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FORMULATING INSIGHTS ON JOB SATISFACTION AND ITS IMPACT ON JOB PERFORMANCE IN MALAYSIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the factors that influence job satisfaction and its impact on job performance among civil servants in Malaysia. Using a qualitative approach with a Basic Qualitative Inquiry design, data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with five participants from various public sector departments. The findings revealed that job satisfaction was influenced by supportive leadership, task success, recognition, and benefits provided to employees. In addition, project success motivated employees to enhance their performance. However, challenges such as frequent policy changes, management instability, and lack of recognition negatively affected motivation and commitment. Recognition also emerged as a cross-cutting theme, influencing both satisfaction and performance depending on its presence or absence. This study contributes to the literature by offering new insights into the relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance in the public sector. Practical suggestions include introducing clear KPIs, meaningful reward systems, and professionalism courses to strengthen satisfaction and performance. The study also highlights the need for more systematic management and a more appreciative approach to foster a productive work environment.

Keywords:

Job Satisfaction, Job Performance, Organizational Commitment, Civil Servants, Human Resource Management

Introduction

The performance of civil servants plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the government service delivery system in Malaysia (Abdullah Sani & Jaafar, 2025). However, inconsistent performance of civil servants has become a critical issue that requires urgent attention (Alhosani & Alhashmi, 2024). Based on the annual report of the Malaysian Public Service Department, there are concerns about the gap in the quality of service delivery by civil servants. This imbalance not only reflects weaknesses in organizational capabilities but also has the potential to affect the level of satisfaction of the people with the public administration system. Therefore, this issue requires in-depth study to identify the causes that contribute to inconsistent performance.

One of the main factors identified is low job satisfaction among civil servants. Job satisfaction is an important element that is closely related to the motivation and productivity of an employee (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). In addition, it also affects the level of organizational commitment among civil servants. Low organizational commitment, if not addressed properly, can contribute to significant performance gaps (Hosen et al., 2024). In this context, understanding the factors that influence job satisfaction is important to identify strategic measures to improve the quality of public service delivery overall.

This study aims to explore the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance among civil servants in Malaysia. Using a qualitative research approach, this study will examine the experiences and perceptions of civil servants on the factors that influence their job satisfaction. It is hoped that this study will provide a deeper and more comprehensive view, thereby assisting stakeholders in formulating relevant policies to improve the performance of civil servants.

Although research on the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance has been widely conducted, most existing studies have concentrated on private sector employees, particularly in areas such as manufacturing, services, and multinational corporations (Febriana & Mujib, 2024; Mishra et al., 2020). In contrast, the public sector, especially civil servants in Malaysia, has received limited scholarly attention despite its crucial role in ensuring effective governance and public service delivery. This imbalance creates a research gap, as civil servants operate within unique institutional settings that differ significantly from the private sector in terms of bureaucracy, rigid hierarchical structures, and dependence on government policies (Lee & Kim, 2024; AlMarzooqi et al., 2025). Moreover, past studies have often overlooked contextual challenges such as frequent policy shifts, organizational instability, and resource constraints that may weaken the link between job satisfaction and performance in the public sector (Gunawan et al., 2024). By addressing these gaps, the present study contributes new insights into how job satisfaction influences job performance within Malaysia's public service system, offering evidence that is both contextually relevant and academically significant.

The problem of job performance imbalance is increasingly critical when linked to a lack of organizational commitment among civil servants (Lee & Kim, 2024). This leads to two main problems, namely a lack of consistency in job performance across various roles and departments in the Malaysian public sector and insufficient organizational commitment that contributes to the performance gap among public sector employees (Hngoi et al., 2024). This imbalance not only impacts the organization, but also affects the effectiveness of the service delivery system to the people.

Based on the background of this problem, the main objective of the study is to identify factors that influence job satisfaction among civil servants in Malaysia. This study also aims to analyze the relationship between job satisfaction and their job performance. Research on these two aspects is important to understand the dynamics that influence the performance of civil servants as a whole. By understanding these factors, proactive steps can be taken to improve the current situation and improve the quality of the public service delivery system in Malaysia.

