Editorial — Satisfaction at Work

Several years ago I attempted a summary of the key factors for success in participation. Today I want to do the same for satisfaction at work. The importance of the thirteen items on my list will vary from one person to another, and the balance will differ for different jobs. There is no such thing as a right order of priority and I have not attempted this. Indeed I have difficulty in deciding my own preferences.

Nor would I claim to have included everything that motivates people at work. You may find important items missing. But most people count the factors on my list important. If too many are missing their working lives are impoverished.

1) Challenge is essential, and most of us enjoy it and like to be stretched beyond our normal limits. Not all the time, and for some not too often. But without challenge we grow lazy and forget how good it can feel to work under pressure.

2) Change, notwithstanding that many people enjoy routine, especially if it has a rhythm to it. But we all need change from time to time. Too much routine is a kind of death, and in this sense workplaces today are full of dead or sleeping people.

3) Interest. There is nothing worse than boring work. If done for too long you become dull, or go mad. And yet millions of people are condemned to boredom for much of their working lives. Look at their faces.

4) Being your own boss, the boss of your own job, the expert in it and totally responsible for it. Without this you are a kind of slave, deprived of the essential core of adult individuality. Some of us want also to run our own show, section, department or business and will never be satisfied until we are doing so. There are too few master journeymen at work today.

5) “Good Pay” — a complex and critical subject. I think four requirements must be satisfied. That:
   a) We receive a steady improvement in our real living standards.
   b) Effort is rewarded — there must be financial incentive.
   c) What we get is felt as fair — differentials are only acceptable on this basis.
   d) No one is condemned for ever to be bottom of the pay league. Technically this may be impossible, but nothing breeds resentment so much as always being bottom, always being the loser. This is part of the case for a length of service element in the pay packet.

6) Worth while Work. I would rather build houses than gin palaces, make gardens than mink coats. Most human beings feel like this. Pointless tasks take the meaning from life and lack of meaning is the neurosis of our time.

7) Sense of Achievement — the need to experience the sense of “a good job well done”.

8) Companionship—few can tolerate loneliness or isolation for long. To work with people you like in an atmosphere of friendship is a basic human need.

9) Success. We all like to be part of a successful, energetic, well-run organisation — we can forgive many faults if we are successful. There is nothing worse than slogging your guts out for an enterprise that is going downhill, or headed for failure.

10) Organisation Style/Atmosphere. My preference is for relaxed informality, first name terms, with the minimum of demarcation at job, social, or any other level. I am not really interested unless the ethos of the organisation is open, equalitarian and future oriented. I find a growing number of people who share this viewpoint. Closed, class structured organisations that are also authoritarian seem increasingly out of touch with human needs today.

11) Creativity — the source of life, psychologically and biologically. The greatest danger of the perfect organisational machine is that it kills creativity, and allows no room for spontaneity, improvisation, innovation, improvement, and the many other forms the creative muse takes. You cannot resolve this difficulty with problem solving groups and suggestions schemes! Somehow you have to offer people the opportunity to give something of their essence, their heart, in the work situation. High on my personal list.
CORRECTIONS

We apologise for two errors in the Summer 1978 issue of Industrial Participation (serial number 564).

Page 24. **British Home Stores Limited Employee Share Participation Scheme.**
Under Share issue price the last phrase should of course read *(or nominal value if higher).*

Page 27. For Dr Ruth Bellamy read Dr Joyce Bellamy, in the Editorial introduction to the Hull Printers Ltd. Case Study.

We apologise to British Home Stores and Dr Bellamy for these errors.

12) **Fair treatment.** This has essentially to do with gut feelings and reactions. Bad situations can be tolerated, for a time at least, if people feel that the burdens are fairly shared. The same goes for benefits in a good situation. The failure to take account of gut feelings, and to think that if a policy makes intellectual sense it should be acceptable, is one of the commonest causes of dissatisfaction at work.

13) **Security**—on everybody’s list.
Those who are familiar with the work of management and behavioural scientists—MacGregor, Maslow, Herzberg et al.—will find my list familiar. Words may change, but core ideas remain the same.

Their contemporary relevance is sharply focused by our present industrial unrest. How many jobs today meet more than a few of the requirements of my list? Granted the lower paid feel they are treated unfairly, that society is sitting on their backs. Granted too that the better paid are worried by the erosion of differentials, progressively penal personal taxation, and the loss of incentive. But a significant component of present aggravation arises from non-financial causes. What if we do get pay and productivity right, but continue to create jobs and working conditions that drive people to laziness, sleep or psychological death; that forces them to choose between being dull or mad; that in effect makes them slaves with a neurotic lack of meaning to their lives? Our present discontents could then seem like a golden age.

Satisfaction at work, the humanisation of work, must have a far higher priority for the future than at present.

Ian Gordon-Brown