



HEALTHCARE SECTOR EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION SURVEY ANALYSIS

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EMPLOYMENT SATISFACTION OF HEALTHCARE SECTOR
EMPLOYEES IN CLARKE, KEMPER, LAUDERDALE, NESHOPA, AND NEWTON
COUNTIES, MISSISSIPPI

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Abstract: This study delineates the factors that influence workplace satisfaction of healthcare professionals in a rural five county area in east central Mississippi. Seven different aspects of the workplace are studied and conclusions and recommendations regarding firm-level policy changes are presented.

BACKGROUND

One of the critical factors to the lack of healthcare accessibility in rural areas is the failure to retain quality healthcare professionals by provider firms, particularly in the nursing and allied health fields. As part of its continuing mission to enhance the retention of professional healthcare workers in the East Central Mississippi region, the east Central Mississippi Health Network (EC HealthNet) contracted with the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) and the Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSUES) to conduct and analyze a survey of the attitudes and opinions of these types of workers regarding their employment situations.

ACTION

To accomplish the goals of the program, approximately 3,500 survey instruments mailed to healthcare professionals. Of these 622 usable forms were returned for a response rate of 17.8 percent. The survey instrument was divided into six parts with each section analyzing a different aspect of the respondent's workplace. Questions were posed in each of these categories that sought to comprehensively, but concisely, ascertain the respondent's feelings and perceptions regarding the particular aspect of their workplace life.

RESULTS

Work Environment

In order to delineate the factors that influenced the participants' satisfaction with their work environment, this section is divided into five subsections. With regard to work expectations, 95 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement "When I come to work, I know what is expected of me." Likewise, over 85 percent of the survey participants agreed that they were given the opportunity to do their best while at work. However, 80 percent of participants agreed that with the statement "Quality is a top priority in my organization."

The second subsection, Workplace Growth Opportunities, dealt with workplace mentoring or coaching programs and the value of employees' suggestions to their employer organizations. While fewer than 40 percent of respondents felt that mentoring/coaching programs were available, well over 70 percent felt that these types of programs were important for their job satisfaction. Furthermore, less than half

of the participants indicated their organization has an employee suggestion program, but 60 percent of respondents felt this type of program is important to their job satisfaction.

Corollaries to these responses can be found in the third subsection dealing with employees' involvement in organizational decision making. Even through a substantial proportion of respondents felt that their input was not necessarily valued by the organization, over 80 percent felt that their performance positively contributed to the organizations' successes and over 70 percent are satisfied with the amount of independent through that they are able to exercise on their jobs.

Likewise, over 60 percent of participants felt that they were actively involved in making their organization a better place to work and supervisors typically asked them for input into decision making processes and policies that affect their positions. However, the majority of respondents either disagreed or was neutral with regard to the concept of being giving the opportunity to be part of task groups and assignments outside their core area of responsibility.

The final subsections are closely related. Less than 70 percent of respondents feel they are satisfied with the quality of supervision that they receive and larger majorities indicated that they not only receive an annual performance review from their supervisors, but that these annual reviews are important to their overall job satisfaction.

While these perceptions undoubtedly have a positive impact on the relief of workplace related stress, the fact remains that healthcare professionals believe themselves to be employed in high stress positions. Seventy-four percent of respondents disagreed with the statement "My job is not at all stressful." The most common causes of job stress are work volume, the nature of the particular job, and co-worker relationships.

Job Satisfaction and Advancement

While almost 90 percent of the survey respondents felt that they get a feeling of accomplishment from doing their job well, less than 55 percent felt that they are valued by their employer organizations. These responses seem to track closely with the responses for the job advancement related issues. Only 32 percent of survey participants feel that established career ladders exist in their organization and only 57 percent agreed that these types of programs are important to their overall job satisfaction. Likewise, only 35 percent of respondents indicated that their organization has a career development program that helps employees manage their careers.

Responses were only slightly more positive with regard to questions regarding employee incentive programs. While approximately 75 percent of respondents indicated that their organizations offer tuition reimbursement and substantial recognition and rewards programs, only a slight majority indicated that recognition and rewards programs were important to their job satisfaction and a minority (48 percent) agreed that they valued tuition reimbursement programs.

Job Related Training

Only 52 percent of respondents felt that job training opportunities were available for their position and just over 65 percent felt that adequate training opportunities had been made available for them to succeed in their positions. Only half of the respondents indicated that their organization provides as

much training as is needed for their position. However, 77 percent of the survey participants feel that adequate levels of job related training are important to their overall level of job satisfaction.

Compensation and Benefits

With regard to compensation and benefits packages, responses were predictably mixed. Minorities of respondents feel that their organizations provide competitive salary/compensation benefit packages and important competitive healthcare benefits. However, other components of the packages received more favorable responses. Over 65 percent of respondents feel that their organization offers competitive leave benefits and just over 60 percent indicate that they participate in competitive retirement benefits. All components of the compensation/benefits package are judged to be important to the respondents' overall job satisfaction.

Co-Worker Environment

While a majority of respondents feel that there is a spirit of cooperation between their co-workers, slightly less than half believe that there is an environment of openness and trust within their organizations. However, even with its lack of perceived trust and openness, there seems to be amicable relationships between co-workers. Furthermore, the majority of respondents agreed that they experience a sense of cooperation in their organizations.

Workplace Environment

The workplace environment section primarily dealt with the physical and operational characteristics of their workplace environment. The majority of respondents (although to various extents) feel that they work in modern facilities, that their workplace is clean and safe, and that their physical working conditions are good. A relatively slight majority of respondents (58 percent) believe that they have up-to-date tools and equipment at their disposal.

Management Relations and Trust

The majority of survey respondents agreed that they were proud to work for their organization and that they contribute to their particular organization's plan and mission. Unfortunately, a significantly fewer number of respondents feel that they can trust what they are told by their organizations' management. Slightly over half agreed that they have confidence in management's ability to implement the organization's long-term plan.

CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious from these results that the employees responding to the survey instrument have a very positive attitude toward the work that they are doing. However, there are several factors to the employees' work environment that need to be addressed. These include:

- While co-workers seem to be able to get to know each other while on the job, the level of trust among co-workers, as well as a commitment to quality, needs to be improved.
- Employee mentoring and career planning programs are lacking across the respondents' organizations. Increased focus on these programs, particularly at the non-practitioner and non-

registered nurse levels, could improve employee morale.

- The two lowest rated compensation/benefit package components are salary levels and the quality of healthcare benefits. Healthcare benefits in particular are likely to continue to be a driving force for employee satisfaction in the future.
- Employee perceptions of the workplace environment (including condition and age of the infrastructure and equipment) are relatively low and are likely a major source of employee frustration and job stress. Increased attention to plant and equipment upgrades will be vital to employee retention.
- Job stress plays a vital role in the level of employee satisfaction. The healthcare industry is an inherently stressful industry and respondents to the survey instrument indicate that the three top causes of stress in the workplace are the nature of their jobs, work volume and co-worker relationships.
- Trust in and relationships with management are relatively low compared to other factors in the employees' workplace.

While there are some factors that organizations may not be able to address in the short term, it seems that several of the factors mentioned in the survey deal with communication issues. Meaningful communication can go a long way to relieving stress and building relationships with co-workers, supervisors and administration. It should be realized, however, that meaningful communication does not necessarily mean having more meetings. Things like newsletters (either electronic or hard-copy based), bulletin boards, or organized break time activities to build relationships can help to increase the level of employee satisfaction within their workplace and, as a result, increase the organizational retention rate.