The contributions of this study are diverse and significant to several stakeholders. First of all, to the government, this study offers important information that can be used to formulate policies and initiatives to increase job satisfaction and improve the performance of civil servants. The findings from this study can be used as a basis for reform in the human resource management system in the public sector. Second, to the community, more consistent and quality work performance of civil servants will increase the effectiveness of public service delivery, thus strengthening the people's trust in the government. Third, to the industry, the insights gained from this study can provide inspiration to other large organizations that may face similar challenges, especially in addressing the issue of employee job performance imbalance. Finally, from an academic perspective, this study contributes to the expansion of existing literature by offering a new perspective on the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, especially in the context of civil servants in Malaysia.

The scope of this study is limited to civil servants in Malaysia, focusing on various government departments and agencies. The qualitative approach used allows this study to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and factors that influence civil servants' job satisfaction. Focusing on this context is important to ensure that the study findings are relevant to the current state of the public sector in Malaysia.

To ensure that the structure of this article is clear and easy to understand, it has been organized into several sections. The first section introduces the background of the study, the problem statement, the objectives of the study, and the significance and contributions of the study. The second section discusses a literature review relevant to this study. The third section explains the methodology used in the study, followed by data analysis and discussion in the fourth section. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented in the fifth section. With this structure, this article is expected to provide a clear and detailed picture of the issues studied as well as suggestions for future improvements.

Literature Review

Research on job satisfaction and job performance has become an important topic in the field of organizational management because of its impact on organizational productivity and effectiveness (Yang et al., 2024). In the context of civil servants in Malaysia, the issue of inconsistent job performance is a major challenge that is often associated with low levels of job satisfaction (Gunawan et al., 2024). Therefore, this section will discuss the concepts of job satisfaction and job performance, the relationship between the two elements, gaps in existing research, and the conceptual framework proposed for this study.

Job satisfaction refers to the level of enjoyment or satisfaction an employee has with their tasks and work environment (Yang et al., 2024). Paul E. Spector (1997) defined job satisfaction as the subjective experience of employees that is influenced by various factors such as rewards, promotion opportunities, work relationships, and support from management (Gardiner et al., 2024). In the public sector, job satisfaction is often influenced by job stability, social benefits,

and the feeling that their work contributes to society. Previous studies have shown that high job satisfaction not only increases motivation but also encourages employees to give their best performance (Bolatito & Mohamoud, 2024).

Job performance, in turn, includes two main components as introduced by Borman and Motowidlo (1993): Task Performance and Contextual Performance (Zhang et al., 2025). Task Performance refers to the ability of employees to perform specific and formal tasks according to their role. In contrast, Contextual Performance encompasses additional behaviors such as helping colleagues, showing initiative, and supporting the overall work environment (Hai & Park, 2024). In the public sector in Malaysia, the work performance of civil servants is often affected by high workload, bureaucratic pressure, and lack of adequate resources. Empirical studies show that consistent work performance is essential to ensure the effectiveness of the public service.

The relationship between job satisfaction and job performance has been extensively studied in the literature. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory states that job satisfaction factors such as recognition and achievement play an important role in improving job performance (Ybañez, 2024). Previous studies support a positive relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, indicating that satisfied employees tend to be more committed and productive (Febriana & Mujib, 2024). However, there are also findings that show a weak or insignificant relationship, especially in the context of the public sector. External factors such as work stress, bureaucracy, and resource constraints often act as barriers to this positive relationship.

Although many studies have been conducted on this topic, there are several gaps in the existing research. For example, most studies on the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance have focused more on the private sector, while studies in the public sector, especially in Malaysia, are still limited. In addition, most studies use a quantitative approach, which may not be sufficient to capture individual experiences and perceptions in depth. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by using a qualitative approach to understand the factors of job satisfaction and their relationship with job performance in the context of civil servants in Malaysia.

The conceptual framework in this study is based on two main theories: Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and Borman and Motowidlo's Task-Contextual Performance model. Factors such as promotion opportunities, rewards, and work relationships are considered as independent variables that influence job performance, which are measured through Task Performance and Contextual Performance. Organizational commitment is considered as a mediator variable that strengthens the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance (Pepple & Ambilichu, 2024). This approach provides a clear framework for understanding the dynamics between these elements in the public sector context.

