

GENDER AND JOB SATISFACTION IN A SELF-MANAGED WORK TEAM ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This study examines the determinants of job satisfaction for women and men working in self-managed work teams. The data used are from a 1990 survey sample of 99 production employees in an electronics manufacturing plant. A model that integrates past theories using factors from job design, interpersonal and personal levels is tested. Workers' positions in the organizational hierarchy were controlled in order to clarify gender differences in predictors of job satisfaction. The model explained 67% of the variance for men and 55% of the variance for women. Women and men were found to have two predictors in common: Cooperation and commitment. Additionally, women's job satisfaction was affected by task significance and task identity. Men's job satisfaction was also affected by role clarity and skill variety.

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction has been studied for decades and gender differences have been noted for at least 25 years. However, most job satisfaction models have focused either on job design, interpersonal factors, or on personal factors. Few studies have combined all of these areas for a more holistic analysis. A model that includes job characteristics as well as personal and interpersonal factors is particularly relevant today as new management approaches such as self-managed work teams (SMWTs) place increasing emphasis on these workplace characteristics. SMWTs typically consist of 5 to 15 workers who are collectively responsible for making decisions and performing all the tasks related to a defined piece of work or project. The team may be responsible for scheduling its work, interacting with customers, disciplining team members, participating in hiring, and many other responsibilities previously left to management in traditional job designs (Stanley-Stevens, Yeatts, and Seward 1995). The growth in SMWTs has been attributed to a variety of positive impacts on the organization's performance including lower turnover and absenteeism, increased flexibility and productivity, improved communication and cooperation (Boyett and Conn

1988; Lawler, 1986; Yeatts, Beyerlein and Thibodeaux 1991). The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between several workplace characteristics and job satisfaction within a SMWT environment and, in particular, determine whether the importance of these characteristics varies by gender.

Several researchers have discussed the need for integrated models for studying work attitudes, such as job satisfaction, for both men and women (Feldberg and Glenn 1979; Izraeli 1983; Lambert 1991; Lorence 1987; Neil and Snizek 1987; Pearson and Kahn 1980). Such an integrated model would include aspects of previous models with regard to organizational, job design, interpersonal and personal factors. Even though it is reasonable to assume that gender socialization has a significant influence on a person's values and expectations and consequently his/her satisfaction, limiting the factors related to men's job satisfaction to job characteristics, as has traditionally been done (eg. Hackman and Oldham 1975, 1976, 1980) and factors related to women's job satisfaction to interpersonal factors, as reflected by past studies (Clark 1997; Lambert 1991; Mason 1995) is inadequate. Additionally, women can be expected to be affected by job characteristics and men can

be expected to be affected by interpersonal factors, especially in SMWTs where interaction and teamwork are emphasized. Other factors such as age and position in the hierarchy also need to be considered. The following is a discussion of the integrated model to be tested.

POSITION IN THE ORGANIZATION'S HIERARCHY

Position in the hierarchy is expected to be an important organizational variable affecting job satisfaction. Kanter (1976) argues that job satisfaction differences between the sexes are a "function of location in organizational structures" rather than of gender. In hierarchical systems, women are disadvantaged with regard to opportunity and power which results in behaviors and attitudes (limited aspirations, concern with co-worker friendships) that are also likely true for men in disadvantaged positions. Position in the hierarchy has covaried with gender in the past (Kanter 1976, 1977; Israeli 1983; Glass, 1984). Lambert (1991) found comparable levels of job satisfaction among men and women when controlling for job conditions. Also, Neil and Snizek (1988) found no significant gender difference in job satisfaction when hierarchical position in the organization was controlled. On the other hand, Mason (1995) found similar levels of job satisfaction for women and men at the same clerical level but found women managers to be more satisfied than men managers. These findings suggest the following propositions:

1) When position in the organizational hierarchy is controlled, the model which measures job, interpersonal and personal characteristics will provide similar levels of explanatory power for both men's and women's job satisfaction.

2) When position in the organizational hierarchy is controlled, men and women will have similar levels of job satisfaction.

