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# Examining the Influence of Goal Clarity and Contingent Rewards on Job Satisfaction

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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF GOAL CLARITY AND CONTINGENT REWARDS ON  
JOB SATISFACTION

By

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B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2012

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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TITLE: EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF GOAL CLARITY AND CONTINGENT  
REWARDS ON JOB SATISFACTION

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Randall S. Davis

Improving the performance of public organizations has been, and continues to be, a central concern in public management. However, relative to the private sector, the tools available to the public manager for enhancing performance are somewhat limited. This paper examines two techniques for enhancing individual performance, setting clear goals and offering contingent rewards. I use data collected by the United States Office of Personnel Management to test two hypotheses. The results indicate that setting clear goals and offering contingent rewards both increase job satisfaction, an important attitude linked to job performance. However, setting clear goals more prominently influences job satisfaction as compared to offering other performance rewards. To the extent that public managers have the capacity to clarify goals for public employees, they can enhance governmental performance.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Brewer and Selden (2000) argue that improving the performance of government is a central concern of public administration. Public Service Motivation (PSM) has been at the forefront of discussion in the academic community, as well as in public run organizations for the past 2 decades as a way to increase motivation, thus increase job performance. The fundamental assumption of PSM is that intrinsic rewards provided by the nature or function of the organization may be more important to public sector employees than performance-related extrinsic rewards (Perry & Wise, 1990). Public sector work spans a vast area of function and nature, and to think that intrinsic rewards will be more important to all or most employees in all or most of these very different settings leaves open the probability that organizations and employees all won't find the nature of their work internally rewarding. So alternatives to PSM and intrinsic rewards and motivation must be considered if performance in government, specifically the employees of the public organizations making up the government, are to be improved.

One predictor of performance at the individual level is job satisfaction, and higher job satisfaction leads ultimately to higher performance (Locke & Latham 1990; Judge et. al. 2001). Saari and Judge (2004), Pandey and Wright (2006) and Rainey and Bozeman (2000) argue that performance in public organizations can be difficult, costly and inconsistent when attempting to measure. Job satisfaction, and ways of increasing job satisfaction, may offer ways to avoid these hurdles. According to Saari and Judge (2004), job satisfaction is directly related to employee attitudes, which are influenced by the interaction between the person and the internal and external factors of the situation. One key element that has an external and internal influence on an employee in a public organization is the unavoidable consequence of conflicts among values,



political processes and the lack of profit indicators to measure, which leads to goal ambiguity (Jung, 2013; Pandey & Wright 2006; Davis & Stazyk 2014a; Chun & Rainey, 2005a, 2005b). Goals and goal setting strategies are important determinates of performance and performance related outcomes such as job satisfaction. Determining which strategies can negate the negative effects of goal ambiguity on job performance will assist in managers and agencies attempts at increasing performance.

Incentives or contingent rewards are also related to job satisfaction, which include pay, promotion, career opportunities and recognition (Locke & Latham, 2013). There is debate in this relationship over who is effected by whom. Locke and Latham argue that an individual's performance brings about contingent rewards, which will increase their overall job satisfaction (Locke & Latham, 1990). An increase in job satisfaction will lead back to a higher organizational commitment and the individual setting higher goals for themselves, which will ultimately increase performance. In the public sector, Jung (2013) argues goals are more multiple, conflicting and ambiguous than the private sector, increasing the importance of establishing what is expected of the employee and what they must do to increase their job satisfaction. My thesis is that goal setting provides the organizational context that accentuates the benefits of contingent rewards on performance related outcomes such as job satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Goal Setting.* A goal is defined by Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory as the object or aim of an action (Locke & Latham, 1990). There are two main attributes of goals, content and intensity (Locke & Latham, 2013). Content is the result being sought by the goal, and intensity is the effort needed to set the goal, where the goal falls hierarchically for an individual and how committed the person is to attaining the goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). In today's public organization setting, the political environment is cause for continuous goal ambiguity (Lee, Rainey, & Chun 2009; Pandey & Rainey 2006; Pandey & Wright, 2006; Stazyk & Goerdel 2011; Stazyk, Pandey, & Wright 2011; Davis & Stazyk 2014). The understanding of these attributes and applying the mechanisms to which lead to higher performance become increasingly important in a public settings because goals function as a way to legitimize action. Ambiguity in goals or do your best goals leave question as to what constitutes effective performance for an individual or organization (Locke & Latham, 2013).

