

Employee Satisfaction: Does Gender Play a Role?



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For any organization, human capital is the most valued attribute and employees often can provide differentiation and strategic advantage. To attract and maintain these critical resources, employers offer a variety of benefits and workplace attributes to motivate and keep their employees happy and productive. This paper examines a variety of work factors to ascertain the importance of these factors, satisfaction level with each factor, and if there are differences in the responses between male and female workers. The study finds significant differences between the importance and satisfaction; however, no differences by gender were found.

1. Introduction

American society has experienced tremendous changes over the last half century. Perhaps one of the most important aspects is the movement of women from homemaker to an equal in the workforce. In 1950, women comprised less than 30% of the US workforce, however, over the next 56 years, the percentage of women in the workplace grew by nearly 60% so that women now account for nearly 47% of all US workers (US Dept of Labor, 2016). Since human capital is the most valued attribute, workers often can provide differentiation and strategic advantage. To attract and maintain these critical resources employers offer a variety of benefits and workplace attributes to motivate and keep their workers happy and productive.

The purpose of this paper is to examine a variety of work factors to ascertain the satisfaction level with each factor, how important each factor is, and if there are differences in the responses between male and female workers.

2. Literature Review

Work Factors

The rewards that a person aspires to gain from his or her job are called work values (Schwartz, 1999). It has been found that the work values a person holds are related to both loyalty and job satisfaction (Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). O'Brien (1992) also found that by looking at an individual's work values, behaviors and outcomes can be predicted. In addition, certain work values have also been noted to be correlated with higher salaries and job performance (Frieze, Olson, Murrell, & Selvan, 2006). Work values are comprised of two categories: intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors (Lundberg, Gudmundson, & Andersson 2009). Responsibility and recognition are included in intrinsic factors, while salary and reward system are extrinsic factors.

There are differences in work values based on both individual factors and cultural factors (Lebo, Harrington, & Tillman 1995). In addition, some work values vary due to cultural differences, but others seem to be universally important. Due to the differences in culture between the United States and some other countries, important work values for workers in the United States may not be relevant in other countries.

Individualized work, competition, and achievement are all work values that are important to employees in the United States (Haslett and Leidel 2015). This may be due to the culture of the U.S., which places emphasis on individualism and independence.

Several studies show extrinsic factors to be most important in the United States (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Haslett & Leidel, 2015). Furthermore, Lee, Terada, Shimizu, Lee, and Lee (2017) indicated that job security, which is an extrinsic factor, is the overall most important work value held by workers in the United States. It does appear, however, that disparities are present in individuals' personal work values. Many different work values, both extrinsic and intrinsic, were found to be important to individuals (Jones 2006). These values include fulfilling work, assisting others, high salary, and flexibility within the job tasks and hours. Jones (2006) also found that the most disliked features of a job are low salary, inadequate managers, and dull work. It has been indicated that individual background and gender both influence the way in which a person's work values are developed (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007).

Job Satisfaction

Locke (1976) defines job satisfaction as an enjoyable emotional state, which is a direct consequence of an individual's job. Many different aspects of a person's job can affect his or her satisfaction; this includes responsibilities, rewards, and relationships (Parker & Brummel, 2016). Vroom (1964) found that economic benefit, status, energy expenditure, social relations, and production of goods and services are some of the reasons that individuals choose to work. According to Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, and Paul (1989), job satisfaction is assessed by studying each element of the job separately, or by studying the overall job satisfaction. Overall job satisfaction is a makeup of each element of job satisfaction (Parker & Brummel, 2016).

Employees' levels of job satisfaction are important to employers; studies have found that employee satisfaction is positively correlated with workers' commitment to the company (Watson, 2008).

Even though both extrinsic and intrinsic work values are linked with overall job satisfaction, other variables also affect this satisfaction (Dunnette, Campbell, & Hakel, 1967). For example, the degree to which the presence or absence of these factors influences overall satisfaction depends on how important each of these factors are to an individual (Mottaz, 1985).

Gender

Another factor that influences the development of the work values of an individual is gender. Numerous studies have noted the differences between male and female work values (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Jones, 2006; Westover, 2010). In one study of 51 varying work values, 43 (84%) of those work values were influenced significantly by gender (Haslett & Leidel, 2015). In addition, females rated the seven work values that were not significantly different as more important than did males.

