

# PROPERLY IMPROVING EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES THROUGH HR PROGRAMS AND RECOGNITION PRACTICES

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## Goal/Purpose

The aim of this project is to make preparations for and skillfully disseminate the results of my honors thesis. With one presentation already solidified, one pending, and another in the works, I hope to be granted the resources to rigorously refine my ideas and present them in the highest and most prestigious of academic settings.

## Importance of Project

This project is of considerable worth because of its potential positive impact on (1) academia, (2) business, (3) BYU, and (4) my career.

Academia. Academic journals around the world laud HR incentive programs and employee recognition programs as the fix-alls to job dissatisfaction, employee indiscretion, employee absenteeism, and low productivity. Moreover, each article (some of which are listed under Scholarly Sources) touts one program or another as the next best thing. Hence, many employers have launched a barrage of these programs, hoping that at least one will reach each employee. However, we have found compelling evidence that refines these ideas into a more manageable and logical framework that will guide future studies.

Business. With the information provided by my research, HR professionals and company executives will be empowered to more fully and more efficiently meet employee needs by focusing on developing a few HR programs and recognition practices that are tailored to their employees.

BYU. Our university is making tremendous strides to become a sustained research powerhouse, and the presentation of the findings at conferences for organizations like WorldatWork and The Academy of Management will boost its image and encourage future research relationships.

My Career. My goal is to pursue a PhD in Management and good school require applicants to publish and present their research. The resources provided by an ORCA grant would allow me to pursue my dreams.

## Main Proposal Body

Data for this study comes from 1,205 employees who are both salaried and hourly paid. Survey participants were found either through my personal contacts or through willing members of the National Association of Employee Recognition and their employees. In order to minimize confounding variables, respondents represent 73 different companies. The following sections will describe some of the preliminary findings of my study and the metrics that will be used to obtain entry into the targeted academic conferences.

Employees were asked to complete an Internet questionnaire that took between 15-20 minutes to complete on average. The participants were invited with an email containing the URL for the questionnaire, so they could simply click on the link, complete the questionnaire, and submit their responses electronically. (IRB Approval has already been granted.)

Consistent with previous research (Allen and Meyer, 1990), all of the attitudinal measures were evaluated using the 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Job Satisfaction. Evaluation of this attitude was accomplished by analyzing the respondent's rating of six questions that Price and Mueller (1981, 1986) adapted from Brayfield and Rothe (1951) to measure general satisfaction with one's specific job. These questions include the following: (1) "I find real enjoyment in my work", (2) "I consider my job rather unpleasant", (3) "I am often bored with my job", (4) "I am fairly well satisfied with my present job", (5) "I definitely dislike my work", and (6) "Most days I am enthusiastic about my work". The responses to questions 2, 3, and 5 were later inverted (i.e., Inverted

Response = 6 - Actual Response) in order to render all statements positive, thus ensuring consistent data. Cronbach's alpha for the Job Satisfaction Scale was .88.

Employee Engagement. The questions grouped together to analyze this attitude include six questions adapted from a scale made by May, Gilson, and Harter (2004), which was based on the theoretical work of Kahn (1990). As explained by Cherrington (2007), this scale includes two items measuring each of the three aspects of engagement: cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement. May, et al. combined the items into a single engagement scale, since the factor analysis failed to produce three separate factors for the three concepts, and the alpha reliability of their combined 13-item scale was 0.77. The questions used for this thesis include the following: (1) "Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else", (2) "Time passes quickly when I am performing my job", (3) "I really put my heart into my job", (4) "My own feelings are affected by how well I perform my job", (5) "I exert a lot of energy performing my job", (6) "I take work home to do". Cronbach's alpha for the Employee Engagement Scale was .68.

Organizational (Affective) Commitment. The following five questions, from Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993), were asked in order to analyze the respondent's organizational commitment: (1) "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization", (2) "I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it", (3) "I feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization", (4) "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me", (5) "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization". Cronbach's alpha for the Organizational Commitment Scale was .85.