JOB DESIGN FACTORS

The job characteristics model has often been tested and supported by previous re-

search. Common job characteristics include skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and role clarity (Hackman and Oldham 1975, 1976, 1980 and see Loher, Noe, Moeller and Fitzgerald 1985, for meta analysis). Some differences have been reported regarding the effects of job characteristics on men's and women's job satisfaction. Specifically, the factor found to be more related to women's satisfaction than men's is skill variety (Miller 1980). More important predictors for men include task significance (Rosenbach, Daily and Morgan 1979) and autonomy (D'Arcy, Syrotuik and Siddique 1984; Keith and Glass 1977; Jurgensen 1978; McCarrey, Edwards, and Jones 1977; Miller 1980; Mottaz 1986; Murray and Atkinson 1981). The job model was originally designed for men and some studies have found more factors related to men's satisfaction than to women's. But with all respondents working in SMWTs, at the same organizational level, these findings suggest the following proposition:

3) Job characteristics will be significantly related to both men's and women's job satisfaction.

INTERPERSONAL FACTORS

Interpersonal level explanations of job satisfaction suggest that women's job satisfaction is linked to social relationships, including cooperation, coworker support, supervisor support, feedback and recognition from other workers (Abdel-Halim 1982; Blau 1981; Cummins 1989; Drory and Shamir 1988; Karasek, Triantis, and Chaudhry 1982; Manning and Fullerton 1988; Mottaz 1986; Schnake 1983; Skaret and Bruning 1986; Zalesny, Farace, and Kurchner-Hawkins 1985). Since SMWT environments emphasize cooperation and teamwork, this view would contend that women will experience higher job satisfaction in a SMWT environment. But since the level of hierarchy is controlled, it is expected that the gender differences found in past studies would be reduced here, suggesting the following proposition:

4) Interpersonal characteristics will provide similar explanation for women's and men's job satisfaction.

PERSONAL FACTORS

Regarding personal factors, commitment has been found to affect job satisfaction but not necessarily differently for women and men (Bateman and Strasser 1984; Robinson, Roth and Brown 1993; Vandenberg and Lance 1992; and for a meta-analysis, Blegen 1993). Age and education have been examined before with mixed results and no indication that they affect job satisfaction differently for women than for men (Hackman and Oldham 1980; Kalleberg and Loscocco 1983; Loscocco and Bose 1998; Neil and Snizek 1988; Smith, Smits and Hoy 1998). Satisfaction with pay has also had contradictory effects, with some researchers finding it positively related to job satisfaction (Hogan and Mantell 1987) and some, negatively (Hackman and Oldham 1980); but again, no differences between women and men. These findings suggest the following proposition:

5) Personal factors have similar effects on both men's and women's job satisfaction.

In sum, an integrated model of job satisfaction involves a variety of predictors including job characteristics, interpersonal factors, and personal factors. Gender differences in the predictors of job satisfaction may be caused by differences in the positions in the organizational hierarchy of the jobs held by men and women. The following study examines the predictors of job satisfaction for workers in self-managed work teams where both men and women occupy positions at the same level of in the organizational hierarchy.

METHOD

A survey instrument was developed in early 1990, using existing literature as a basis for including questions that could be later used to develop indices for the concepts of interest (e.g. job characteristics) (See Appendix A). In June 1990, the in-

strument was distributed to approximately 400 workers at an electronics manufacturing facility in the southwest United States. This plant is subsidiary of a large, national firm which has been in operation since 1987. From this survey, 313 instruments (78%) were completed.

Of the instruments completed, 120 were from employees classified as production workers, employees organized into self-managed work teams, where all workers, both male and female, performed the same tasks and held the same responsibilities. Of the 120 respondents from the production division, 99 answered the question asking their sex (52 women and 47 men). These respondents are used for the analysis. Having both men and women in comparable jobs allows for a control of the hierarchical position since they are all in the same position. Such control has rarely been used in previous research because in most studies the men and women hold traditional job positions, i.e. a higher percentage of males in management positions and a high percentage of females in lower paying positions.

