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The Influence of Genetics on Job Satisfaction: A Narrative Literature Review

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Abstract

Job satisfaction plays a crucial role in employee well-being, retention, and organizational performance, yet global surveys show persistently low engagement levels that cost trillions annually. While extensive research has examined situational and environmental factors, the influence of genetic and biological traits on job satisfaction remains underexplored and fragmented. This paper aims to bridge that gap by reviewing and synthesizing existing literature on the genetic underpinnings of job satisfaction, highlighting how heritable traits interact with workplace conditions. Using a multidisciplinary narrative literature review approach, the study draws from psychology, behavioral genetics, and organizational behavior, focusing on peer-reviewed studies indexed in SCOPUS. Findings reveal that genetic factors account for a significant portion of variance in job satisfaction, primarily mediated by stable personality traits and affective dispositions, while also interacting dynamically with environmental factors. For practice, this suggests organizations can design more personalized recruitment and retention strategies; for academia, it expands research to integrate biological insights with workplace studies; and socially, it promotes healthier, more inclusive work environments. Overall, the paper aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Genetic Predisposition, Workplace Interventions, Personality Traits, Organizational Behavior, Sustainable Development Goal

INTRODUCTION

According to Gallup's Global Workplace Report 2022 (Gallup, 2022), only 21% of employees worldwide report being engaged at work, while disengagement is estimated to cost the global economy approximately $8.8 trillion annually. As a key determinant of employee well-being, organizational performance, and retention, job satisfaction has long attracted extensive scholarly attention (Mukherjee, 2018). Central to this body of research is the enduring debate over the relative influence of individual traits versus workplace environments (Mukherjee & Bhat, 2018) on job satisfaction- an issue that traces its roots back to Lewin's (1935) foundational equation (B = f[P, E]) emphasizing the interaction between the person and the environment.

The situational perspective on job satisfaction highlights how organizational factors such as job design, leadership styles, and workplace culture contribute to how satisfied employees feel in their roles (Saritha & Mukherjee, 2021). In contrast, the dispositional perspective focuses on individual differences- including cognitive ability, personality, and increasingly, genetic predispositions-that shape how people experience their work (Cacioppo et al., 2014). While situational determinants have been widely examined, the potential influence of genetic factors remains comparatively underexplored (e.g., Boamah et al., 2022; Niebuhr et al., 2022). This imbalance is striking given that organizations worldwide are making substantial investments in employee well-being (S R Saritha. & Mukherjee, 2024):

companies like Amazon are expanding employee benefits, and global spending on corporate wellness programs is projected to exceed $94.6 billion by 2026.

Against this backdrop, this narrative literature review addresses the question: What does existing research reveal about the extent to which genetic factors influence individual differences in job satisfaction? By synthesizing empirical findings and theoretical insights, this paper seeks to clarify the role of genetics within the broader interplay of dispositional and situational factors. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of job satisfaction, with implications for both organizational practices and future research directions.

Theoretical Underpinning

Behavioral Genetics Theory (Zietsch et al., 2015) provides a foundational framework for understanding how genetic factors contribute to individual differences in job satisfaction. Rooted in the broader field of behavioral genetics, this perspective examines how inherited traits shape human behaviors and attitudes (Bouchard & McGue, 2003). By highlighting the heritability of certain psychological characteristics, this approach helps explain why consistent differences in job satisfaction can persist across individuals, even when they share similar work environments.

A growing body of research has linked job satisfaction to heritable personality traits such as neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness (Ilies & Judge, 2003a; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012)). These traits affect how individuals perceive, interpret, and react to their work contexts (Power & Pluess, 2015; Sanchez-Roige et al., 2018). For example, employees with higher levels of neuroticism tend to report lower job satisfaction due to heightened sensitivity to stressors, whereas those high in extraversion generally experience greater satisfaction, benefiting from their sociability and positive outlook.

In addition to broad personality traits, genetics influence affective dispositions-namely, tendencies toward positive or negative affectivity- which in turn shape how workplace experiences are evaluated (Ilies & Judge, 2003a). Individuals genetically predisposed to positive affectivity are more likely to interpret work events optimistically and maintain higher satisfaction levels over time.

