

Employee Satisfaction with Offshore Catering Job: Piloting for Interviews

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DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i10/3428 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i10/3428>

ABSTRACT

Previous studies indicate that employee's job satisfaction plays a major role in organizational performance. This study draws upon qualitative investigation with offshore catering employees; the main aim was to explore their satisfaction with the job. Although there have been a numerous number of studies, the area remains to experience range of grasps and ambiguity in this discourse. Shifting the focus from usual job setting where job satisfaction is commonly studied, researchers draw on the findings to gain insights into these differing understandings of offshore catering employees as they engaged in secluded and confined workplace. The pilot interview was carried out as impetus for a dissertation in constructing a bespoke job satisfaction instrument. In this small-scale pilot study, this study explored the job satisfaction experiences of Mark and Karl, two offshore catering employees. Data in the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews identified 44 codes, indicating 10 dimensions of job satisfaction derived from the emerging themes. Evidently, the qualitative findings present meaningful attributes of job satisfaction among offshore catering employees. Apparently, findings of this study shed light on the need for future research to extend the scope of the study, bringing diverse cultures in order to improve the understanding of job satisfaction across a broader spectrum.

Keywords: *Qualitative, Pilot study, Interview, Job satisfaction, Offshore catering*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Capable and satisfied employees are necessary to solve operational problems (Nekoeui, Othman, Jarud & Ahmad, 2014). It is generally assumed that job satisfaction leads to a higher employee commitment and better organizational performance. Likewise, previous literature has shown that reduced job satisfaction was significantly related to employee turnover (Tett & Meyer, 1993; Carsten & Spector, 1987) and job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton,

2001). Practically, more organizations are aware of the impact of employee satisfaction on their organizations, thus, employee welfare is taken care of to create a win-win situation for both parties (Riketta, 2008). However, without a proper understanding of the theory, organizations simply increase salaries or improve working conditions (Bader, Hashim & Zaharim, 2013) with expectations to improve job satisfaction.

Unlike onshore catering employees, offshore catering employees are restrained from their normal activities. Apparently, Ross (2009) noted that offshore working group presents a unique situation that needs to be addressed specifically as compared to onshore working environment. According to Krohne and Magnusen (2011), these employees normally perform a repetitive task in which prepare and serve food and provide laundry service. Living away from home, these employees provide services to attend the needs of other offshore employees. The employees are transported and stay on the vessel for a minimum of 45 days. As a result of this opportunity, attention should be paid on the outcomes of working under this challenging working environment.

Apparently, limited studies provide a nuanced understanding of their job satisfaction, as experienced by employees of this population. Noting that, the offshore catering employees' daily working life seems to be different from life of general catering employees, thus, it indicates that the extent of attributes of job satisfaction demands an analysis in its own right. This paper investigates satisfaction with job among offshore catering employees using qualitative approach. Despite the previous research conducted on job satisfaction in multidiscipline, little is known pertaining to satisfaction of offshore catering employees with their job (Majid, Othman, Mohamad & Lim, 2016). Additionally, as part of a wider isolated, confined and extreme (ICE) environment, there is a relatively few studies carried out relating to the job attitude of people working in such situations (Zimmer, Cabral, Borges, Coco & Hameister, 2013; Suedfeld, 1998). Henceforth, this paper seeks to address the lack of research within the work setting.

It is important to note that, this study was conducted as enticement for a dissertation in constructing a bespoke job satisfaction instrument for offshore catering employees. This study explored the attributes of job satisfaction using qualitative approach by describing, reflecting upon and interpreting experiences of individuals on the phenomenon. Mainly, this paper briefly describes the method carried out by researchers and discusses the findings from the data collection of the pilot interviews. Further explanation of each step operationalized in the pilot study was presented elsewhere (see Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim & Yusof, 2017).

Why pilot study?

While working on the dissertation, researchers had an opportunity to carry out a pilot study. Through the pilot work, it was researchers' intention to find out the experiences of the offshore catering employees in connection to their satisfaction with their job. This section also describes

how researcher identified the participants. There is not necessary for qualitative study to be piloted, but researchers agreed with Seidman (1991), who suggests that:

The best advice I ever received as a researcher was to do a pilot of my proposed study... Although it may not seem ahead of time that the world of interviewing research takes one along strange paths or through dangerous places, the unanticipated twists and turns of the interviewing process and complexities of the interviewing relationship deserve exploration before researchers plunge headlong into the thick of their projects. (p.29)

Given the suggestion by Seidman (1991), more qualitative researchers have aware of the importance of conducting pilot study recently (e.g. Dikko, 2016; Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Callio, 2016). Seemingly, the significance of pilot study has expanded to qualitative inquiry where it is conducted as preparation prior to the fieldwork. Pilot study is a beneficial technique as preparation of a full-scale study, irrespective of the paradigms (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It addresses impending issues in the following research procedures (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002) and trying out the questions. Likewise, in recent pilot study by Castillo-Montoya (2016), the author established that one could improve the interview protocols through a pilot study. It assists to ascertain errors, or restrictions of the interview protocols that might require changes to the fieldwork study (Kvale, 2007). Researchers believe that pilot study provide a stage for novice qualitative researcher to avoid err on the side of caution.

