

## Need Salience, Job Involvement, and Well-being in Railway Employees

Ms. Soma Mohapatra  
Dr. Fakir Mohan Sahoo

Doctoral Scholar, Psychology Department, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack – 753003  
Research Professor, Xavier University, Xavier Square, Bhubaneswar – 751013

### Abstract

The present investigation is geared to examine the need salience framework of job involvement. The framework posits that job involvement is significantly related to salient need satisfaction and it is unrelated to nonsalient need satisfaction. The proposition was investigated in the context of Railway sector. One hundred two Railway employees (57 males and 45 females) participated in the study. Within males, there were 32 executives and 25 assistants; within females there were 24 executives and 21 assistants. All participants were individually administered a measure to rank-order the priority of their needs. Subsequently they were administered measures of job satisfaction, job involvement and psychological well-being. The use of appropriate statistical analysis revealed that job involvement is significantly related to salient need satisfaction, but unrelated to nonsalient need satisfaction. These were in congruence with our prediction. Psychological well-being was also found to be associated with salient need satisfaction. The findings were explained in terms of need salience theory. Major implications were outlined.

**Key words:** *Salient needs, Nonsalient needs, Job involvement, Job satisfaction, Psychological well-being*

Indian Railways is a vast organization with complex processes. It is the largest nonmilitary employer in the world with a workforce of 13 million employees. The vastness of the organization can be gauged from the fact that it has a railway network of more than 70,000 kms, connecting the country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. The large network carries about 2 crore people and more than 2 million tons of cargo in a daily basis. Being a state-run organization, it is almost the unifying lifeline of this diverse nation.

With a history of more than 160 years, the organization has come through various phases of development. The men and women of Indian Railways not only run trains of all kinds, they also run the largest chain of schools, hospitals, hostels, guest houses, hotels and training institutes. Being so large, discipline and ethics are of paramount importance. The very nature of having to deliver a certain quantity and quality of service within the fixed time creates an atmosphere of perpetual urgency in workplace. The optimum use of human resources requires a deeper understanding of the dynamics of employees' motivation, satisfaction, and well-being.

Good management and high productivity go hand in hand. The concept of productivity has come into greater prominence during recent years in the context of rapid development in India. Despite the importance of studying employees' motivation, the approaches do not appear to be pancultural in their application.

### Early Approaches

Prior to empirical approach, the concept of *work alienation* was offered in the philosophical and discursive tradition. Borrowing the term from the Bible, theologians used it as an explanatory concept to denote a state of separation. Although it originally meant separation from God, the secondary feature denoted the individual's affective experience with a state of separation. An alienated individual was perceived as showing cool, aversive, hostile and unwelcome feelings towards the object of separation. The negative affective states of dissatisfaction and hostility among workers were described as indicators of work alienation.

Subsequently social contract theorists like Hobbes and Locke used the term to denote “renouncing” or “transferring” one’s right while entering the social contract. Such alienation was viewed desirable because the long-term gains would outweigh the personal loss.

Hegel (1949) referred to the surrender of transfer of individual’s right. Hegel’s view implies that alienation or separation from job, work and organization is not desirable. In order to overcome such alienation, employees need to make personal sacrifices. They need to attach greater importance to work and organization.

Marx (1963) provided an elaborate view of alienation. Marx followed Hegel’s philosophical tradition, but articulated an empirical notion. For Marx, man’s essential characteristics are those of individuality, sociality, and sensuousness. According to Marx, labour alienation represents a loss of individuality or separation of individuals from the labour when men do not experience themselves as the acting agents in their grasp of the world, they feel alienated. Thus, the absence of workers’ autonomy and control at the workplace are the necessary and sufficient conditions of alienation. In other words, alienation is a form of separation from work through the frustration of a worker’s *intrinsic needs*.

Drawing on the Marxian framework, sociologists have sought to explain factors associated with work alienation. Weber’s (1930) treatment of the concept of alienation is similar to that of Marx. However, Weber treated alienation as a much more widespread social phenomenon than did Marx. Both believed that the individuality or personal worth of workers is determined by their labour. Alienation results from working conditions that deny an expression of individuality.

