International Journal of
Organizational Innovation

A TRIANGULATION OF JOB LOVE:
A STUDY OF THE MEANING OF LOVE OF THE JOB

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Abstract

Love of the job (LOJ) may be common vernacular in some work cultures and in best-selling non-fiction books, but it is not widely acknowledged or researched by the academic community. The goal of this research was to provide empirical validation for the emerging construct of LOJ and explicate its impact on individuals and organizations. An initial document analysis of practitioner literature on the topic of LOJ provided underlying themes and a framework for further analysis. Based on these themes, and with the guidance Sternberg's interpersonal model of love, data from fourteen qualitative surveys were analyzed to explain and elucidate the construct. By corroborating multiple data sets, this research resulted in a deeper understanding of the construct of LOJ as a three-factor construct comprising passion for the work, meaningful relationships, and commitment to purpose. Exploratory qualitative data provided impetus for a three-factor model of LOJ. Explanatory qualitative data clarified the commitment to purpose dimension and implied that self-determination theory may explain why LOJ does not necessarily lead to increased productivity. An increased understanding of love of the job provides benefits for individuals through increased well-being and benefits for organizations through decreased turnover and the indirect productivity and cost-saving effects of employee well-being.

Key words: Love of the job; job engagement; job satisfaction; well-being

Introduction

For the past three decades, loving one's job has been a central theme of best-selling books (Bloch and Richmond, 1998; Gordon, 2005; Hansen, 2018), television shows (e.g. Oprah Winfrey "I Love My Job!" aired February 24, 2003) and websites or blogs (e.g. http://lyjnow.wordpress.com). Yet, there is a lacuna of empirical research on the topic. The objective of this research was to provide construct validity for Love of the Job (LOJ) and explicate its impact on individuals and organizations.

An initial document analysis of practitioner literature on the topic of LOJ was conducted to provide underlying themes to aid in the understanding and provide a framework for development of a quantitative measure. These themes, which correlated with those of Sternberg's (1997) seminal model of interpersonal love were further examined through fourteen qualitative surveys. This two-method approach provided greater insights into the emerging construct of LOJ by corroborating evidence from multiple data sets. The definition of love used in this study is: "a motivational state in which the goal is to preserve and promote the well-being of the valued object [job]" (Rempel & Burris, 2005, p. 309; Whiteley, 1979, p.235).

The use of the term triangulation in the title is a somewhat of a play on words. Triangulation relates to the use of multiple data sources and methodologies in this study to provide a confluence of evidence regarding the construct of LOJ.

The term also relates to the use of Sternberg's (1997) seminal triangle theory of interpersonal love as a foundation for the measure of LOJ.

Study One- Document Analysis

The objective of the initial document analysis was to interpret the content and discourse of the practitioner literature and best-selling books about LOJ and discover patterns or themes that were worthy of further study. In short, the process entailed "evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed" (Bowen, 2009, p. 33).

Literature Review

The topic of love of the job (LOJ) has gradually emerged in the academic literature in fields ranging from health care to firefighting (Bolster, 2007; Hadley, 2008; Hume, 2018; Kelloway, Penney, & Dimoff, 2017; Kelloway, Inness, Barling, Francis, & Turner, 2010; Lasky, 2004; McAllister, Happell, & Bradshaw, 2013). Although not expressly about love of the job, empirical research on career development in the late 1990s identified three themes of highly achieving women: passion, persistence and connection, (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser & Robinson, 1997).

Some researchers have based their interpretation of LOJ on extant social psychology and interpersonal love models (Barling & Innes, 2007; Bygrave, 2011; Hadley, 2008; Kelloway et al., 2010). These authors refer to three factors: passion, intimacy and commitment.

Kelloway et al. specifically defined these factors as: "passion for the work itself, commitment to the employing organization, and high-quality intimate relationships with coworkers" (Kelloway et al., 2010, p. 109). This LOJ model was based on Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love which posits that consummate love is a composite of three components: "motivation and other forms of arousal that lead to passion …decision making about the existence of and potential long-term commitment [and] feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness" (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119).