In general, females tend to search for jobs that allow them to benefit others, develop skills or knowledge, and dedicate time to their families (Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb, & Corrigan, 2000; Post-Kammer, 1987). Males, however, tend to prefer jobs that offer status, high salaries, opportunities for advancement, authority over others, risk taking, and a large amount of responsibility (Konrad et al., 2000; Post-Kammer, 1987; Weisgram, Bigler, & Liben, 2010).

Many studies have shown that intrinsic values are most important to women, especially the values related to the social aspects of a job (Duffy & Sedlacek 2007).

Jones (2006) found that females viewed the social element of a job as more important to them than males did. Unlike women, men more often placed higher importance on extrinsic work values. Salary is the work value that is most important to males (Clark, 1997). Salary and responsibility are considered more important work values to men than to women (Konrad et al. 2000). Konrad et al. (2000) also found that women place higher significance on a good boss, good colleagues, and the job importance than men do.

There are additional studies from other countries that signified that males and female from other countries also have different values; this indicates that these studies may be applicable. Zupan, Kase, Raskovic, Yao, and Wang (2015) found that in China, there are significant variations over all studied work values of males and females. In addition, Walk, Schinnenburg, and Handy (2013) found that female students in China place more value on pay and benefits than male students.

Many studies have compared differences in job satisfaction between genders. These studies have indicated many differences between males and females when it comes to levels of job satisfaction (Hersch & Xiao, 2016; Moyes, Shao, & Newsome, 2008; Sabharwal & Corley, 2009).

Hersch and Xiao (2016) found that women generally have higher levels of job satisfaction than men. Considering that females are often in relatively lower level jobs, receive less pay, experience more stress in the workplace, have less flexibility, and endure more discrimination than their male peers, this is interesting (Blau & Kahn, 1992; Lynch, 1992; Roxburgh, 1996; Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000).

The difference in importance of work values and different job expectations for males and females may be the cause (Hersch & Xiao, 2016). Moyes et al. (2008) also indicated that the values of advancement and high salary are more important to men than to women. In addition, females tend to hold lower salary and advancement expectations, which may result in higher job satisfaction (Moyes et al., 2008; Sabharwal & Corley, 2009).

Moyes et al. (2008) also emphasized the dissimilarities in which work values are important to males and females; they found that women place high importance on the social and emotional aspects of the job. The study also found that males were more focused on high salary, opportunities for advancement, job security, and the ability to work independently.

Among a study of university faculty, it was found that males have higher job satisfaction than their female counterparts, especially in relation to the values of salary and benefits (Sabharwal & Corley, 2009). However, Ward & Sloane (2000) found no significant variances in the overall job satisfaction between male and female faculty members. The same study found that when looking at opportunity for advancement, male faculty's job satisfaction was almost three times that of the females. Women in

higher-ranking academic positions indicate higher job satisfaction than their male colleagues (Okpara et al., 2005).

Even though an abundance of research has indicated that women have higher rates of job satisfaction than men, some results are inconclusive (Westover, 2012). Several studies have shown that there are no significant differences in levels of job satisfaction (Fields & Blum, 1997; Westover, 2009; Zoghi, 2003). Moreover, a meta-analysis including over 10,000 employees determined the results were undependable and lacking (Brush, Moch, & Pooyan, 1987)

3. Methodology and Results

Over 330 respondents from a mid-Atlantic Masters I institution in the United States chose to participate in this confidential, anonymous survey via an online survey link on Google Forms. Respondents ranked their satisfaction with nineteen common job factors on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Then, the respondents ranked the importance of those responses on the same Likert scale. The data was then entered in SPSS for analysis. Table 1 presents the demographic data in which 35 percent of the respondents were male and 65 percent were women.

A total of nineteen common work benefits and factors were rated by the participants. For each factor, the means for the satisfaction of that item and the importance of that item was found. Further, the ranks for each are shown in the first and last columns.

Table 1 *Demographics*

Gender	N	%	Ethnicity	N	%
Male	117	35%	African American	33	10%
Female	219	65%	Asian	15	5%
Total	336	100%	Caucasian	277	84%
			Hispanic	3	1%
Personality	N	%	Middle Eastern	1	0%
Extrovert	137	41%	Other	1	0%
Introvert	199	59%	Total	330	100%
Total	336	100%			
Annual Income	N	%	Level of Education	N	%
Less than \$25,000	84	25%	High school	7	2%
\$25,001 to \$50,000	85	25%	Some college no degree	42	13%
\$50,001 to \$75,000	80	24%	2-year degree	47	14%
Over \$75,000	85	25%	4-year degree	101	30%
Total	334	100%	Master's degree	83	25%
			Doctoral degree	55	16%
Age	N	%	Total	335	100%
18-22	66	20%			
23-29	66	20%			
30-39	57	17%			
40-49	67	20%			
50-59	48	14%			
60+	30	9%			
Total	334	100%			

