Superior-Subordinate Perceptual Congruence of Promotion Criteria Importance and its Relationship to Job Satisfaction

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SUPERIOR-SUBORDINATE PERCEPTUAL CONGRUENCE
OF PROMOTION CRITERIA IMPORTANCE AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO JOB SATISFACTION

BY

STACIE LEE CLARK
B.S., St. Joseph's University, 1984

THESIS
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Science degree in Industrial/Organizational
Psychology in the Graduate Studies Program
of the College of Arts and Sciences
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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1986
ABSTRACT

The degree of perceptual congruence of the importance of promotion criteria to superiors and subordinates was investigated. The relationship of congruence to job satisfaction was also evaluated. Fifty-two student workers and their superiors participated in the study. Perception of promotion criteria importance was measured through the ratings of a list of promotion criteria using a seven point scale. An average discrepancy score of 7.925 was obtained between superiors' and subordinates' ratings indicating a significant degree of discrepancy, \( t(50) = 25.04, p < .001 \). Job satisfaction was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and was correlated with the discrepancy scores. Perceptual congruence of promotion criteria was found to be significantly related to subordinates' satisfaction with supervision on the job, \( r = -.276, p < .05 \), and satisfaction with present pay, \( r = -.299, p < .05 \).
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INTRODUCTION

"Despite what has been written on the subject, the process of promotion in complex organizations remains surrounded by much ambiguity, contradictions, speculation, and folklore" (Gemmill & DeSalvia, 1977, p. 75). Promotion decisions are judgmental. They are based on subjective criteria that come from numerous and sometimes ambiguous information sources (London & Stumpf, 1981). Unlike hiring decisions, promotion decisions are not made by personnel experts (London, 1978), but by people who are not highly trained in interviewing techniques or personnel matters (Stumpf & London, 1981). According to Lawler (1967, p. 378), all personnel decision making is "at best a rather complex set of trade-offs and compromises, whether it involves promotion, raises, or dismissals."

Promotions are an integral part of the quality of leadership in most organizations though little is known about the process or the effectiveness of these decisions (Stumpf & London, 1981). A particular candidate with a certain set of attributes could be evaluated differently by different people. A study performed by Gaines and Lewis (1982), found significant differences among raters in an oral review board used in police promotions, and concluded
that validity could not be established. Hamner, Kim, Baird, and Bigoness (1974) looked at biases in the promotion decision process and found that higher ratings were given to applicants of the same race as the rater, and females were rated higher than males of equal ability when being assessed for an unskilled job. Lavoegie (1979-80) found that decisions to promote or not promote first-level managers were related to aptitudes, and personality characteristics had little influence on the decision. A contrary finding by Jones (1984) was that individual advancement in work systems with merit-based promotion is directly tied to the willingness to ingratiate oneself with others, particularly superiors.

A candidate could also be evaluated differently by the same person depending on the conditions under which the evaluation is made. Wright (1974) has found that a harassed decision maker has a tendency to accentuate negative evidence. He found that when under time pressures, one becomes extremely alert to discrediting evidence on a few prominent dimensions. These studies illustrate the fact that there are many problems inherent in present day promotion decision making as far as the decision maker is concerned. It has been suggested that through the use of substantial training, decision makers would be better able to weigh more similarly and objectively the criteria for promotion (London & Stumpf, 1981).
Training of decision makers would help with the decisions that are made, but does not help with problems that arise from the organization itself. A step that could be taken here would be for the organization to make its promotion policies more clear (London & Stumpf, 1981). Many organizations depend on an informal system when making a promotion decision (Dessler, 1942). This means that the availability of, and requirements for an open position are kept secret and decisions are made by a certain few managers. When employees are not made aware of available jobs, what criteria is important for the job, or how these decisions are made, the reinforcing property of a promotion may be lost since the link between promotion and performance is largely broken (Dessler, 1942). Any discrepancy between what an employee believes is important for promotion (and thus works for) and what is really important for promotion, could lead the employee to believe that the "reward" of promotion is not contingent on his behavior. This kind of belief could lead to dissatisfaction with the job (DuBrin, 1984). The present study aimed to look at this relationship of what employees believe to be important for promotion and what really is important for promotion (to their managers), and how these beliefs are related to job satisfaction.

