THE EFFECT OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY ON THE JOB SATISFACTION OF A GROUP OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT EMPLOYEES EMPLOYED IN A MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

Employees working in municipalities and especially those who have to support other municipal employees (such as human resource management personnel), are constantly working in difficult working circumstances which may have a negative effect on their levels of job satisfaction. The effect of gender and ethnicity on the job satisfaction of human resource management employees working in a municipality has not yet been demonstrated. This information could help to improve the working circumstances of employees working in the municipality. Results indicated that employees are dissatisfied about the following job satisfaction components: company policies and practices, remuneration, promotion, security, acknowledgement for good performances, status, supervisor skills, working conditions, equipment and facilities. White employees in particular are found to be less satisfied in terms of the way their bosses handled personnel matters, on variety and on independent functioning in their job context. In the light of the above-mentioned, a few recommendations were made.

Key words: job satisfaction, biographical variables, human resource management employees, municipality

1.   INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

How do organizations know if they are keeping employees happy, motivated, and actively committed to the organization? Harrison, Newman and Roth (2006:311) argue that variables such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment overlap a good deal and could be collectively considered when examining employee attitudes and behavior. Harrison et al. (2006:316) stated further that "*when attempting to understand patterns of work behavior from attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, researchers should conceptualize the criterion at a high level of abstraction*".

According to Curtis (2007:92) job satisfaction is a widely researched topic, because most individuals spend a large part of their lives at work. Therefore understanding the factors that contribute to job satisfaction is important to improving the overall well-being of individuals in this aspect of their lives. Another reason suggested for investigating job satisfaction lies in the assumption that increasing job satisfaction will increase productivity and, ultimately, organizational profit. Moynihan and Pandey (2007:803) has argued that the key to long-term success has been, and will continue to be, how

organizations manage their employees, because creating meaningful work and otherwise keeping employees happy is central to fostering organizational effectiveness.

In spite of the vast amount of material on job satisfaction, it would seem that dissatisfaction with work has reached critical levels throughout society (Parsons, Simmons, Penn & Furlough, 2003). Human resource managers are often concerned about job satisfaction, because it is positively associated with workforce motivation, retention, and performance, as well as with reduced turnover and litigation (West & Berman, 2009: 329). Employees employed in municipalities, and more specifically those involved in human resource management activities, very likely fall under the group of South African employees who experience a high degree of dissatisfaction.

The employees employed in the human resource management department must increasingly see to the well-being and support of the very likely already - dissatisfied employees employed in the municipality, and cases of stress and burnout have already been identified in previous research (Cope 2003:2) by employees in the human resource management function. White employees in particular, indicated high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction (Cope, 2003: 2). Despite the fact that the municipal employees are exposed to a broad spectrum of causes of job dissatisfaction, very little research which can describe their actual job satisfaction levels, or which can indicate what effect biographical variables (for example gender and ethnicity) can have on their levels and causes of job satisfaction, is available.

In support of and as compliment to the aforementioned studies, it was decided to compare the levels and causes of job satisfaction among sub-groups (gender and ethnicity) of human resource management employees employed in a municipality. This information can aid psychologists / employers in following a specific and effective approach in terms of communication and the management of problems with those involved. Van den Berg (2002:5) argues that wellness management strategies must be proactive and preventative, because when employees experience high levels of job dissatisfaction and request aid, their health and productivity levels have likely already been negatively influenced. Proactive steps can be taken if more information on levels and causes of job dissatisfaction among municipal employees is available.

2.   JOB SATISFACTION

Job satisfaction is a central construct in organizational psychology. This is associated with important work related outcomes (for example higher levels of productivity, organizational involvement and life satisfaction), as well as lower levels of absenteeism and labour turnover (Borman, Ilgen & Klimoski 2003:22; Anderson et al. 2001:33; Kahneman, Diener & Schwarz 1999:46). From the

aforementioned discussions it is apparent that research regarding the nature and cause of job satisfaction is important. Theoretical conceptualizations, with regard to the determinants of job satisfaction, can be divided into situational approaches, dispositional approaches and interactional approaches (Cooper & Robertson 2004:363; Anderson et al. 2001:2).

As per the situational approach, focus is placed on favourable working conditions, which will imply high levels of job satisfaction (Cooper & Robertson, 2004:363). According to the dispositional approach, job satisfaction is a function of individual dispositions, and some individuals will experience higher levels of job satisfaction than others on grounds of this. Situational and dispositional approaches are however, integrated in the interactional approaches of job satisfaction, where both the individual and work environment can be regarded as determinants of job satisfaction (Cooper & Robertson, 2004:362).