The most frequent sociological usage explaining alienation involves Durkheim’s (1893) concept of *anomie*– a condition of normlessness. According to Durkheim, anomie is endemic in societies and virulent in economic sector where all the customary restraints and moral limits on person’s aspirations are undermined by greed. When the conditions of anomie prevails, there is chaos. People are socially unstable. Anomie signifies the state of mind of those who have no longer any standards but only disconnected urges. The anomie persons are spiritually sterile, responsive only to themselves, responsible to no one. They live on the thin line of sensation between no future and no past.

### **Psychological Approach**

In contrast to the sociological approach, psychologists have attempted to analyze the problem of alienation from the point of view of job involvement at work rather than alienation at work. In trying to explain the nature of job involvement, they have attempted to operationalize job involvement, to identify its antecedents, to determine its moderators, and to specify its consequences. In general, job involvement refers to psychological identification with one’s work or the degree to which the job situation is central to the person or his/her identity.

The bulk of the psychological research on job involvement has gravitated towards the analysis of the causes of job involvement. One group of theories is directed towards identifying the specific human need that is significantly linked with job involvement. Although McClelland’s (1967) need achievement theory – stressing that a person’s job involvement is a function of his/her need achievement – had some amount of initial success, it was eclipsed by more elegant later theories.

Though stated independently, the theories of Maslow, Herzberg and Alderfer can be grouped under “Maslow-type framework”. These psychological formulations have basically followed humanistic tradition suggested by Maslow (1954).

Maslow posited the construct of *need hierarchy*. Maslow believed that a person’s motivational needs can be arranged in a hierarchical manner; once a given level of need is satisfied, it no longer serves to motivate the individual. The five levels are physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. As soon as a lower-order need is satisfied, its potency diminishes and next level need arises to replace it. It is important to recognize that higher-order needs (self-esteem and self-actualization) do not lose

their potency easily and continue to motivate employees. An organization is effective in motivating its employees to the extent the organization provides conditions for the satisfaction of higher-order (intrinsic) needs.

Herzberg (1966) and Alderfer (1972) posit similar propositions using different usages. Herzberg distinguishes two categories of needs: hygiene (maintainance) needs and motivators. According to Herzberg, hygiene factors or maintainance factors describe basically the context and these serve the primary function of preventing job dissatisfaction. Motivators, on the contrary, refer to content factors and these factors are significantly related to promoting motivation. A close comparison between Maslow and Herzberg would reveal a striking similarity; Maslow's lower-order needs are Herzberg's maintainance factors whereas Maslow's higher-order needs are Herzberg's motivators. Similarly, Alderfer's ERG theory posits that human needs can be arranged in terms of "existence, relatedness and growth" needs. Thus, the underlying principle involves a transition from extrinsic needs to intrinsic needs.

While Maslow-type framework has been accepted as a working model of securing job involvement in contemporary organization, a critical examination identifies two major limitations.

First, it appears that there is much valorization in Maslow-type frameworks. Science ought to be ethically neutral. Although this is not completely possible in social and behavioural sciences, a reasonable level of neutrality is desirable. Yet Maslow seems to equate lower-order needs with inferior needs and higher-order needs with superior needs. This kind of valorization is not consistent with scientific temperament.

Second, Maslow-type of conceptualizations were formulated and developed in Euro-American contexts. As such, there is cultural bias built into the system. In western societies, much premium is given to individuality and individual needs are considered more important than social needs. This importance is reflected in the theories of Maslow and Herzberg where security and social needs are considered less important than individual needs (e.g., self-esteem needs) Hofstede (1980) has identified individualism-collectivism as one of the fundamental work values across the globe. There are significant differences between individualistic ("me") societies and collectivist ("us") societies. The issue of security and community needs is still a vital concern to countries of Asia and Africa.

In view of these considerations, the application of Maslow-type explanations of job involvement appears inappropriate to nonwestern situations.

### **A Pancultural Model of Need Salience**

In order to get around the problem of ethnocentric bias in motivational theories, cross-cultural psychologists have proposed a pancultural model of work behaviour (Kanungo, 1982). In such a model, the notion of *need salience* is offered as an integrative construct. Sahoo and his associates have also provided convincing evidence in this context (Sahoo, 2000; Sahoo & Bidyadhar, 1995; Sahoo, Nanada & Sia, 1995; Sahoo & Rath, 2003; Sahoo & Sahoo, 2003).