There appears to be a significant ranking difference between what is important to the employees and what they are satisfied with. Two factors clearly illustrate the differences in rank. For example, living close to work received the third highest rank in terms of satisfaction. However, when asked about the importance of living close to work, that factor was ranked seventeenth, a difference of fourteen. Conversely, the satisfaction with their pay was ranked seventeenth, however sufficient pay was the second most important item, a difference of fifteen.

The top five factors in importance were being treated with respect, sufficient pay, job security, good health insurance and benefits, and working relationship with supervisor. However, the respondents ranked these factors 10th, 17th, 9th, 13th, and 11th respectively in satisfaction. The top five items in satisfaction were being able to help others, being able to work independently, living close to work, flexible hours, and regular workday hours. However, the respondents ranked these factors 10th, 9th, 17th, 12th, and 18th respectively in importance (see Table 2).

Table 2 Importance Ranks

Importance Rank	Factor	Importance	Satisfaction	Satisfaction Rank
1	Being Treated with Respect	4.78	3.83	10
2	Sufficient Pay	4.631	3.104	17
3	Job Security	4.628	3.857	9
4	Good Health Insurance and Benefits	4.598	3.753	13
5	Working Relationship with Supervisor	4.5	3.821	11
6	Vacation Time	4.464	3.86	8
7	Opportunities to Provide Input at Work	4.399	3.693	15
8	Opportunity to Learn New Skills	4.387	3.717	14
9	Being Able to Work Independently	4.354	4.134	2
10	Being Able to Help Others	4.336	4.205	1
11	Working Relationship with Peers	4.315	3.878	6
12	Flexible Hours	4.262	3.958	4
13	Working Relationship with Subordinates	4.259	3.789	12
14	Limited Job-Related Stress	4.205	2.94	18
15	Chances for Promotion	4.143	2.899	19
16	Work Is Important to Society	4.14	3.872	7
17	Living Close to Place of Work	4.036	4.098	3
18	Regular Weekday Hours	3.979	3.887	5
19	Recognition from Coworkers	3.595	3.565	16

When conducting a t-test to compare the means between satisfaction and importance, statistically significant differences were found in sixteen of the nineteen factors. The largest differences were found between sufficient pay, limited job-related stress, chances for promotion, being treated with respect and job security which were significant at the .001 level (see Table 3). However, there were no statistically significant differences by gender on their satisfaction of these nineteen work factors.

Table 3 Differences between Satisfaction and Importance Means

Factor	Paired Differences Means	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sufficient Pay	-1.52679	-20.315	335	0.000
Limited Job-Related Stress	-1.26488	-16.046	335	0.000
Chances for Promotion	-1.24405	-15.002	335	0.000
Being Treated with Respect	-0.9494	-14.567	335	0.000
Job Security	-0.77083	-12.04	335	0.000
Good Health Insurance and Benefits	-0.84524	-11.796	335	0.000
Opportunities to Provide Input at Work	-0.70536	-10.242	335	0.000
Opportunity to Learn New Skills	-0.66964	-10.23	335	0.000
Working Relationship with Supervisor	-0.67857	-10.088	335	0.000
Working Relationship with Subordinates	-0.47024	-8.611	335	0.000
Vacation Time	-0.60417	-8.563	335	0.000
Working Relationship with Peers	-0.4375	-7.139	335	0.000
Flexible Hours	-0.30357	-4.514	335	0.000
Work Is Important to Society	-0.26786	-4.111	335	0.000
Being Able to Work Independently	-0.22024	-3.951	335	0.000
Being Able to Help Others	-0.14881	-2.546	335	0.011
Regular Weekday Hours	-0.09226	-1.384	335	0.167
Recognition from Coworkers	-0.02976	-0.421	335	0.674
Living Close to Place of Work	0.0625	0.998	335	0.319

Of the top five factors in importance, only one, being treated with respect, was rated in the top 5 in satisfaction. In fact, being treated with respect was ranked as the most important factor for males. Interestingly, only two factors, living close to work and recognition from co-workers, had lower importance scores than satisfaction scores. Stated another way, males rated the importance of seventeen of the nineteen factors higher than their satisfaction with those factors (see Table 4).

