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Higher Education Job Satisfaction and Relevance to Workforce

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss three major subjects. The major part consists of the relationships between higher education and the job market. Challenges, benefits, advantages and disadvantages of various higher education-workforce schemes to close the gap between courses and degrees offered by higher education institutions and employer demands are explained along with examples such as the current programs offered in the USA and by the National Health Service in the UK. Job satisfaction in higher education is then discussed including examples from around the world. Factors that cause job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are explained from various leading researches and conclusions from relevant researchers are presented. The difference that gender makes in the workplace is also a subject inducing many researches. Higher education influence on marital status is briefly discussed also with the aid of various researches as the closing paragraphs of this paper. Finally, the conclusion is presented taking into account the main subjects discussed throughout the paper.

1. Introduction

It is a well known fact that higher education has a critical role in competitive economies throughout the world by creating necessary knowledge and skills. Most higher education institutions have a descent working relationship with employers via various research programs and learning networks. Some institutions develop models for presenting higher level skills to satisfy employer's requirements. However, all higher education institutions should increase their capacity in engaging employers to a larger extent and must take into account their different profiles and objectives.

Cooperation between higher education institutions and companies isn't a new concept. Employers have been sponsoring university research based programs and projects for years. Many universities include business development and entrepreneurial units that work directly with employers to develop effective programs.

Due to the changes in economies worldwide, cooperation between higher education and employers has also been affected. A fresh drive has been created especially through foundation degrees to modify undergraduate programs which are designed in collaboration with employers. Workforce focus and increasing flexibility has caused higher education institutes to go beyond responsiveness to old-school full time student's demands to the education and skills required by employers in various sectors.

As stated above, the concept of job satisfaction has been the focus of many studies. Focus is then made on job satisfaction in higher education. However, not much research has been carried out on the affects that gender has on job satisfaction in the same field. This subject will then be discussed and the connection between individual and structural variables which affect men and women's views on job satisfaction in higher education. Most perspectives on job satisfaction are divided into two categories. The first perspective is structural which focuses on the relation between the working environment and personnel satisfaction. The second perspective is dispositional which focuses on personal characteristics and capabilities to adapt to the organizational environment. Researches indicate that to really understand factors that affect employee satisfaction in higher education, the interaction of workers' personal attributes with objective attributes related to the work environment must be addressed.

The closing sections of the paper will include further discussions related to how gender is relevant to job satisfaction in higher education working environments as well as marital contentment.

2. Higher Education Programs to Benefit Employer Requirements

It is important to have employer input to the development of vocationally-focused higher education programs which are intended to meet the needs of employment. Foundation degrees especially are vitally dependant on employer support. Employers represented on steering groups take a leading role in ensuring the design of a program is fit for purpose. Such involvement helps to reinforce the commitment of employers to the course and encourage their further involvement in delivering the program. Wider employer consultation may include a consultation event, a web based consultation or individual meetings with employers. Such consultation should consider the mode of delivery as well as content. Much discussion will relate to the provision of work based learning. Learning in the workplace often raises questions about the ability of full time provision to provide meaningful work based learning beyond placement experience. Although full time provision can meet minimum expectations for work based learning, flexible, part time modes of delivery may better meet both the university's program validation requirements and the needs of employers and individuals. A key consideration for employers is the time required to release employees for study. For example Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College's part time foundation degree in sport and leisure management was made flexible as possible to enable employees to participate. Attendance is required one day a fortnight, with an open door for students at other times to suit their work and family commitments. This flexibility has enabled employees to participate from well outside the area as the reputation of the course has grown.

Limiting input to employers on the steering group might

give one dominant partner or small group of employers' undue influence, with the risk of skewing the design in favor of special interests. A balance may need to be struck between specific employer needs and the broader requirements of program validation. For example, Aerosystems International cooperated with Yeovil College to develop a trainee program spanning advanced apprenticeship and a foundation degree, with the prospect of further progression to honors. The company had reservations about an internet module because it had no use for website development skills. A compromise was agreed whereby the module was adapted to accommodate the use of web based technology which the company uses in an asset tracking system.

Higher education providers should guide employers on the development and validation process and be mindful of jargon that may be commonplace in higher education but strange to employers. A significant employer contribution to the process may be to couch program documentation in language that can be readily understood in the workplace. For example, the University of Bath is working with Airbus UK and other aerospace associated companies to develop a demand-led curriculum to support the introduction of new composite materials technology with the industry. The project focuses on how higher education and further education institutions within the south west higher level skills pathfinder partnership can accredit existing Airbus in house composites material training. The project will support the future development needs of Airbus employees and will also create generic and industry specific resources that can be used more widely across the aerospace sector.

