

Job satisfaction tops poll of life happiness

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Job satisfaction is the most critical factor for life satisfaction and well-being, according to new research by a team of economists at the University of Aberdeen.

The Europe-wide research project also highlights the dramatic increase of stress-related illnesses in recent years in employees with high-speed jobs and tight deadlines.

The research, led by Professor Ioannis Theodossiou, Dr David McCausland, and Kostantinos Pouliakas, of the Centre for European Labour Market Research (CELMR) at the University of Aberdeen Business School, highlights a number of key findings which demonstrate the link between job satisfaction and quality of life. The countries studied were Denmark, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK.

Professor Theodossiou, who co-ordinated the three-year research project funded by the European Union, said the link between working patterns on employees' quality of life and well-being is a major concern. He said: "Employers increasingly demand that their employees have versatile skills, working time flexibility and a willingness to relocate.

"It is widely accepted that European workers are becoming more stressed by time constraints and deadlines and since work is an overwhelmingly important part of most of our lives, the satisfaction we derive from our jobs is a major factor in how happy we are as individuals."

Professor Theodossiou and his team presented their findings to a European conference in Brussels recently where EU officials and high-level policymakers were invited from each of the governments of the participating EU Member States. The conference delegates also included representatives from employer and trade union organisations across the EU.

One of the most recurrent findings of the report is the fact that job satisfaction is the top factor in employees' overall life satisfaction. This is over and above satisfaction with family, leisure time, health, finance, and social life.

“We found that satisfaction with the amount of leisure, with environment and with housing come last in the pecking order of happiness and well-being,” said Professor Theodossiou. “Career fulfilment provides workers with the means to maintain life satisfaction according to our results.”

Another key finding of the report shows that in most of the countries studied the high educated have a significantly lower level of job satisfaction and/or the low educated have a higher level of job satisfaction.

“We also found the relationship between the type of occupation and the level of job satisfaction is one of the most strongest and most cross-country results,” continued Professor Theodossiou. “It points to the importance of the type of job as the main factor of job satisfaction.

“Interestingly, employees who, due to sickness or disability, are unable to work full time report a marked improvement in their life satisfaction if they are able to be work part-time. Hence, society can only gain from this if the labour markets accommodate these individuals.”

The other main conclusions of the report refer to the more obvious aspects of job satisfaction including wages and job security.

“Wages are generally considered to have a positive impact on job satisfaction and across all the countries studied, a higher wage has a significantly positive effect on job satisfaction. Employees also strongly desire jobs that provide security in their employment, which is demonstrated by the fact that risk-free, permanent contracts are the most preferred contracts on average. However, employees show a lot of concern with the uncertainty and restraint that is associated with rotating shifts and with having their working times determined by their employer.”

A consistent finding is that employees express a strong desire for early retirement plans at the age of 55 or 60. Professor Theodossiou said: “This is a particularly worrying trend for the future as employers may have to give up the possibility of early retirement for their workers, which is likely to come at a cost in terms of offering them higher wages or some other work benefit such as lighter responsibility, or avoiding fixed job routines.”

The key findings of the research were the result of an identical questionnaire drawn up for the seven different countries that were studied.

Professor Theodossiou added: “Our research provided us with a unique opportunity to study the relationship between an individual’s working situation and quality of life and, as our research has highlighted, the link between career fulfilment and life satisfaction cannot be underestimated. This is an issue of policy concern and deserves attention.”

Source: University of Aberdeen

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