Crucially, gene-environment interactions serve as an important moderating mechanism. As originally suggested by (Power & Pluess, 2015) and further supported by Ilies and Judge (2003), genetic predispositions do not operate in isolation but interact with situational factors such as leadership style, job design, and organizational culture. A supportive and engaging work environment, for instance, may buffer employees from genetic tendencies that would otherwise lower their job satisfaction

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has evolved in scholarly discourse from a simple emotional response to a complex, multidimensional construct. Early definitions, such as those by Churchill et al. (1974), described job satisfaction as an affective state arising from specific job facets like compensation, supervision, and promotion opportunities. Building on this, Locke et al. (1976) provided one of the most enduring definitions, framing job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences.”

As the field matured, researchers began to distinguish between its affective and cognitive dimensions. Churchill et al.

(1974) emphasized that job satisfaction encompasses both emotional reactions and rational evaluations. Moorman et al. (1993) further clarified that cognition-based satisfaction involves reasoned judgments about work conditions, whereas affective satisfaction stems from emotional responses to those conditions. Matzler and Renzl (2022) reinforced this distinction, highlighting its relevance for understanding the varied ways employees experience their work.

Despite its conceptualization as primarily emotional: job satisfaction is frequently measured through cognitive assessments, such as surveys that ask employees to rate aspects of their jobs logically. (Weiss et al., 2022) advanced the definition by describing job satisfaction as a measurable internal state reflecting an individual's degree of liking or disliking their job.

The historical development of the construct further illustrates its complexity. Hoppock (1935) was among the first to frame job satisfaction as a subjective reflection of one's work environment, emphasizing its inherently personal nature. Later scholars, including Kalleberg (1977), conceptualized it as an overall job attitude encompassing multiple facets of work life. Others, like Vroom (1962)., advocated for analyzing satisfaction at the component level- examining how satisfaction with specific elements like pay, coworkers, or advancement opportunities contributes to the broader experience.

Whether defined as an overall feeling or a set of evaluations about particular job aspects, the literature consistently revolves around the employee's positive or negative attitude toward their work (Saritha & Mukherjee, 2021). Importantly, while situational factors such as job design and leadership have received significant empirical attention, research over the past two decades has increasingly pointed to the role of dispositional traits-including genetic influences- in shaping individual differences in job satisfaction. Studies by Judge et al. (2012), and Power and Pluess (2015) have highlighted how heritable traits like neuroticism, extraversion, and positive affectivity partially account for the stability of job satisfaction across different roles and organizational contexts.

This growing line of inquiry suggests that job satisfaction cannot be fully understood without considering the interplay between situational variables and individual predispositions. By situating the concept within both its historical context and emerging genetic perspectives, this literature review underscores the need for an integrated approach that recognizes genetic factors as a meaningful, if still underexplored, dimension of job satisfaction research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper employs a multidisciplinary narrative literature review approach. This method is appropriate for synthesizing complex and diverse findings across fields (Vagvala et al., 2025) such as psychology, behavioral genetics, organizational behavior, and human resource management. The review focuses primarily on empirical and theoretical studies published in reputable, peer-reviewed journals indexed in SCOPUS, ensuring the inclusion of high-quality and relevant research (Sreeja & Mukherjee, 2025).

Unlike systematic reviews, which adhere to rigid protocols and narrowly defined inclusion criteria, the narrative approach offers flexibility to explore and integrate insights from multiple disciplines (Mukherjee, 2025). This adaptability is particularly valuable given the inherently interdisciplinary nature of research on

genetics and job satisfaction, which draws on theories and methods from behavioral genetics, personality psychology, occupational psychology, and organizational studies (Cissey Usman, 2025).

Key search terms included combinations of “job satisfaction,” “genetics,” “behavioral genetics,” “heritability,” “personality traits,” and “gene–environment interaction.” Databases such as SCOPUS, PsycINFO, and Web of Science were consulted to ensure comprehensive coverage. Reference lists of seminal articles were also screened to identify additional influential studies.

FINDINGS & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

A synthesis of the reviewed literature (refer table 1) reveals a consistent pattern: genetic factors play a notable, though not deterministic, role in shaping individual differences in job satisfaction. Foundational twin and family studies such as those by Arvey et al. (1994), Ilies and Judge (2003), and Li et al. (2016) converge on the estimate that roughly one-quarter to one-third of the variance in job satisfaction can be attributed to heritable influences. These findings align with the principles of Behavioral Genetics Theory, which suggest that stable individual traits, like affectivity and core personality dimensions, underlie enduring differences in how people perceive and respond to their work environments.