DATA ANALYSIS

Factor analyses and reliability tests were run in order to determine the consistency of the items used to measure a single concept. Separate multiple regressions were performed for women and men using job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Only testing respondents who worked in self-managed work teams as production employees controlled position in the organizational hierarchy. The independent variables measuring job characteristics included skill variety, task significance, task identity, autonomy and role clarity. Interpersonal independent variables measuring interpersonal relationships included cooperation, and feedback/recognition. Personal characteristics measured included age, education, and satisfaction with pay.

The application of theory, the correlation coefficient (R^2) and partial coefficients of each variable were used to identify any

variables that could be eliminated from the equation (Cohen and Cohen 1983). This was preferable to stepwise regression because it is based on theoretical understanding of variables where stepwise regression allows the computer to select the variables independent of causal priority or logical relevance (Cohen and Cohen 1983). The regression analyses revealed education and satisfaction with pay as two factors that could be removed from the analysis. This was further indicated by minimal support from past research. Therefore education and satisfaction with pay were removed from the analysis.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

While this study provides insight into factors that affect women's and men's job satisfaction, there are several limitations. First, the data were collected solely from a cross-sectional, self-report questionnaire of employee attitudes. Such a format subjects itself to a number of biases. First, common method variance, measuring the dependent and independent variables within the same instrument, can result in inflated correlations between the dependent and independent variables. Unfortunately, using a different method to measure job satisfaction would have required additional data collection and this was not practical given our time and financial constraints. To reduce the effects of common method variance such as respondents' marking answers consistently high or low, concepts were measured by using several questions, some of which were in a reversed format.

Concerning clarity of the questions, the questionnaire was pretested with a small group of employees and, consequently, some questions were reworded in order to improve understanding. Also, interviews were conducted following the survey in order to insure questions were understood the way the researchers intended. Using multiple questions to measure a single concept also reduced problems of question misunderstanding since questions that did not correlate highly with others measuring the

same concept were removed. Finally, selection bias may also be an issue with the 21 production associates who did not mark their sex.

FINDINGS

The first proposition states: The model will provide similar levels of explanatory power for both men's and women's job satisfaction.

To compare the fit of the model for men and women, two multiple regressions were performed (see Tables 1 and 2). These analyses calculated both the variance explained by the hypothesized determinants and the relative strength of each

determinant toward the overall explanatory power (Lewis Beck 1980). The model appears to provide moderate explanatory power for both men and women, supporting proposition 1. However, the model explains over 11 percent more of the variance for men (adjusted $R^2 = .67$) than for women (adjusted $R^2 = .55$). Thus, proposition 1 is supported.

T-tests revealed no significant difference between men's and women's job satisfaction (see Table 3). This finding supports proposition 2, which states: Men and women have similar levels of job satisfaction when controlling for position in the organizational hierarchy. However considering the other factors in the model revealed that there were significant differences in the mean scores of men and women for task significance and skill variety. Women scored higher on task significance and men scored higher on skill variety.

Proposition 3 states: Job characteristics will be significantly related to both men's and women's job satisfaction. Both men and women had two job characteristics that were significant determinants of job satisfaction. For women, task significance ($\text{Beta} = .30, p < .01$) and task identity ($\text{Beta} = .29, p < .01$) were significant predictors. For men, skill variety ($\text{Beta} = .37, p < .01$) and role clarity ($\text{Beta} = .36, p < .01$) were significant predictors. Thus, proposition 3 is not supported because men's and

Table 1
Multiple Regression Analysis for Women

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
<u>Job Design Factors</u>					
skill variety	.42	.42	.11	.99	.328
task signif.	.61	.21	.30	2.93	.006**
task identity	.31	.11	.29	2.85	.007**
autonomy	.07	.16	.05	.41	.684
role clarity	-.13	.22	-.07	-.57	.571
<u>Interpersonal Factors</u>					
cooperation	.31	.14	.27	2.08	.044*
feedback/rec.	.03	.11	.03	.28	.779
<u>Personal Factors</u>					
commitment	.57	.14	.44	3.94	.000***
age	.11	.08	.13	1.31	.196