Although there is a general consensus that job satisfaction plays an important role in determining job performance, there is also debate in the literature (Barbu et al., 2025). For example, studies in the public sector have found that job stability and social benefits are more important than intrinsic satisfaction factors in influencing job performance (AlMarzooqi et al., 2025). Other studies have shown that job satisfaction is often neglected in the public sector because employees are more influenced by external factors such as organizational structure and government policies (Obeng et al., 2025). These differences in findings indicate that the

relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is complex and influenced by various contextual factors.

In conclusion, the literature shows that job satisfaction and job performance are two important elements that are interrelated (Mishra et al., 2025). However, this relationship is influenced by various external and internal factors, which require further study to understand its Subtlety. The gap in existing research, especially in the context of civil servants in Malaysia, provides an opportunity for this study to contribute to the existing literature. By focusing on job satisfaction factors and individual experiences, this study is expected to provide new insights that are relevant to the government, community, and other stakeholders.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance among civil servants in Malaysia. This approach involves direct interaction with participants to explore their experiences, perceptions, and views. The research design used is Basic Qualitative Inquiry, which allows researchers to understand the research issue in depth through the collection of rich and meaningful data (Lim, 2025). This design was chosen because it is in line with the study objectives which aim to identify factors of job satisfaction and analyze their relationship with job performance.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which enabled the researcher to deliberately choose individuals who could provide the most relevant and insightful information regarding the research questions (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024). Five civil servants were recruited from different ministries and departments, ensuring diversity in terms of roles, seniority, and organizational functions. Although the sample size was small, it was sufficient to reach data saturation, where no new themes emerged after the fifth interview, consistent with qualitative research standards.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in participants' workplaces between January and March 2024, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. An interview guide with open-ended questions was used to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences, while maintaining flexibility for follow-up questions. In addition, observational notes were taken to capture contextual elements such as workplace interactions and non-verbal cues.

The data analysis process involved coding and thematic analysis, which were carried out manually using Microsoft Word software. The coding process was used to identify the main themes in the data, while thematic analysis helped to organize the data into meaningful and relevant categories with the study objectives (Ahmed et al., 2025). The analysis was conducted in three stages: (1) open coding to identify initial concepts, (2) axial coding to link codes into broader categories, and (3) selective coding to refine and finalize themes. Peer debriefing was also carried out with academic colleagues to strengthen the credibility of the analysis.

In accordance with ethical research standards, participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, and written consent was secured prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, with pseudonyms used in transcripts and reports. Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Overall, the qualitative approach with the Basic Qualitative Inquiry design provides a solid foundation for exploring the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance of civil servants. The data collection and analysis methods used ensure that the research findings are in-depth and relevant, in line with the research objectives. This approach is not only appropriate to the issues under study but also provides meaningful insights to improve work practices in the public sector in Malaysia.

Results And Discussion

This study aims to explore the factors that influence job satisfaction and its impact on the performance of civil servants in Malaysia. Data from five participants were analyzed thematically and summarized in Table 1. To improve clarity, the findings are grouped into two categories: (1) factors enhancing job satisfaction and performance, and (2) factors reducing job satisfaction and performance. A cross-cutting theme, namely recognition, emerged across both categories, indicating that its presence enhances motivation and satisfaction, while its absence reduces morale and undermines performance.

Table 1: Table of Themes and Coding

Interview Questions	Coding	Theme
Experience and factors that affect job satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A supportive attitude of the leader • Success of projects and programmes • Benefits to the target group • Wide range of workloads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership influence on job satisfaction • Impact of work success on motivation
Job satisfaction and its impact on job performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation from the leader • Programme success • Benefits to the target group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct relationship between job satisfaction and performance • Positive impact of appreciation on motivation
Challenges in maintaining consistency in work performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative attitude of the chairman • Frequent policy changes • Lack of appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management challenges to work consistency • Impact of organizational structure changes
Suggestions to improve job satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewards and appreciation • Clear and achievable KPIs • Professionalism courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation as motivation • The importance of clear work planning

Factors Enhancing Job Satisfaction And Performance

Several themes emerged as important drivers of satisfaction and performance. First, leadership support was consistently highlighted. Participant 1 noted: “My boss is good, always gives us the freedom to give ideas and opinions when doing tasks.” This reflects how positive leadership fosters a supportive work environment and strengthens motivation. Second, recognition in the form of appreciation or promotions was described as an important motivator. Participant 3 emphasized: “When we are given recognition such as promotions or rewards, I feel more motivated to do my job better.” Third, project and program success was identified as a source of deep satisfaction. Participant 2 stated: “I feel satisfied when the target group benefits from the activities or programs that we do.” This sense of achievement reinforced their morale and willingness to perform. In addition, participants recommended clearer and more achievable KPIs as well as professionalism courses, which were perceived to improve confidence, planning, and long-term performance consistency.