Several studies deepen this understanding by highlighting the mediating role of personality traits. Ilies and Judge (2003) showed that positive and negative affectivity mediate a large share of the genetic effects on job satisfaction, with the Five-Factor Model explaining a more modest portion. Hahn et al. (2016) extended this by demonstrating that while a genetic component exists, its effects are fully channeled through dispositional traits, reinforcing that genetics shapes job satisfaction indirectly rather than exerting direct influence. This helps explain why employees with similar roles and environments still experience work differently.

Building on broad heritability estimates, more recent molecular genetics research pushes the field toward identifying biological pathways that underlie these predispositions. Song et al. (2011) found links between specific dopamine and serotonin gene polymorphisms and variations in momentary job satisfaction, while Bagozzi and Verbeke (2020) showed that OXTR gene variants associated with social bonding can influence satisfaction, especially when moderated by psychological factors such as attachment style or role conflict. These findings underscore the complex interplay between biological makeup and real-world contexts, supporting the idea of gene–environment interactions first noted by Arvey et al. (1989).

Beyond satisfaction alone, related constructs like job and occupational switching (McCall et al., 1997) and perceptions of organizational climate (Hershberger et al., 1994) further illustrate how genetic influences may extend into broader work attitudes and behaviors. Together, these studies reinforce Lewin’s (1935) classic premise that workplace behavior results from the dynamic interaction between personal traits and environmental conditions.

Yet, despite these valuable contributions, tensions and gaps remain. Twin studies like Li et al. (2016) demonstrate the stability of genetic effects over time but fall short of explaining the

underlying biological mechanisms, while molecular genetics studies provide early clues about specific genes but often lack replication and generalizability across work settings. Moreover, findings such as those from Hahn et al. (2016) remind us that the majority of variance in job satisfaction still stems from non-shared environmental influences. This highlights the ongoing relevance of leadership, job design, and organizational culture, and cautions against any notion of genetic determinism.

These limitations suggest several ways future research could strengthen its contributions for both scholars and practitioners. For academia, moving beyond heritability estimates toward identifying and replicating specific genetic markers in diverse organizational settings would provide deeper, more actionable insights. Integrating molecular genetics with other disciplines such as neuroscience and occupational psychology could help clarify how genetic factors translate into moment-to-moment workplace experiences. Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies would be particularly valuable in testing whether these gene-environment interactions hold across time, industries, and cultural contexts, addressing the over-reliance on Western samples and bringing greater inclusivity and relevance to the field.

At a practical level, more research on how genetic predispositions interact with concrete organizational practices would help HR professionals and leaders design interventions that support different dispositional needs. For example, while some employees may thrive under high social interaction, others may benefit more from flexible or quieter work arrangements. Studies could explore how leadership development, job crafting, and mental health initiatives can be adapted to align with diverse dispositional profiles. Understanding this nuance could help organizations reduce turnover, enhance employee well-being, and build truly supportive cultures.

Finally, advancing this field responsibly means foregrounding ethics and social responsibility. Scholars and practitioners alike must be mindful of how genetic insights are used, ensuring that individual differences are respected and that no stigma or misuse arises from biological profiling. Policies and practices developed from these insights should promote fairness, inclusivity, and decent work for all, aligning with global goals such as UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

This narrative review consolidates and critically synthesizes the existing research on the influence of genetic factors on job satisfaction, demonstrating that heritable traits-particularly affective dispositions and core personality dimensions such as Extraversion and Neuroticism- play a significant, though not deterministic, role in shaping how employees experience their work. Across studies, heritability estimates for job satisfaction generally range from about 25% to 50%, yet the consensus remains that these genetic predispositions interact continuously with environmental factors such as leadership styles, organizational culture, and job design. This reinforces the perspective rooted in Lewin’s interactionist framework, which holds that behavior is a function of both personal and environmental factors.

For academic researchers, these insights encourage moving beyond situational explanations to include biological factors in understanding job satisfaction. By connecting behavioral genetics, psychology, and organizational behavior, this paper supports more

integrated, multidisciplinary research. Combining molecular genetics and neuroscience with workplace studies can build richer models of how genetic markers and work experiences jointly shape employee well-being.

There is also clear scope to expand research beyond Western samples. Many studies overlook how culture, gender, and socioeconomic context affect gene-environment interactions at work. Using cross-cultural frameworks and intersectional perspectives can make future research more globally relevant and inclusive, helping organizations better understand diverse workforces.