The construct of need salience assumes that there is no fixed hierarchy of needs across several subsets of human population. At an empirical level, people attach greater priority to certain needs as compared to other needs. The salience of needs in any individual is determined by his or her past socialization in a given culture and is constantly modified by present job conditions. Moreover, job involvement is determined by salient need satisfaction potential. More specifically, need salience formulation posits the following two basic propositions.

1. *Job involvement is significantly related to salient need satisfaction.*
2. *Job involvement is unrelated to non-salient need satisfaction.*

For instance, individuals may be asked to indicate their priority ratings for a number of needs (say a list of 15 needs). Thus, needs rated first and second are regarded salient needs whereas the needs rated fourteenth and fifteenth are considered non-salient needs.

The theory predicts that satisfaction of salient needs would bear a significant positive correlation with job involvement. In contrast, satisfaction of non-salient needs would yield a near-zero correlation with job involvement.

### **The Study**

The basic objective of the study is to examine the proposition that job involvement is significantly related to salient need satisfaction and unrelated to nonsalient need satisfaction. The purpose is also to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction and psychological well-being. The study is anchored to the context of railway employees.

### **An Overview of Design**

The study involves a 2 (gender) x 2 (job categories: executives versus assistants) factorial design where executive and assistant employees are crossed with male and female categories. The dependent variables include perceived importance of job outcomes, job satisfaction, job involvement, and well-being.

### **The Sample and Setting**

One hundred two (57 males and 45 females) railway employees participated in the study. Within male employees, there were 32 executives and 25 assistants. Similarly, there were 24 female executives and 21 female assistants. The participation was on voluntary basis. They were contacted at their residences and tests were administered individually during their leisure hours. All participants were debriefed after the completion of the study.

### **The Instrument**

The questionnaire used is a multi-part measure of job involvement. It is developed by Kanungo (1982). The measures have been transculturally used and their psychometric efficiency has been reported by Kanungo (1982). This scale has been empirically used in Canada, West Germany and India (Mishra, Kanungo, Rosentiel&Stuhler, 1985). As indicated earlier, Sahoo and his associates have used and validated it in India.

### ***Perceived Importance of Job Factors***

The first part of the questionnaire was designed by Lawler (1973) to assess employee's perception of job outcomes. This part of questionnaire contained only items that assess respondents' view on the value of their present job in their lives. Respondents are required to indicate the perceived instrumentality of their job for them by ranking job factors according to their perceived importance. The job factors are listed in random order. Eight of these factors are organizationally controlled extrinsic job factors. These include comfortable working conditions, sound company policy, adequate earnings, fair pay, promotion opportunity, fringe benefits, job security, and opportunity for professional growth. There are four interpersonally mediated extrinsic job outcomes: technically competent supervisor, considerate supervisor, interpersonal relation, and respect and recognition. The remaining three factors are intrinsic in nature; these are responsibility and independence, a sense of achievement, and interesting nature of work.

The priority ratings indicated by respondents can be analysed across groups. It is important to note that the factors receiving first two ratings (i.e., 1 & 2) are considered salient needs, whereas factors receiving last two ratings (i.e., 14 & 15) are considered nonsalient needs. The identification of salient and nonsalient needs of an individual is employed to measure other responses of the individual with respect to his or her salient and nonsalient needs.

In order to identify salient and nonsalient needs of a group, mean priority rating for each need is computed. For example, if a respondent assigns priority rating of '1', second respondent assigns '2' and the third respondent assigns '3', the sum of priority ratings for this need across three individuals happens to be 6. Accordingly, the priority ratings would be 2.0. Once mean priority ratings for all 15 needs are computed, the two specific needs yielding top most mean priority ratings are designated salient needs. In contrast, the two specific needs receiving lowest mean priority ratings are designated nonsalient needs.

### **Job Satisfaction Measures**

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents are asked to indicate on a six point scale their present level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their job with respect to each of the 15 job factors. The job factors are again randomized in this part of the questionnaire. In addition, respondents are also asked to indicate their overall job satisfaction.