The modest academic interest in LOJ pales in comparison to the hundreds of scholarly articles published each year about other employee attitude or motivation measures such as job satisfaction (Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr, 1981; Wall, Kemp, Jackson, & Clegg, 1986; Warr, Cook, & Wall, 1979). Warr et al. (1979) define job satisfaction as: "the degree to which a person reports satisfaction with intrinsic and extrinsic features of the job" (p.133). Although job satisfaction appears to the holy grail measure of employee motivation for both the academic and practitioner communities, "job satisfaction may not sufficiently assess the full range of possible affective states" (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000, p. 229).

Job or employee engagement, another popular measure of job motivation, taps into more affective aspects with a focus on both "emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization" (Saks, 2006, p. 601). One of the most popular models of job engagement is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) that measures three dimensions: vigor; dedication and absorption (Roberts & Davenport, 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, although it "goes beyond satisfaction [job engagement] may not describe the highest levels of motivation people can feel and show for their work. It falls short of true passion" (Gubman, 2004, p. 43).

Notwithstanding the popularity of job satisfaction or job engagement, the subject of love is intuitively more interesting as evidenced by the proliferation of best-selling books on the topic of loving one's job and a coincidental dearth of practitioner literature on liking or being satisfied with work. Do people really want to spend most of their waking lives in jobs that are merely satisfying? Probably not. Perhaps many of us would prefer to heed the sage advice of Confucius to "Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life".

Methods

A cursory content analysis was conducted on the table of contents of best-selling books that mentioned love of the job or work in their titles or subjects. Common themes were identified and condensed or collapsed as follows: Fun/joy; meaning/ fulfillment; balance; passion; purpose; commitment; relationships; people; and learning. The next phase involved examining the content and discourse of fourteen of these best-selling books to identify specific phrases or words that aligned with the identified themes related to loving one's job.

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Results

The results of this analysis revealed that each of the fourteen books dealt with three common themes: Challenge/Passion; Commitment/ Purpose; and Relationships/People. Table 1 contains a list of best-selling practitioner books and actual phrases or words that were used by the authors in each of these categories.

Challenge/Passion Theme

In this category, authors described how loving one's work involved a level of joy or engagement that encouraged people to seek challenge, exert additional effort and address their fears. These descriptions were conceptually like those of the vigor aspect of job engagement. According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), vigor evokes high levels of enthusiasm, energy, persistence, and willingness required to actively engage in a job.

This theme resonates with Kelloway et al.'s (2010) passion for work category and Sternberg's (1997) passion dimension of interpersonal love.

Commitment/Purpose Theme

Under this theme, authors described the importance of pursuing meaningful, worthwhile work in order to love one's job. Commitment to a vision or purpose leads to fulfillment which in turn leads to a sense of purpose and love of the work or job. These descriptions are conceptually like the meaningful work component of the job characteris-

tics model (Wall, Clegg, & Jackson, 1978) and are thus innately motivating. They are also similar Meyer and Allen's (1991) affective organizational commitment which has been empirically linked with (lack of) turnover intention (Anvari & Seliman, 2010).

This theme resonates with Kelloway et al.'s (2010) commitment to the employing organization category and Sternberg's (1997) commitment ⁄ decision dimension of interpersonal love.

Relationships/People Theme

Each of the fourteen authors dedicated a chapter or significant section of the book to a discussion of the significance of communicating, collaborating or generally getting along with people in order to love a job. This is not surprising since compassionate relationships among coworkers are cited by the Gallup Q12 survey as the number one reason that thousands of people every year are engaged in their jobs (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002).

This theme resonates with Kelloway et al.'s (2010) intimate relationships with co-workers category and Sternberg's (1997) intimacy dimension of interpersonal love.

In summary, the document analysis of practitioner literature exposed three main themes for love of the job (LOJ): Challenge / Passion; Purpose / Commitment; and Relationships. These themes are identified in Table 1 and were further explored in Study Two.