For practitioners, these findings offer practical value. Knowing that job satisfaction is partly linked to stable traits suggests that personality assessments could improve recruitment and job fit. Organizations can also design flexible work environments and supportive leadership to offset genetic risks, boosting satisfaction and retention. Overall, these insights help employers foster healthier, more productive workplaces.

This line of research also carries important social implications by encouraging organizations to create work environments that better align with employees' intrinsic needs. By acknowledging how genetic and dispositional factors interact with workplace dynamics, employers can cultivate cultures that promote mental well-being, fairness, and inclusion, while reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction. These practices not only improve individual quality of life but also support broader economic and social goals. In this sense, the paper's recommendations contribute directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), by promoting sustained, inclusive, and productive employment that benefits both employees and organizations.

In conclusion, this review achieves its aim of consolidating existing studies to provide a comprehensive perspective on the genetic influences that shape job satisfaction. The evidence makes clear that genetic factors, while significant, are part of a dynamic system where person and environment interact continuously. The paper highlights robust findings on heritability, clarifies the mediating role of affect and personality, and points to important gaps, including the need for more cross-cultural, intersectional, and occupational studies. By outlining directions for future research, the paper sets a foundation for a more holistic understanding of workplace well-being. For scholars, it expands the theoretical landscape; for practitioners, it provides actionable insights for better talent management; and for society, it supports the development of work environments that are healthier, more inclusive, and more sustainable for all.

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TABLE 1

TITLE & AUTHOR	FINDINGS
1. Genetic influences on job satisfaction and work values (Arvey et al., 1994)	Significant genetic influence was observed, aligning with the findings of Arvey et al. (1989).Genetics substantially contributed to the variance in intrinsic job satisfaction.
2. Are Genetic Influences on Job Satisfaction Stable Across Time? A Three-Wave Longitudinal Twin Study.(Li et al., 2016)	Positive and negative affectivity mediated the genetic influence on job satisfaction. General mental ability did not mediate this relationship.
3. On the heritability of job satisfaction: The mediating role of personality. (Ilies & Judge, 2003b)	PA-NA Model: Stronger mediator of genetic effects on job satisfaction. Mediates approximately 45% of the genetic variance in job satisfaction. Five-Factor Model (FFM):Mediates about 24% of the genetic variance in job satisfaction
4. Genetic Influences Job and Occupational Switching. (McCall et al., 1997)	A significant genetic influence on the tendency to switch jobs and occupations was identified. Genetic factors contribute to individual differences in job and occupational switching.
5. Genetic influences on job satisfaction: A reply to Cropanzano and James. (McCall et al., 1997)	Despite limitations, the study's findings align with behavioral genetic theory, suggesting that work attitudes are partially influenced by genetic factors.
6. Associations between dopamine and serotonin genes and job satisfaction: Preliminary evidence from the Add Health Study. (Song et al., 2011)	The study demonstrates a link between genetics and job satisfaction, advancing the understanding of how biological factors contribute to workplace attitudes.
7. The Heritability of Job Satisfaction Reconsidered: Only Unique Environmental Influences Beyond Personality. (Hahn et al., 2016)	28% of job satisfaction was attributed to genetic factors. All genetic influences were mediated by personality traits. 72% of job satisfaction was explained by non-shared environmental factors
8. A polymorphism in the serotonin Receptor 5-HT2A Gene, Stressors, and Momentary Job Satisfaction (Song et al, 2011)	The G allele of the -1438A/G SNP was negatively associated with momentary job satisfaction. Participants with the G/G genotype reported the lowest average job satisfaction
9. Genetic and environmental influences on perceptions of organizational climate. (Hershberger et al., 1994)	Significant genetic effects were found for the perception of a supportive organizational climate (22% variance) and annoyance (27% variance), but not for time pressure or job satisfaction.
10. Genetic basis of job attainment characteristics and the genetic sharing with other SES indices and well-being (Song et al., 2022)	The six job attainment traits showed moderate to high genetic correlations with each other, meaning they share some common genetic influences.
11. Genetic and psychological underpinnings of motivation and satisfaction of industrial salespeople. (Bagozzi & Verbeke, 2020)	OXTR gene variants (GG carriers) are positively associated with job satisfaction, especially in those with low anxious attachment and low role conflict.