

# Organisational Life and its Regrets: A Study of Retired employees

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## INTRODUCTION

**“Untapped potential is the difference between where a person is now and where he or she can be.”**  
Said to be the only asset that doesn't depreciate, human potential is often not tapped fully, leading to regret. This paper is on regret and untapped human potential in organizational life, and mapping them using a research methodology of questionnaire and survey. Its implications for employees and OB practitioners are also discussed prior to the concluding remarks.

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## EVALUATION OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Classical theories focused on satisfying the needs, like food, security, compensation and self-esteem, of the employee to achieve employee satisfaction. To understand if there could be something more that motivated and encouraged employees to be more engaged in the workplace, a study of regrets is needed. The regrets of employees, when listed by frequency, give a better understanding as to what the employee needs to be satisfied with his/her job. This included spending more time with the family, lesser stress and anxiety and seeking of appreciation for work done. (Solidum-Protacio, 2013).

Organizations today must focus on enabling employees to attain success by providing proper resources, tools and rewards / incentives, along with opportunities for autonomy, empowerment and work-life balance. (Deloitte's 2015 Global Human Capital Trends survey)

### **Regret and Elation Following Action and Inaction- Affective Responses to Positive Versus Negative Outcomes**

An attempt was made to replicate “Kahneman and Tversky's (1982a) finding of greater regret for action than inaction” and to determine if this theory was applicable for joy over positive results, to different domains, and to both genders. The earlier finding of feeling a greater regret in case of action rather than inaction was replicated through a vignette experiment. (Landman, 1987)

### **The experience of regret: what, when, and why.** (Gilovich T1, Medvec VH)

This study suggests a temporal pattern to the regret experience based on action and inaction.

“Actions, or errors of commission, generate more regret in the short term; but inactions, or errors of omission, produce more regret in the long run.”

They also take into account the origin of thinking about regret functionally and culturally, and documents “(a) decrease the pain of regrettable action over time, (b) bolster the pain of regrettable inaction over time, and (c) differentially affect the cognitive availability of these two types of regrets.”

Emotions of regret and disappointment are elicited by a decision's unfavorable outcome. This research combines the counterfactual thinking process to the theory of regret and disappointment. It shows that counterfactual thought that is behavior-focused is related to regret, where actions of the decision maker are changed. And, counterfactual thought that is situation-focused is related to disappointment. “It addresses the relation between counterfactual thinking, attributions and affective reactions to decision outcomes, and the implications for decision research.” (Zeelenberg, 1998)

[Emotional Reactions to the Outcomes of Decisions: The Role of Counterfactual Thought in the Experience of Regret and Disappointment

**Critique of Existing Literature**

Every theory put forth is lacking in one way or the other. There are so many facets to human behavior that it is an impossible task to have a single theory encompass it all. Maslow’s theory deals with human needs and does not focus on the regrets of an employee, which can determine what an employee needs to be satisfied.

Zeelenberg’s “Emotional Reactions to the Outcomes of Decisions” paper focuses on regret and disappointment from actions of an individual, but does not take into account those due to inaction by him/her or its short term and long term effects on the individual.

“The experience of regret: what, when, and why” paper by Gilovich and Medvec suggests a temporal pattern of regret, based on both action and inaction and their relative degrees of regret, and also their short term and long term effects on the individual. This is also both behavior centric and situation centric approach.

Issues remaining unresolved:

- Types of actions / inactions that lead to regret in individuals
- How the situations leading to disappointment contribute towards untapped potential.
- Corrective/remedial measures to be taken for each regret (situation based).