The need for qualitative interviews to be piloted is not relatively compulsory because as the interviews continued, the quality of the interview guide improved (Harding, 2013, p.48) and emerging issues are brought to subsequent interviews. Nevertheless, the author stated that it is noticeably useful to pilot the interview questions and accordingly make changes to the interview guide prior to fieldwork study. The interview guide steers qualitative researcher with needed consistency (Krauss, Hamzah, Nor, Omar, Suandi, Ismail & Zahari, 2009) in order to keep track on the research questions. Thus, it gives researcher with early exposition of flow of discussions and emerging issues evolved through the pilot study.

DESIGN AND METHOD

First researcher conducted the interviews in March 2017. This study was primarily based on a qualitative inquiry using in-depth, semi-structured interviews as primary data collection was employed. The informants were identified through word-of-mouth and referrals from one offshore catering company located in Klang Valley, Malaysia. A formal letter was sent to the organization's representative personnel and an approval letter was obtained. In pilot interviews, Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011, p.120) suggest that the participants should share as similar criteria as possible to the group of respondents for the major study. Researcher had given the inclusion criteria of participant beforehand and the offshore catering employees were identified by referrals from the respective organization. Following the approval, an effort was made to interview the two employees, Mark and Karl, whom work as Western cook and Asian

cook, respectively. Both informants had experiences of working in the sector for more than ten projects. The informants were willingly to participate in the study and were contacted to confirm the date, time and place of interview. Below is the profile of the participants of this study.

Table 1: Participants' profiles

	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Educational Level	Job Position	Approximate no. of trips involved
1	Mark	40	Male	Diploma	Western	More than 10
2	Karl	31	Male	High school	cook Asian cook	More than 10

Prior to the interview, research purpose was explained to each informant and they were provided with the letter of informed consent. Permission was obtained from both informants to audiotape the interview using IC recorder and both interviews lasted approximately 32 and 37 minutes, respectively. The interviews were guided by seven open-ended questions and were based on the previous studies on job satisfaction. Before piloting the interview, the supervisory committee members reviewed the questions in terms of its language, wording and relevancy. The main question was: *"How do you generally feel about your current job?"*

The interviews were carried out in Malay language with occasional use of English, as it was perceived as more casual for both interviewer and interviewees to have comfortable discussions. Interviewer asked the same set of questions to both informants, however interviewer did not ask the questions in orderly form but rather follow the flow of the conversation. The interviewees were given a flexibility to freely discuss around each question. That is to say, it was almost impossible to determine precisely how the interviewees were going to answer the questions. However, interviewer asked probing questions in order to obtain further clarification on the issue discussed. It is worth to mention that, unplanned probes help to elicit further information that was linked to the question discussed previously.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using six-phase of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process of coding was carried out with two doctoral course mates in order to ensure transparency and reliability. The printed transcripts were handed to each course mate. The process was completed in several iterations. First, the transcriptions were read several times to obtain a general sense of the whole material. Second, the important phrases were independently marked next to each line or paragraph to reflect our initial coding. The coders identified codes of all perspectives that the informants described or referred in the interviews that pertained to their job satisfaction. The codes were then carefully checked back against the transcripts to ensure they demonstrate the concept. Then, the coders mutually discussed their independent coding until a consensus was reached. Third, a number of

codes that were created then were collated together to search and address the similar themes, thereafter referred to as dimensions. The first researcher conducted the process of collating the codes. Fourth, the dimensions were reviewed and were later presented and discussed with all co-researchers to discuss the relevancy of the codes to the particular dimensions. Re-coding of the data was made and dimensions were revised to ensure the collated codes form a coherent pattern. Fifth, the identified dimensions were further refined and researchers jointly named and finalized them into 10 dimensions of job satisfaction. Lastly, the evidence from the data analysis is presented in relation to the research purpose. 10 dimensions emerged based on 44 codes namely remuneration, working condition, freedom, fringe benefit, flexibility, social support, promotional opportunity, reward, competence and involvement. Each distinct dimension linked back to the research aim and therefore, is discussed.

DISCUSSIONS

Remuneration included a-month salary for two-week job, adequate salary, bring home large sum of money and good salary relative to off day provided. Karl, an Asian cook in the department, asserted that even he was paid daily, he was able to get a higher salary than onshore's. Mark, a Western chef, further elaborated on this issue. "Because one thing, we are working for two weeks and off for two weeks. But, we are able to obtain salary like a-month salary." This implicitly explained that they able to earn monthly pay rate for short working period. Noting that, remuneration was critical to satisfaction with their job.

