

Job Satisfaction – A Comparative Analysis

By Susan J. Linz

Executive Briefing: The objective here is to report job satisfaction results from an employee survey conducted between 2005 and 2007 in four formerly socialist economies: Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, with a focus on gender and generational differences in response patterns. Personal contacts, the currency used to achieve objectives in formerly socialist economies, dictated the survey locations. Foreign scholars, part of a mentoring program that involved training in survey research, became the local project coordinators; so by default, the project locations included: Ufa, Russia; Yerevan, Armenia; Almaty and Taldyquorgan, Kazakhstan; and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. While a single location cannot possibly capture the population or workforce diversity in the country, for convenience, I refer to country name when discussing results.



In developed market economies, 'good' jobs traditionally have been defined by pay and hours of work, and perceived job quality thus defined has been linked to productivity, absenteeism, and turnover. Workers satisfied with their job perform better and are less likely to be late, absent or quit than dissatisfied workers (Borjas 1979, Freeman 1978).

Few studies focus on job satisfaction in former socialist economies (Lange 2008, Linz 2003), largely because of the chaotic nature of the transition – appropriate data were hard to collect, and isolating job satisfaction determinants in a fast-changing environment was problematic. As macroeconomic and labor market conditions have stabilized, it is now possible to more systematically investigate factors influencing worker performance.

Sample Characteristics

In each country, the participating workplaces included both private and state-owned organizations, retail and manufacturing organizations, and small and large-scale organizations. To facilitate successful completion of the project, organizations responsible for security, either at the local or national level, were not included in the study. Altogether, more than 5,800 employees participated in the survey project. Table 1 summarizes the basic characteristics of the participating employees by country.

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instructions: *The purpose of this section is to give you a chance to tell how you feel about your present job, what things you are satisfied with and what things you are not satisfied with.* Each statement requested a response from a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, with 3 = neutral.

Responses to two questions most similar to those used in studies conducted in developed market economies are reported in Table 1: *Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job, and I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do on this job.* On average, at least 62% reported being very satisfied with their job (selected 4 or 5), with nearly the same proportion reporting that they are very satisfied with the work that they do on their job. This is comparable to results from studies conducted in developed market economies (Freeman 1978, Clark 1998). Among participating Armenian workers, job satisfaction is somewhat lower: only about 55% report being very satisfied. Gender differences are evident among Kyrgyz and Kazakh respondents, with women being marginally more satisfied than men. In comparison to country average, older workers in Russia and Kyrgyzstan express significantly more job satisfaction, and younger workers in Russia and Kazakhstan express significantly less job satisfaction.

To circumvent issues of self-reporting, a third statement addressed the job satisfaction issue more broadly: *Most people on this job are very satisfied with the job.* Overall, 43% of the participating employees agreed with this statement (selected 4 or 5), but country differences are evident: 50% of Kazakhs

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Participating employees were asked five different questions about job satisfaction and given the following

agreed compared to only 30% of Russians. No gender differences are evident in response patterns to this statement, but significant generational differences do emerge: older workers in each country are much more likely to report their co-workers as dissatisfied.

Two questions focused on the flip side of job satisfaction – intention to quit. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent they agreed with the following: *I frequently think of quitting this job* and *People on this job often think of quitting*. Overall, about half (48%) express no intention to quit, with more than one-quarter (29%) considering that option. This result is driven largely by Kazakh employees: 29% express no quit intent, compared to about 60% of participating employees in Russia, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Generally, women are more likely to agree with this statement than men. In comparison to the average, older workers are significantly more likely to agree, and younger workers are significantly more likely to disagree that they frequently think about quitting.

Just over 39% disagree with the statement that their co-workers often think of quitting, but once again, country differences are evident. While nearly half (47%) of the Kyrgyz participants share this sentiment, only one-third of the Kazakhs and about 40% of the Russian and Armenian employees report this view. Gender differences are not evident in response patterns, but generational differences are quite significant – older workers tend to agree, and younger workers tend to disagree that their co-workers often think of quitting.

Expectations Influence Job Satisfaction

Participating employees were given a list of element items associated with their job or workplace and asked about the importance of each item: pay, chance to feel good, opportunity to develop skills, job security,

Only 30% of Russians agreed that most people on the job are very satisfied with the job compared to 50% of Kazakhs.

promotion opportunities, chance to learn new things, chance to accomplish something worthwhile, freedom on the job, respect of co-workers, praise from supervisor, and friendliness of co-workers. Not surprisingly, pay dominated the list in all four countries. They then were asked about the likelihood of receiving these items if they do their job especially well. The working hypothesis here is that the gap between desired and expected rewards will affect job satisfaction.

Regression results indicate that, among the employees participating in this project, the larger the gap between desired and expected rewards, the lower reported job satisfaction, holding age, gender, work experience, and education constant. This suggests that an important strategy to pursue involves identifying what elements workers deem important about their job and workplace.

The larger the gap between desired and expected rewards, the lower the reported job satisfaction.

Conclusions

Job satisfaction influences a firm's bottom line – understanding factors contributing to job satisfaction improves firm performance. Studies conducted in developed market economies and formerly socialist economies show that the majority of workers report themselves satisfied with their job. Many factors contributing to job satisfaction are the same across countries, and quite surprisingly do not hinge solely on pay or hours of work. Numerous job attributes, worker characteristics and workplace environment contribute to job satisfaction. Expectations of receiving a desired reward are clearly important. While additional pay might not be an option, understanding that job security or the opportunity to learn new skills or the friendliness and respect of co-workers is important does illuminate ways that workplace conditions and policies might be configured to enhance job satisfaction. ♦ gBR Article 03-06, Copyright © 2009.

Table 1

	Russia	Armenia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	ALL
Satisfied with job (%)	62.8	56.9	64.8	63.3	62.1
Satisfied with my work on this job (%)	65.4	54.7	61.8	65.8	61.3
Mean age (years)	38.8	37.6	33.6	37.1	36.3
Young^a (% of total)	38.3	45.3	59.8	50.1	47.7
Older^b (% of total)	14.2	12.6	4.0	15.5	14.4
Women (% of total)	70.8	56.5	52.6	63.1	59.0
Mean education (years)	14.9	15.1	14.6	14.3	14.8
Mean job tenure (years)	9.6	6.5	5.0	7.0	6.7
Unemployed^c (% of total)	21.5	28.0	41.9	37.9	31.9
Supervisor (% of total)	43.9	36.2	47.5	33.1	40.2
Employed in SOE (% of total)	50.8	30.4	24.0	70.1	39.0
Employed in mfg (% of total)	29.2	23.9	31.3	2.1	23.8
Observations	1111	1509	2179	1004	5803
Year of survey	2005	2005	2005	2007	

a = less than 21 years in 1992
b = more than 40 years in 1992
c = w/o work for two weeks or more in last 5 years

Sources

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