

MINNESOTA SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (MSQ)

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October 13, 2025

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2025). *MINNESOTA SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (MSQ)*.
PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=44211>

MINNESOTA SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (MSQ)

Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Organizational Behavior, Vocational Psychology

1. Core Definition

The **Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)** is a highly respected and widely utilized psychometric instrument designed to measure an individual's level of job satisfaction across various facets of the work environment. Developed initially at the [University of Minnesota](#), the MSQ provides a structured and quantifiable assessment of how satisfied an employee is with specific reinforcers in their job, moving beyond simple global satisfaction scores to identify precise areas of fulfillment or frustration.

The fundamental premise of the MSQ is that job satisfaction is a multidimensional construct influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Unlike instruments that only gauge overall happiness, the MSQ systematically breaks down satisfaction into scales that measure distinct aspects, such as compensation, supervision, co-workers, recognition, and the nature of the work itself (e.g., variety, autonomy). This granular approach allows researchers, human resource professionals, and counselors to diagnose specific sources of discontent or success within a job role or organizational context.

The instrument is available in two main formats: a comprehensive Long Form, which measures satisfaction across 20 distinct scales, and a concise Short Form, which provides scores for Intrinsic Satisfaction, Extrinsic Satisfaction, and General Satisfaction. The reliance on standardized, validated scales makes the MSQ an invaluable tool for both academic research into the psychology of work and practical organizational management, ensuring reliable data collection across diverse populations and industries.

2. Historical Development and Origin

The development of the MSQ is rooted in the extensive research conducted by the Minnesota Work Adjustment Project (MWAP) at the University of Minnesota's Industrial Relations Center during the 1960s. Key researchers involved in its creation included David J. Weiss, Rene V. Dawis, Lloyd H. Lofquist, and George W. England. The project's overarching goal was to understand the vocational rehabilitation process and predict how individuals would adjust to their working environments. The MSQ was a critical component of this effort, providing the necessary metrics to evaluate the affective component of work adjustment.

The theoretical cornerstone underpinning the MSQ is the [Theory of Work Adjustment \(TWA\)](#). TWA posits that tenure and satisfaction are functions of the correspondence between an individual's

vocational needs and the structure of the work environment (the set of reinforcers provided by the job). The MSQ was specifically created to operationalize the measurement of satisfaction--the affective response that results when the environment successfully meets the individual's needs. Therefore, its structure reflects the TWA framework, mapping individual needs onto environmental characteristics.

Following its initial validation and publication in 1967, the MSQ quickly gained traction within the fields of I/O psychology and human resources. Its detailed factorial structure and robust psychometric properties allowed it to supersede many earlier, less comprehensive measures of job satisfaction. While initially focused on vocational rehabilitation, its utility expanded rapidly, becoming a de facto standard for assessing employee attitudes in organizational research, contributing significantly to our understanding of employee morale, retention, and performance across the United States and globally.

3. Structure and Administration (MSQ Scales)

The MSQ utilizes a simple, standardized administration format, typically employing a five-point Likert-type scale where respondents indicate their level of satisfaction, ranging from "Very Dissatisfied" to "Very Satisfied." The choice between the Long and Short Forms depends on the specific goals of the assessment, balancing comprehensiveness against time constraints and respondent burden.

The **MSQ Long Form** is the most comprehensive version, consisting of 100 items distributed across 20 distinct facet scales. Each facet is represented by five items. This level of detail allows practitioners to pinpoint exactly which elements of the job--from technical supervision to the freedom to use one's abilities--are driving overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The 20 scales provide an intricate profile of an individual's affective experience in the workplace, making it ideal for deep organizational diagnostics and individualized career counseling.

Conversely, the **MSQ Short Form** is highly efficient, comprising only 20 items--one representative item from each of the 20 Long Form scales. While it loses the granularity of the full instrument, the Short Form is preferred for large-scale surveys, longitudinal studies, or situations where time is highly limited. It yields three primary scores: Intrinsic Satisfaction, Extrinsic Satisfaction, and a composite General Satisfaction score. Both forms are generally completed in under 15 minutes (Short Form) to 30 minutes (Long Form) and are available in various languages, facilitating international research.

4. Key Components: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Satisfaction

A critical contribution of the MSQ is its clear distinction between the sources of job satisfaction, which are categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This dichotomy is central to understanding

motivation and long-term vocational fulfillment.

Intrinsic Satisfaction refers to the satisfaction an individual derives directly from performing the job tasks themselves, reflecting personal achievement, growth, and utilization of abilities. These factors are internal to the individual and often relate to higher-order needs, such as self-actualization. High intrinsic satisfaction suggests that the employee finds the work inherently meaningful and engaging. The MSQ scales contributing to this component include:

Ability Utilization: Satisfaction with the chance to use personal abilities and skills.

Achievement: Satisfaction derived from the feeling of accomplishment.

Activity: Satisfaction with being busy all the time.

Independence: Satisfaction with the ability to work alone and make decisions.

Variety: Satisfaction with the opportunity to do different things.

Extrinsic Satisfaction relates to the rewards and conditions surrounding the job rather than the job content itself. These factors are external to the individual and are often controlled by the organization, such as compensation, working conditions, and social relationships. While extrinsic factors are essential for preventing dissatisfaction, they are generally considered less powerful drivers of deep, long-term vocational fulfillment than intrinsic factors. The MSQ scales contributing to this component include:

Compensation: Satisfaction with pay and the amount of work done.