Personal Performance. This measure will be used to provide supplementary information for the thesis and will be computed using the following four questions: (1) "How does your performance compare with the performance of other members of your work group?", (2) "How often do you do things that are above and beyond your normal job duties to help the organization?", (3) "How would you describe your performance at work?", (4) "How would you describe your commitment to excellence in performing your job?" I was originally going to include a fifth question ("In the past year, how many days were you absent from work?"), but the question was too vague and did not clarify vacation days, sick days, travel days, etc. on the survey. For the four questions, then, Cronbach's alpha was .75.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether or not (1 = Yes, 2 = No) their company sponsored each of 14 HR programs and 9 recognition practices, respectively. Each respondent that indicated a Yes was also asked to evaluate the program or practice using a 5-point scale: 1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, and 5 = Excellent. The ratings for each of these HR programs and recognition practices were then run through a correlational analysis with the scaled scores for each employee attitude. This data, yielding results for this thesis' sub-hypotheses, were followed by an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Yes/No (i.e. does the HR program or recognition practice exist at the organization) scores for each program and practice.

Additionally, demographical information, like respondent age, years of education, job industry (corresponding with the nine categories used by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), years with company, and years in current position, was collected. While most of the analysis has been completed, some post-hoc analysis may be required to provide supplemental data in the papers I plan to write.

### **Anticipated Academic Outcome**

As will be delineated in the Project Timetable, my research has caught the attention of BYU professor David J. Cherrington, who plans to present my research at a November meeting of the Human Resource Association of Central Utah. This presentation and consequent feedback will allow me to hone my presentation topics before submitting to the WorldatWork (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) and Academy of Management (Anaheim, California) conferences. The purpose of the WorldatWork conference is to present initial findings to HR professionals, offering ideas of how to improve their companies. The conference at the Academy of Management serves to get feedback on my paper and serves as a filter for publication to the Academy of Management Journal. I will also publish a comprehensive review of my research in my honors thesis, which shortly thereafter my defended.

### **Qualifications**

Apart from the dedication and experiences illustrated previously in the Qualification section, Dr. Bingham is the ideal mentor for this project because he presented at the Academy of Management conference (undisputedly, the best conference in U.S. management research) just last year. Dr. Bingham has also committed professors at New York University and Texas A&M to review my work to increase the

likelihood of its acceptance.

### **Project Timetable**

Oct. 1, 2007: Apply for workshop presentation at WorldatWork Total Rewards Conference & Exhibition 2008 to be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Nov. 1, 2007: Begin composition of paper to submit to 2008 Academy of Management (AM) Annual Review Conference in Anaheim, California.

Nov. 8, 2007: Present findings with Dr. David J. Cherrington at meeting for Human Resource Association of Central Utah.

Nov. 21, 2007: Have completed draft of AM paper.

Dec. 1, 2007: Commence peer-review of AM paper by professors at other universities

Jan. 15, 2008: Submit entry to AM conference.

Feb. 1, 2008: Submit complete draft of honors thesis.

Mar. 1, 2008: Deadline for completion of thesis defense.

Feb. - Aug.: Make flight arrangements (hopefully), and attend and present at conferences.

### **Scholarly Sources**

Several sources were cited in the Main Proposal Body of this section, six of which include the following:

1. Allen, N., & Meyer, J. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63(1), 1-18. Retrieved June 19, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.
2. Brayfield, A. & Rothe, H. (1951). An Index of Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 35: 307-311.
3. Kahn, W. (1990). Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 33: 692-724.
4. May, D., Gilson, R., & Harter, L. (2004). The Psychological Conditions of Meaningfulness, Safety and Availability and the Engagement of the Human Spirit at Work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 77:11-37.
5. Price, J. & Mueller, C. (1981). *Professional Turnover: The Case of Nurses*. New York: Spectrum.
6. Price, J. & Mueller, C. (1986). *Handbook of Organizational Measurement: 70-82, 215- 232*. Marshfield, MA: Pitman.