

EXPLORING THE SATISFACTION OF EMPLOYEES IN THE FREIGHT LOGISTICS INDUSTRY

Dr Chenedzai Mafini

Faculty of Management Sciences, Vaal University of Technology

P. Bag X021

Vanderbijlpark

South Africa

chenedzai@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study developed and tested a conceptual framework that linked job satisfaction to satisfaction to employee-supervisor relationships, task allocation, employment conditions and pay. A questionnaire partitioned into six sections was administered to 247 employees drawn from freight logistics companies located in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Hypotheses were tested using regression analysis. All four factors were statistically significant, which qualifies them as predictors of job satisfaction in a freight logistics environments. The findings of the study provide managers in freight logistics companies with information that may be used to develop strategies for enhancing job satisfaction among employees.

Keywords: Employee-supervisor relationships, task allocation, employment conditions, pay, job satisfaction, freight logistics

1. INTRODUCTION

Success in the freight logistics industry depends, in part, on the quality of service provided by the company. The quality of service provided is to a large extent, determined by employees who form the front line contact with clients. If employees in a freight logistics company are disgruntled with their employers, they typically to pass on their dissatisfaction to the clients. This has adverse consequences on customer satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn, negatively affects profits and overall prosperity of the enterprise. It is supreme then, to direct attention to the satisfaction of employees in freight logistics companies in order to have readily available information on how to improve it for the benefit of the enterprise.

Against the above-chronicled backdrop, this study developed and tested a conceptual framework (refer to Figure 1) that linked job satisfaction to four factors; namely, employee-supervisor relationships, task allocation, employment conditions and pay. Job satisfaction cannot be improved unless its drivers are known. This study identified four of these antecedents and tested their ability to predict job satisfaction within the context of the South African freight logistics industry. As such, this study has the potential to either endorse or challenge previous results on the ability of these factors to predict job satisfaction. The

apparent paucity of studies that have developed and tested a conceptual framework similar to the one in this study added a fundamental impetus to the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

2.1. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1969). It also pertains to an individual's perception and evaluation of his job and this perception is influenced by the person's unique circumstances such as needs, values and expectations (Buitendach & De Witte, 2005). It emphasises the general internal state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction within the individual (Thompson & Phua, 2012). High job satisfaction is a product of such factors as affirmative social intercourse, adequate pay, pay, empathetic superiors as well as attractive employment conditions (Giannikis & Mihail, 2011). In other words, job satisfaction increases when an individual's work environment fulfils his/her needs, values and personal characteristics (Yee, Yeung & Cheng, 2010). The results of job satisfaction include higher commitment, higher employee productivity, increased organisational citizenship behaviours and decreased turnover/ intention to quit (Agarwal & Ferratt, 2001). Therefore, it is widely considered wise for organisations to endeavour to ensure that their employees are satisfied, as this gives yield to an assortment of pertinent benefits to the organisation (Price, 2001).

2.2. Employee-Supervisor Relationships

There are a number of dominant internal relationships in any organisation, with relationships amongst employees, between employees and supervisors and between employees and functional departments being standard examples (Nielsen, Yarker, Brenners, Randall & Borg, 2008). Among these, the relationship between employees and their line managers (supervisors) is arguably one of the most critical (Yeow & Sen, 2006). The right treatment of employees is the first market of the organisation (Bhattacharya & SankarSen, 2003). As such, the creation and management of acceptable internal relationships between management and employees is regarded as a critical activity (Voss, Cable & Voss, 2006).

A study by Nielsen et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between management style and employee well-being through mediation from work characteristics. Consistently, Bono and Ilies (2006) concluded that that proper management styles create a positive emotion and mood among employees. Gilbreath and Benson (2004) further opine that supervisory behaviour is the most overriding factor compared with other workplace factors that influence the happiness of employees. This challenges managers to positively acknowledge the role played by employees and to develop management styles and demeanours that facilitate the satisfaction of the needs of employees in order to ensure that the performance of the organisation is improved (Martins, 2005). Based on this, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H₁: Employee-supervisor relationships significantly predict the job satisfaction of employees in freight logistics companies

2.3. Task Allocation

Task allocation is the process of apportioning clear tasks, in numbers appropriate to the current situation, to specific workers (Duarte, Pen, Keller & Weissing, 2012). O'Donnell and