Locke and Latham identify four mechanisms or mediators that allow high and specific goals to lead to higher performance. Choice or direction allows for the attention and effort toward activities that are focused on what an individual is trying to accomplish and away from what they are not (Locke & Latham, 2013). In other words, it allows a goal to help establish what is needed or important to achieving the desired result and separate out what is not important. Effort is the second mediator, which is used to direct an individual's work to the desired performance level. This is proportionate to the difficulty level of the goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). Persistence is the time spent to attain a goal, and a specific and high goal will keep them working longer than a vague or easy goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). Goals make

individual draw on knowledge or skill to accomplish them, which is the fourth mediator (Locke & Latham, 2013).

Goal Setting Theory also identifies several variables that affect the relationship between goals and performance. Ability can moderate this relationship by increasing or decreasing the difficulty of a given goal an individual can set. A greater positive effect on the level of performance by goal setting was found in individuals with higher ability compared to those with lower ability (Wood et al., 2013). If a person has a higher ability, they will then be able to set higher goals for themselves, which will lead to higher performance.

Goal commitment is another variable that is important when considering goal setting and performance. Commitment is necessary to establish a goal, because absent commitment an individual will not strive for attaining goal objectives (Klein et al., 2013). Erez and Zidon found that goal difficulty level is more highly and positively related to performance for individuals with high goal commitment compared to those with low goal commitment (Klein et al., 2013). A higher goal intensity affects goal commitment positively because an individual's awareness of how a goal can be attained is raised (Locke & Latham, 2013). When given a high, specific goal, a person must commit to the goal and develop a plan to achieve the goal, which will increase performance.

Strategies refer to a plan or pattern of decision making or actions designed to achieve a goal (Wood et al., 2013). Wood, Whelan, Sojo and Wong (2013) argue that goals initiate the process of searching for strategies to accomplish a task. Strategies were shown by Wood et al to also positively affect performance when implemented (Locke & Latham, 2013). By implementing goals, strategies will be used and performance will increase.

In addition to directly influencing performance, clear, challenging goals are likely to facilitate attitudes, such as job satisfaction, that give rise to performance. The connection

between goal clarity and performance related attitudes results less from sustained effort, and more from a resulting feeling of self-efficacy when goal objectives are accomplished (Bandura, 1997). When an individual feels as though they have accomplished something meaningful, they are likely to exhibit positive attitudes toward work due to a heightened sense of achievement. In this sense it may be useful to examine the effects of goals on job satisfaction.

*Job Satisfaction.* Job satisfaction generally concerns how a person feels about their job and is defined as a "pleasurable or emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience" (Locke & Latham, 2013 p. 272). Higher job satisfaction can lead to increased individual and organizational productivity and performance (Jung, 2013). Job satisfaction is directly and negatively related to turnover intention which is positively related to actual turnover in organizations (Chen et. al., 2011). Wright and Davis argue that job satisfaction is an important influence on absenteeism and turnover, and in order to retain the top employees, they must be kept happy or satisfied (Wright & Davis, 2002). The environment in which an employee works directly effects their job satisfaction (Wright & Davis, 2002). It then becomes an important aspect of the public work setting and the public organization to try and increase the public employee's job satisfaction. The correlation made by Judge et al (2001) in their meta-analysis between overall job satisfaction and general job performance at .3 shows that increasing job satisfaction is a plausible way to increase general performance.

Wright and Davis (2002) argue that job characteristics (what a person does at work) and work context (characteristics of the overall organizational setting) make up the work environment. Job specificity makes up one component of job characteristics and is the clarity of job duties and how well their importance to the job is defined (Wright & Davis, 2002). Organizational goal specificity is a component of the work environment, which is the degree an employee believes they understand the direction purpose and performance measures of the

organization (Wright & Davis, 2002). Having clear job duties and an understanding of the organization's direction and expectations are important for increasing employee's job satisfaction. As stated, clarity and specificity of the job and the job duties are important aspects of attaining job satisfaction, both of which run the risk of suffering from ambiguous and vague goals found in the public work environment.

An important predictor of job satisfaction was found to be goal ambiguity because ambiguity creates role dissatisfaction, experience anxiety, can distort reality and lead to less production (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Chun & Rainey, 2006; Davis & Stazyk, 2014a; Jung 2013). Goal ambiguity also influences employee knowledge about what is expected of them and what they are trying to accomplish, which can diminish the meaningfulness of the job, make it difficult to evaluate what the employee contributed to the goal and decrease job satisfaction (Jung 2013; Wright & Davis 2013; Ting 1997). Goal ambiguity in the public work environment comes from the inherently political environments of public organizations, which establishes that ambiguity in the public work setting will be present and it will have a negative effect on job satisfaction (Davis, Stazyk, 2014a; Lee, Rainey, & Chun 2009; Pandey & Rainey 2006; Stazyk & Goerdel 2011; Stazyk, Pandey, & Wright 2011).