For the purposes of this study focus shall be placed on the interactional approach to job satisfaction, primarily as it is simple and workable, and is used in previous research (Bender, Donohue & Heywood 2002:12; Sloane & Williams 2000:32; Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza 2000:33; Donohue & Heywood 2003: 1; Anderson et al. 2001:3).

Classic theories often emphasize job satisfaction as resulting from congruence between what employees want from their jobs and perceptions about what they actually receive (Wright & Davis, 2003:76), though other authors also note working conditions and outcomes that are not always articulated as wants or needs (e.g., job challenges; Bright, 2008:162). Typically, studies hypothesize that the following factors affect job satisfaction: (a) work content, (b) work impact, (c) salary, (d) benefits and working conditions, and (e) job security (Saari and Judge, 2004:402; Steijn, 2004:301).

Although studies usually find that job satisfaction among public and private sector employees and managers are similar, a defining difference is that those in the public sector are more often motivated by the intrinsic nonmonetary nature of the job and opportunities to make a difference (Wright & Davis, 2003:76). Many other studies have also found that the opportunity to accomplish something worthwhile and to make a difference affect job satisfaction (Bright, 2005:43, 2008:162; Kamdron, 2005:1218; Dehart-Davis, Marlowe & Pandey, 2007:880; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007:813).

Having the opportunity to practice and develop one's skills is an important determinant of job satisfaction (Daley & Pope, 2004:132; Markman & Baron, 2003:282). Often, this involves challenging jobs that give people a chance to do what they do best (Bright, 2005:43, 2008:162). Recognition for achievement is also important for employees in the public sector. Kotze (2008:168) defines recognition for achievement as the recognition for

achievements by management, colleagues, subordinates and client. Linked to this is compensation. Although studies generally agree that compensation affects job satisfaction, they vary markedly about the extent of its importance. Some studies find that compensation is one of the most important explanatory variables of job satisfaction for those working in the public sector (Ellickson, 2002:350; Steijn, 2004:299), while other studies note that benefits also matter (Reddick & Coggburn, 2008:34).

Furthermore, for many people, economic security is linked to well-being. During the last decade, job security has become an increasingly important issue for those in the public sector (Adams, Goldsmith, McKenna & Rosse, 2000:124; Lewis and Frank, 2002:396; Light, 1999:22, 2008:14; Prah, 2005:730), and at upper echelons, civil service protections are no longer always available; many managers operate in at-will environments (Bowman and West, 2007:24; Kellough & Nigro, 2006:88) and with varying degrees of severance pay. Yet economic security is more than job security. It also involves obtaining competitive, alternate employment in the face of job loss.

Furthermore, stress, anxiety and depression have been recognized as important outcome measures in various work environments (Bennett, Williams, Page, Hood & Woollard, 2004:235). Plaisier, de Bruijn, de Graaf, Have, Beekman & Penninx (2006:12) suggested that poor working conditions may be an important precursor of stress and may, therefore, contribute to the development of depression or anxiety which eventually can lead to job dissatisfaction.

Biographical variables may also play a role in an individual's level of job satisfaction. Iindividual attributes reflect the role of time and work motivation. Time can matter in three ways: employee age, length of time with the organization, and length of time in position. The balance of the empirical literature suggests that older employees in the public sector are more positively engaged with their work (Bakker, Demerouti & Euwema, 2005:173)

Kifle and Kler (2009:18) indicated in a study been done in municipalities in Australia, that gender differences may have an effect on the level of job satisfaction experienced. They have found that women having high workloads together with family responsibilities (like for instance small children), experience levels of job dissatisfaction. Abu-Bader (2005:17), however found no significant differences with regard to job satisfaction between male and female social workers in Israel. Abu-Bader (2005:9) however found a significant difference between Arab and Jewish social workers when looking at the effect of gender on job satisfaction levels of social workers' job satisfaction scores where Jews being more satisfied than Arabs (Abu-Bader, 2005: 9).

Dole & Schroeder (2001:230) however found no relationship between gender and ethnicity and job satisfaction amongst accountants working in state and private organisations.