Bulova (2007) point out that it is necessary to allocate work in line with the abilities of employees, since some employees have higher abilities than others. Proper task allocation attracts a number of desirable returns to the organisation, such as growth of total output in terms of the production levels of both individual employees and the company (Yoon & Suh, 2003). Bolton (2007) further advocates that the fair allocation of workloads results in motivated employees. On the other hand, an inequitable task allocation system may result in high levels of disgruntlement, which may further lead to industrial action and labour turnover (Origo & Pagani, 2009). In allocating work, managers should be fair, taking into account the skills, knowledge and understanding of employees as well as their experience and workloads and the opportunity for development (Lazear & Gibbs, 2009). Inconsiderate task allocation may result in a development in which certain employees are overwhelmed with work while others have less work to do. Consequently, those who have been allocated more work may be overworked leading to loss of production and despondency in the workplace (Duarte *et al.*, 2012). Based on the foregoing discourse, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₂: Task allocation significantly predicts the job satisfaction of employees in freight logistics companies

2.4. Employment Conditions

Employment conditions may be perceived as the circumstances under which the employee works (Forlan & Browne, 2005). These consist of the surroundings that influence an individual at work, with examples being facilities, physical environment, and the degree of safety and noise levels (Nurmala, 2010). Rethinam and Ismail (2008) suggest that employment conditions involve promoting a work environment that is conducive to the satisfaction of employees' needs. Md-Sidin, Sambasivan and Ismail (2010) view employment conditions as a comprehensive factor that includes an individual's job-related well-being and the extent to which work experiences are rewarding, fulfilling and devoid of stress and other negative personal consequences. Employment conditions are meant to capture the extent to which the work environment, job requirements, supervisory behaviour, and ancillary programs in an organisation meet the needs of an employee (Yavari, Amirtash & Tondnevis, 2009).

Employment conditions are also associated with both the health and well-being of employees (Mead, Witkowski, Gault & Hartmann, 2003). Poor employment conditions may be an important source of stress and may therefore contribute to the development of depressive and anxiety disorders (Fabiano, Curro, Reverberi & Pastorino, 2008). Other employment conditions potentially associated with employee health behaviours include working overtime, work fatigue, physically strenuous work and mentally strenuous work (Holcroft & Punnett, 2009). Moreover, Varonen and Mattila (2003) emphasise the importance of safety climate, showing that the more safety-conscious the climate of the company, the lower the accident rate. Issues such as physical workload, machine-paced work or the inability to take a break when tired, lack of training, absence of a lockout program, low seniority and gender are also associated with high injury risk through accidents (Tangen, 2004). It becomes advisable then for organisations to improve the employment conditions of employees by ensuring that safety training is given to employees (Attwood, Khan & Veitch, 2006). In view of this, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H₃: Employment conditions significantly predict the job satisfaction of employees in freight logistics companies

2.5. Pay

Pay may be defined as the reward given to employees for performing their work (Schutte & Eaton, 2004). Most successes or problems in organisations can be traced back to the level of satisfaction with employee rewards as well as the competency of human resources (Katou & Budhwar, 2007). Organisations recognise that people are the true agents in business and that all assets and structures, whether tangible or intangible, are the result of human actions (Guthrie & English, 1997). This could explain why most organisations locally and internationally invest astronomical amounts of money in attracting and placing human talent (Ireland, Hoskisson & Hitt, 2009).