One way to limit this negative effect on job satisfaction of goal ambiguity in the public work environment on the lower level employees is to implement clear, specific goals that allow the employee to know what is expected of them and what they are trying to accomplish. Clear, specific goals lead to increased goal commitment, task interest, job attitude and self-efficacy, thus

*Hypothesis<sub>1</sub> - Goal setting leads to higher job satisfaction*

*Contingent Rewards.* Saari and Judge (2004) argue that the nature of the work, or intrinsic characteristics of the work are the most important factors influencing job satisfaction. Yet these

are rarely, if ever, under the control of the manager or administrator in the public setting. Much of the work done in public organizations is simple a function of the mission or task of the agency, beyond the control of the supervisor, manager or even director of the agency. One facet that does influence job satisfaction that can be altered or used by a manager or agency head is a reward that is contingent on the performance of the employee. An incentive, or contingent based reward such as increased pay, promotion, career opportunities or recognition Locke and Latham (2013) believe effect job satisfaction.

As a modifier of the job satisfaction-performance relationship, jobs that place the reward being contingent to performance of the employee are found to be more satisfying than weaker performance-reward contingencies (Judge et al, 2001). One reason Judge et al (2001) give for this is that the success is tangible in the form of a reward which the employee finds valuable. Locke and Latham (1990) support this when they looked at contingent rewards and performance, concluding that incentives increased performance, as long as the reward was significant and attainable to the person attempting to reach it.

One example of this is a study done by Kahn, Silva and Ziliak (2001) who examined the introduction of rewards contingent on performance to a tax collection authority. The possible reward received by the employees in this study were significant amounts, at times double the salary of the employee over that time period (Burgess & Ratto, 2003). The findings show that an average of 75% increase in fines collected over the entire district resulted immediately after the program was introduced, showing that the employees were motivated by the possible reward. This example shows that contingent rewards, such as pay, will increase the performance of an employee, as long as the employee believes the reward is worth the effort and that they can achieve it.

Contingent rewards were found to have a significant influence on the importance employees placed on their jobs, according to Wright (2007). How important the job is to the employee is related back to the perception of the employee and the importance they place on attaining the outcome. In other words, if an employee places a higher importance on their job, they are more likely to want to attain the outcome, such as a reward contingent on performance. By increasing the importance an employee puts on a valued outcome, Borgogni and Russo (2013) argue that the relationship between job satisfaction and performance will be increased. This leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis<sub>2</sub> – Increased contingent rewards leads to higher job satisfaction

## CHAPTER 3

### DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this survey were collected from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (2012). Every federal employee was offered the opportunity to answer the survey, but participation was voluntary and results were confidential. 666,500 federal employees responded to the survey, of which a 1% random sample was taken for this study (N = 6665). Select demographics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: 2012 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey**

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	3419	51.30%
Female	2781	41.73%
Missing	465	6.98%
Minority Status		
Minority	2020	30.31%
Non-minority	4011	60.18%
Missing	634	9.51%



## Age Group

29 and under	359	5.39%
30-39	1065	15.98%
40-49	1725	25.88%
50-59	2215	33.23%
60+	782	11.73%
Missing	519	7.79%

## Pay Category

Federal Wage System	369	5.54%
GS 1-6	355	5.33%
GS 7-12	2901	43.53%
GS 13-15	2052	30.79%
SES/OTHER	517	7.76%
Missing	471	7.07%

## Agency Tenure

Up to 3 years	1280	19.20%
4 to 5	770	11.55%
6 to 10	1251	18.77%
11-20	1261	18.92%
20+	1609	24.14%
Missing	494	7.41%

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Several survey items were used to define model constructs. Goal clarity is assessed using four items drawn from Cho and Perry (2012) and Whitford and colleagues (2010). The first two items capture “goal directedness” whereas the third and fourth are a direct measure of goal clarity. For goals to be deemed clear, they must be specific but attainable, communicated to workers (goal directedness), and viewed as legitimate by employees (Locke & Latham 1990). As such, it is appropriate to assess goal clarity using items that tap clarity and directedness. Each item was rated on a five-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher values reflect greater goal clarity. Similar to the work of Pitts (2009) and Yang and Kassekert (2010), job satisfaction is assessed using four items on five-point scales, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items are scaled such that higher values reflect greater satisfaction. Contingent rewards were measured using five items on a five-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items are scaled such that higher values reflect greater anticipation of rewards. This models the work of Borgogni and Russo (2013) and Locke and Latham’s (1990) questionnaire to measure tangible rewards employees anticipated from better performance.

