

Understanding the Employee Perspective in a Multicultural Environment: A Case Study into Job Satisfaction and Organisational Commitment in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

The UAE economy is a high growth economy (Ministry of Planning, 2005) and it is rapidly diversifying into areas of tourism, manufacturing, logistics, banking and finance. To promote all these industries a huge construction boom is being witnessed. The country's construction industry is valued at \$221 billion (around Dh811.73 billion) - the highest in the Middle East region. This highlights the fact that planned construction is the focus of the Emirates, particularly in the emirate of Dubai.

The shortage of indigenous manpower in the construction industry has attracted a large influx of overseas workers. Due to political stability in the GCC region as compared to other countries in the Middle East, the construction industry is mostly dependent on foreign workforce from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), and neighbouring Arab countries other than GCC countries.

As a result the workforce being very multicultural there is a need to appreciate the cultural diversity and expectations of employees while managing projects. Similarly, it is essential to understand the influence of different factors affecting job satisfaction and organisational commitment of employees, especially in this culturally diverse environment.

A strong correlation exists between organisational commitment and job satisfaction, with many researchers believing that the latter affects the former (Porter et al., 1974; Barling et al., 1990; MacKenzie et al., 1998; Mannheim et al., 1997). A pick and drop survey method was adopted for a qualitative questionnaire. A pilot study was also carried out to evaluate the questionnaire before distributing it to three construction organisations in the Emirate of Dubai.

The study revealed that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are strongly influenced by the nature of work, salary received, career progression, job flexibility, job security, direct manager's behaviour, company leadership and company culture. Thus, the findings of the study suggest that employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment are affected by a common list of factors, irrespective of industry sector.

Furthermore, the study evaluates the results in the context of cultural diversification in the construction industry. The analyses of the responses received from three construction organisations shows that there is a difference in extent of the factors influencing job satisfaction and organisational commitment of employees, based on their cultural background and origins.

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Introduction

Dubai is a leading emirate of the UAE in terms of economical growth and construction boom. The construction industry in Dubai employs approximately 393,535 numbers of individuals, which makes construction industry the largest employing industry of the emirate (Census, 2005). The emirate's ambitions continue to grow with over \$100 billion worth of projects in the pipeline. Some of the main development activities underway in Dubai are world's biggest man-made islands (Palm Islands), the world's tallest building (Burj Dubai), Dubai land city, Arabian Canal, Waterfront, Jumairah Towers, and a world's high-tech metro network in the city.

The shortage of indigenous manpower in the construction industry has attracted large influx of the foreign workers. The neighbouring Arab countries, apart from Gulf Council Countries (GCC) nations are contributing effectively towards the shortage of resources in the local market. This is due to the political stability of UAE as compared to other countries in the Middle-East. The construction industry is mostly dependent on the foreign workers from South-Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), other Arab countries, and European nations.

Thus, managing of such a multinational workforce in a vibrant city is a critical factor in the success of any country. Two key elements to consider while managing employees are job satisfaction and the level of their organisational commitment. As the UAE's construction industry has recently begun to develop and has limited academic research in the field of job satisfaction and organisational commitment for employees in the construction industry.

The aim of the study undertaken is to explore factors and their extent contributing towards job satisfaction and organisational commitment of the office employees in the industry. The paper also analyses cultural influence on employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Hence, the paper is outlined by presenting related literature review, followed by a methodology adopted, and is then concluded by survey results and findings.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an immediate antecedent of intention to leave the workplace and turnover. Unsatisfied workers will leave their jobs more than their satisfied colleagues (Padilla-Vellez, 1993; Gangadhraiah et al., 1990; Martin, 1990). Employees who experience job satisfaction are more likely to be productive and stay on the job (McNeese-Smith 1997; Irvine and Evans, 1995). Furthermore, more satisfied employees have more innovative activities in continuous quality improvement and more participation in decision-making in organisations (Kivimaki and Kalimo, 1994).

Literature suggests that numerous factors influence employee job satisfaction (Hodgetts, 1991), which are as follows (but not limited to):

- **Pay and benefits:** The importance of equitable reward is a factor to consider here. One could add fair promotion policies and practices concerning fair pay (Witt & Nye, 1992).