3.   METHOD

A convenience sample (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006:15) of 40 employees, employed in the human resource management department of the municipality, was included in the study. A Self Assessment Questionnaire, namely the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (Buitendach, 2009: 11), was utilized. The purpose of this questionnaire is to give the respondent a chance to tell the researcher how he/she feels about their present job, what things they are satisfied with and what things they are not satisfied with. By using the above-mentioned questionnaire, the researchers hoped to get a better understanding of the things people like and dislike about their jobs. The questionnaire is a standardized questionnaire, and possesses construct and content validity. Reliability coefficients, as determined by the Kuder Richardson formula 8 and test-retest methods, vary between 0,66 and 0, 91 (Buitendach, 2009:9). A biographical questionnaire developed by the Human Sciences Research Council was used to collect biographical information. From the information gathered by the biographical questionnaire, it was evident that the majority of respondents (63%) were married, 40% were African, 32% were White and 28% were Coloured while 63% were female and 50% of the respondents had 7 years service and longer in the organization.

Although only 40 respondents could be included in this study, the results (refer to table 2), on grounds of Guilford's guide to interpret statistically significant relationships, can still be interpreted as a definite effect (Tredoux & Durrheim, 2002:38).

3.1.   Formulation of hypothesis

Based on the theoretical overview, the theoretical and null hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

Theoretical hypotheses (H1)

Statistically significant differences exist with regard to the scores achieved on job satisfaction components between certain sub-groups (gender and ethnicity) of human resource management employees who are employed in a municipality.

Null hypotheses (H0)

No statistically significant differences exist with regard to the scores achieved on job satisfaction components between certain sub-groups (gender and ethnicity) of human resource management employees who are employed in a municipality.

3.2.   Statistical analysis

Differences in job satisfaction between sub groups were determined by means of multiple variance analysis (Manova). The aforementioned analyses were decided upon as the data (n=40) is normally distributed and implies a parametric statistical method.

4.   RESULTS

4.1.   Level of job satisfaction for the group as a whole

The job satisfaction levels for the group as a whole, in light of the different job satisfaction components, are given in table 1.

Table 1: Levels of job satisfaction in municipal employees (n=40)

SCALE	AVERAGE VALUE	STD DEVIATION	INTERPRETATION
Utilization of abilities	17.6000	5.48100	Satisfied
Performance	17.0000	4.97580	Satisfied
Activity	17.6000	4.85372	Satisfied
Promotion	12.0667	4.48702	Uncertain
Power	16.7333	5.08502	Satisfied
Company policy and practices	13.4333	4.18275	Dissatisfied
Remuneration	13.0000	4.24264	Uncertain
Colleagues	18.2000	4.48292	Satisfied
Creativity	17.7000	4.99068	Satisfied
Independence	18.5000	4.48561	Satisfied
Morale	18.0333	4.36667	Satisfied
Recognition	14.2000	5.39092	Dissatisfied
Responsibility	17.0667	4.63073	Satisfied
Security	15.6667	4.11334	Dissatisfied
Social service	18.7333	4.48702	Satisfied
Social status	15.5000	3.93700	Dissatisfied
Supervisor: human relations	15.6000	4.70216	Dissatisfied
Supervisory technical	14.6667	5.58528	Dissatisfied
Variety	16.5667	5.02877	Satisfied
Working conditions	16.6000	4.31996	Dissatisfied
Total score	324.4667	73.36340	Satisfied

From table 1, it is apparent that the respondents are dissatisfied with the following dimensions (see Buitendach, 2009:9 for norm table):

- company policy and practices
- remuneration
- promotion within the company
- recognition for good performance
- security
- social status
- supervision: human relations
- supervision: technical execution of tasks
- working conditions.

4.2. Effect of gender and ethnicity on job satisfaction

Table 2: Effect of biographical variables on the job satisfaction of municipal employees (differences between groups) (n=40)

VARIABLES	SUB GROUPS			
	GENDER		ETHNICITY	
	F value	P value	F value	P value
1. Utilization of abilities	,19	,66	,73	,48
2. Performance	,02	,88	,53	,59
3. Activity	,32	,57	,73	,19
4. Promotion	,74	,39	,89	,42
5. Power	,43	,51	,08	,35
6. Company policy and practices	,11	,73	,05	,36
7. Compensation	,63	,43	,22	,30
8. Colleagues	,15	,69	,41	,66
9. Creativity	,02	,86	,35	,27
10. Independence	,04	,83	,80	,05*
11. Morale	,09	,75	,25	,30
12. Recognition	,18	,67	,10	,34
13. Responsibility	,06	,79	,31	,11
14. Security	,61	,21	,99	,38
15. Social service	,44	,51	,47	,62
16. Social status	,18	,67	,50	,60
17. Supervisor: human relations	,01	,90	,74	,03*
18. Supervisory technical	,23	,27	,93	,07
19. Variety	,18	,67	,62	,05*
20. Working conditions	,16	,68	,38	,68