With multiple questionnaire items being used in each model construct, summative indexes were generated to examine the effects of contingent rewards and goal clarity on job satisfaction. Gender, race, age, pay category and agency tenure were held as controls to rule out alternative explanations. Race was dichotomized such that 0 represents minority status and 1 represents white. Gender is coded such that 1 represents females. Pay category was coded such that 1 = federal wage system, 2 = GS 1-6, 3 = GS 7-12, 4 = GS 12-15 and 5 = SES and other. Agency tenure was coded such that 1 = up to 3 years, 2 = 4-5 years, 3= 6-10 years, 4 = 11- 20 years and 5 = more than 20 years. Finally, age is a continuous variable measured in years. Each model construct and corresponding questions are described in greater detail in appendix A. I

used a multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses presented above. Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the questionnaire items.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlations												
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. JS1	3.8538	1.07597	1												
2. JS 2	4.169	0.88257	.657**	1											
3. JS 3	3.7398	1.05325	.661**	.547**	1										
4. JS 4	3.5141	1.09597	.557**	.414**	.762**	1									
5. CR 1	2.8988	1.21778	.439**	.277**	.519**	.575**	1								
6. CR 2	2.9187	1.14417	.435**	.275**	.517**	.562**	.675**	1							
7. CR 3	3.0565	1.21775	.427**	.266**	.501**	.550**	.688**	.750**	1						
8. CR 4	3.2586	1.13426	.468**	.297**	.556**	.630**	.625**	.658**	.672**	1					
9. CR 5	2.5529	1.16555	.352**	.220**	.431**	.479**	.594**	.578**	.580**	.566**	1				
10. GC 1	3.9791	0.96642	.544**	.466**	.537**	.506**	.386**	.396**	.396**	.434**	.318**	1			
11. GC 2	4.0802	0.86079	.485**	.404**	.471**	.476**	.365**	.373**	.365**	.416**	.307**	.500**	1		
12. GC 3	3.5568	1.08754	.438**	.274**	.523**	.616**	.498**	.501**	.506**	.572**	.416**	.473**	.462**	1	
13. GC 4	3.5865	1.04097	.427**	.277**	.533**	.616**	.498**	.508**	.516**	.572**	.429**	.459**	.453**	.838**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The findings in this study found that both hypotheses are fully supported, establishing a statistical significance between goal clarity, contingent rewards and job satisfaction. The first hypothesis suggested that increasing goal clarity would increase job satisfaction. The findings presented support this indicating that it is statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ) with a  $\beta$  of 0.544. In other words, for every 1 unit increase in goal clarity, an increase of 0.544 units will occur in job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous research by which a clear, consistent, difficult but attainable goal will increase job satisfaction. The second hypothesis suggests that an increase in contingent rewards would increase job satisfaction. The findings in this study support this hypothesis as well. Contingent rewards were found to be statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ) with a  $\beta$  of 0.209. So for every 1 unit increase in contingent rewards, an increase of 0.209 can be expected in job satisfaction. Like goal clarity, contingent rewards have a positive effect on job satisfaction.

Gender, minority status, the pay category of the employee, the tenure in the agency of the employee and the age group the employee falls in where all held as controls. This study found gender ( $p = 0.887$ ), minority status ( $p = 0.215$ ), pay category ( $p = 0.865$ ) and agency tenure ( $p = 0.173$ ) to be statistically insignificant. This shows that they had no statistical significance to job satisfaction among the employees that completed this survey. Age group was found to be statistically significant ( $p = 0.003$ ). This is shown in table 3 below.

**Table 3: Standardized Regression Parameters Predicting Job Satisfaction**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	EST	Std. Error	EST	t	p
1. Intercept	3.627	0.242	--	14.999	0.000
2. Contingent Rewards	0.209	0.009	0.305	23.694	0.000
3. Goal Clarity	0.544	0.014	0.506	39.556	0.000
4. Gender	-0.010	0.067	-0.001	-0.142	0.887
5. Minority Status	0.088	0.071	0.012	1.239	0.215
6. Age Group	0.103	0.034	0.033	3.000	0.003
7. Pay Category	-0.006	0.036	-0.002	-0.170	0.865
8. Agency Tenure	-0.034	0.025	-0.015	-1.362	0.173