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Table 1 – Best-Selling Book Themes

Author and Year Citation	Book Title	Challenge / Passion Theme	Commitment / Purpose Theme	Relationships / People Theme
(Black, 2007)	The Essential Guide for Getting Ahead at Work	Drive / passion	Attitude	People / leadership
(Bloch & Richmond, 1998)	SoulWork: Finding the work you love, loving the work you have	Energy	Meaning / calling	Community / harmony
(Dagostino, 2019)	The Power of Wow	Creating	Cultivating shared values	Connecting / People power
(Dalio, 2017)	Principles: Part III Work Principals	Radical Truth and Transparency	Cultivate meaning	Cultivate relationships
(Dickie, 2017)	Love Your Work: 4 Practical Ways You Can Pivot to Your Best Career	Passion / engagement	Meaningful	Empathy
(Hansen, 2018)	Great at Work	Passion	Purpose	Disciplined collaboration
(Garfinkle, 2019)	Love Your Work	Enjoy work	Willingness / commitment	Coworker relationships
(Goddard Davidson, 2008)	101 Ways to Love your Job	Effort	Fulfillment	Benefit others
(Gordon, 2005)	Be Happy at Work: 100 Women who Love Their Jobs, and Why	Process - engagement, challenge	Purpose / Fulfillment	People / relationships
(Hannon, 2015)	Love Your Job: The New Rules for Career Happiness	Challenge and effort	Sense of progress	Play nicely with others
(Lewis, 2017)	Love Your Work, Love Your Life	Emotionally driven/ passion	Worthwhile work	Conscious communication
(Nelson, 2009)	Don't Quit Your Day Job, Learn To Love It	Challenge	Purpose	Alliance with boss & Team
(Smiley Poswolsky, 2016)	The Quarter-life Breakthrough	Embrace fear / challenge	Meaningful Purposeful	Collaborative relationships
(Stein Jr., 2019)	Raise Your Game	Passion	Vision/purpose	Team/cohesion

Study Two - Qualitative Survey

The purpose of this study was to empirically validate the three themes that emerged in Study One through direct feedback from individuals on the topic of LOJ.

Methods

To explore the diversity of meanings and experiences of LOJ with a minimum of intrusion on participants' anonymity, qualitative surveys were used to collect data (Fink, 2003). Both convenience and quota sampling strategies were used to

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obtain a diverse pool of participants for the qualitative surveys. Participants were recruited through an advertisement in the Community/Volunteers in British Columbia, Canada classified section of Craig's List. Craig's List, an American-based classified advertisement and discussion forum website, has millions of adult users world-wide and is an acceptable recruitment medium for qualitative research (Worthen, 2013). Respondents to the advertisement were given a link to a Qualtrics survey where they gave informed consent before identifying their age, gender, employment sector and tenure related data then answering specific open-ended questions related to LOJ. Some of the survey questions were: "Why do you love your job or line of work? What specifically is it about the job/work that makes it lovable? and What benefits do you think could result from loving your job/work for you or your employer?"

Data from fourteen respondents were selected for analysis to balance parsimony with diversity of gender, age, industry and employment type. Qualtrics data from these fourteen respondents were loaded into a code-and-retrieve data analysis program (HyperRE-SEARCH) and analyzed. Due to significant overlap in the answers, the researcher was confident that saturation had been reached.

Content analysis involved examining the codes and comments identified by the code-and-retrieve software for authenticity and validity. Then, the transcripts were reread with the intent of analyzing subjective discourse and identifying repeated ideas or patterns of

meaning that may have been missed by the software. Codes were assigned to identify unique patterns of meaning or key themes (McCracken, 1988). For example, comments such as "I care about my co-workers" and "My clients mean the world to me" were coded as "Connection with people". Comments such as: "My wife and kids are my number 1 priority" and "This job enables me to do what I love during the day and be with the kids I love in the evening" were coded as "Work-life balance". To reduce potential bias, the researcher engaged a faculty cohort member as a "disinterested peer" to review the initial coding and theme analysis and provide feedback (Johnson, 1997, p. 283). The codes were then synthesized, reduced and reconstructed into four main themes. Separate files and journals were kept for codes and data pertaining to: aspects of loving one's job; aspects of not loving one's job; benefits of loving one's job for the individual; benefits of loving one's job for the organization; productivity aspects; and other. Although this study was predominantly designed to be explanatory, inductive logic was also incorporated to allow theories to emerge through the discourse analyses.