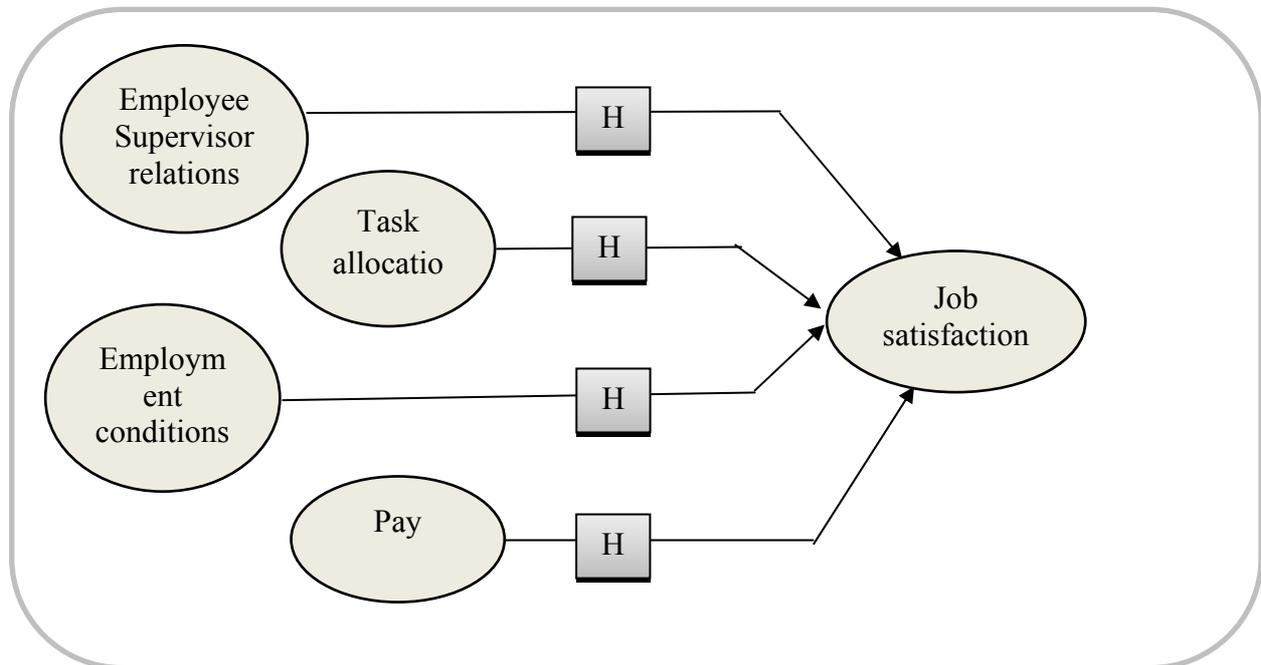
A salary is an important source of income for employees since it determines their standard of living. Pay is a factor in employee retention because it is a component of job satisfaction (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). It is a factor in career choice, as well as the salary gradient between positions and practice opportunities in organisations (Beardsle, Matzke & Rospond, 2008). Salaries also determine the productivity and work performance of employees (Yang, 2008). Van Herpen, Van Praag and Cools (2005) substantiate that pay has a major impact on organisations' capability to catch, retain and motivate high potential employees, which determines the levels of performance within organisations. Furthermore, Estes and Micheal (2005) opine that well-remunerated employees are likely to perform the job efficiently and effectively. This demonstrates that the amount and method of pay is central to the company's production. The aforementioned aspects motivate the following hypothesis;

H₄: Pay significantly predicts the job satisfaction of employees in freight logistics companies

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

After considering the insights gained from the literature review, the following conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 was developed. The framework identifies four factors; employee-supervisor relationships, employment conditions, pay and task allocation as drivers of job satisfaction. Accordingly, four hypotheses; H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄ were postulated.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

For the purposes of this study, the quantitative research approach using the survey method was adopted in the collection of primary data. This approach was preferable because the survey method makes use of questionnaires to obtain data from a sample of respondents selected from the population, which made it directly applicable to this study (Chai & Xiao, 2012).

4.2. Sampling design

The study was conducted among employees at a 13 freight companies that are based in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Respondents were selected using the non-probability availability sampling technique, since it was difficult to access all the respondents at the selected freight companies at the same time. An initial sample size of n=400 respondents was set, using the available historical information. However, 247 usable questionnaires were eventually collected and used in the data analysis, giving an approximate response rate of 62%. The profile of the respondents is reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Categories	N	n	%
Gender	Males	247	143	58
	Females	247	103	42
Employment period in the freight industry	Less than 2yrs	247	45	18
	Between 2-5 years	247	69	28
	Between 6-9 years	247	67	27
	More than 9 years	247	67	27
Type of employment	Permanent	247	168	68
	Contract	247	49	20
	Part time	247	30	12
Highest academic qualification	Matriculation	247	52	21
	Certificate	247	45	18
	Diploma	247	86	35
	Degree	247	42	17
	Higher degree	247	17	7
	Other qualification	247	5	2
Age group	18-25 years	247	42	17
	26-35 years	247	99	40
	36-45 years	247	74	30
	46-55 years	247	30	12
	56+	247	2	1

The profile of the respondents showed that 58% (n=143) of the respondents were male whereas 42% (n=103) of respondents were female. A majority of the respondents (54%; n=134) had been employed for more than six years. Most of the respondents (68%; n=168) were permanently employed in their freight companies. In terms of academic qualifications, the largest group of respondents (35%; n=86) were in possession of a diploma. After collapsing the age groups, it emerged that a majority of the respondents (87%; n=208) were aged between 18 and 45 years.