The employee working in an organization that uses an informal system of promotional decision making must infer promotion policies based on past practices or the behavior
of managers (London & Stumpf, 1981). According to Dessler (1942), a manager can never assume that his/her employees perceive things as he/she does, or as they "really are". Dessler believes that our perceptions are influenced strongly by what we expect and that these perceptions, in turn, affect how we perform. Beyer, Stevens, and Trice (1980), assume that members of the same organization should perceive criteria for promotion similarly, since they have shared experiences and observations involving promotion. This statement appears valid, but studies done on the congruence of employee and manager perceptions have shown that things are not always perceived the same by people in organizations (Hatfield & Huseman, 1982; Wexley, Alexander, Greenwalt, & Couch, 1980; Maier, Hoffman, Hooven, & Read, 1961).

Perceptual congruence is based on Katz and Kahn's role episode model (1978), which states that the superior is the communicator of role expectations and the subordinate is the receiver who responds in different ways to the sent roles. Thus a subordinate's received role is his/her perception of the sent role. By comparing superior and subordinate perceptions, we see the correspondence of sent and received role expectations. If the sent role, as perceived by the subordinate, is clear then the subordinate understands what his/her superior expects. Conversely, if the subordinate's perception of the sent role is not clear and not understood,
then it is likely that the subordinate is unsure of what is expected of him. How congruent these perceptions are depend on factors such as: the sender and receiver, the content of sent role expectations, and the clarity of communication between sender and receiver (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The role of manager and employee perceptual congruence in organizations has been investigated in many areas (see Hatfield & Huseman, 1982). These studies have consistently shown that superiors and subordinates have differing perceptions.

A study by Maier et al. (1961) interviewed people who held positions typically just under vice-president and an immediate managerial subordinate, on job content and requirements comprising the subordinate's job. They found that in 85% of the 58 pairs investigated, the superior and subordinate agreed on at least half of the job duties comprising the subordinates' job. (Maier et al. felt that it was this high due to job descriptions.) These are not very accurate perceptions of the job content if the superior and subordinate can only agree on half of job duties comprising the job. Comparable findings concerning the requirements the subordinate must fulfill to do his/her job well showed that 64% of the 57 pairs interviewed agreed on half or more of the topics, with 29% agreement on less than half the topics, and 7% with almost no agreement on the topics. These percentages show that employees and their
managers have differing perceptions on a great deal of requirements needed for a subordinate to perform their job well. If they do not agree on what is needed to perform the job well, then most likely they will not agree on what criteria are important in being promoted.

Other studies on perceptual congruence look at its relationship to job satisfaction. A study by Hatfield and Huseman (1982), found perceptual congruence about communication between supervisor and subordinate to be significantly related to job satisfaction. A similar finding by Wexley et al. (1980), on perceptual congruence about attitudes, found that the more congruently a subordinate perceived the manager's attitudes, the more satisfied the subordinate was with the supervision received from the manager. These studies show that a perceptual congruence between managers and subordinates is related to the amount of job satisfaction of the subordinate. This finding corresponds to Wexley and Yukl's (1977) theory of job satisfaction, which states that dissatisfaction sometimes stems from employee misperceptions that are based on inadequate or incorrect information.

In summary, the theories and studies discussed above show that there are many problems involved in different aspects of the promotion process. Also, studies show that superiors and subordinates often disagree about different aspects of the job such as the job duties and requirements
of the subordinate, communication, and attitudes. In some cases, the perceptual congruence of the superior and subordinate has been shown to be related to the amount of job satisfaction of the subordinate. No previous research has explored the perceptual congruence of promotion criteria and its relationship in job satisfaction. This study looked at the congruence of superiors' and subordinates' perceptions of the importance of criteria in promotion decisions as this congruence relates to job satisfaction.