Results

The average age of the respondents was 42. Seven of them identified as female, six identified as male and one identified as non-binary. The following employment fields / occupations were represented: Sales consultant; financial manager/accountant; nurse practitioner; dentist/hygienist; computer graphics designer; utilities/ telecommunications technician; construction worker; po-

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lice/law enforcement officer; business executive/manager; scientific researcher/professor; healthcare worker; lawyer; and occupational therapist. Seven of these occupations were listed as significant jobs in 2019 in Canada (Brownwell, 2019). The qualitative surveys produced 35 pages of data (approximately 12,000 words) that were analyzed, coded and synthesized into four main subject categories.

Discussion

Four main themes of loving one's job (LOJ) emerged from the data analysis: Pride and Joy of Achievement; Commitment to Purpose; Workplace Relationships; and Work-life balance. Each of these themes is explained below and included in Table 6 along with themes and factors that emerged in the first study, Sternberg's triangular theory dimensions, and Kelloway et al.'s. proposed LOJ categories.

To enhance the plausibility, credibility and trustworthiness of this study, the researcher used: Peer review during the coding and theme phase; low inference descriptors or codes that were based on respondents' actual words; theory triangulation or multiple theories to interpret the data; pattern matching whereby themes that emerged in the first study were compared to the data in this study to identify the presence of patterns; and reflexivity by examining the researcher's potential biases and personal experience with the topic of love of the job (Johnson, 1997).

Passion for Achievement Theme

Each respondent referred to some level of passion for achievements in their descriptions about work that they love. I.e. "I am really passionate and proud of what I do – my student loans were the smartest investment I ever made " and "I sometimes amaze myself by what I can accomplish in a day!" Others disclosed feelings of gratification, joy of accomplishment or thrill of achievement. One respondent captured this sentiment very succinctly as: "This is why I stayed in school for seven years…I finally made it and I am loving it!"

According to some researchers, "the need for achievement underlies self-actualization" (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1970). Many of the respondents' comments such as "I achieve really great things" and "I am amazed at what I can accomplish in a day" resonated with McClelland's (1985) conceptualization of an individual's need for achievement (nAch) as a drive to excel and create novel solutions despite difficult challenges. Other respondents referred to "bliss" or getting "so wrapped up in what I am doing I lose track of time". This experience is what some researchers refer to as "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) and is conceptually like the passion factor of LOJ.

Overall, pride and joy of achievement denotes affective and energetic states that are consistent with passion (Kelloway et al., 2010; Sternberg, 1997). For example, Olympic athletes who are passionate about their sport en-

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dure countless hours of training in pursuit of the pride and joy of receiving a medal.

Commitment to Purpose

There was clearly an ethical or moral theme of needing to do the right thing or making a difference in the responses. This virtuousness was apparent in comments such as: "I feel like I make my clients' lives a little bit better" and "this is my calling…what I was meant to do". Comments in this theme appear to resonate with McClelland's socialized power (*sPwr*) dimension whereby people strive to achieve goals for the greater good, rather than seek recognition or approval from others (McClelland, 1970).

There was a strong overlap among this theme, the Purpose / Commitment dimension of Study One, Kelloway et al.'s (2010) commitment to the employing organization, and Sternberg's commitment ⁄ decision dimension of interpersonal love.

However, the data suggested that commitment to a cause, meaning or purpose may be more than or as significant as committing to the organization itself. Of course, if the organization's values are aligned with the worker's values, it is more likely that the worker will be committed to the organization. However, the focal point of this factor appears to be commitment to purpose or meaning.

Meaningful Relationships

Every respondent commented in some way about the significance of connecting with people at work, either as coworkers, partners, cohorts or clients. One respondent referred to her coworkers as her "daytime family" while another respondent stated that he felt a "sense of belonging" with his clients. The drive to belong or affiliate with others is considered by some psychologists to be a critical human need and an integral aspect of motivation (Murray, 1938; McClelland, Human motivation, 1985; Maslow, 1970). And, as previously noted, thousands of people every year cite close relationships among coworkers as the main reason for their job engagement on the Gallup Q12 survey (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002).

This theme resonates with the relationships classification of study one, Kelloway et al.'s (2010) intimate relationships with co-workers category, and Sternberg's intimacy dimension.