An example of higher education and workforce collaboration in the healthcare industry are the programs set up involving the UK's NHS (National Health Service) and higher education institutes. The quality, safety, effectiveness and efficiency of healthcare services depend on the availability of sufficient numbers of well-trained and well-motivated staff. The NHS has, therefore, rightly attached a high priority to the education and training of staff. Despite this, however, there is now an urgent requirement for a whole-system review of the education and training of the health and care workforce. This is made necessary by the consequences of the wider NHS reforms. More substantively, this situation presents a welcome opportunity to address some of the weaknesses of the current arrangements. These are complex, inflexible and unfair, and may be an obstacle to desirable changes in healthcare provision.

It is obvious that the new structures for education and training must be built around a stronger, more transparent and accountable system of workforce planning. For too long the current system has been characterized by "boom and bust" alternating oversupply and undersupply of trained staff with shortages eased by large-scale recruitment from overseas. This inability to identify and manage developments of the skill mix required in the health and care workforce has resulted in waste and inefficiency, as well as frustration and disappointment for individual trainees. Effective workforce

planning is not, of course, straightforward. It needs to take account of changes in technology and clinical practice as well as changing patterns of demand and expectations from patients and the wider community. Addressing all these issues effectively through workforce planning requires close alignment with service commissioning and funding, as well as linkages with employers, educators and trainers.

3. Job Satisfaction in Higher Education

Oshagbemi (1996, 389) believes that job satisfaction is an important subject because of its relevance to the physical and mental wellbeing of employees. Hence, an understanding of the factors relating to job satisfaction is important. It may affect absenteeism, turnover and job performance. "Highly satisfied faculty will generally be innovative and motivated to establish and maintain an environment conducive to learning" (Truell, Price and Joyner 1998, 120). In this regard, job satisfaction is seen as 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one's job experiences' (Locke in Oshagbemi 1999, 388).

Academics are a unique group worth studying. Their primary tasks are defined as teaching, research and community service although they also have administrative and management tasks. Academics have to keep abreast of new developments in other fields that influence the way they work, such as computer and computer-related developments. Added to this is the issue of control over their teaching, research and community service functions. Thus, research findings on the job satisfaction of those employed in other professions may not be useful for understanding the factors that influence the satisfaction of academics in higher education.

Research related items that were found to cause job dissatisfaction in higher education included: inadequate time for research, pressure to publish, erosion of time for research and personal development in specialist area, increasing difficulty with and time spent on obtaining research grants, lack of funds for research, difficulty attracting able Ph.D. students, necessity of applying for grant support, the undue importance attached to 'research', little time spent writing, research assessment exercises and lack of research facilities (Oshagbemi 1997, 358). Contrary to Herzberg's theory, there were examples of elements of the job itself responsible for both job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction.

Other aspects of academics' jobs that caused dissatisfaction were: poor communication with university authorities, failure to provide agreed job description, authoritarian management structure, lack of consultation and top down communication, government policy towards universities, working hours, lack of co-ordination in management, not getting promoted unless one applies for it, lack of proper departmental strategy on teaching and research, poor retirement benefits, excessive bureaucracy, lack of leadership from the centre of the university, inconsistency in planning, location of university, changes in university funding mechanisms, not being able to

retire with full benefits at 60, lack of time to think, difficulty with managing the separate responsibilities of administration, teaching and research, and indifferent and inefficient management (Oshagbemi 1997, 358). All this research, mainly shaped by North American and Western European influences, suggest that there is much to be done to fully define and explore job satisfaction and administrative employees. Also, more research is needed to understand employee satisfaction in higher education in developing or less developed countries.

4. Higher Education Job Satisfaction in Terms of Gender

The concept of job satisfaction has been central to the study occupations. However, the effect of gender on job satisfaction in professional settings is further discussed further. Gender is a socially constructed, individual level variable that is made salient in organizational settings and thus produces distinct experiences for men and women in the organization.