Adjusted R Square .55

n = 52

* Significant at the .05 level

** Significant at the .01 level

*** Significant at the .001 level

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis for Men

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
<u>Job Design Factors</u>					
skill variety	1.30	.45	.37	2.89	.008**
task signif.	.33	.19	.21	1.68	.107
task identity	-.12	.16	-.12	-.90	.376
autonomy	-.13	.14	-.14	-.99	.333
role clarity	-.60	.21	.36	-2.89	.008**
<u>Interpersonal Factors</u>					
cooperation	.38	.19	.33	2.06	.050*
feedback/rec.	-.07	.12	-.08	-.56	.579
<u>Personal Factors</u>					
commitment	.74	.16	.58	4.59	.000***
age	-.04	.08	-.07	-.56	.579

Adjusted R Square .67

n = 47

* Significant at the .05 level

** Significant at the .01 level

*** Significant at the .001 level

Table 3
Mean Scores Comparing Women and Men

	Men (n=47)	Women (n=52)
job satisfaction	25.87	26.35
<u>Job Design Factors</u>		
skill variety	5.70	5.04*
task significance	18.04	19.21*
task identity	13.68	13.94
autonomy	13.87	14.59
role clarity	15.96	15.80
<u>Interpersonal Factors</u>		
cooperation	20.96	21.49
feedback/recognition	16.91	18.41
<u>Personal Factors</u>		
commitment	13.81	14.57
age	31.56	29.38

* Significant at the .05 level

women's job satisfaction were not significantly affected by the same job characteristics.

Proposition 4 states: Interpersonal characteristics will provide similar explanation for women's and men's job satisfaction. Cooperation was the significant interpersonal factor for both women (Beta=.27, $p < .05$) and men (Beta=.33, $p < .05$). Feedback/Recognition was not a significant variable for women nor for men. Thus, proposition 4 is supported.

Proposition 5 states: Personal characteristics are similar for men and women in explaining job satisfaction. Commitment is the strongest determinant of satisfaction for both women ($b=.44$, $p < .001$) and men ($b=.58$, $p < .001$). Age was not significant for women nor men. Thus, proposition 5 is supported.

DISCUSSION

This research has endeavored to provide a model that helps explain both men's and women's job satisfaction and to identify

factors related to men's and women's job satisfaction when working in self-managed work teams. The R^2 s indicate that the model has been successful in explaining both men's and women's job satisfaction. The significance levels of individual factors identify similarities and differences in predictors of men's and women's job satisfaction. Discussed below are the effects identified for each group of factors considered.

POSITION IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL HIERARCHY

With the analysis relieved of bias caused by differing hierarchical positions within the organization, the results of the t-tests comparing men and women were particularly interesting. In support of Kanter's theory and several studies (Neil and Snizek 1988; Northcott and Lowe 1987; Lambert 1991, Mason 1995), when organizational hierarchy was controlled, there was no significant difference in the self-reports of men's and women's job satisfaction.

JOB DESIGN FACTORS

This study supports the findings of de Vaus and McAllister (1991) who found gender differences only among job design (not social) factors. Women's job satisfaction was affected by task significance ($\beta=.30$) and task identity ($\beta=.29$). These findings support Hackman and Oldham's (1980) contention that when workers view their work as important and see how their work fits into the "big picture," they are more satisfied. Interestingly, this is contradictory to the findings of Rosenbach et al. (1979) who found women's job satisfaction related to all job dimensions except task significance. Also Miller (1980), and McNeely (1986) found "substantive complexity" (akin to this study's "skill variety") to be an important predictor.

Job characteristics related to men's satisfaction included skill variety ($\beta=.37$) and role clarity ($\beta=-.36$) which are the two factors Glisson and Durick (1988) found to be the most important predictors for job satisfaction. Other studies that have noted a positive effect of role clarity on job satisfaction include Abdel-Halim (1981) and Fry and Hellriegel (1987). The betas for men's significant job characteristics indicate that job characteristics have a larger effect on job satisfaction for men than for women. The presence of a negative relationship of role clarity together with a positive relationship of skill variety and cooperation to job satisfaction probably is reflective of the self-managed work team environment. These men expect the opportunity to work on complex tasks and to not have everything clearly defined for them. They defined these work assignments within their team. To have their roles clarified for them, presumably by management, was viewed as a sign of team incompetence. Autonomy was not found to be a significant predictor for men nor women which is contrary to many past studies (D'Arcy et al. 1984; Keith and Glass 1977; Jurgensen 1978; McCarrey, Edwards, and Jones 1977; Mottaz, 1986; Murray and Atkinson 1981). These studies suggested that more choice

in work provides more job satisfaction. Perhaps autonomy is taken for granted in this self-managed work team environment.