The first hypothesis was that the superiors' and subordinates' perceptual congruence of promotion criteria importance is low (i.e., that the dissimilarity score is high). The second hypothesis was that differences between superior and subordinate ratings of promotion criteria importance are related to job satisfaction with higher congruence being related to higher job satisfaction.
METHOD

Subjects

Two hundred sets of materials were distributed to University of Central Florida students who were currently employed in a full-time job. Fifty-two usable sets were returned. The 52 students who responded comprised the "SUBORDINATE" group, while their supervisors at work who are responsible for promotion decisions and who also responded to the study, comprised the "SUPERIOR" group. Participation in the study was voluntary. Subjects held a wide variety of jobs ranging from a correction probation officer to a bank teller.

Materials and Procedure

Perceived promotion criteria importance was measured through the rating of promotion criteria using a seven-point Likert-type scale (see Appendix A). The superiors and subordinates rated the criteria using this scale. The promotion criteria list (see Appendix B) contains criteria that are generally available when making a promotion decision. The subordinates rated the criteria based on how important they believe the criteria to be to their superior when making a promotion decision. The superiors rated the criteria based on how important they feel the criteria to be when making a promotion decision. Subordinates also
completed the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1975). The JDI is a set of six scales which measures six areas of job satisfaction: work on present job, present pay, opportunities for promotion, supervision on present job, people on present job, and job in general (JIG). The average reliability coefficient for the first five scales is .79 (Smith et al., 1975), and the reliability coefficient for the JIG scale is .945 (P. C. Smith, personal communication, June 2, 1986). Completed ratings and surveys were returned to the experimenter through the use of self-addressed stamped envelopes to ensure the anonymity of participants. Envelopes were coded in advance so that the superior-subordinate relationship was maintained.

Perceptual congruence of the superior and subordinate ratings were calculated using Cronbach and Gleser's (1953) D index, which is the square root of the sum of squared absolute differences on scale items. This is a measure of the similarity/dissimilarity between two sets of scores which takes into account the elevation, scatter, and shape of the profiles and thus, according to Cronbach and Gleser (1953), makes the D score method superior to other methods of measuring profile similarity. The lower the D score, the greater the congruence between superior and subordinate perceptions of promotion criteria importance.
RESULTS

Means and standard deviations for all variables may be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR ALL VARIABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>JDI Subscales&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D Score&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>7.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The higher the score, the greater the discrepancy.

<sup>b</sup>Maximum score = 54 for each subscale.

The mean D score for superior-subordinate ratings of promotion criteria was 7.93, which differs significantly from zero, \( t(50)=25.04, p < .001 \).

Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficients were performed to determine the relationships between the D score and the JDI subscales (see Table 2). The D scores were not found to be related to the JDI subscales of work, promotion, people, and job in general (JIG), all \( p > .05 \). The D scores were found to be significantly related to the JDI subscales
of pay and supervision with $r = -0.299$, $p < 0.05$, and $r = -0.276$, $p < 0.05$, respectively. The negative signs show that a decrease in perceptual congruence is related to an increase in dissatisfaction with pay and supervision.

### TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PERCEPTUAL CONGRUENCE AND JDI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JDI Subscales</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Pay</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>JIG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D Score</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.299*</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.276*</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05

These two dimensions of the JDI, pay and supervision, do seem to be independently related to the D scores as evaluated by their semipartial correlations with the D scores. When all dimensions of the satisfaction index are jointly considered, the semipartial correlations for pay is $sr = -0.25$, $p < 0.05$, and for supervision, $sr = -0.237$, $p < 0.05$. 
DISCUSSION

The results show that there is a significant degree of discrepancy between superior and subordinate perceptions of promotion criteria importance. This agrees with previous research performed on perceptual congruence that has found that things are not always perceived the same by people in organizations, especially between an employee and his/her manager (Hatfield & Huseman, 1982; Wexley et al., 1980; Maier et al., 1961). These discrepancies may be based on poor inferences made on the part of the subordinate about promotion policies. According to Dessler (1942), perceptions are strongly influenced by what we expect, so a superior can never assume that his employees perceive things as they "really are". Another factor that may add to misperceptions is that employees often must learn about promotion policies based on past practices of the behavior of managers (Stumpf & London, 1981b), not on specific, formal, written policies.