- **Promotion:** The level of satisfaction will depend on the acceptability of the system in operation, be it a system based on merit, or seniority, or whatever combination of the two.
- **Job:** This would embrace (a) skills variety-the extent to which the job allows a worker to use a number of different skills and abilities in executing his or her duties (Glisson & Durick, 1988); (b) interest and challenge derived from the job, in particular moderate challenge (Katzel, Thompson, & Guzzo, 1992); and (c) lack of role ambiguity – how clearly the individual understands the job (Glisson & Durick, 1988).
- **Leadership:** There has been endorsement of people-centred or participative leadership as a determinant of job satisfaction (Miller & Monge, 1986)
- **Work group:** It would appear that good intra-group working and supportive colleagues have value in not permitting job dissatisfaction to surface, rather than in promoting job satisfaction.
- **Working conditions:** Where working conditions are good, comfortable, and safe, the setting appears to be appropriate for reasonable job satisfaction, though not necessarily high job satisfaction. The situation with respect to job satisfaction would be bleaker if working conditions were poor.

Justification for the need to investigate job satisfaction is exemplified in the seemingly observed relationship between the levels of job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, grievance expression, tardiness, low morale and high turnover. Job satisfaction is an immediate antecedent of intention to leave the workplace and turnover (Padilla-Vellez, 1993; Gangadhraiah et al., 1990; Martin, 1990). Employees who experience job satisfaction are more likely to be productive and stay on the job (McNeese-Smith 1997; Irvine and Evans, 1995). Furthermore, satisfied employees have more innovative activities in continuous quality improvement and more participation in decision-making in organisations (Kivimaki and Kalimo, 1994).

Affect of Culture on Job Satisfaction

A number of researchers have observed that individuals from different cultures have fairly dissimilar levels of job satisfaction (Kanungo et al. 1976; Azumi and Macmillan, 1976, Jain et al., 1979; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1985; Griffeth and Hom, 1987; Yavas et al., 1990), organisational commitment (e.g. Near, 1989; Al-Meer, 1989, 1995); and performance (Al-Otaibi, 1993).

Bhuiyan and Islam (1996) examined the extent to which expatriate employees in Saudi Arabia are satisfied with the security of their jobs and the relationship between satisfaction with job security and continuance commitment. They found that expatriate employees in Saudi Arabia do not strongly express that they are satisfied with their job security. Furthermore, expatriate employees' satisfaction with job security is significantly correlated with continuance commitment. A recent case study by Randeree and Chaudhry (2007) concludes that job satisfaction affect productivity of employees in a culturally diversified environment.

Organisational Commitment

Organisational commitment has received substantial attention in past research due to its significant impact on work attitudes such as job satisfaction, performance, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. Porter et al. (1974) and Al-Meer (1989) elaborated organisational commitment as the relative strength of the identification of the individual and his involvement with his particular organisation.

Similar to above definition, Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualised three components of organisational commitment:

- **Affective commitment:** essentially concerns the person's emotional attachment to his or her organisation.
- **Continuance commitment:** a person's perception of the costs and risks associated with leaving his or her current organisation. There is considerable evidence that there are two aspects of continuance commitment: the personal sacrifice that leaving would involve, and a lack of alternatives available to the person.
- **Normative commitment:** a moral dimension, based on a person's felt obligation and responsibility to his or her employing organisation.

There is a good evidence for the distinctions between these forms of commitment (Dunham et al., 1994). Interestingly, they approximate respectively to the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of attitudes.

Schappe and Doran (1997) illustrate organisational commitment as employees with strong affective commitment remain with the organisation because they want to, those with strong continuance commitment because they need to, and those with strong normative commitment because they feel they ought to. In another definition, Meyer and Allen (1997) summarised that Organisational commitment is a psychological state that characterizes the employee's relationship with the organisation. This has implications in terms of continuing his or her membership in the organisation. A committed employee is one who stays with the organisation under any favourable or unfavourable circumstances affecting the organisation.

Kotter and Heskett (1992), for example, believe that corporate culture has a long-term impact on the performance of the organisation. Denison (1990) found that certain types of culture could enhance organisational performance, while Van der Post et al. (1998) found significant relationships between organisational culture and performance. It is also believed that corporate culture is related to organisational strategy, particularly in the implementation of a selected strategy in an organisation (Schwartz and Davis, 1981; Scholz, 1987; Choe, 1993; Rashid and Anantharaman, 1997).