The job characteristics model has traditionally ignored role clarity as well as relational and personal elements, which were all found significant for both men and women in this study. Clearly, the model studied would be less adequate if these elements were excluded. However, the job characteristics do not explain work satisfaction as well in this study as in those of the past. One explanation could be that the self-managed work teams or the type of technology employed at this plant affect the importance of these factors. Also, it is possible that relational and personal factors have become more important to workers' satisfaction in recent years.

INTERPERSONAL FACTORS

Among interpersonal factors, cooperation had significant explanatory power for both men ($\beta=.33$) and women ($\beta=.27$) while feedback/recognition did not. The lack of finding feedback/recognition a significant predictor for both women and men contradicts past studies where supervisor support and feedback have been significant predictors of job satisfaction (Abdel-Halim 1982; Blau 1981; Cummins 1989; Drory and Shamir 1988; Karasek, Triantis, and Chaudhry 1982; Manning and Fullerton 1988; Mason 1995; Mottaz 1986; Schnake 1983; Skaret and Bruning 1986; Zalesny et al. 1985). For women, these results partially support the assumptions of the "gender model" where women's attitudes are expected to be derived from their wife/mother roles (Feldberg and Glenn 1979). Since these roles are often considered "thankless jobs," perhaps it is not surprising that feedback/recognition was not a significant predictor for women. The "gender model" posits that women's job satisfaction can be explained entirely through relational variables. Yet it is clear that, with the inclusion of job characteristics and personal factors, women's job satisfaction is better explained. In general, the perspective of the gender

model is not supported because women's job satisfaction was only partially explained by interpersonal variables and, as indicated by the betas, the interpersonal variables did a better job explaining men's satisfaction. Also, the value hypothesis (Lambert 1991) predicts that men's satisfaction would be significantly affected by autonomy, which was not the case. The importance of cooperation on men's satisfaction could indicate that cooperation is particularly important in self-managed work teams. Without cooperation, the team could not perform well. A second explanation is that men's attitudes are changing, where relationships have become more important to them than in the past.

PERSONAL FACTORS

Of the personal factors, commitment had strong explanatory power for both men ($\beta = .58$) and women ($\beta = .44$). This finding supports past studies by Bateman and Strasser (1984), Cummings and Molloy (1977), Robinson et al. (1993) and Vandenberg and Lance (1992). Commitment's positive effect on job satisfaction suggests that a worker's positive affectivity for the organization results in general positive affectivity for the job itself. Applying exchange theory to this situation, a worker probably weighs the benefits and costs of working for the organization and is committed to the organization because s/he feels the benefits outweigh the costs. Being committed to the organization allows the worker the freedom to enjoy his/her present situation. Also, committed workers feel a sense of "ownership" in the organization which leads to satisfaction. Persons not committed to the organization might give significant emotional energy to thoughts of leaving. Such feelings would reduce job satisfaction.

Contrary to the findings of Loscocco and Bose (1998) and Smith et al. (1995) both of which found a relationship with age and job satisfaction, no significant differences and low betas (.13 for women and -.07 for men) were found in this study. Loscocco and Bose's (1998) study was of Chinese

workers where gender stratification is considerably higher than in the United States and Smith et al.'s (1998) study does not control for position in the organizational hierarchy. The current study's finding confirms earlier suggestions that having position in the hierarchy controlled considerably reduces the effect of age (Kanter 1976, 1977; Northcott and Lowe 1987; Mason 1995).

