Regression Analyses Predicting Job Satisfaction

	Job satisfaction	
Variable	β	t
Step 1		
Company tenure	.04	.47
ΔR^2	.00	
Step 2		
Company tenure	.11	1.52
Recent performance	.35	4.37***
Employees mindset	.53	6.44***
ΔR^2	.44***	
Step 3		
Company tenure	.07	1.01
Recent performance	1.03	3.50***
Employees mindset	1.02	4.68***
Employee mindset x Recent performance	-.86	-2.35*
ΔR^2	.03*	

Note. N = 75. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

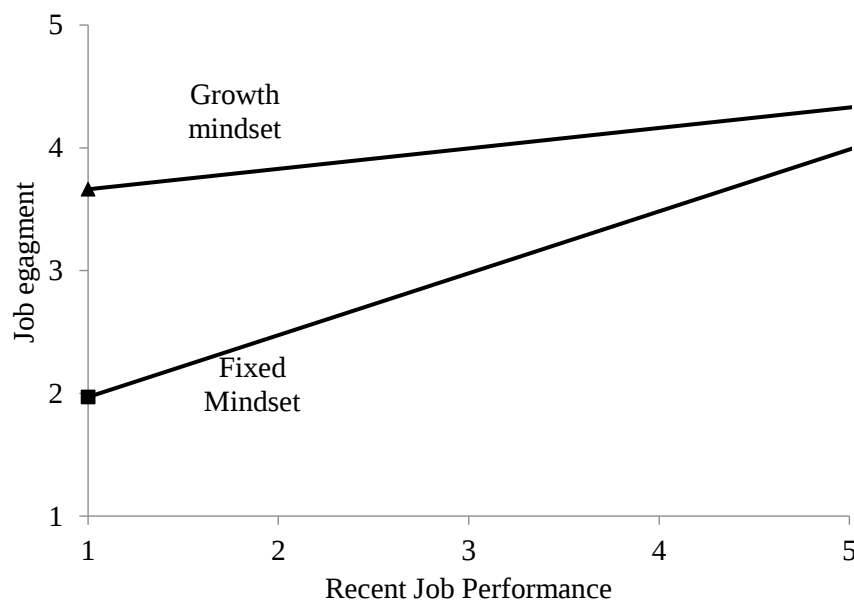


Figure 1: Relationship between recent job performance and job satisfaction for those with a growth mindset and those with a fixed mindset

Hypothesis 3 stated that an employee's mindset would moderate the positive relationship between recent job performance and job satisfaction. Specifically, this relationship would be stronger for those with a more fixed mindset. As shown in Table 2,

the interaction term was significant for job satisfaction ($\beta = -.86, p < .05$). Next, I calculated the predictive values for job satisfaction for employees with a more growth mindset (1 standard deviation above the mean) and those with a more fixed mindset (1 standard deviation below the mean). As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between recent job performance and job satisfaction was stronger among those with a more fixed mindset. Overall, I found support for Hypothesis 3.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings indicate that recent job performance and mindset directly and indirectly affect employees' job satisfaction. Specifically, employees with the latest positive performance evaluation were more satisfied. In addition, employees with a more growth mindset were also more satisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, employees with a more fixed mindset were more sensitive to recent job performance, as their job satisfaction was more strongly influenced by it than was that of employees with a more growth mindset.

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. The finding of a positive relationship between performance evaluation and job satisfaction adds to research showing a similar relationship between feedback and job characteristics in general. In the context of this study, recent performance in the sales industry is an additional contribution. Future research should further examine the relationship using a longitudinal design. In addition, the finding that this relationship is moderated by mindset adds a new empirically tested personal resource to the satisfaction literature. There are also contributions to mindset literature. Specifically, although the relationship has been theoretically proposed (Keating & Heslin, 2015), limited field studies have tested it. Furthermore, it helps address the need for more mindset field research conducted in a business setting (Han & Stieha, 2020).

This study also has practical implications. It again shows the importance of considering mindset when giving performance evaluations (Heslin et al., 2006). Employees with a more growth mindset were more resilient after performance evaluations concerning job satisfaction. Organizations would benefit from coaching employees to adopt a growth mindset, and managers should be mindful of how they communicate feedback directly to employees.

For example, feedback focusing on effort and process effectively instills a growth mindset. Also, comparisons should be made with that employee's prior performance, not with other employees' (Zingoni & Byron, 2017). Furthermore, highlighting the most improved employees and the percentage increase in performance could also help foster a growth mindset among employees.

Performance evaluation and feedback, in general, are opportunities to cultivate a growth mindset in existing employees. However, organizations could select talent with a more growth-oriented mindset. The mindset measure is short enough to include in any hiring assessments. Furthermore, organizations can use structured interview questions or situational judgment questions to identify potential employees with a more growth-minded mindset.

CONCLUSION

Performance evaluations are a critical opportunity in employee development and cultivating employee satisfaction. Fostering a growth mindset among employees helps them remain resilient after a period of poor performance and allows them to improve and develop.

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