Factors Reducing Job Satisfaction And Performance

Other themes highlighted challenges that undermined both satisfaction and performance. Negative leadership behaviors, including lack of appreciation, were viewed as demotivating. Participant 4 remarked: “Sometimes, no matter how much effort we put in, our work is not appreciated by the boss.” Frequent policy changes and structural instability were also disruptive. Participant 3 explained: “Policy changes make our work process complicated and slow.” Such challenges created uncertainty and reduced employees’ capacity to maintain consistent performance. Heavy workloads were also cited as a demoralizing factor, adding stress and limiting their ability to deliver effectively.

Cross-Cutting Theme: Recognition

Recognition emerged as a central theme that operated across both enhancing and reducing dimensions. When present, recognition (such as promotions, awards, or verbal praise) increased motivation, satisfaction, and commitment. However, when absent, it became a major source of frustration and dissatisfaction, weakening morale and reducing performance quality. This dual role underscores recognition as a pivotal element in shaping the overall work experience of civil servants.

Theoretical Contribution

The findings of this study also contribute to established organizational theories. For instance, the role of recognition and achievement aligns with Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, where motivators such as recognition and project success enhance satisfaction, while the absence of appreciation reflects hygiene factors that create dissatisfaction. Similarly, the findings support Meyer and Allen’s Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment, as leadership support and recognition strengthened affective commitment, whereas lack of recognition and unstable policies weakened commitment. In addition, the dual influence of satisfaction and commitment on both task and contextual dimensions of performance is consistent with Borman and Motowidlo’s performance model. This explicit linkage demonstrates how the study’s qualitative evidence extends theoretical understanding in the context of Malaysia’s civil service.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study highlight several practical implications for improving job satisfaction and performance among civil servants in Malaysia. Because recognition was consistently reported as lacking, meaningful reward systems such as performance-based incentives,

promotions, and public acknowledgment are essential to enhance employees' motivation and commitment. Similarly, the strong emphasis on leadership support suggests that supervisors should be trained in people-oriented leadership skills to provide encouragement, constructive feedback, and opportunities for employee participation in decision-making.

Furthermore, the study indicates that project success and clear targets enhance satisfaction and performance, implying that well-defined and achievable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are crucial to reduce ambiguity and increase accountability. Professionalism courses and continuous training opportunities are also needed to support civil servants' growth and ensure they are equipped to handle evolving responsibilities.

Beyond individual human resource practices, the findings also point to the need for systemic reforms. Challenges such as frequent policy changes and unstable leadership structures were reported to undermine motivation and performance. Therefore, ensuring greater policy stability, continuity in management practices, and transparent communication during organizational changes are vital to sustain civil servants' trust and performance. In this regard, policymakers should consider long-term strategies for governance consistency, rather than frequent short-term adjustments, to create a more stable and supportive work environment. These practical implications suggest that both targeted HR practices and broader organizational reforms are necessary to create a public service environment that supports job satisfaction, strengthens organizational commitment, and enhances consistent job performance.

In summary, civil servants' job satisfaction is shaped by leadership support, recognition, project success, and growth opportunities, while challenges stem from negative leadership attitudes, lack of recognition, policy instability, and heavy workloads. This overall pattern provides the foundation for the practical strategies proposed above and sets the stage for the study's concluding insights.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth look at the factors that influence job satisfaction and its relationship with the work performance of civil servants in Malaysia. The study findings show that job satisfaction is influenced by the support and leadership of the leader, success in carrying out tasks, appreciation, and benefits provided to the target group. The success of a project or program is found to provide great motivation to employees, while challenges such as frequent policy changes, negative boss attitudes, and lack of appreciation affect employee motivation and commitment. The close relationship between job satisfaction and job performance can also be seen through the success of work that provides additional enthusiasm for civil servants to deliver the best results.