Affect of Culture on Organisational Commitment

Al-Meer (1989) reported that Westerners, Asians, and Saudis differed significantly with respect to their commitment towards their respective organisations. Likewise, Yavas, Luqmani and Qureshi (1990) found that expatriates and Saudis shared similar work values. Finally, Ben-Bakr et al. (1994) concluded that organisational commitment was a predictor of turnover.

Inter-relationship of Job Satisfaction and Organisational Commitment

Several researchers have examined the relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Agho et al., 1993; Brooke et al., 1988; Cramer, 1996; Currivan, 1999; Glisson and Durick, 1988; Lance, 1991; Lok and Crawford, 1999; Mowday et al., 1979; Vandenberg and Lance, 1992).

Vandenberg and Lance (1992) examined the casual order of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. They found that organisational commitment causes job satisfaction. Russ and McNeily (1995) looked into the relationship between organisational commitment and job satisfaction using experience, gender and performance as moderators. They discovered that experience and performance moderate the relationship between organisational commitment and job satisfaction dimensions. The common denominator of all the above conceptualisations of organisational commitment is that organisational commitment is a strong desire to remain a member of the particular organisation, given opportunities to change jobs (Hunt, Chonko, & Wood, 1985).

Yousef (2000) studied the relationship between organisational commitment, job satisfaction and performance in the UAE and found significant positive results. However, his study reveals moderating effects of national culture on the relationships of leadership behaviour with organisational commitment, job satisfaction and performance.

Methodology

To achieve the aim and objectives of the research, a questionnaire was designed based on the research questions and the literature review. The questionnaire was aimed to collect mainly qualitative data, so that the extent of factors influencing job satisfaction and organisational commitment can be determined more accurately. However, the questionnaire was kept flexible enough to receive comments from the respondents.

For this study, the questionnaire was aimed at office workers only and 600 hard copies of the questionnaires were distributed to three companies. The sample organisations selected were Client, Consultant and Contractor firms. Then 30 days were given to respondents before the completed forms were collected from each organisation.

An overall response rate for the survey was 41.83 %, which is reasonably satisfactory for a construction industry. The responses were analysed to measure the extent of each factor influencing job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Furthermore, the data was cross-examined under the context of cultural groups.

General Characteristics of Data

The general characteristics of the survey are illustrated in the Table 1. Some of the major findings noted in the general characteristics of the construction industry in Dubai are as follows:

- The results indicate that nationals from South Asia make a largest employee group in the office environment of the industry.
- Male gender employees dominate the construction industry in the office as well.

- In the age group category, a moderate mix of employees is found.
- Majority of the office employees have their education to a graduation level.
- The survey results indicate that about 39% of the office employees have not changed their jobs frequently.

Table 1: General Characteristics of the Survey

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Nationality Group		
<i>UAE National</i>	17	6.8%
<i>Arab National</i>	40	15.9%
<i>Indian Sub-continent</i>	129	51.4%
<i>European</i>	44	17.5%
<i>American</i>	2	0.8%
<i>Canadian</i>	1	0.4%
<i>Far East Asian</i>	18	7.2%
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	217	86.5%
<i>Female</i>	34	13.5%
Age Group		
<i>21-25</i>	29	11.6%
<i>26-30</i>	90	35.9%
<i>31-35</i>	59	23.5%
<i>36-45</i>	62	24.7%
<i>46-55</i>	8	3.2%
<i>>55</i>	3	1.2%
Marital Status		
<i>Single</i>	70	27.9%
<i>Married</i>	179	71.3%
<i>Divorced</i>	1	0.4%
Educational Status		
<i>High School</i>	0	0.0%
<i>Diploma</i>	57	22.7%
<i>Graduate</i>	158	62.9%
<i>Post Graduate</i>	34	13.5%
<i>PhD</i>	1	0.4%
Years of professional experience		
<i>0-3</i>	42	16.7%
<i>4-5</i>	61	24.3%
<i>6-10</i>	56	22.3%
<i>10-15</i>	63	25.1%
<i>16-20</i>	19	7.6%
<i>20-30</i>	8	3.2%
<i>>30</i>	2	0.8%
Number of previous employers		
<i>1</i>	98	39.0%
<i>2</i>	46	18.3%
<i>3</i>	48	19.1%
<i>4</i>	25	10.0%
<i>5</i>	31	12.4%
<i>6-8</i>	3	1.2%
<i>8-10</i>	0	0.0%
<i>>10</i>	0	0.0%

Results

Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction

The factors determined by the literature review were listed in the questionnaire to analyse their affect on an employee’s job satisfaction. Table 2 summarises the responses received for each of those listed factors. The percentage response indicated in Table 2 illustrates that approximately 50% respondents believe that Nature of Work; 40% respondents feel that Direct Manager’s behaviour, very strongly influence their job satisfaction. However, around 50% responses say that Salary, Job Security, and Company Leadership strongly influence the job satisfaction.