Work-life Balance Theme

With one exception, every respondent discussed how much they appreciated the ability to balance their work lives with their personal or family lives. Comments ranged from: "I can't believe how lucky I am to be able to bring my dog to work" to "I get to be with people I care about during the day and spend time with my family that I love at night".

Work-life balance has become increasingly important due to the deteriorating psychological contract of work, demographic changes (such as an increase in Generations X and Y and women in the workforce), and the increased expectations of speed and performance due to advances in information

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technology (Guest, 2002). Although there are several models of work-life balance in the literature, the "conflict" model appears to be most applicable in this scenario whereby due to "high levels of demand in all spheres of life, difficult choices have to be made and some conflicts and possibly some significant overload on an individual may occur" (Guest, 2002, p. 259). In this study, it appears that jobs that enable individuals to resolve conflicts between the demands of personal, family and work life are more loveable.

Due to its commonality of concern for relationships with people, the theme of Work-life balance was integrated with the theme of Meaningful Relationships. However, further research may indicate that this is a separate, stand-alone dimension of LOJ.

Productivity

Sometimes it is more interesting to note what is missing in the data than what is present. None of the participants discussed how love of the job increased their productivity or vice versa. If anything, there was reference to the potential for external measures of productivity to decrease love of the job. The lawyer left private practice because of the "relentless expectation to increase billable hours". The university professor described how "the pressure in this university to publish or perish actually diminishes my urge to engage in research for the joy of it".

Although some of the participants alluded to the ability to accomplish great things when they were engaged in a task that they love, the reward appeared to be intrinsic, emanating from the experience of being lost in time or accomplishing something of personal meaning. This lack of association between LOJ and productivity resonates with the results of previous empirical research (Bygrave, 2011).

One explanation of this lack of correlation may be based on evolution and demographic differences. The expectations of who dictates productivity or value in the workplace appear to be changing. In their best-selling book, "The New Rules of Work", the authors explain "Being productive is now a personal quality that we all define for ourselves" (Cavoulacos & Minshew, 2017, p. 272). Thus, productivity, when classified as an external control measure of economic efficiency and effectiveness, does not appear to be an important goal or a motiving factor for people who love their jobs in the 21st century.

The lack of correlation between productivity and LOJ may also be explained by seminal needs theories. Forty years ago, long before it was fashionable to discuss loving our jobs, researchers warned that: "Management by direction and control may not succeed because it is a questionable method for motivating people whose physiological and safety needs are reasonably satisfied and whose social, self-esteem and self-actualization needs are becoming predominant" (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982, p. 48). Rewards for productivity are more likely to be a desired outcome for people who are focused on overcoming Herzberg's (1974) hygiene factors, meeting the lower-levels of Maslow's (1970) Hierar-

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chy of needs, or fulfilling what McClelland (1985) referred to as need for personal power.

For people who love their jobs, external or extrinsic rewards may be moot. Perhaps it is Herzberg's (1974) motivational factors, Maslow's (1970) higher-level intrinsic needs or McClelland's (1985) need for affiliation, socialized power or achievement that inspire them.

Integration of the Analyses

This research provides insights for both positivist and post-positivist researchers. A triangulation of qualitative methods and analyses provides content validity for the three-factor measure of LOJ: Passion for the work; Commitment to purpose; and Meaningful workplace relationships.

Passion, an integral component of LOJ, appears to be fueled by a high need for achievement, self-esteem or self-actualization. Commitment to purpose appears to be driven by the worker's need to be virtuous and to make a positive impact. Meaningful relationships or belongingness appear to be derived from the basic human need to bond and belong to a social group. Inherent in this theme is the need for work-life balance.

Table 6 integrates the themes that emerged in Study One and Two with Kelloway et al.'s LOJ categories and Sternberg's Theory of Interpersonal Love dimensions.