Thirteen out of the nineteen factors resulted in strong statistically significant differences amongst males. The largest difference found between satisfaction and importance was sufficient pay. In other words, respondents were not just above neutral

in their rating of 3.154 in satisfaction with their pay. However, the importance of sufficient pay was rated at a strong 4.521 mean (see Table 5).

Table 4 Males Importance Ranking

Rank	Factor	Importance	Satisfaction	Males Satisfaction Rank
1	Being Treated with Respect	4.701	3.983	5
2	Job Security	4.547	3.923	8
3	Sufficient Pay	4.521	3.154	17
4	Good Health Insurance and Benefits	4.496	3.821	13
5	Working Relationship with Supervisor	4.453	3.915	9
6	Opportunities to Provide Input at Work	4.333	3.829	12
7	Vacation Time	4.325	3.949	6
8	Being Able to Work Independently	4.325	4.205	1
9	Opportunity to Learn New Skills	4.291	3.803	15
10	Working Relationship with Subordinates	4.214	3.88	10
11	Being Able to Help Others	4.205	4.128	2
12	Working Relationship with Peers	4.197	3.932	7
13	Limited Job-Related Stress	4.154	3.009	19
14	Work Is Important to Society	4.111	3.838	11
15	Flexible Hours	4.094	4.026	4
16	Chances for Promotion	4.051	3.051	18
17	Living Close to Place of Work	3.966	4.094	3
18	Regular Weekday Hours	3.88	3.812	14
19	Recognition from Coworkers	3.573	3.684	16

Table 5 Comparison of Means between Satisfaction and Importance for Males

Factor	Paired Differences Means	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sufficient Pay	-1.36752	-10.478	116	0.000
Limited Job-Related Stress	-1.1453	-8.498	116	0.000
Chances for Promotion	-1	-7.281	116	0.000
Being Treated with Respect	-0.71795	-6.977	116	0.000
Good Health Insurance and Benefits	-0.67521	-5.935	116	0.000
Job Security	-0.62393	-5.756	116	0.000
Working Relationship with Supervisor	-0.53846	-5.037	116	0.000
Opportunities to Provide Input at Work	-0.50427	-4.841	116	0.000
Opportunity to Learn New Skills	-0.48718	-4.526	116	0.000
Working Relationship with Subordinates	-0.33333	-3.703	116	0.000
Vacation Time	-0.37607	-3.308	116	0.001
Working Relationship with Peers	-0.26496	-2.434	116	0.016
Work Is Important to Society	-0.2735	-2.329	116	0.022
Being Able to Help Others	-0.19658	-1.831	116	0.07
Being Able to Work Independently	-0.11966	-1.467	116	0.145
Flexible Hours	-0.06838	-0.616	116	0.539
Regular Weekday Hours	-0.06838	-0.573	116	0.568
Recognition from Coworkers	0.11111	0.93	116	0.354
Living Close to Place of Work	0.12821	1.142	116	0.256

Interestingly, none of the top five factors in importance were ranked in the top five in satisfaction for female participants (see Table 6).

Table 6 Importance Rank of Females

Rank	Factors	Importance	Satisfaction	Satisfaction Rank of Females
1	Being Treated with Respect	4.822	3.749	11
2	Sufficient Pay	4.689	3.078	17
3	Job Security	4.671	3.822	8
4	Good Health Insurance and Benefits	4.653	3.717	13
5	Working Relationship with Supervisor	4.525	3.772	10
6	Vacation Time	4.539	3.813	9
7	Opportunities to Provide Input at Work	4.434	3.621	15
8	Opportunity to Learn New Skills	4.438	3.671	14
9	Being Able to Work Independently	4.37	4.096	3
10	Being Able to Help Others	4.406	4.247	1
11	Working Relationship with Peers	4.379	3.849	7
12	Flexible Hours	4.352	3.922	5
13	Working Relationship with Subordinates	4.283	3.74	12
14	Limited Job-Related Stress	4.233	2.904	18
15	Chances for Promotion	4.192	2.817	19
16	Work Is Important to Society	4.155	3.89	6
17	Living Close to Place of Work	4.073	4.1	2
18	Regular Weekday Hours	4.032	3.927	4
19	Recognition from Coworkers	3.607	3.502	16

Fifteen of the nineteen factors for females resulted in strong statistically significant differences. Like their male counterparts, the largest difference found between satisfaction and importance was sufficient pay. In other words, respondents were not just above neutral in their rating of 3.078 in satisfaction with their pay. However, the importance of sufficient pay was rated at a strong 4.689 mean (see Table 7).