The sum of ratings across all items indicates the total amount of satisfaction. It is also possible to compute salient needs satisfaction score of an individual by summing up ratings across his/her most salient needs. Similarly, non-salient needs satisfaction score can be computed by summing up ratings across non-salient needs of an individual. It is important to note that salient and non-salient needs are specified by an individual in the form of his/her priority rating given in the first part of the questionnaire. Furthermore, overall need satisfaction is shown by the individual in terms of his or her response to the 16th item of the questionnaire.

### **Measures of Job Involvement**

Three measures in different formats are included. A thirteen item semantic differential measure (JISD), an eleven item questionnaire measure (JIQ) and a two item graphic measure (JIG) are used for this purpose. These measures reflect a person's cognitive state of psychological identification with the specific job.

**Job involvement semantic differential measures (JISD).** The JISD requires the respondents to think about their present jobs in context of their life and evaluate it by using a seven-point scale. The measure uses bipolar description such as involving-noninvolving, important-unimportant, fundamental-trivial, essential-nonessential, identified-notidentified, attached-detached, integrated-nonintegrated, united-disunited. The responses of participants are scored depending on the direction of keying. The closer a subject's rating is to the positive attribute, higher is the score. The total JISD score is found by summing scores across scorable items. This part contains four filler items which are not scored. There are eight scorable items.

**Job involvement questionnaire (JIQ).** JIQ presents 15 statements which directly reflects a cognitive state of psychological identification with a particular job, which depends on their saliency of his/her needs and the perceptions he/she has about the need satisfying potentialities of the job. This part also contains 5 filler items which are not scored.

Thus, the scale contains ten JIQ items. These includes, "the most important things that happen to me involve my present job", "To me my present job is only a part of who I am", "I am very much involved personally in my job"; "I live, eat, and breathe my job", "Most of my interests are centered around my job"; "I have very strong ties with my present job which would be very difficult to break"; "Usually I feel detached from my job"; "Most of my personal life goals are job oriented"; "I consider my job to be very central to my existence"; "I like to be absorbed in my job most of the time". Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement/disagreement on a six-point scale. The items are keyed in both the direction. The category includes points from agreement to complete disagreement. Participants are asked to

indicate their responses for each of the items. The JIQ score is obtained by summing up individual item scores.

**Job involvement graphic measure (JIG).** In the JIG measures there are two sets of pictures; the overlapping circles and the person desk designs. Each set contains seven paired designs.

In each set the distance between the designs is systematically varied. The first pair represents the maximum gap between the designs, whereas the 7th pair represents the complete overlap. The respondents are asked to indicate the pair that best represents their relationship with the present job. The maximum closeness is scored 7 and minimum closeness is scored as 1 point. The individual's score is computed by summing up the two scores across sets.

### **Measure of Well-being**

The measure of well-being forms a sub-scale in Health Behaviour Questionnaire (HBQ) developed and validated by Sahoo (2004). This subscale employs semantic differential technique to measure well-being. Bipolar adjectives are presented to denote each of 15 criteria of well-being (e.g., competent versus incompetent; anxious versus calm). Numerals from 1 to 7 between each of descriptions are used. Participants are asked to encircle a number for each set to depict his/her well-being. While scoring the direction of keying is considered. The closer is an individual's rating to a desired criterion, higher is the score. The administration of the measure generates well-being score on each of 15 criteria; an overall well-being score is also generated.

### **Procedure**

All participants were individually administered tests. There was a gap of one week between the administration of job involvement measure and well-being measure. Statistical analyses were geared to test the basic propositions concerning salient need satisfaction. Group comparisons were also undertaken.

### **Results**

The basic purpose of the present investigation is to examine the need salience proposition that job involvement is significantly related to salient need satisfaction and unrelated to non-salient need satisfaction. In order to test these propositions in the context of Railway employees, appropriate statistical analyses are carried out. Table 1 depicts salient needs and non-salient needs as experienced by male and female executives and assistants (see Table 1). Table 1 shows that all the four groups (i.e., male executives, male assistants, female executives and female assistants) report security as the most salient need. However, they differ from each other on the second salient need. Male executives report responsibility and independence as the second salient need. Male assistants view comfortable working conditions as the second salient need. Moreover, in case of female executives the second salient need is respect and recognition whereas for female assistants it is adequate earning.