Table 2: Factors and their influence on Employees’ Job Satisfaction

Factors	1=Very Little Influence		2=Little Influence		3=Moderate Influence		4=Strong Influence		5= Very Strong Influence		Mean	SD
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Salary	1	0.4%	16	6.4%	30	12.0%	120	47.8%	83	33.1%	4.1	0.86
Other Benefits	3	1.2%	17	6.8%	48	19.1%	113	45.0%	69	27.5%	3.9	0.92
Nature of work	1	0.4%	16	6.4%	28	11.2%	84	33.5%	121	48.2%	4.2	0.92
Job Flexibility	0	0.0%	16	6.4%	39	15.5%	107	42.6%	88	35.1%	4.1	0.87
Job Security	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	56	22.3%	117	46.6%	75	29.9%	4.1	0.76
Job Timing	0	0.0%	15	6.0%	91	36.3%	103	41.0%	41	16.3%	3.7	0.82
Company Culture	0	0.0%	43	17.1%	45	17.9%	80	31.9%	82	32.7%	3.8	1.08
Direct Manager behaviour	0	0.0%	10	4.0%	60	23.9%	83	33.1%	97	38.6%	4.1	0.89
Company leadership	1	0.4%	3	1.2%	54	21.5%	132	52.6%	60	23.9%	4.0	0.74
Name of company	43	17.1%	50	19.9%	55	21.9%	78	31.1%	24	9.6%	3.0	1.26
Place of work	3	1.2%	28	11.2%	75	29.9%	72	28.7%	71	28.3%	3.7	1.04
Living environment	5	2.0%	24	9.6%	59	23.5%	81	32.3%	69	27.5%	3.8	1.04
Inflation	2	0.8%	30	12.0%	120	47.8%	45	17.9%	52	20.7%	3.5	0.98
Traffic	9	3.6%	59	23.5%	113	45.0%	22	8.8%	47	18.7%	3.2	1.10

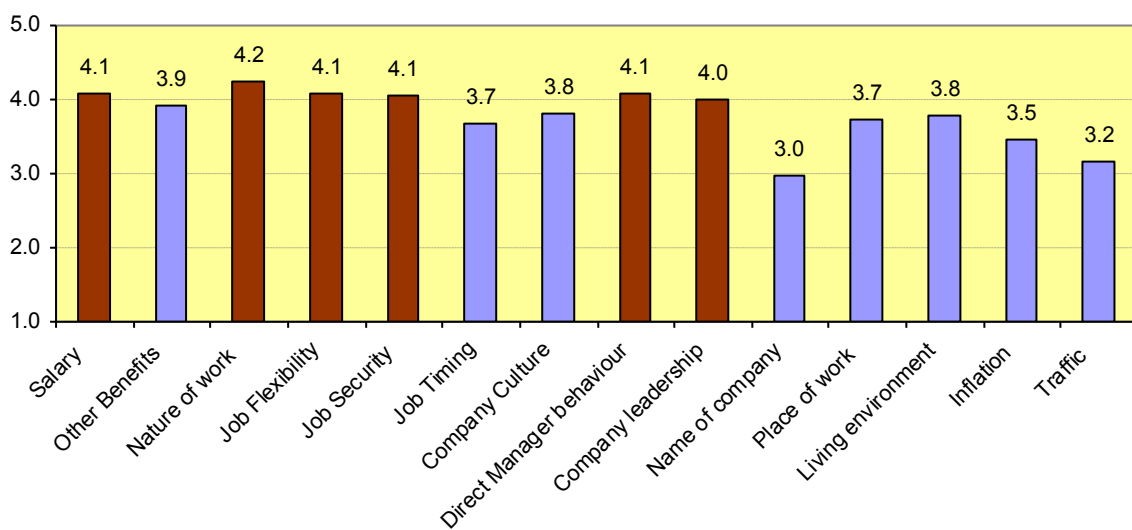


Figure 1: Mean Value of responses for each Factor affecting Job Satisfaction

The mean analysis of the responses indicate that six strongly influencing factors are Salary, Nature of work, Job flexibility, Job Security, Direct manager’s behaviour, and Company leadership as represented in Figure 1.