The present study has also shown that the less closely a subordinate perceives the importance of promotion criteria to his/her superior, the more likely the subordinate is to be dissatisfied with his supervision on the job and the pay
he receives. A previous study that looked at perceptual congruence of communication between a superior and subordinate found it to be significantly related to the amount of the subordinate's satisfaction with the supervision received on the job (Hatfield & Huseman, 1982). This may be related to the finding in the present study since promotion criteria may well be one of the things that are poorly communicated. If this subordinate has unrealistic perceptions of what is important to get ahead on the job, he/she may not receive frequent promotions, or any at all, since the employee is working towards incorrect goals. This may lead to more dissatisfaction with his/her supervisor compared to someone else whose superior communicates things more clearly, which gives the subordinate a better idea of what is important to get ahead.

The relationship between the degree of discrepancy between superiors' and subordinates' ratings and satisfaction with pay appears to be independent of the relationship that the degree of discrepancy has with satisfaction with supervision. These two measures of satisfaction seem to cover two entirely separate aspects of satisfaction in the workplace. Satisfaction with supervision deals mainly with the interactive aspects of superior and subordinates in the workplace, while pay deals with a more tangible aspect, one that may be an outcome related to how satisfied one is with the level at which they
are working. If a subordinate has unrealistic perceptions of what is important to be promoted, again, he/she may not be promoted often and may be less satisfied with the salary received.

Since no significant relationships were found between perceptual congruence and satisfaction with work or satisfaction with the job in general, then possibly promotions, or the lack of promotions, do not necessarily lead to more satisfaction with the actual work performed on the job.

Other areas of satisfaction not found to be related to perceptual congruence were satisfaction with promotional opportunities and people on the job. These two dimensions of work would appear to be unaffected by the degree of perceptual congruence of promotion criteria between superiors and subordinates. Opportunities for promotion are based on the organizational structure of the workplace which is rigid and would remain unchanged by how realistically an employee perceives what is important to get promoted.

These results show that superiors and subordinates do not always perceive workplace policies in the same way, and that this lack of congruence is related to two aspects of job satisfaction. Thus, clear communication of promotion standards could enhance satisfaction with pay and supervision policies.
APPENDIX A
Rating Scale for Promotion Criteria List

1 -- This criterion is not of any importance in making a promotion decision. It does not influence the outcome of the decision at all. Or, it is not applicable to the present organization.

2 -- This criterion is of very low importance in making a promotion decision. It has a very minor influence on the outcome of the decision.

3 -- This criterion is of low importance in making a promotion decision. It has a minor influence on the outcome of the decision.

4 -- This criterion is of medium importance in making a promotion decision. It has a moderate influence in the outcome of the decision.

5 -- This criterion is of high importance in making a promotion decision. It has a good deal of influence in the outcome of the decision.

6 -- This criterion is of great importance in making a promotion decision. It has a great deal of influence in the outcome of the decision.

7 -- This criterion is of maximum importance in making a promotion decision. It is a major influence in the outcome of the decision.
Promotion Criteria List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rating</th>
<th>criterion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Education - the level attained such as college degree of high school diploma, and its relevance to the open position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Employment History - job experience outside the current organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Job Experience Inside the Organization - positions held within the company and their related job experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Psychological Tests - such as intelligence, personality, vocational interests, and supervisory knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Job Performance Appraisal Information - gathered through performance review forms or ratings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Interview Data - impressions of the candidate gathered while interviewing him/her for the open position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Grapevine - information about candidate transmitted by co-workers or clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Assessment Center Ratings - determines one's potential to perform at a higher managerial level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Supervisory Ratings of Management Potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Seniority - status received due to continuous length of service in the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Candidate's Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Candidate's Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Candidate's Age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Recommendations - those made by others within the organization (peers, other managers, etc.)