**Table 1**  
**Identification of Salient and Non-salient Needs**

Groups	Salient Needs	Non-salient Needs
Male Executives	. Security . Responsibility . independence	. Technically competent supervisor and . Considerate and sympathetic supervisor
Female Executives	. Security . Respect and recognition	. Sound company policy & practice . Technically competent supervisor
Male Assistants	. Security . Comfortable working conditions	. Opportunity for professional growth . Good interpersonal relationship
Female Assistants	. Security . Adequate earning	. Fair pay . Sound company policy and practice

In the context of non-salient need, it is shown that male executives view technically competent superior as the non-salient need and considerate and sympathetic superior as the other non-salient need. Male assistants report opportunity for professional growth as the non-salient need and good interpersonal relations as the other non-salient need. Female executives view sound company policies and practices as the non-salient need whereas female assistants view the same as the second non-salient need. The non-salient need of female executives are reported to be technically competent superior. Female assistants view fair pay for work as their non-salient need.

A salient feature of the study involves the proposed hypothesis that job involvement is significantly related to salient need satisfaction and unrelated to non-salient need satisfaction. This is clearly supported (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients Between Salient / Non-salient Need Satisfaction and Job Involvement**

Groups	Relationship with Salient Needs Satisfaction			Relationship with Non-Salient Needs Satisfaction		
	JISD	JIQ	JIG	JISD	JIQ	JIG
Male Assistants (n=25)	.39*	.42*	.27	-.13	.01	.11
Male Executives (n=32)	.35*	.55**	.32	.30	.11	.07
All Males (n=57)	.27*	.12	.37**	.08	.29*	.09
Female Assistants (n=21)	.43*	.17	.46*	-.08	-.30	.53*
Female Executives (n=24)	.13	.41*	.59**	-.21	-.01	-.12
All Females (n=45)	.31*	.45**	-.18	-.17	-.06	-.04
All Participants (N=102)	.17*	.25**	.19*	-.03	-.02	-.003

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01

It is clearly evinced that job involvement as measured by JISD, JIQ and JIG bears significant positive correlation with salient need satisfaction. This is shown in each of the subgroups and also in the total pool of participants. For example, in the group of male assistants, there is significant positive correlation between salient need satisfaction and job involvement as measured by JISD,  $r(23) = .39, p < .05$ . In the context of all participants, this relationship is also positive and significant,  $r(100) = .17, p < .05$ . Excepting a few exceptional cases, the obtained correlation coefficients are in the predicted direction.

As expected, the relationship between non-salient need satisfaction and job involvement is found to be nonsignificant excepting a few cases. In the total pool of participants, the correlations between non-salient need satisfaction and job involvement are found to .03, .02 and .003 respectively for JISD, JIQ and JIG measures. The findings are congruent with our hypotheses.

The analyses of variance was carried out to examine group differences with respect to job involvement. However, the results reveal no significant differences. The F-ratios are

**Table 3**  
**Mean Scores of Job Involvement Measures of Participants**

Measures	Groups	Males		Females		Combined	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
JISD	Assistants (n=46)	41.24	10	42.76	6.8	41.93	8.6
	Executives (n=56)	43.43	10.3	42.00	12.25	42.82	11.1
	All (N=102)	42.47	10.15	42.35	9.98		
JIQ	Assistants (n=46)	39.20	6.4	43.09	5.9	40.97	6.4
	Executives (n=56)	38.59	7.9	41.54	7.1	39.85	7.6
	All (N=102)	38.85	7.2	42.26	6.7		
JIG	Assistants (n=46)	10.52	1.8	11.76	7.4	11.08	5.1
	Executives (n=56)	10.81	2.6	10.16	2.7	10.53	2.7
	All (N=102)	10.68	2.3	10.91	5.4		

nonsignificant on each case. Males indicate as much job involvement as do females. Similarly, executives report as much job involvement as do assistants (see Table 3).