**$R^2=.553$**

The final part of this study looked at the explanatory capacity of the multiple regression model. The  $R^2$  value represents the amount of variation in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. As shown in table 3, the  $R^2$  value was 0.553, which means that 55.3% of the variation in job satisfaction is explained by goal clarity, contingent rewards, and the control variables included in the model. To better explain this, the standardized coefficients must be used. By using the standardized coefficients, independent variables are able to be compared with each other against the dependent variable. The findings here show that goal clarity has a  $\beta$  value of 0.506, meaning that for every 1 standard deviation increase in goal clarity, a 0.506 standard deviation increase in job satisfaction will be seen. Contingent rewards reveal a  $\beta$  value of 0.305, or for every 1 standard deviation increase in contingent rewards, an increase of 0.305 in job satisfaction will be seen. This shows that although both goal clarity and

contingent rewards will increase job satisfaction, goal clarity will have a greater positive effect than contingent rewards.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has looked at goal setting and contingent rewards and the effects they have on increasing job satisfaction in public sector employees. As hypothesized, both goal setting and contingent rewards were empirically shown to influence job satisfaction. PSM argues that intrinsic motivation is a greater factor in increasing motivation in the public sector than extrinsic or contingent rewards. Public sector employees have shown to value the nature of their work, or intrinsic motivation, over pay and promotion or other contingent type rewards as the most important job facet (Judge & Church, 2000). Along with job facets, Wright (2007) argues that the importance employees place on the mission of the organization with increase the employees feeling of importance in their jobs, increasing the employee's motivation. In other words, employees are more motivated when the mission of the organization and the nature of the work they are doing in the organization satisfies them.

The value of using contingent rewards with goal setting to increase job satisfaction is important to public administrators, only as a general tool knowing job satisfaction is directly influenced through them, but in aspects that do not allow public employees to be intrinsically motivated. Public service spans a wide variety of fields, many of which are jobs that must be done for the betterment of the public interest. All employees are not going to find value or credence in the organizational mission. As public administrators, altering or adapting the job or jobs that must be done or the mission of the organization are very likely not an option. Hepburn and Knepper (1993) found an example of this studying correctional officer's job satisfaction. They found that the only way intrinsic qualities of the employee's job satisfaction was increased was by redefining the roles of the officers to a role of a human service guide. This was

hypothesized to only be possible in the lower or minimum security areas. This leaves out a large section of employees that are not being motivated by intrinsic rewards.

These specific cases are where contingent rewards, used with specific and clear goals can be used to increase job satisfaction. Not limiting to only situations such as these, but as an obvious use for contingent rewards, employees in these areas of work could benefit from having rewards that motivate them to increase reach a set goal that would allow for better pay, promotion or possible more time off. Judge et al (2001) found that in such cases, jobs with rewards that are contingent on performance are more satisfying than jobs which have a weaker performance-reward contingency. They go on to conclude that the effect of performance on satisfaction stems from success, that performance is satisfying because it brings success through a valued reward. Borgogni and Russo (2013) state that job satisfaction is related to job performance only if the performance is perceived by the employee as instrumental for attaining a valued outcome, and most effective when high performance is in response to high goals. In other words, to increase job performance through job satisfaction, the employees must believe that the outcome will result in an outcome that is of value to them and this is most effective when a high goal is used. To get the most out of measuring job performance through job satisfaction, the employee must have a high and attainable goal and have a sense they will receive a valued outcome. A contingent reward such as pay, promotion or other benefits incorporated with a difficult and attainable goal would then allow job performance to be maximized through job satisfaction.



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## **APPENDIX**

## Appendix A

To assess Goal Clarity, 4 questions were selected using a 5 point Likert Scale format (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree). The questions were grouped in similar terms compared to the previously validated scales used by Borgogni and Russo (2013). The questions, correlated with a Cronbach Alpha Test of .844, were:

1. I know what is expected of me on the job
2. I know how my work relates to the agency's goals and priorities
3. Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization
4. Managers review and evaluate the organization's progress toward meeting its goals and objectives

To assess Contingent Rewards, 5 questions were selected using a 5 point Likert Scale format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The questions were grouped in similar terms compared to the previously validated scales used by Lee et al (1991). The questions, correlated with a Cronbach Alpha Test of .900, were:

1. Promotions in my work unit are based on merit
2. In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way
3. Awards in my work unit depend on how well employees perform their jobs
4. Employees are recognized for providing high quality products and services
5. Pay raises depend on how well employees perform their jobs

To assess Job Satisfaction, 4 questions were selected, the first 2 using a 5 point Likert Scale format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and the second 2 using a 5 point Likert Scale format (1 = Very Dissatisfied to 5 = Very Satisfied). The questions were grouped in

similar terms compared to the previously validated scales used by Davis and Styzak (2013). The questions, correlated with a Cronbach Alpha Test of .857, were

1. My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment
2. I like the kind of work I do
3. Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job
4. Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization

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