It is apparent from table 2 that no statistically significant differences, with regard to gender, are observed. Men and women's job satisfaction levels, with regards to the different components of job satisfaction, do therefore not differ significantly from one another. Statistically significant differences are however observed with regard to ethnicity. With regard to the components supervision: human relations (in other words the manner in which supervisors manage

their people), independence (in other words the degree which autonomy and independence is allowed) and variety (in other words the degree to which alteration and variation are built into tasks), statistically significant differences were achieved (see table 2).

Table 3: Differences in scores attained on supervisor: human relations, independence and variety (differences between ethnical groups) (n=40)

AFRICAN				COLOURED			
SCALE	AVERAGE VALUE	STD DEVIATION	INTER-PRETATION	SCALE	AVERAGE VALUE	STD DEVIATION	INTER-PRETATION
Supervisor: human relations	15,80	4.62	Uncertain	Supervisor: human relations	16,80	4,89	Satisfied
Independence	17,00	4,48	Uncertain	Independence	18,50	4,62	Satisfied
Variety	15,80	15,00	Uncertain	Variety	16,50	5,22	Satisfied

WHITE			
SCALE	AVERAGE VALUE	STD DEVIATION	INTERPRETATION
Supervisor: human relations	12,62	2,82	Dissatisfied
Independence	16,60	4,20	Dissatisfied
Variety	14,80	5,23	Dissatisfied

Upon closer investigation (see table 3) it is apparent that especially coloured employees experience satisfaction on these component (Supervisor: Human Relations). African employees are uncertain (in other words do not experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction) and white employees experience dissatisfaction. This same tendency is experienced with regard to the components variety and independence.

The theoretical hypothesis is therefore accepted, namely that statistically significant differences exist in terms of scores achieved on job satisfaction components between certain subgroups (gender and ethnicity) of human resource management employees employed in a municipality.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Level of job satisfaction for the group as a whole

The abovementioned results are in line with previous research findings.

Literature studies (Jenkins and Elliot, 2004: 629;Van Der Doef and Maes, 1999:93; Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006:1331; as well as Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002:102) indicated that unfair company policies (like unfair working hours, conditions of employment and clothing policies in particular), may give rise to job dissatisfaction.

From the literature it is also clear that studies generally agree that compensation affects job satisfaction. However, other authors such as Light (2008:18) claim that compensation is less important than other factors mentioned earlier. Although there is also some evidence that HR professionals underestimate the importance of pay to employees (Nelson, Stone, Frye & Chown, 2008:40), organizations that fail to provide adequate compensation find it more difficult to attract and retain top talent. People like challenging jobs, but many people are also willing to leave for jobs that pay more.

Some studies have also found that public employees are more satisfied with opportunities for professional growth and recognition for good performance than are their private sector counterparts, but studies of managers do not always bear this out (deLeon & Taher, 1996:410; Lewis, 1991:398; Maidani, 1991:442; Rainey, 1991:28; Steel & Warner, 1990:18). The importance of possibilities of promotion within the company as well as having the opportunity to learn new skills, is also important to new entrants; a survey of public affairs graduates found that the opportunity for promotion and recognition for good performance was identified as a *very important* (75%) factor in deciding which job to choose, along with the opportunity for job advancement (West & Berman, 2009: 331).

Sverke, Hellgren and Naswall (2006:8) added that experiences of uncertainty concerning one's future employment (insecurity) are likely to have severe consequences for an employee's overall life situation in that economic and other highly valued aspects of life will be perceived as threatened. Furthermore, Sverke, Hellgren and Naswall (2000:8) reported that the individual's evaluation of work is also shaped by a strong desire for stability and losing the job would mean losing this structure and stability as well. The individuals will be frustrated and experience stress due to the fact that they feel these important features of life are threatened, and are uncertain as to how to protect them.