Factors Influencing Organisational Commitment

Furthermore, analysis of the factors in relation to their affect on the organisational commitment of the employees is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Factors and their influence on Employees’ Organisational Commitment

Factors	1=Very Little Influence		2=Little Influence		3=Moderate Influence		4=Strong Influence		5= Very Strong Influence		Mean	SD
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Salary	3	1.2%	27	10.8%	39	15.5%	91	36.3%	90	35.9%	4.0	1.03
Other Benefits	4	1.6%	23	9.2%	77	30.7%	120	47.8%	26	10.4%	3.6	0.86
Nature of work	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	31	12.4%	132	52.6%	85	33.9%	4.2	0.69
Job Flexibility	1	0.4%	36	14.3%	42	16.7%	122	48.6%	49	19.5%	3.7	0.95
Job Security	0	0.0%	15	6.0%	89	35.5%	75	29.9%	71	28.3%	3.8	0.92
Job Timing	0	0.0%	21	8.4%	71	28.3%	107	42.6%	50	19.9%	3.7	0.87
Company Culture	0	0.0%	20	8.0%	35	13.9%	111	44.2%	84	33.5%	4.0	0.89
Direct Manager behaviour	0	0.0%	4	1.6%	38	15.1%	85	33.9%	123	49.0%	4.3	0.78
Company leadership	1	0.4%	5	2.0%	66	26.3%	112	44.6%	66	26.3%	3.9	0.80
Name of company	27	10.8%	64	25.5%	49	19.5%	91	36.3%	19	7.6%	3.0	1.17
Place of work	13	5.2%	31	12.4%	111	44.2%	49	19.5%	46	18.3%	3.3	1.08
Living environment	4	1.6%	23	9.2%	132	52.6%	63	25.1%	16	6.4%	3.3	0.79
Inflation	3	1.2%	91	36.3%	105	41.8%	35	13.9%	16	6.4%	2.9	0.89
Traffic	34	13.5%	76	30.3%	66	26.3%	22	8.8%	52	20.7%	2.9	1.33

The response rate shown in Table 3 reveals that around 50% respondents’ organisational commitment is very strongly influenced by Direct manager’s behaviour. Furthermore, more than 40% of the respondents feel that their organisational commitment is strongly affected by Other benefits, Nature of work, Job flexibility, Job timing, Company culture, and leadership.

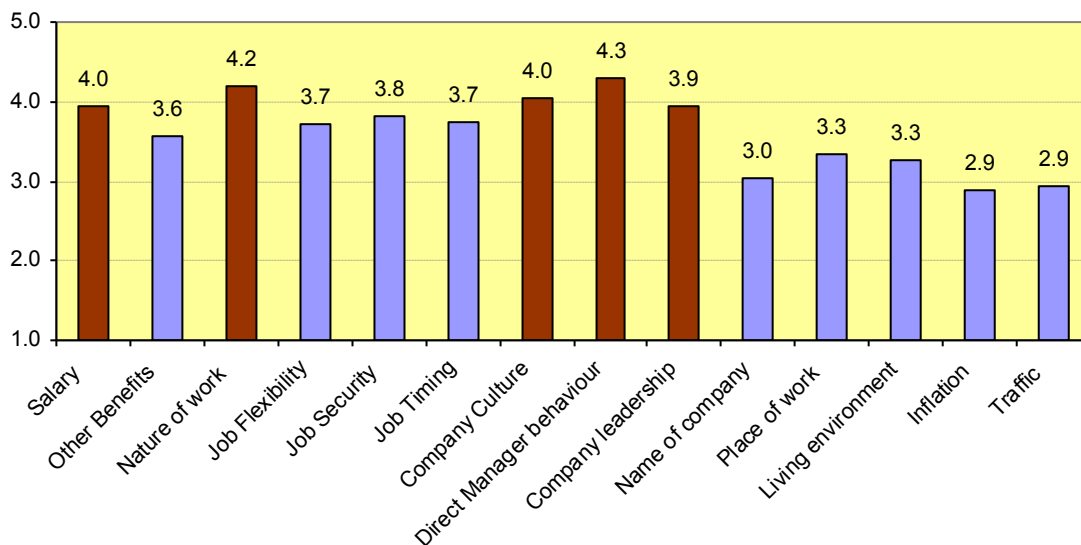


Figure 2: Mean Value of responses for each Factor affecting Organisational Commitment

Figure 2 indicates that organisational commitment of the employees is strongly influenced by Salary, Nature of Work, Company Culture, Direct Manager’s behaviour, and Company Leadership.