**Research Method**

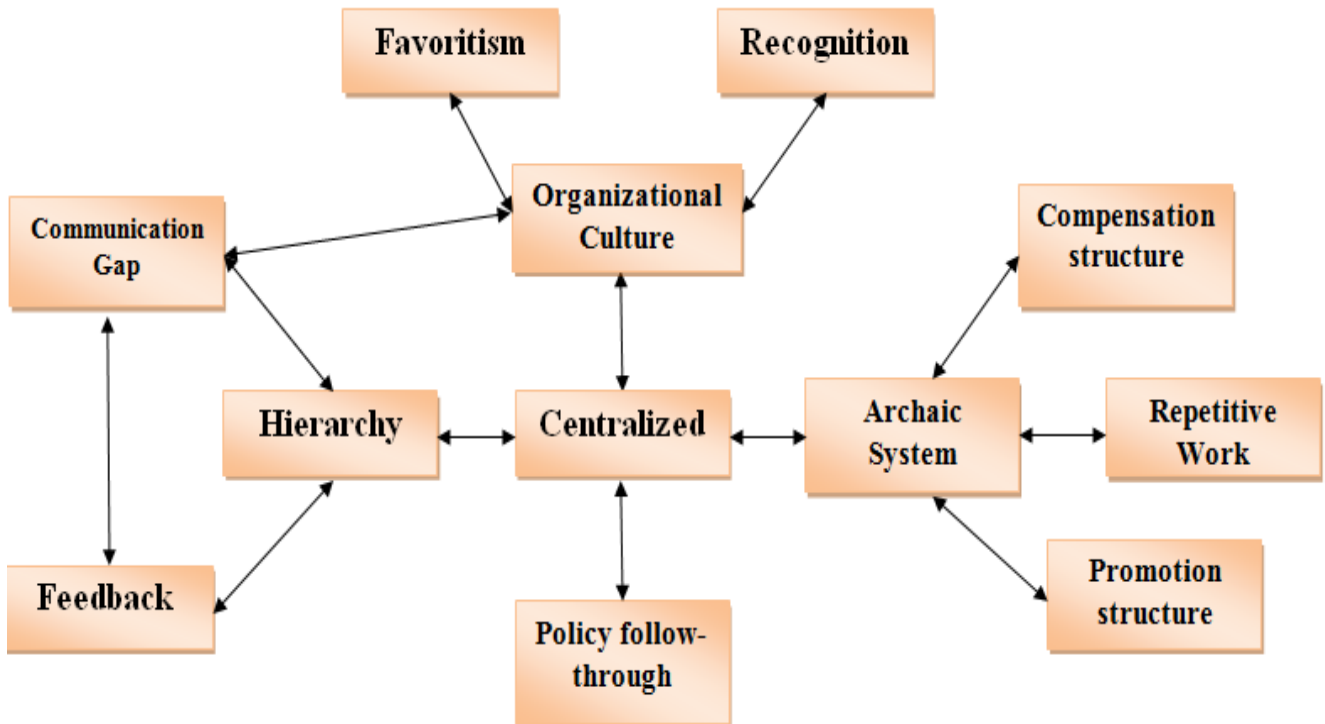
The research method used was questionnaire and survey for retired employees of the government sector. A sample size of 10 was taken for the purpose of finding out the reason for employees’ untapped potential, the causes behind it, and the measures that could have been taken to remedy this during their serving time. Their responses were then tabulated in adjective form and mapped to provide a holistic view of the regrets, their causes and the measures to remedy these regrets.

**Analysis:**

There were several regrets, reasons for those regrets, and possible solutions given by the respondents which are categorized in the table below:

What I Could have done	Why I couldn't do it	Remedial Measures
Initiative	Centralized	Empowerment
Skill set	Repetitive work	Effective job training
Effectiveness & Efficiency	Archaic system	Work Process Flexibility
Performance	Compensation structure	Better review and feedback system
Skill set	Repetitive work	Effective job training
Initiative	Hierarchy	Empowerment
Performance	Promotion structure	Performance based review
Performance	Promotion structure	Performance based review
Job Switch	Repetitive work	Effective job training
Performance	Recognition	Performance based review
Challenging work	Favoritism	Performance based review
Career advancement	Promotion structure	Performance based review
Effectiveness & Efficiency	Feedback	Better review and feedback system
Workplace Improvement	Policy follow-through	Work Process Flexibility
Effectiveness & Efficiency	Hierarchy	Empowerment
Work-life balance	Communication gap	Better review and feedback system
Job Switch	Self estimate	Effective job training
Job Variety	Repetitive work	Effective job training
Networking	Organizational Culture	Empowerment
Initiative	Centralized	Work Process Flexibility

Regrets pertaining to job profile, nature of work, attitude of management, attitude of fellow employees, organizational structure and policies, processes followed by the organization etc. are present in the employees in varying degrees. This is evident from the frequency of the same issues being reported by different employees multiple times. These regrets contribute to the pool of untapped talent which in itself is a cost to the organization.



To overcome this, the organizations must continuously adapt to the changing environment and ensure employee satisfaction and engagement. The potential can be fully utilized if the employees find their job stimulating and challenging, if they feel empowered, and are given effective feedback. Flexibility in the work, proper training, opportunities for professional and personal growth, and making employees feel a part of the organization is a step towards effective employee engagement and allowing the organizations to tap their full potential.