4.3. Instrumentation and Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using a six-section structured questionnaire. Questions in Section A consisted of five items that elicited the demographic information of respondents. Section B consisted of six questions adapted from Booth and Hamer (2000) and Bono and Ilies (2006) that elicited the respondents' views on their relationship with their supervisors. Section C consisted of four questions adapted from Ruhala et al. (2007) as well as David, Rawley and Polsky (2011) that elicited information on task allocation. In Section D there were five questions that incited the respondents' perceptions on their employment conditions. These questions were adapted from two studies conducted by Lynch (2004) and Kinzl et al. (2004). Section E was composed of six questions (adapted from Fay & Thompson, 2004; Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2006) that elicited the respondents views on their levels of pay. Section F of the questionnaire consisted of 20 job satisfaction questions that were adapted from the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire short form (MSQ) designed by Spector (1985). The questions in Sections B to E were scored on a 5 point Likert Scale with 1 expressing *strongly disagree* and 5 *strongly agree*. Similarly, the Likert scale configuration was in section F but

the scale was anchored by 1= strongly dissatisfied and 5= strongly satisfied. The respondents were requested to indicate their scores on these ranges in the scales.

After their obtaining clearance from management at the selected freight companies, the questionnaire was administered to participants during the month of March 2014. Respondents were given a period of approximately 14 days to complete the questionnaire. In ethical considerations such as the right to anonymity, the right to confidentiality, informed consent, right to privacy or non-participation, and the right to protection from discomfort or harm were adhered to.

4.4. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a computerised statistical package (SPSS Version 22.0) to compute frequency distributions, measures of central tendency and regression analysis.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Validity and Reliability

In order to determine the face and content validity of the measuring instrument, a panel consisting of three experts in the discipline of supply chain management was asked to review the questionnaire items to assess their ability to clearly measure the constructs under consideration. A pre-test involving 20 conveniently selected respondents was also conducted. Feedback obtained from these two procedures facilitated the further refinement of questionnaire items. The internal consistencies of the scales in the measuring instrument were measured using the Cronbach alpha coefficient (refer to Table 2). The Cronbach alpha values for the scales ranged between 0.745 and 0.832. Additionally, the alpha value for the overall scale was 0.791. Since these values were all above the acceptable minimum level of 0.70 which is prescribed by Malhotra (2010). It can be concluded then that the measurement scales used in the study were internally consistent or reliable.

Table 2: Mean Ranking and Reliability Measures

Dimension description	Number of items	Reliability α	Mean	Position in mean score rank
Employee-supervisor relationship	6	0.813	4.184	5
Task allocation	7	0.781	3.927	4
Employment conditions	4	0.773	3.512	3
Pay	6	0.832	4.613	2
Job satisfaction	20	0.745	4.315	1
Overall Scale	35	0.791	4.527	Not applicable

Scale (Sections B-E): 1= Strongly Disagree: 2=Disagree: 3=Neutral: 4=Agree: 5=Strongly agree

Scale (Section F): 1= Very dissatisfied: 2=Dissatisfied: 3=Neutral: 4=Satisfied: 5=Very Satisfied

Table 1 reports the mean scores of the dimensions considered in the study. The mean-scores for the five factors under consideration in this study ranged between 3.512 and 4.613, which

represents inclinations towards either the *agree/strongly agree* or the *satisfied/strongly satisfied* positions on the Likert scales. This result demonstrates that respondents were satisfied with the existing levels of these factors in their organisation. A comparison of the mean scores, shows that pay ($\bar{x} = 4.613$) scored the highest mean, which depicts that respondents were most satisfied with this factor than the other four.