Data Analysis in Context of Nationality Groups

A cross-dimensional analysis of data received examines the extent of factors affecting job satisfaction and organisational commitment under the context of cultures.

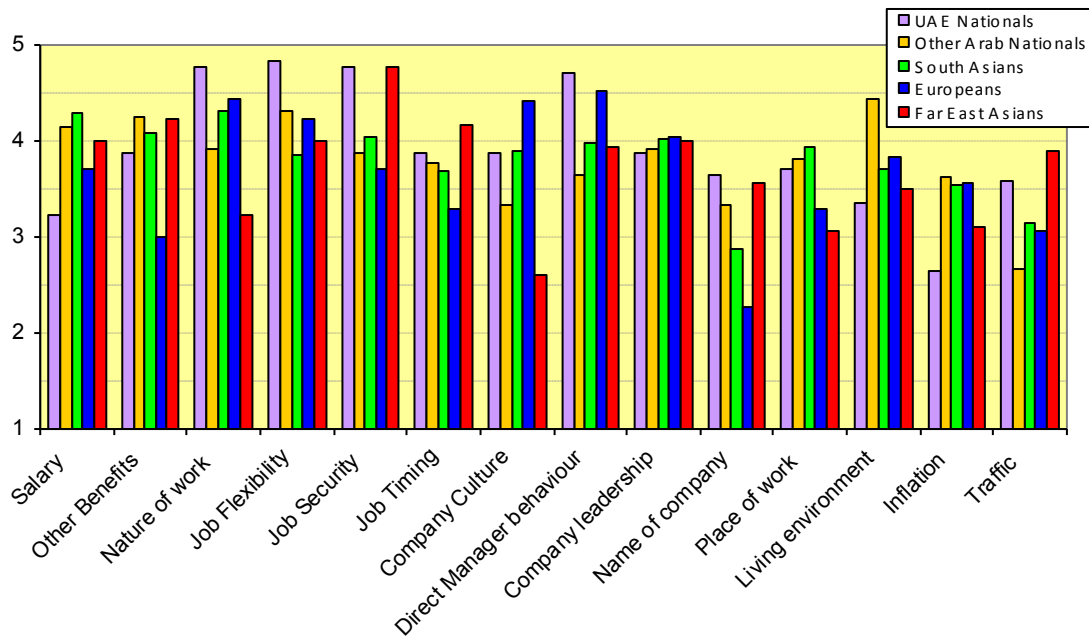


Figure 3: Comparison of Mean Values as per the Cultural Groups for factors influencing Job Satisfaction

The mean analysis of the responses for each factor is indicated in Figure 3. It indicates that almost all the factors do have some influence on employees’ job satisfaction. However, some of the interesting findings noted are that European national’s job satisfaction is strongly influenced by company culture and direct manager’s behaviour; where as Far East Asian’s job satisfaction is very strongly influenced by the extrinsic factors such as job security, salary and other benefits. On the other hand UAE nationals feel that salary moderately affect their job satisfaction but nature of work, job flexibility, and job security are strongly influencing factors.

