

THE DETERMINANTS OF JOB-SATISFACTION IN BRITAIN

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A Summary

The economics literature on workers' well-being is relatively modest but growing. This study aims to extend this analysis by examining job satisfaction in Britain and other nations. The authors use information concerning nearly 7000 randomly selected Britons, who have been tracked and interviewed in each year of the 1990's. Approximately 40,000 face-to-face interviews have been done. The broad patterns found for satisfaction in Great Britain are replicated by studies on other European countries and the US.

All those interviewed were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with respect to seven specific items: promotion prospects; total pay; relations with their supervisor; job security; ability to work on own initiative; the actual work itself and the hours of work. Each of these categories was assigned a number between 1 and 7, 1 representing 'not satisfied at all', 7 indicating 'completely satisfied' and the numbers from 2 to 6 corresponding to intermediate levels of satisfaction. Finally, and subsequent to these seven questions, a question was asked:

"All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your present job overall using the same 1-7 scale?"

The preliminary questions suggest individuals evaluated many attributes of their job package when responding. This approach will produce a response more closely approximating satisfaction at the workplace than would a simple direct question. This question forms the basis for our study of the causes of job-satisfaction.

How satisfied are British Workers?

The pattern of satisfaction scores (shown in the table over page) indicates, contrary to some opinion, most workers in the UK appear to be remarkably satisfied with their

jobs. Approximately a fifth of all workers suggest that they are ‘completely satisfied’ with their job. Whilst those individuals reporting the next highest level of satisfaction (number 6) constitute the largest grouping, with some 41% percent of people replying with this figure. As the level of job-satisfaction falls (from 5 to 1) so does the number of people who feel this represents their situation, with only two percent suggesting they are not satisfied at all.

The Job Satisfaction Data

Satisfaction Level	Number of Individuals	Percentage
7 (completely satisfied)	5860	20.3
6	11676	40.5
5	5662	19.6
4	2470	8.6
3	1836	6.4
2	732	2.5
1 (not satisfied at all)	606	2.1
Total	28842	100

The Causes of Satisfaction

Unrelated to the type of job the authors discern some interesting patterns in satisfaction. Men are found to be markedly less satisfied in work than women, and non-whites noticeably less satisfied than whites. Job-satisfaction also appears to fall with age, from the mid-teens until the late 30’s, whereupon satisfaction begins to rise again and overall older workers are more satisfied.

Surprisingly, higher levels of education induce lower reported levels of satisfaction; individuals with degrees report satisfaction scores below those with A or O-levels, who themselves report lower numbers than those with no qualifications. This result may be explained by the idea that satisfaction depends upon the gap between outcomes and aspirations, and that education raises people’s targets.

Turning to the job itself, greater hours of work are a cause of dissatisfaction whilst higher income raises job-satisfaction; this effect is, however, not as pronounced as many would expect. Interestingly, the study finds that to compensate the average worker for a one-hour increase in the working week, and leave satisfaction unchanged, would require the take home wage for that hour to equal nine pounds.

Other sources of dissatisfaction associated with a job are the length of commuting time and working shift or varied working patterns. Whilst those employees who gain incentive pay or bonus schemes, or who experience work-related training, report significantly higher levels of satisfaction.

Examining the nature of the workplace itself, individuals who have a union at their workplace are less satisfied than comparable workers in non-union establishments; however unions may conceivably still be beneficial by influencing hours of work, pay or other working conditions. The size of the firm or organisation is also found to exert

a pronounced effect on worker well-being, with reported satisfaction decreasing as the size of workplace increases. People like small offices and factories.

Finally, turning to the employing organisation, individuals employed within the state sector are found to be more satisfied than workers in the private sector are. However there has been a pronounced fall in satisfaction at work for public sector workers in the 1990's. This is shown in the table below. This displays the average satisfaction score (on the 1-7 scale) for the workers who have remained in the public sector throughout the period and those in the private sector.

Average Job-Satisfaction Score for Public and Private Sector employees

Year	Public Sector Employees	Private Sector Employees
1991	5.68	5.49
1992	5.62	5.50
1993	5.53	5.44
1994	5.43	5.41
1995	5.43	5.33
1996	5.42	5.38

The 1997 data are currently being checked.

One group of state sector employees is, however, found to have much lower level of job-satisfaction when compared to their counterparts in the government sector, and below that of the private sector. These are teachers.

Conclusions

The key findings arising from this analysis are as follows. First, most workers appear to be remarkably happy with their jobs. Second, education appears to depress satisfaction with work. Third, workers in large establishments are less satisfied than those employed in small workplaces. Finally, workers within the state sector appear to have higher levels of well-being than comparable individuals working in the private sector, but this effect has been declining strongly through the 1990s.