Table 7 Comparison of Means between Satisfaction and Importance for Females

Factors	Paired Differences Means	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sufficient Pay	-1.61187	-17.609	218	0.000
Limited Job-Related Stress	-1.32877	-13.682	218	0.000
Chances for Promotion	-1.37443	-13.333	218	0.000
Being Treated with Respect	-1.07306	-13.009	218	0.000
Job Security	-0.84932	-10.75	218	0.000
Good Health Insurance and Benefits	-0.93607	-10.264	218	0.000
Opportunity to Learn New Skills	-0.76712	-9.383	218	0.000
Opportunities to Provide Input at Work	-0.81279	-9.118	218	0.000
Working Relationship with Supervisor	-0.75342	-8.791	218	0.000
Vacation Time	-0.72603	-8.186	218	0.000
Working Relationship with Subordinates	-0.54338	-7.962	218	0.000
Working Relationship with Peers	-0.52968	-7.226	218	0.000
Flexible Hours	-0.42922	-5.15	218	0.000
Being Able to Work Independently	-0.27397	-3.73	218	0.000
Work Is Important to Society	-0.26484	-3.394	218	0.001
Being Able to Help Others	-0.12329	-1.785	218	0.076
Regular Weekday Hours	-0.10502	-1.311	218	0.191
Recognition from Coworkers	-0.10502	-1.199	218	0.232
Living Close to Place of Work	0.0274	0.364	218	0.716

When comparing the satisfaction of factors between males and females, none of the nineteen factors were different in a statistically significant manner. However, when comparing the importance of factors, six of the nineteen factors had weak but statistically significant differences. Further, in all six instances, the means of the female respondents were statistically higher than the means of the males (see Table 8).

Table 8 Differences in Importance

Factors	Males	Females	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Vacation Time	4.325	4.539	.139*	0.011
Being Able to Help Others	4.205	4.406	.120*	0.027
Sufficient Pay	4.521	4.689	.134*	0.014
Working Relationship with Peers	4.197	4.379	.112*	0.039
Being Treated with Respect	4.701	4.822	.130*	0.017
Flexible Hours	4.094	4.352	.146**	0.007
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Four of the top five factors in satisfaction were shared by males with being treated with respect as the only exception, while females reflected the overall rating completely. This may be attributed to nearly two-thirds of the respondents being female. However, both genders ranked the top five factors nearly identically. The only variance, which was slight, was females ranked sufficient pay second while males ranked sufficient pay third. Likewise, job security was flipped by gender. Despite the high rankings for sufficient pay, this factor was not the most important for either male or females. Fascinatingly, being treated with respect was the most important factor (see Table 9).

Table 9 *Top 5 in Importance and Satisfaction*

Importance		
Overall	Males	Females
Being Treated with Respect	Being Treated with Respect	Being Treated with Respect
Sufficient Pay	Job Security	Sufficient Pay
Job Security	Sufficient Pay	Job Security
Good Health Insurance and Benefits	Good Health Insurance and Benefits	Good Health Insurance and Benefits
Working Relationship with Supervisor	Working Relationship with Supervisor	Working Relationship with Supervisor

Satisfaction		
Overall	Males	Females
Being Able to Help Others	Being Able to Work Independently	Being Able to Help Others
Being Able to Work Independently	Being Able to Help Others	Living Close to Place of Work
Living Close to Place of Work	Living Close to Place of Work	Being Able to Work Independently
Flexible Hours	Flexible Hours	Regular Weekday Hours
Regular Weekday Hours	Being Treated with Respect	Flexible Hours

4. Conclusions and Implications

There was remarkable consistency between the satisfaction and importance responses by both genders. The statistical differences between importance and satisfaction reveal that regardless of the satisfaction, those items may have not been factors which motivated workers as the importance of those factors was nearly always higher.

While many studies have found the gender differences in satisfaction with job factors, this study did not find any such differences. However, what stands out is that the factors that are important to employees, they are not highly ranked on their satisfaction list. For organizations, this should be a noteworthy aspect and the managers may need to address, the factors which are important to the employees to increase their satisfaction on these factors.

5. Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of the study is the limited sample size. Additional research can examine other factors such as age, ethnicity, personality type, level of education, and level of income. Further, these results could be compared with responses from other countries.

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