Social status can be considered to be important within a social structure which carries some esteem from others. In practice, a person may be a member of several social structures, so that he or she has the possibility of esteem from several positions (Warr, 1987:18, 2007:728). Esteem within a social structure is generated primarily through the value attached to activities inherent in a role and the contribution these make to the institution in question. Role incumbency also provides public evidence that one has certain abilities, conforms to certain norms, and meets certain social obligations. In turn, membership of an institution may carry with it high or low esteem in the wider community. Particular role activities may of course be considered important to different degrees by different people, and external indicators of social esteem do not always coincide with the value which a person accords to his or her own contributions (Warr, 1987:18, 2007:728).

The finding supervision: human relations is supported by Jenkins & Elliot (2004:628) who stated that support can be emotional, such as the action of caring or listening sympathetically, or instrumental, involving tangible assistance such as help with a work task. Social support is a straightforward resource in that it is functional in achieving work goals (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005:175).Thus instrumental support from colleagues can help to get the work done in time and may therefore alleviate the impact of work overload on strain, including burnout (Van Der Doef & Maes, 1999:92).

Furthermore, stress, anxiety and depression have been recognized as important outcome measures in various work environments (Bennett, Williams, Page, Hood & Woollard, 2004:235). Plaisier, de Bruijn, de Graaf, Have, Beekman & Penninx (2006:10) suggested that poor working conditions may be an important precursor of stress and may, therefore, contribute to the development of depression or anxiety. There are abundant studies exploring the relationship between working conditions and stress, anxiety and depression (Rusli, Edimansyah & Naing, 2008:33). Karasek (1979:293) have shown that workers with jobs simultaneously low in job control and high in job demand reported exhaustion, nervousness, anxiety, and insomnia or disturbed sleep.

5.2.   Effect of gender and ethnicity on job satisfaction

From table 2 it was indicated that significant differences are observed with regard to ethnicity on the following job satisfaction dimensions:

- human relations
- independence
- variety.

Black and white employees (in particular) are dissatisfied with the above-mentioned results. The aforementioned results thus concur with research conducted by Cope (2003:12), which pointed out that white employees employed in human resource management departments, experienced more job dissatisfaction than their African peers.

6.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this article was to determine the effect of gender and ethnicity on the job satisfaction of a group of human resource management employees employed in a municipality. From the results of the study it can be concluded that the employees are dissatisfied with regard to the following dimensions: company policy and practices, remuneration, promotion within the company, recognition for good performance, security, social status, supervision: human relations, supervision: technical execution of tasks and physical working conditions, equipment and facilities.

With regard to the effect of ethnicity on employees' job satisfaction, it is apparent that in particular white employees are dissatisfied with the following job satisfaction components: human relations (in other words the manner in which supervisors manage their people), independence (in other words the degree to which autonomy and independence is allowed) and variety (in other words the degree of alteration and variation built into tasks).

Employers should be aware of the aforementioned results, and should pay special attention to the following:

- Company policies and practices should support employees. Fair policies with regard to working hours, conditions of employment and clothing policies, should be implemented.

- Recognition for good performance (for example in the form of a bonus), should be considered. Grobler, Warnich, Carrel, Elbert and Hatfield (2002:373) indicate that managers prefer a salary increase as other examples (for example bonuses and life insurance) are linked to the salary notch. Recognition for good performance will produce feelings of security and independence.

- Clear career promotion paths must exist for each occupation, and an employee must be able to progress upward within the organization according to his performance. Should vacancies exist within the organization, preference must be given to existing employees.

- Employees should be empowered enough to feel part of the social environment by means of regularly organized social functions. These employees should also be allowed to obtain knowledge about the cultures of different employees. Language courses, programmes focusing on breaking cultural barriers or stereotypes, and the valuing of cultural differences, should be considered.

- Working conditions (for example light, office space and temperature) must be satisfactory. Stationary and electronic equipment should always be available and in working condition.

With regard to black (to a lesser extent) and white employees, the importance of human relation/self-leadership skills amongst employees should be emphasized. Training of managers in particular to develop human relation/self-leadership skills will help them to manage difficult subordinates, and to be able to give guidance on the technical execution of tasks. Supervisors especially, must be trained in the management of particularly white employees in their department. The incorporation of job enrichment, job enlargement and job rotation to achieve variety and independence for especially white employees, should be considered.

Lastly, open and regular communication sessions between employees, will help to identify problems timeously as well as to implement measures to deal with that pro-actively.

Kreigler (n.d.) as cited in Van Zyl and Lazenby (2002:114), recommends that methods should be found to improve the health and productivity of all South Africans (including municipality employees). In this regard, it is hoped that the results of this study will serve to stimulate more research.

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