



Satisfied? Well Perhaps You Should Be!

**Adrian Taggart,
Smoothstone Consultancy Ltd.**

When your KPI's go kaput, again, and when your Business Case becomes a "basket case", again, and when you are forced to reclassify your delivery schedule under "Great works of Fiction", again, it is easy to conclude that a Project Manager's lot is not a happy one. If this picture of frustration aligns with your own professional experiences then you will probably need a lot of persuading that a Project Manager may actually enjoy one of the most intrinsically satisfying jobs of all. Strange though it may seem, this is a conclusion that may be inferred from one of the most eminent authors on the subject.

Some of you will be familiar with the work of Frederick Herzberg (1923-2000), the American psychologist, others may feel that that unique combination of profession and nationality alone are sufficient to warrant cynicism. This though, would be a great injustice to a man whose primary text "Work and the Nature Of Man" was listed by the International Press as one of the ten most important books impacting management theory and practice in the 20th Century.

The landmark study, upon which most of his subsequent work was based, took place in America in the 1950's and involved two hundred engineers and accountants, who represented a cross-section of Pittsburgh industry. He was concerned with times when the subjects felt particularly good about their jobs and their work experience. Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of his work was that he chose to examine his subjects, and collect his data, by the process of an interview which was largely unstructured, and in which subjects were encouraged to talk freely. This may seem a facile comment but it is interesting to consider this in relation to modern communication methods. Putting yourself in the position of one of the original subjects, what would be the best way to secure a full understanding of your viewpoint? An emailed questionnaire perhaps, or alternatively, a prolonged face to face meeting where people actually listened to you and encouraged you to talk. (The conclusion is obvious but how often do we actually take the trouble to meet with, and listen to, our major stakeholders?)

What he learned from this was that there was great consistency in the presence of “satisfier” factors and the declared periods of pronounced satisfaction whilst at work. Principals among these factors were achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and advancement. You may wish to reflect on the highpoints of your own working life and consider the veracity of his assertions.

From here the assumption was that if jobs and the work environment were rich with these factors then workers would be satisfied and hence motivated to greater efforts. This approach gave rise to the concept of Job Design whereby roles and specific jobs would be designed to be intrinsically satisfying. Three approaches were considered for this. The first two Job Rotation and Job Enlargement simply advocated increasing the breadth of activity involved within a role by either combining it, or rotating it with another role. The third, Job Enrichment, was more involved.

This approach advocated incorporating those satisfiers by increasing the individuals’ degree of responsibility and autonomy for the product and its delivery. Whilst a number of techniques are recommended there are some which are of particular relevance, as follows:

- Workers should be provided with the opportunity to have greater contact with clients and the end users of their products or services.
- Roles should be based not on a particular function but on the completion of a whole task cycle, or complete product, and should include responsibility for all that is required to complete that task.
- Workers should be allowed to operate in self-managing teams with responsibility for monitoring their own performance.
- Workers should be granted freedom over the scheduling and pacing of their work.

Anything seem familiar?

The parallels between the idealised “enriched” job and the role of Project Management are unmistakable and plain to see. So, congratulations, you have chosen the right career after all.

Or have you? Well there is more to Herzberg’s work and, perhaps sadly, this may suggest that all is not a bed of roses in the PM Garden?

In the same way that Herzberg was interested in those times when individuals felt positive about their work, he was also interested in those times when individuals had negative feelings. This was the subject of the second phase of interviews.

In the same way as before, a list of factors was drawn up that were associated with periods of pronounced dissatisfaction. Amongst these “dissatisfiers” were company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions.

That the list of dissatisfiers is entirely different from the list of satisfiers is both fascinating and confusing and the hypothesis that explains it is a fundamental tenet of Herzberg's work.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, one would happily consider concepts of satisfaction and dissatisfaction to be the opposite of each other and hence to lie at opposite ends of a continuum. Also, that each of the factors that influence one's position along this continuum would be capable of determining the position as being at any point along the continuum. This, however, is not consistent with the results Herzberg secured.

In explaining this Herzberg concluded that dissatisfaction and satisfaction were not the opposite of each other and could not be considered to lie upon the same continuum. Rather, the opposite of satisfaction was "no satisfaction" at all, and the opposite of dissatisfaction, "no dissatisfaction". To help explain this further he renamed the dissatisfiers and the satisfiers.

Dissatisfiers were renamed "Hygiene factors" since they were considered to be analogous to the concept of hygiene and health. By this, a lack of hygiene was likely to promote poor health but adherence to hygienic practices, in of itself, would not cause good health but simply reduce the likelihood of poor health. Similarly, the absence of practices that adequately addressed the dissatisfiers would lead to dissatisfaction, however the presence of practices that adequately addressed the dissatisfiers would not in of themselves cause satisfaction, but simply reduce the likelihood of dissatisfaction.

In a similar way the satisfiers were renamed "Motivators" and whereas the presence of practices that adequately addressed them would lead to satisfaction, the absence of them would not necessarily lead to dissatisfaction, simply a reduction in the likelihood of satisfaction.

It goes without saying that this concept is not easy to grasp yet it does offer some surprising possibilities. For example, by considering satisfaction and dissatisfaction as separate entities which are not the opposite of each other, it follows that they are not mutually exclusive. This creates the possibility of one being both dissatisfied and satisfied, at the same time.

Whilst on the face of it this seems nonsensical, within the context of Herzberg's work it has meaning. It may also have particular relevance to the role of a Project Manager

As we have said, as a project manager it is highly likely that you are influenced by many Motivating factors that would promote your level of satisfaction. However, it may also be true that you are simultaneously dissatisfied. The reason for this lies within the organisation structure you may well operate within.

Most Project Managers exist within an organisation that arranges itself into departments primarily on the basis of the functions that are performed, rather than the tasks, or projects, that are worked upon. Accordingly the company policy, administration, authority structures and communication channels that have evolved are unlikely to be consistent with, or

supportive of, your endeavours in running a cross-functional project. In such a scenario, pronounced conflict between your work, and the company administration is highly likely, leading you to experience pronounced levels of dissatisfaction.

So, if you are inspired by your project and frustrated by your company administration: if you are both satisfied and dissatisfied, simultaneously, then it just may be that Mr. Herzberg has an explanation for your paradox.

If so, there are 200 long-retired residents of Pittsburgh that have every sympathy with you.

Adrian Taggart, June 2012

©Smoothstone Consultancy Ltd. 2012