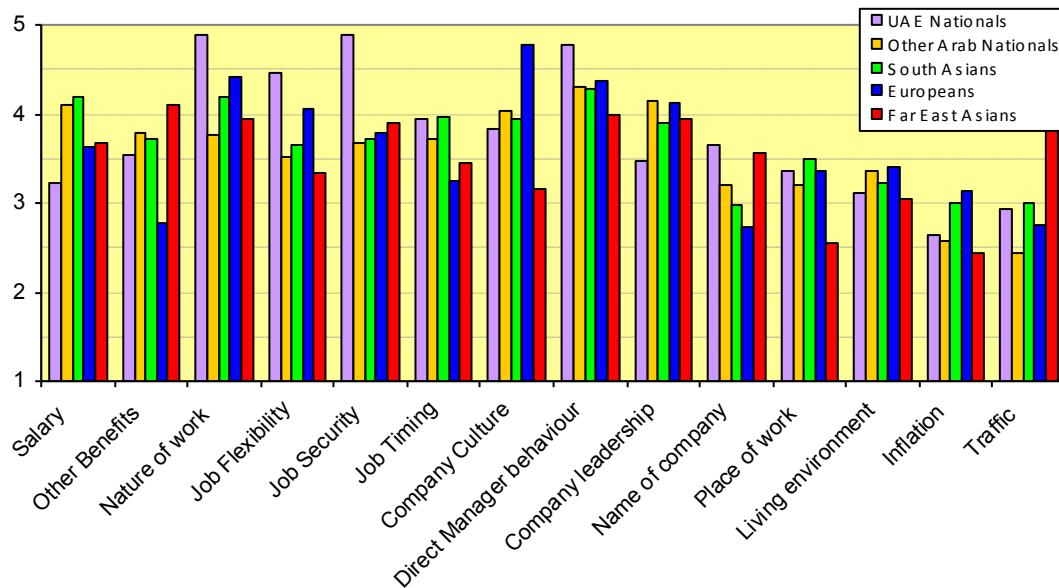


Figure 4: Comparison of Mean Values as per the Cultural Groups for factors influencing Organisational Commitment

Furthermore, Figure 4 elaborates the influence of the factors on organisational commitment of the employees in the industry. As it can be noted that a trend similar to job satisfaction follows here and Europeans' organisational commitment is very strongly affected by the company culture and nature of work. South Asian nationals value direct manager's behaviour, salary, nature of work more than other factors. Similarly, the organisational commitment of UAE nationals is strongly affected by the nature of work, job security, and direct manager's behaviour. It is clearly evident that most of the nationality groups' organisational commitment is strongly affected by the Direct manager's behaviour.

Conclusions

Job Satisfaction

The analysis of the survey reveal that employees' job satisfaction is strongly affected by following factors: Salary, Nature of work, Job Flexibility, Job Security, Direct Manager behaviour and Company Leadership. The response rate show that more than 50% respondents feel that Company leadership strongly influences their job satisfaction, which validates earlier findings (Miller & Monge, 1986; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), stating that people-centered or participative leadership style is a determinant of job satisfaction. McKenna (2006) further confirm the findings by exploring that job satisfaction straddles several related attitudes, for example people experience fairly strong affective or emotional responses to such things as remuneration, promotion opportunities, relations with superiors and colleagues, and the work itself.

Organisational Commitment

The study further explores that organisational commitment of employees in the industry is strongly influenced by salary, nature of work, company culture, direct manager's behaviour, and company leadership. The findings validate exploration of earlier researchers (Reichers,

1985; Barling et al., 1990; Kotter and Heskett, 1992). In light of the survey response rate it is found that around 50% respondents believe that their organisational commitment is very strongly influenced by direct manager's behaviour and more than 40% respondents' organisational commitment is strongly affected by other benefits, nature of work, job flexibility, job timing, company culture and its leadership.

Organisational commitment of employees differs based on their national cultures such as study finds that European nationals' organisational commitment is very strongly affected by the company culture and nature of work whereas South Asian nationals value direct manager's behaviour, salary, nature of work more than others. Similarly, the organisational commitment of UAE nationals is strongly influenced by the nature of work, job security, and direct manager's behaviour. The findings are similar to the results found by Al-Meer (1989) in the region, which are that Westerners, Asian, and Saudis differ significantly with respect to their commitment towards their respective organisations.

The study shows that there is a difference in extent of the factors influencing the job satisfaction and organisational commitment of the employees based on their national groups. For example, European national's job satisfaction and organisational commitment are strongly influenced by company culture and direct manager's behaviour; where as Far East Asian's job satisfaction and organisational commitment are very strongly influenced by the extrinsic factors such as job security, salary and other benefits. On the other hand UAE nationals feel that salary moderately affect their job satisfaction and organisational commitment but nature of work, job flexibility, and job security are strongly influencing factors.

Most of the expatriates prefer working in UAE because of its tax-free policies and mainly due to highly paid salaries as compared to home countries. There are several other reasons too that bind expats to UAE, some of the major ones are number of expatriates from each country, flexibility to communicate in their own language, and food. Although the recent increase in the living cost and high fluctuation in the foreign exchange rates in UAE are affecting salaried employees but still the country remains better place to live and work.

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