Working condition was the second dimension of job satisfaction. Both informants described that no cost was spent when going to work because they live at their workplace. Moreover, accommodation, food and uniform are provided. Hence, no expenses were made while they are working offshore. Apart from that, Mark mentioned that he enjoyed the challenge of working offshore. He said that even working for 12 hours a day, he enjoyed it. He also identified a defining moment when he feels happy with the job. "First time I celebrate [Raya festive] there, it was not something to be sad of but happy. Because of the variety of food, and our working hour was shortened."

Freedom was labeled as the third dimension. According to the informants, being able to feel and live independently was an important part of feeling satisfaction as an offshore catering employee. Mark said that from his experiences, temporarily separation from family and going to work offshore to calm him from onshore environment made him happy with the job. However, researchers believe that marital status might have significant impact on this dimension, indicating married employees might decline the assertion.

The fourth dimension was *fringe benefit* that included provision of accommodation, meal, uniform, transportation and entertainment. According to Mark, "...company which provides the work to the employees takes care of the benefits that should have. In terms of travelling fare, hotel, accommodation, travelling and so on, I think they have no problem." Seemingly, such benefits are entitled to employees as part of the employee welfare. It implied that the

employees require no cost spend when they begin their offshore duty. Thus, they can save literally some portions of their pay, as compared to those working onshore that require such expenditures.

Mark suggested that he was happy with *flexibility* of the job where he was able to earn more if he stayed back after he completed his 2-week duty. He mentioned, "If I stay back, I will earn more." Apart from that, he said he also did part time job onshore after he signed off from offshore duty and earned extra income from that. However, the flexibility depends on the individual employee. Some employees might return to work immediately, rather than seek for part time job onshore. Thus, this flexibility gives employees option to choose pertaining to their motivation.

The researchers labeled the sixth dimension as *social support*. According to Mark, being able to mix around as very important, whether with employees or superiors. The feeling that the others interact and doing social activities with him was a significant part of feeling satisfaction with the job. He proudly remembered, "...I was able to mix around with them, eat at the same table with them. That makes me feels happy, even their level are different." Both informants had been making friends from other departments and deriving social support from the catering and other departments.

Promotional opportunity, or getting promoted, was the seventh dimension of job satisfaction reported in this study. Karl said he was promoted from steward to Asian cook whom his Camp boss (termed as catering supervisor) gave the promotional opportunity. He said that he took that opportunity to learn the job tasks and he was happy with the promotion. Similarly with onshore work setting, the promotional opportunity will be granted to competent employees when their superiors see commitment and reliable work ethics.

According to Karl, there were *rewards* provided by the company, for both individual and the team. He mentioned that the rewards were in the forms of cash or gift. He was rewarded for the best comments and suggestions for safety improvisation. He also able to defined a moment where he was rewarded. He said, "There was a drilling team came and they drilled the well. When they were able to get the first oil, they gave reward to all employees at the rig." The result found not mentioned by Mark, but Karl stated it was one of the factors that made him happy.

Competence was apparently another important dimension of satisfaction with the job. Mark suggested that when employees are satisfied with the job, they seek ways to perform extra work and help others. Mark mentioned, "To me, there was time I used to do preparation for next day's product." He explained that the extra work he performed was not payable, but for the sake to reduce the work tasks. Karl concluded by mentioning that he knows what to do with the job and his competency precedes when no complains were made during his duty.

The tenth dimension emerging from the interviews was *involvement*. Satisfied employees apparently known to be involved with their job including the community and the system. Karl described the situation that influenced his involvement. "There is a program, which they called as unsafe condition. So, anyone could contribute their views, advices." The best views selected during the program might have been an evidence of successful involvement. Thus, it motivates the employees to take part in the program. At the same, such program increases employee participation to provide feedback about the working related issues and is beneficial to the company in order to improve the quality of working surroundings.

CONCLUSION

The research was conducted using basic qualitative technique to elicit information that involves the use of in-depth, semi-structured interview. This paper is concerned with an investigation of what are the attributes of job satisfaction among offshore catering employees in Malaysia. The results can be regarded as having varying degrees of job satisfaction attributes and this study might provide a platform in understanding these employees' satisfaction with their job. However, due to the small number of informants involved in the study, it is important to note that the saturation of data was not reached. As noted earlier, this study was mainly conducted as preparation prior to major study. There is need for further investigation to extend the scope of the study, bringing different cultures in order to enhance the findings on job satisfaction across a broader spectrum. Thus, considering wider sample members of different demographic background might increase the transferability of the study, increasing the usefulness of the research to the scholarly literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Researchers would like to thank the respective organization for facilitating this research by enabling access to the organization and the offshore catering employees for their willingness to participate. Researchers also would like to thank Aziz and Mohd Nazri whom had been contributing efforts and insights during the process of data coding.

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