Table 6 - Integration of Themes and Factors

Sternberg's Interpersonal Love Theory	Kelloway et al. (2010) LOJ Categories	Study 1 Themes	Study 2 Themes / Codes
Passion	Passion for the work itself	Challenge / Passion	Passion for Achievement
Commitment / Decision	Commitment to the employing organization	Purpose / Commitment	Commitment to Purpose
Intimacy	Intimate relationships with co-workers	Relationships	Meaningful Relationships & Work-life balance

This study provides insights for organizations by illuminating factors that can lead to LOJ in the workplace. To evoke passion, employers can provide challenges for employees that appeal to their need for achievement, self-esteem or self-actualization. I.e. Mutually setting challenging goals. To support the employees' commitment to purpose, employers can espouse meaningful values that inspire employee affective commitment and support their social and environmental causes through CSR activities. To meet employees′ needs for connection and meaningful relationships, employers can encourage teamwork and team-based goals and provide family-friendly perks such as flextime or "bring your family to work" initiatives.

For organizations with internally driven cultures, the business case for LOJ is based on increasing employee benefits because "happiness and health [are] viable goals in themselves" (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008, p.148). The business case for LOJ for organizations with externally driven cultures may be based on reduced employee turnover and the secondary effects of employee well-being on productivity and absenteeism (Coats & Max, 2005; Cooper & Bevan, 2014; Dimoff, Kelloway, & MacLellan, 2014).

LOJ and Productivity

This research did not expose a strong positive correlation between LOJ and productivity. On the contrary, respondents claimed that high productivity expectations of billable hours or research

publications decreased their motivation levels. The lack of positive association may reflect self-determination or cognitive evaluation theory whereby an activity that is intrinsically motivating is not made more motivating by offering extrinsic rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand & Reid, 1984). Offering extrinsic rewards for productivity can actually undermine and decrease intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971).

The key take-away message for employers of people who love their jobs is that they should support or augment the employee's level of intrinsic motivation rather than impose external performance measures and rewards. Productivity is often a subjective, externally imposed measure and it is not always possible to quantify creative or heartfelt output such as LOJ. To help make sense of this, imagine an artist who does not consider economizing on paint or paint strokes when crafting a masterpiece, a labor of love. In a similar way, people who love their jobs do so for intrinsic reasons and not for extrinsic rewards.

In the best-selling book "Pride of Ownership: A Firefighters' Love of the Job", Lasky (2006) describes how love of the job is both integral to a firefighter's existence and intrinsic (Lasky, 2006). Firefighters and other workers who love their jobs are motivated from within and not by external measures of productivity. Perhaps qualifying results is the better approach for employees who "will do a great job if you let them love the job just a little" (Lasky, 2004, p. 132)

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Limitations and Future Research

Although participants in these studies represent an equitable distribution of males and females from different industries, they were all professionals between the ages of 30 and 65 living in Canada. The results may not be generalizable to populations in other countries, job categories or generations. Further research is needed to understand the impact and idiosyncrasies of LOJ for the millennial generation, in other geographic contexts and in various job and industry categories.

The role of work-live balance emerged in study two as a significant aspect of LOJ. More research is needed on the impact and role that this need for balance plays in job motivation, particularly with the millennial generation.

According to some psychologists, love is healthy human need and "the ability to love is viewed as a central component to mental health" (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071). More research is needed to understand the link between loving one's job and one's health and well-being.

Being able to measure affective aspects such as LOJ may be valuable to positive organizational behaviour researchers interested in "the study of that which is positive, flourishing, and life-giving in organizations" (Cameron & Caza, 2004, p. 731). The very presence of the word love in a job motivation measure creates space for the exploration of other emotionally laden, affective constructs.

Sternberg (1986, 1987) discusses unhealthy aspects of interpersonal love; what happens when the three dimensions are out of balance. Excessive commitment, at the expense of intimacy and passion, results in empty love. Excessive passion results in infatuation. Intimacy, without passion or commitment results in liking, not love. More research may help to expose both the potential positive and negative aspects of the three dimensions of LOJ.

In summary, the following quote by Solomon is appropriate in this context and may help clarify the significance of supporting employees who love their jobs: "My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor". It is the work itself that motivates employees, not external rewards for their productivity or performance. If an employer is fortunate enough to have employees who love their jobs, the best advice is to give them a meaningful purpose, challenging work and opportunities to engage in meaningful relationships. Let their hearts take delight in their work as their reward

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