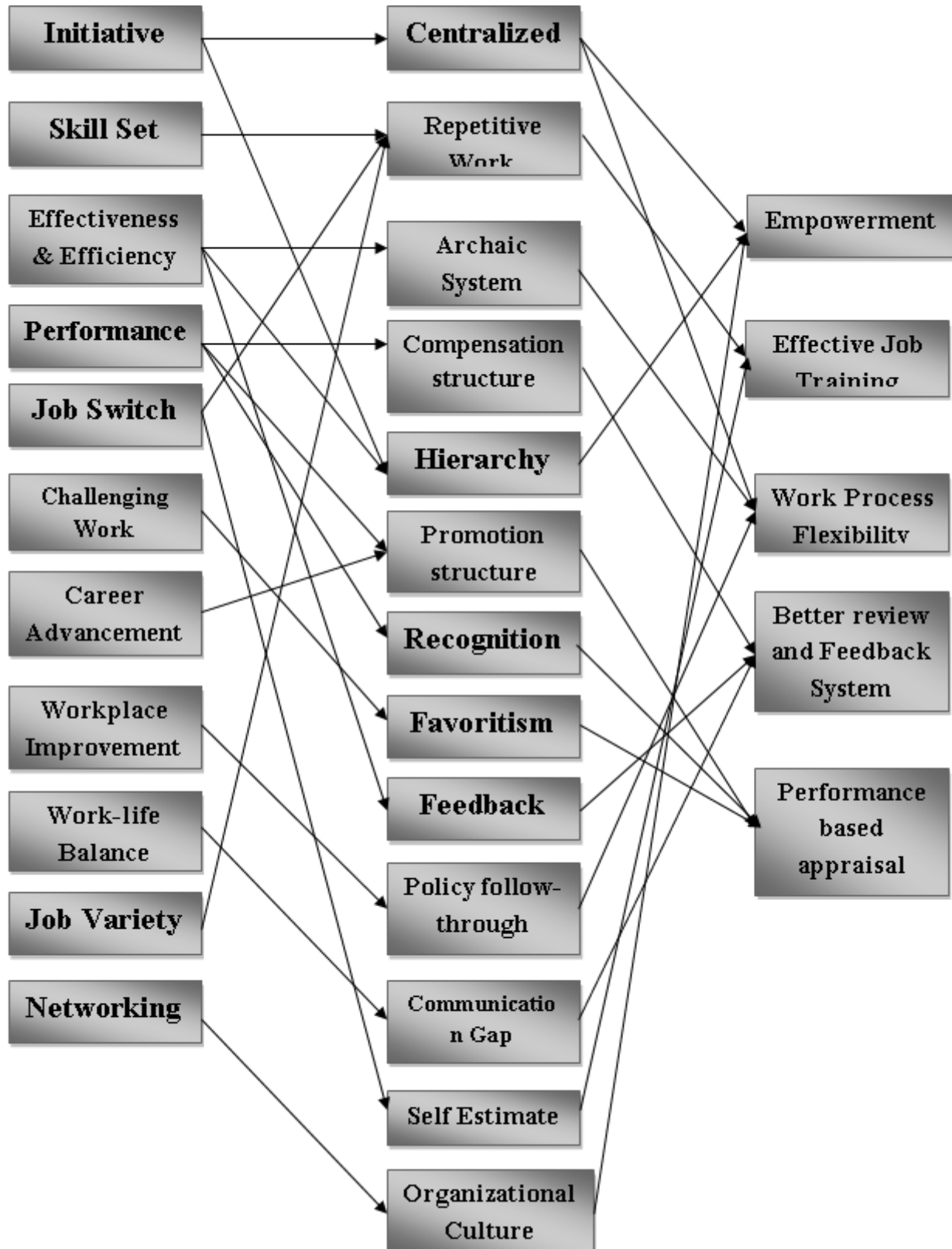
### Implication on Employees and for OB practitioners

Employees are the most valuable assets to any Company, as they are the only assets that cannot be replicated. Hence, taking care of employee satisfaction and engagement is of utmost importance for any organization to succeed. To ensure this, organizations must search for new and better avenues of employee engagement via training, orientation, feedback and transparency in processes followed. An empowered employee works freely and thus more effectively. Therefore, employees must feel empowered so they can use their full potential.

Employees should also be encouraged to voice their opinions, concerns and ideas openly with their colleagues and superiors. 360 degree feedback is an important tool at management’s disposal to gauge the current status and the changes they need to make for greater employee engagement and satisfaction. Organizations must provide opportunities to employees to challenge themselves through stimulating tasks, and in the process provide a platform for further training to achieve personal and professional growth.

“If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your customers, and your business will take care of itself.” – J. W. Marriott

What could have been done to tap 100% human potential?



## CONCLUSION

Through this paper an attempt has been made to understand the individual and collective regrets and reasons for not living up to the full potential in the organizational life. By doing research on this topic through interviews of retired employees in the government sector, a lot of data was gathered and formulated. The questions were designed to encourage honest responses on their regrets, causes of regrets, expectations and the remedies for these regrets. I have tried to analyze the data thus collected to understand the reasons for less than full potential output by employees and how to rectify that using a more decentralized, autonomous, transparent, flexible organization which focuses on timely feedback, job variety, performance based reviews, and open communication.

These measures will ensure a better work environment, allowing an employee to be motivated to give his 100% to the job.

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