As interesting feature concerns the relationship between salient need satisfaction and well-being (see Table 4). The findings are in the expected direction. With respect to almost each of the



Table 4

## Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients Between Salient Needs Satisfaction and Psychological Well-being

	Dimensions of Psychological Well-being	Groups						
		Male Assistants (n=25)	Male Executives (n=32)	All Males (N=57)	Female Assistants (n=21)	Female Executives (n=24)	All Females (N=45)	All Participants (N=102)
1	Competence	.41*	.34*	.29*	.40	.27	.31*	.17*
2	Physical Health	.15	.25	.36*	.44*	.41*	.18	.24**
3	Freedom from Anxiety	.51**	.27	.16	.27	.52**	.19	.11
4	Integrity	.31	.41*	.19	.46*	.21	.33*	.17*
5	Freedom from Depression	.53**	.43*	.29*	.49*	.19	.39**	.24**
6	Autonomy	.21	.15	.37**	.18	.25	.11	.25**
7	Trust	.43*	.26	.26	.21	.43*	.15	.26**
8	Social Support	.51**	.35*	.29*	.44*	.47*	.41*	.13
9	Controllability	.23	.45**	.43**	.47*	.53**	.40**	.14
10	Happiness in family	.41*	.27	.21	.21	.39	.37*	.25**
11	Freedom from stress	.53**	.18	.24	.19	.40*	.17	.24**
12	Job satisfaction	.36	.37*	.27*	.51*	.51**	.23	.15*
13	Social contacts	.39*	.39*	.39**	.56**	.17	.35*	.17*
14	Achievement	.34	.25	.38**	.23	.24	.39**	.24**
15	Spirituality	.37	.27	.34*	.27	.43*	.27	.14
16	Overall well-being	.49*	.36*	.39**	.44*	.41*	.31*	.27**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

criteria, there is significant relationship between the criterion and salient need satisfaction. This is evinced in each of the subgroups and the total pool of participants. For example, in the group of male assistants, the correlation between salient need satisfaction and competence is significant,  $r(23) = .41$ ,  $p < .05$ . With respect to overall well-being, it is also positive and significant,  $r(23) = .49$ ,  $p < .05$ . For all participants the coefficients generated for all criteria are significant and positive excepting a few cases.

Taken together, the results provide strong support for our hypotheses that job involvement is significantly related to salient need satisfaction and unrelated to non-salient

need satisfaction. Security emerges as the salient need for all groups. This is in sharp contrast to the western situations where interesting/challenging nature of job contents appears as the salient need. Groups (males versus females; executives versus assistants) do not differ with respect to job involvement and job satisfaction. Finally, salient need satisfaction is found to be significantly related to well-being.

### **Discussions and Implications**

The basic postulate of need salience holds that the priority attached to human needs is not universal. The salience of a need depends on the subset of human population (Gorn&Kanungo, 1980; Kanungo, 1982). In consistency with this expectation, our results have shown that security is a salient need for Railway employees. This is in sharp contrast to the western findings that people in individualistic societies regard interesting/challenging nature of job contents as the most desirable factor.

The findings provide supportive evidence to need salience construct. The positive association between salient need satisfaction and job involvement is greatly supported. Thus, it corroborates the earlier findings of Kanungo, Rosentiel and Stuhler (1985). Sahoo and his associates have also documented this relationship in their earlier works (Sahoo, Mitra&Mahanti, 2014; Sahoo, Nanda, &Sia, 1995; Sahoo &Rath, 2003; Sahoo, Sahoo & Das, 2011). Furthermore, as expected job involvement is unrelated to non-salient need satisfaction.

While the study does not reveal any group difference with respect to involvement and satisfaction an interesting element is the association between salient need satisfaction and well-being. It can be postulated that human needs are elastic and people crave for satisfaction of all needs for their mental health. Yet well-being may be approached with availability of a few salient needs. This has been supported by the present investigation. A number of studies have indicated this trend in the context of human happiness (Sahoo, 2009, 2013, 2014).

### **Major Implications**

The study offers a number of major implications. First, managers, leaders and policy makers generally go with their preconceived notion of motivators. For example, they may hold fast to the western assumptions that intrinsic needs such as interesting and challenging nature of job contents is the guarantee for motivating employees. But the present research provides an indigenous approach. We must not go with imposed etc, rather we must derive the priority from the population. Salient needs differ across populations, hence these may be discovered by careful identification. This is true of Railway sector as well as other domains.

Second, workplace well-being is assuming great significance these days. It may not be possible to provide all conditions for ensuring employees' well-being. This would be ambitious beyond means. Yet the identification of salient needs for a specific population and their satisfaction may pave the way for attainment of psychological well-being.

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