This study emphasizes the importance of positive leadership, clear work planning, and consistent recognition in increasing job satisfaction and ensuring better work performance. In addition, these findings also contribute to the existing literature by providing new insights into the challenges faced by civil servants. The findings of this study provide a solid foundation for future management strategies in the public sector, including recommendations to introduce clear KPIs, meaningful reward programs, and a more systematic and supportive management approach to employees. With these steps, a more productive and positive work environment can be created in the Malaysian public sector.

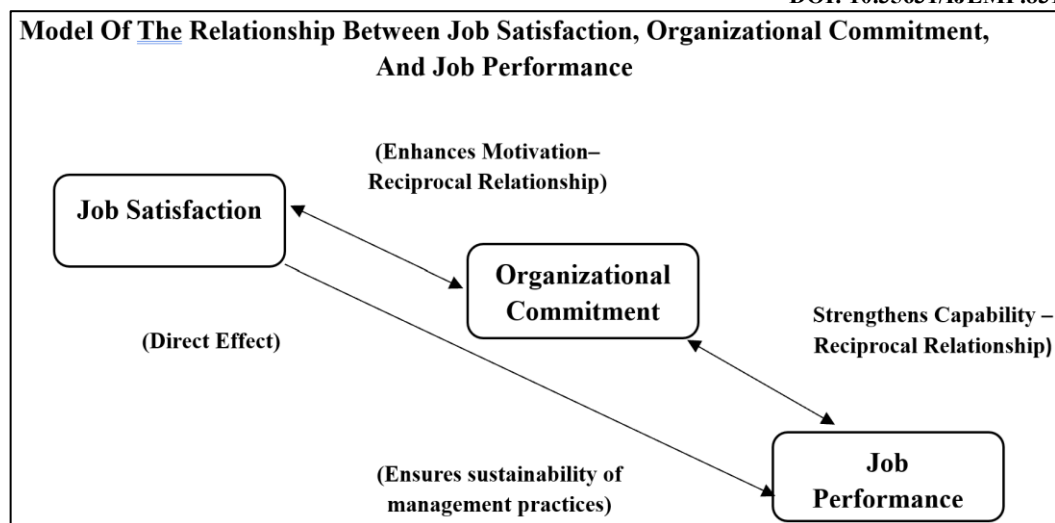


Figure 1: Model Formation to Solve the Problem Statement

The model proposed in this study is the "Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Job Performance Relationship Model" which is designed to address the problem statement related to inconsistent job performance among civil servants. This model connects three main elements: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance.

Job satisfaction is a fundamental factor that influences the motivation and willingness of employees to give their best performance. When employees feel appreciated through appreciation, support from their superiors, and success in performing tasks, the level of job satisfaction will increase. This satisfaction in turn drives stronger organizational commitment. Organizational commitment acts as a mediator, strengthening the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. Committed employees will be more focused, efficient, and able to complete tasks with high quality. In addition, although organizational commitment plays an important role, job satisfaction also directly affects job performance. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to show higher dedication and contribute significantly to the success of projects.

This model was built by taking into account the main challenges identified in the study, such as policy instability, lack of appreciation, and frequent leadership changes. It emphasizes the importance of creating job satisfaction as a foundation for building organizational commitment that ultimately supports more consistent and quality work performance. With this approach, organizations can overcome management issues and provide a more productive and conducive work environment for employees. This model not only serves as a conceptual framework but also as a practical guide to improving the effectiveness of human resource management in the public sector.

Limitations And Future Research

This study is not without its limitations. First, the small sample size of only five civil servants limits the breadth of perspectives and restricts the generalizability of the findings to the wider public sector population. Second, the participants were drawn from selected departments only, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different ministries and agencies in Malaysia. Third, the study relied primarily on self-reported data obtained through

interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias or selective recall, potentially influencing the accuracy of responses.

Future research can address these limitations in several ways. Studies involving larger and more representative samples of civil servants would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies across different ministries, agencies, or hierarchical levels could provide deeper insights into how contextual differences shape job satisfaction and performance. In addition, adopting mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative data would enrich the understanding of these relationships by capturing both the depth of personal experiences and the statistical patterns across larger populations. Such future research would provide a more comprehensive and robust picture of the dynamics between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance in the Malaysian public sector.

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