15. Political Proficiency - the candidate's ability to be aware and sensitive to the political structure and processes of the organization.

16. Public Image of Candidate - how the candidate presents themselves to others within and outside the organization.

17. Past Participation in Management Training Courses

Type of position you currently hold: ___________________
Dear Fellow Student:

I am a graduate student in the Industrial/Organizational Psychology program at the University of Central Florida. The materials in this package deal with a study that is being conducted for my thesis. This study concerns the perceptions of promotion criteria. I am looking at what criteria you think is important to your supervisor when he/she is promoting someone in your position. I am also interested in what criteria your supervisor thinks is important when promoting someone in your position. Also, I am going to see if any differences between these two sets of beliefs are related to how satisfied you are with your job.

Your package, marked "SUBORDINATE" contains a list of promotion criteria which you are to rate using the attached rating scale. Also, in your envelope is a job satisfaction questionnaire that you are to complete according to instructions. Once these are completed, return them to me by simply placing them in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. Please do not sign your name to any materials to ensure you remain anonymous.

I need you to take the package marked "SUPERIOR" to your superior that generally makes promotion decisions regarding someone in your position. Instructions and an explanation of this study are contained in the "SUPERIOR" envelope. The return envelopes have been coded in advance to maintain the superior-subordinate relationship. Completion and return of the materials are voluntary.

The completion and return of your material and your superior's material would be very greatly appreciated and would be helpful to me since I need as many returns as possible. I need to have returns from both you and your superior to include your data in the study. Please place returns in the mail within one week of receiving this package. Your return of the promotion criteria list and job satisfaction survey will indicate that you give your approval for the use of your data in the study.
Thank you very much for your assistance. If you have any questions at all concerning this study, please feel free to call me at 678-5773 at any time after 5:30 p.m.

Sincerely,

Stacie Clark
Graduate Student

Dr. David Abbott, PhD.
Thesis Chairperson

(Keep this form with my phone number if you wish to contact me at a later date for a copy of the study's results.)
Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student in the Industrial/Organizational Psychology program at the University of Central Florida. The materials in this package deal with a study that is being conducted for my thesis. The subordinate who gave you this package volunteered to participate in the study in the class he/she is taking at the university. No names of volunteers were recorded, so anonymity of participants is assured.

This study concerns the perceptions of promotion criteria. I am looking at what criteria you feel are important in promoting someone in your subordinate's position. I am also interested in what criteria your subordinate thinks are important to you when promoting someone in their position. Also, I am looking at whether any differences in these perceptions are related to how satisfied your subordinate is with his/her job. Participation in this study should take only a few minutes of your time.

Your package, marked "SUPERIOR", contains a list of promotion criteria which you are to rate using the attached rating scale. Once you have completed the scale, return it to me by simply placing it in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. Please do not sign your name to the criteria list to ensure you remain anonymous. Your subordinate will rate the same criteria list and will also complete a job satisfaction survey. The return envelopes have been coded in advance to maintain the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Completion and return of the criteria list is voluntary.

The completion and return of your materials and your subordinate's materials would be very greatly appreciated and would be helpful to me since I need as many returns as possible. I need returns from both you and your subordinate to include your data in the study. Please place returns in the mail within one week of receiving this package. Your return of the rated criteria list will indicate that you give your approval for the use of your data in the study.
Thank you very much for your assistance. If you have any questions at all concerning this study, please feel free to call me at 678-5773 at any time after 5:30 p.m.

Sincerely,

Stacie Clark
Graduate Student

Dr. David Abbott, PhD.
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REFERENCES