5.2. Regression Analysis

In the current study, hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis. Regression analysis was defined as an inferential statistical technique that is performed to identify the variables that predict or provide the best explanation for the portion of the total variance in the scores of the dependent variables (Malhotra, 2010). Job satisfaction was entered into the regression model as the dependant variable and the four factors; namely, employee-supervisor relationship, task allocation, employment conditions and pay were entered as the independent variables. The results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression Model

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Job satisfaction				
	Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Employee-supervisor relationship	0.271	3.365	0.003	0.751	1.748
Task allocation	0.346	5.448	0.001	0.865	1.288
Employment conditions	0.119	1.951	0.040	0.578	2.321
Pay	0.397	3.317	0.002	0.763	1.364

Model summary: R = 0.476 Adjusted R² = 0.419 F = 15.727 Std. error of the estimate = 0.94863

The four independent factors accounted for approximately 42% ($R^2 = 0.419$) of the variance explained in job satisfaction. Collenariarity statistics for the four independent variables were satisfactory, indicating that the problem of multi-collinearity was insignificant in this study since there were no high correlations between the independent variables. All tolerance values fell above the value of 0.5 prescribed by O'Brien (2007). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values fell between the 1.0 and 4.0 range recommended by Pan and Jackson (2008).

6. DISCUSSION

Hypothesis H₁ found support in this study and was therefore accepted since the regression model revealed that the *employee-supervisor relationship* factor was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.271$; $t = 3.365$; $p < 0.003$). This result demonstrates that the state of health of the relationship between supervisors and employees is an indicator of the level of job satisfaction among employees in the freight logistics workplace. These findings are consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Noblet, Graffam and McWilliams (2008) which concluded that when managers consult their subordinates, the result is a better feeling of belongingness, which leads to better mental health among the employees. Additionally, Booth and Hame (2007) observed that there were reduced stress levels among employees in democratic management

workplaces than in traditional management workplaces where employees do not participate in decision-making.

Managerial support that allows employee feedback and bilateral communication in an organisation is also important because it improves employee well-being (Kassahun, 2005). Conversely, managers who are under pressure may affect their subordinates by bullying them, which causes most of the subordinates to suffer from depression and other ill health problems (Zairi & Jarrar, 2006). Merriman, Schmidt, Ross & Dunlap-Hinkler (2004) further emphasise that managers should understand that their behaviours can severely alter the efficiency, productivity, morale, quality and culture of their organisations if they damage workplace trust. Lufkin (2006:1) adds that an effective manager is one who is able to “manage expectations, monitor stress levels, and make every effort to know” his/her subordinates. Therefore, in order to spur job satisfaction and its wide-array of associated benefits, it is imperative that there be meaningful relationships between supervisors and their employees in the work-place.

Hypothesis **H₂** found support and was subsequently accepted in this study, since the *task allocation* factor was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.346$; $t = 5.448$; $p < 0.001$). This result designates that job satisfaction amongst employees amongst employees in the freight logistics industry is dependent upon the mode of task allocation. Abd-El-Fattah (2010) found that the majority of resignations in organisations can be attributed to disappointment with work allocation within the organisation. This signifies that there is an established positive association between task allocation and the satisfaction of employees (Adebayo & Ogunsina, 2011). Satisfaction with task allocation was also found to be among the top four factors that influence job satisfaction (Boreham, Gray & Blake, 2006). Roelen, Koopmans and Groothoff (2008) also add that task allocation has emerged as a hindrance to the development and success of organisations (both public and private) in any country because it determines the extent to which employees are satisfied with and motivated to achieve organisational goals (Young, 2009).

Task allocation patterns make a major contribution to the effective and efficient operation of the organisation, as they determine the emotional, social and the physical health of employees (Croxon, Propper & Perkins, 2003; Origo & Pagani, 2009). On the contrary, managers who do not clarify the roles and duties of their employees might cause role conflict and role ambiguity among employees. Yang (2008) also advises that role ambiguity and role conflict may cause an individual to suffer from emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, leading to employee dissatisfaction. This means that in order for the organisation to grow, managers must be able to give out work to employees in such a way that both employees and the organisation will benefit in the end (Bebchuk & Fried, 2003).