SUMMARY

Both men and women reported positive work satisfaction (25.87 and 26.35 out of 30, respectively). What is particularly interesting about the findings of this study is the lack of emphasis on monetary or other recognition as the cause of people's work satisfaction. Satisfaction with pay had such little effect in the model that it was removed. Also, feedback/recognition was not found to be significant. Instead of depending on organizational rewards, both men and women appear to have made their jobs satisfying for themselves. Men, whose work satisfaction is affected by skill variety, have found variety in their work to a greater extent than women. Women, whose work satisfaction is affected by task significance, have found ways to view their work as more significant than men have.

Additionally interesting is the importance of commitment and cooperation to both men's and women's job satisfaction. Again, it is the workers' initiative that is making the job satisfactory to them. They are committed to the organization, which, as in all relationships, helps it be more satisfying to them. And, unlike the typical opinion of life in American companies, workers' satisfaction is affected by cooperation, not competition. These workers appear to be making quality-of-life decisions (one of which is to work in a company that has self-managed work teams) which have led to work satisfaction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR APPLICATION

Employers can increase their competitiveness by reducing their organization's

turnover and absenteeism ratio. Satisfaction has been linked to both lower turnover and absenteeism (Yeatts, Stanley-Stevens and Ruggiere 1992). Therefore, employers can help keep their employee turnover and absenteeism to a minimum by doing what they can to have satisfied employees. The present research suggests that with employees in SMWTs, whether male or female, commitment and cooperation are predicting factors of job satisfaction. Employer efforts, such as the installation of systems that provide rewards for team performance, rather than for individual performance, may help reduce competition and strengthen cooperation. Also, employee relationship seminars and communication training, may help improve cooperation.

The job characteristics that were found to affect job satisfaction in this study are task significance and task identity for women and role ambiguity and skill variety for men. The link of satisfaction with skill variety and task identity dates back to Marx (alienation) and Weber (bureaucracy's "iron cage"). Employers can help workers feel like their work is significant by fully explaining the purposes and effects of the work they do. Skill variety and task identity are achieved by letting employees participate in as much of the process of creating the product as possible (Hackman and Oldham 1980). The traditional assembly-line approach, where a worker tightens the same nut on a number of products all day long, is not satisfying (Hackman and Oldham 1980). Again, self-managed work teams are of value here because they allow workers to participate in a number of parts of the creation process. This is achieved by having teams of 8 to 15 people who each do a number of tasks. On a regular basis, these tasks are rotated. Consequently, the workers are familiar with a variety of tasks and have a greater understanding of the product they are creating.

The role of role clarity in predicting satisfaction is probably not a generalizable finding from this study. As stated earlier, role ambiguity is probably an indicator of

the self-managed work team environment, which, in turn has a positive effect on satisfaction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

T-tests reveal that women scored significantly higher on task significance and men scored significantly higher on skill variety. These findings are similar to those of Neil and Snizek (1988) and McNeely (1986) where there were differences in the predictors of job satisfaction as well as differences in the mean scores of these predictors. The differences in scoring could be attributed to a number of reasons. Such reasons include: 1) Women and men could merely perceive their jobs differently despite the fact that they are doing the same thing. Or 2) The gender distribution of teams varies so that there might be teams that are all women doing different tasks than teams with all men. Or 3) Since these are self-managed work teams, it could be that the people in these teams are segregating their tasks by gender. Certainly a topic for further research is to study the interpersonal dynamics and work distribution within self-managed work teams. Perhaps some type of self-imposed gender segregation of work tasks in the work teams is taking place.

Another explanation for the gender differences among job characteristics affecting work satisfaction can be attributed to socialization. Males are raised to be independent and self-directed. Consequently, an environment that allows men the opportunities to do a variety of tasks without clear explanation of what to do compliments their gender socialization. Females, on the other hand, are often raised with fewer options and are encouraged to be relational. Consequently, this relational orientation is even evident in the women's desires to participate in a complete piece of work and to feel that their work is important.

Lastly, this study only addresses one level of the organizational hierarchy (production associates). Further study on gender differences within other levels (e.g.

Managers or clerical workers) would enhance the body of knowledge on job satisfaction.

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