Supervision (Technical and Human Relations): Satisfaction with the competence and fairness of the supervisor.

Company Policies and Practices: Satisfaction with management decisions and general organizational climate.

Working Conditions: Satisfaction with the physical environment, hours, and facilities.

Security: Satisfaction with job stability and organizational permanence.

The separation of these two types of satisfaction allows researchers to test sophisticated hypotheses regarding motivational theories, such as Herzberg's two-factor theory, which suggests that intrinsic factors lead to motivation and satisfaction (motivators), while extrinsic factors prevent dissatisfaction (hygiene factors).

5. Psychometric Properties (Reliability and Validity)

The enduring popularity and effectiveness of the MSQ stem largely from its documented and continuously verified psychometric soundness. This rigorous testing ensures that the instrument accurately and consistently measures the construct of job satisfaction.

Regarding **reliability**, the MSQ demonstrates high levels of internal consistency. Studies across

various populations consistently report high Cronbach's alpha coefficients, typically ranging from 0.85 to over 0.90 for the General Satisfaction scale, and acceptable levels (often above 0.70) even for the individual facet scales, particularly in the Long Form. This indicates that the items within each scale are measuring a common underlying construct. Furthermore, test-retest reliability studies, which measure the stability of scores over time, generally show high correlation coefficients, suggesting that the MSQ is a stable measure of job satisfaction unless significant changes in the job environment occur.

The **validity** of the MSQ has also been extensively documented. Construct validity, which confirms that the instrument measures the theoretical constructs it intends to measure (i.e., the 20 distinct facets), has been supported through numerous factor analytic studies. These analyses typically confirm the intended factorial structure, particularly the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction components. Criterion-related validity is frequently established by demonstrating significant correlations between MSQ scores and relevant outcomes, such as employee performance, organizational commitment, and inversely, with turnover intentions and absenteeism. High satisfaction scores, particularly on intrinsic scales, are consistently found to be predictive of positive work behaviors.

The MSQ's strong psychometric foundation makes it highly adaptable. It has been translated and validated for use in dozens of countries and cultures, though cross-cultural validation efforts sometimes require minor adjustments to specific items to maintain cultural equivalence while preserving the underlying theoretical factor structure.

6. Applications and Usage

Due to its breadth and reliable measurements, the MSQ is utilized across a vast spectrum of academic and practical settings, playing a crucial role in understanding the interplay between the worker and the work environment.

In **Organizational Development and Human Resources**, the MSQ serves as a vital diagnostic tool. Organizations frequently use it to gauge the success of management initiatives, policy changes, or restructuring efforts. By administering the MSQ before and after an intervention, organizations can quantitatively assess the impact on employee morale and satisfaction in specific areas (e.g., changes in compensation policy impacting the "Pay" scale, or changes in reporting structure impacting the "Supervision" scale). This targeted feedback allows for efficient resource allocation and focused managerial action.

In **Vocational Psychology and Career Counseling**, the MSQ maintains its original utility rooted in TWA. Counselors use the MSQ results, often alongside measures of individual needs and abilities, to help individuals identify work environments that are likely to be congruent with their personal characteristics. High-satisfaction areas identified by the MSQ can guide an individual

toward suitable career paths, while low-satisfaction areas can prompt discussions about necessary environmental modifications or career transitions.

The MSQ is also foundational in **Academic Research**, where it is used as the standard dependent or independent variable in studies investigating job-related phenomena. Researchers leverage its detailed facet scores to examine complex relationships, such as the link between specific leadership styles and employee satisfaction with supervision, or the relationship between organizational culture and satisfaction with company policies. Key applications include:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of employee training and incentive programs.
- Predicting employee turnover, absenteeism, and organizational citizenship behaviors.
- Benchmarking satisfaction levels against industry standards or internal organizational departments.
- Investigating generational differences in intrinsic versus extrinsic job motivators.

7. Limitations and Criticisms

Despite its long history and strong validation record, the MSQ is not without its limitations, which are often cited in contemporary organizational psychology literature.

One primary concern relates to the instrument's age. Developed in the 1960s, some critics argue that certain items or scales may not fully capture the complexities of the modern workplace, which is characterized by factors like remote work, global teams, agile structures, and the influence of technology. While the core psychological constructs of intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction remain relevant, the specific language used for some facets might feel outdated or less relevant to emerging job roles, necessitating careful interpretation or occasional modernization of administration protocols.

Furthermore, the reliance on a standardized Likert response format (e.g., "Very Dissatisfied" to "Very Satisfied") imposes certain constraints. The forced-choice nature of the scale inherently restricts the expression of nuanced or ambiguous affective states. Individuals who feel neutral, indifferent, or who struggle to categorize their complex emotional response to a job element may select the midpoint, potentially leading to a loss of rich qualitative data that open-ended questions might reveal. Moreover, the five-point scale may suffer from central tendency bias, where respondents avoid extreme answers.

Practically, the length of the Long Form (100 items) can present an obstacle. In organizational settings, time constraints and the risk of respondent fatigue are significant. Long questionnaires can lead to less thoughtful responses toward the end, potentially compromising data quality. While the Short Form addresses this, the trade-off is the loss of the detailed diagnostic information provided by the 20 specific facets, limiting the depth of organizational interventions.

8. Further Reading

Weiss, D. J., Dawis, R. V., Lofquist, L. H., & England, G. W. (1967). *Manual for the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire*. University of Minnesota.

[Theory of Work Adjustment \(TWA\) - Wikipedia](#)

[University of Minnesota Research Resources](#)

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