Previous studies show how men and women experience opportunity structures in work organizations in unique ways (Kanter 1977, 1987, Lips 1991, Benokraitis and Feagin 1996, Fernandez 1993, Reskin 1988). For example, these studies find that organizational members hold beliefs that define women as inferior to men in the workplace in terms of productivity and achievement. These negative images of women in the workplace manifest themselves in coworker interaction and, at times, result in barriers that women face when seeking upward mobility in the workplace. Past work describes the connections between gendered beliefs about status and the resulting configuration of hierarchies in organizations. Ridgeway (1997) notes that gender status beliefs, "widely held cultural beliefs that evaluate one sex as generally superior and diffusely more competent than the other", are easily made salient in the workplace during interactions because people construe them as relevant to many situations. She adds that gender status beliefs cause workplace inequality by expecting that male workers will be more competent than female workers and therefore expected to receive more rewards such as promotions and compensation from the workplace. Since gender status beliefs generally privilege male workers, males generally will be uninterested in correcting these forms of discrimination. If female organizational members violate these gender status beliefs, for example, by being promoted above male coworkers, then it is likely to trigger a negative reactive and further development of gender status beliefs from male workers. For example, this manifests itself in male accusations that the woman in question acquired upward mobility based on her sexuality rather than hard work. The result is that male organizational members cry unfair because their organizational culture, of which these gender status beliefs form a part, is being challenged. Since different groups of organizational members experience the dominant organizational culture dissimilarly, it is expected to see differences in relative importance of certain parts of the organizational culture for providing satisfaction

for its members. Organizational characteristics which bring job satisfaction for one group of workers, such as commitment to a gendered organizational structure, will not afford the same level of job satisfaction for other groups of workers. This may be because organizational commitment means something different to male and female workers

5. Higher Education and Marital Contentment

Acquiring higher education has two main effects in an individual's life. First, it gives several advantages at work: a better kind of job, a better salary, more bargaining power in the job market, and so on. All these advantages are expressed by a greater job satisfaction. Second, it increases the chances of marrying an educated partner, as the educational levels of partners are strongly interrelated.

Why do partners tend to have similar educational levels? This may be explained by lifestyle choices: similar-educated partners are more likely to share professional duties, past time activities and view of life. Also, the fertility intentions are similar between partners with similarities in education: educated individuals prefer to delay conception relative to the general population (Cochrane, 1979). In contrast, large differences in the partner's educational level have negative effects on experienced life satisfaction (Frey and Slutzer, 2006).

In the literature of job satisfaction, Blanchflower and Oswald (1992) analyze the National Children Development Study (NCDS) for 1981. Their findings show a positive relationship between job satisfaction and higher education. Meng (1990) estimates disaggregated job satisfaction for 1981 in the Social Change in Canada Survey (SCCS). He finds significance for negative relationships between higher education, "payment" and "surround"(i.e., job environment), and a positive relationship between higher education, "free" and "influence". Idson performs his analysis with the Quality of Employment Survey (QES), which considers US data for 1977. He did not find any significant relationship between education and job satisfaction. Finally, Florit and Lladosa (2007), by the Spanish Household Survey Panel (SHPS) for 1998, find a positive relationship between job satisfaction and education. Any worker enjoys higher marital satisfaction compared to manual workers, even though this is significant only for professional women. The reason can be that a non-manual worker might feel professionally more accomplished.

6. Conclusion

As higher education-workforce projects mature and opportunities for expansion are identified, partners can take the lead, as appropriate, on group activities and sharing information across wider networks about workforce needs, strategies for workforce recruitment, new approaches to undergraduate education, and data on effective practice. Networks might expand across single university systems or

through business and academic associations, government agencies, or other mechanisms. To share learning and insights and bring regional or local projects to scale, national networks and partnerships incorporate the full range of members from academic and business associations, professional societies, and government agencies in order to leverage individual efforts to achieve larger-scale implementation and impact. These networks provide vehicles for existing projects and partners to share learning and scale efforts, as well as platforms for other stakeholders currently not engaged in the initiative to participate in this work. The outputs of these multi-level approaches are sharing of content, replication of successful efforts, and creation of certification in emerging disciplines, increased institutional capacity, and clearer articulation of industry needs.

Since employees are more productive when satisfied with their jobs and the environment they work in, dimensions other than economic ones are major factors in encouraging employee productivity and efficiency in higher education institutions, where economic satisfaction is typically low. Therefore, it can be concluded that improvements concerning non-economic factors are vital in achieving job satisfaction.

From various researches carried out concerning how gender differs in job satisfaction in higher education there seems to be a common conclusion that males are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs if they embrace diversity and are committed to the organization.

This commitment to a male-dominated organization coupled with an embracement of gender diversity may create a problem for male faculty. Although, this may not be a problem if male faculty who embrace diversity consider this embracement synonymous with commitment to a new organizational structure. Female faculty seems to have a more resolved combination of job satisfaction predictors. Female commitment to a male dominated structure is not satisfying. Female faculty may rely on the development of contacts and ties to navigate a male dominated organization while males enter an organization with belief that it will serve them. Future research needs to assess these interpretations.

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