Hypothesis **H₃** was supported and consequently accepted in this study because the regression analysis disclosed that the *employment conditions* factor was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.119$; $t = 1.951$; $p < 0.000$). This finding portrays that the state of employment conditions reflects the degree of job satisfaction among employees in a freight logistics environment. As acknowledged by Kinzl *et al.* (2004) the environment in which individuals work could influence their level of pride in themselves and the work they do. Spitzer (2007) further impresses that if individuals work in clean, friendly environments they are more likely to be satisfied and look forward to their jobs. A world-class working environment also makes it easier for employees to accomplish their tasks (Turkyilmaz, Akman, Ozkan & Pastuszak, 2011). Hall (2003) supports the notion that employment conditions determine the level of satisfaction that an individual experiences.

Employees prefer to work in environments where lighting, temperature, noise and other environmental factors are safe and comfortable (Van Emmerik, 2004). In the same vein, Krueger, Brazil, Lohfield, Edward, Lewis and Tjam (2002) propose that a good working environment results in good performance of the organisation. It is an important supposition then, to assume that satisfaction of job satisfaction hinges, among other things, on satisfaction with the standard of employment conditions in the freight logistics work environment.

Hypothesis **H₄** was supported and thus accepted in this study as there was a statistically significant relationship ($\beta = 0.397$; $t = 3.317$; $p < 0.02$) between *pay* and job satisfaction. This finding illustrates that one may use pay to measure and forecast the level of job satisfaction among workers in a freight logistics company. As observed by Barbie (2010), the inadequate performance of employees in most organisations could be attributed in part, to dissatisfaction with pay. High and recurring incidence of industrial action, turnover, absenteeism and excessive unionism within organisations may be symptomatic of employees' dissatisfaction with the reward system in place (Nilsson, 2010). A study conducted by Van den Berg (2006) established that pay is strongly and positively related to the welfare of employees. A comparative study of public and private sector organisations conducted by Stedham, Yamamura and Satoh (2006) found that employees are less extrinsically motivated and satisfied with their work because their pay is significantly lower than what their counterparts in the private sector earn. An evaluation of employee perceptions in Greece showed that employees upheld that extrinsic motivation instruments, more specifically the provision of fair wages, could be effective tools to improve productivity (Cardoso & Portugal, 2006). Similar conclusions were drawn by Lazear and Oyer (2004) in a study that examined the satisfaction of employees. Frye (2004) further contends that an increase in wages improves the efficiency of the organisation by enhancing the motivation of the employees. Gavrel and Lebon (2008) similarly found that introducing a market related wage may improve market efficiency by reducing the mismatch between workers and jobs. Some empirical studies reveal that pay incentives affect the behaviour of employees in different organisations (Lazear & Oyer, 2004). It may be suggested then that in order to sustain its operational success, it is vital for an organisation to ensure that its employees are well-remunerated.

7. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, caution should be observed in generalising this study to other settings and contexts, since the findings of the present study are based on a small sample that was drawn from a single province in South Africa. Second, the use of the non-probability availability sampling technique increased the study's vulnerability to sampling bias. Third, the study was conducted using a modified questionnaire which was based on questions that were not originally intended for the current study. In addition, the common limitations that are associated with quantitative data collection techniques that were employed in this research are acknowledged.

A number of implications for further research can be identified. Similar studies may be conducted using larger samples recruited from other organisations that were not included in this study. The study could be conducted using more advanced statistical models such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), which may refine the results of the study. Future studies could also consider other factors that were disregarded by this study. Comparative studies between the results of this study and those obtained from other organisations or

through meta-analyses could also be considered in the future. This could lead to other interesting insights that were not captured in the current study.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the existence of predictive relationships between job satisfaction and four factors; namely; employee-supervisor relationships, employment conditions, pay and task allocation in freight companies. It emerged that all factors were statistically significant, which infers that they are predictors of job satisfaction. It is rational therefore to conclude that job satisfaction among freight logistics employees is dependent on the state of the relationship between supervisors and employees, the standard of employment conditions, the levels of pay and the approach to task allocation.

This study is not without theoretical and practical implications. On the theoretical front, the study provides current evidence of the dynamics in the relationship between the dimensions considered in this study, in the context of freight logistics employees. In this regard, the study serves as a reference source to future researchers on similar issues. On the practical side, managers in the freight logistics industry be able to enhance the degree of job satisfaction amongst workers in their organisations by making strategic improvements on the four independent variables considered in this study.

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