

A Longitudinal Analysis of Changing Job Quality and Worker Satisfaction in Israel

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Abstract

Prior research has indicated that the nature of work has changed dramatically in recent years in response to economic shifts and an increasingly global economy. This study used non-panel longitudinal data from the International Social Survey Program (Work Orientations I and II: 1989 and 1997—survey questions on job characteristics and job quality) to examine the changing job quality and job satisfaction determinants in Israel, while exploring the country contextual and cultural shifts that impacted this change. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis show that there were many significant changes in the intrinsic and extrinsic job characteristics and perceived job satisfaction of Israeli workers from 1989 to 1997. The study found workers' job satisfaction impacting firm performance and workers' well-being. The results affirm the need for firms to be cognizant of differences and unique challenges facing Israeli workers and thus tailor their management philosophy and policies to create an organizational environment mutually beneficial to the firm and the employees.

Key words: Job Satisfaction, Work Quality

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of cross-disciplinary research has been done that examines job satisfaction and its determinants. Additionally, a variety of literature across academic disciplines indicates that the nature of work has changed dramatically in recent years in response to economic and technological shifts amplified by increasingly global economies (Westover, 2010b). However, little is known about the shift of the overall comparative quality of work and job satisfaction in recent decades within Israel.

This study utilized non-panel longitudinal data from the International Social Survey Program (Work Orientations I, and II: 1989, and 1997—survey questions on job characteristics and job quality) to conduct an exploratory comparative analysis of job quality and job satisfaction and to examine the impact of various job characteristics and dimensions of job quality on job satisfaction over time in Israel. Following Handel's (2005) approach that studied workplace changes in the United States, we made comparisons by looking at changing job quality characteristics in Israel in relation to global economic and geo-political shifts.

In the section that follows we provide a brief overview of the literature on job quality and job satisfaction. We then take a more detailed look at the variables to be analyzed before presenting our results in the methods section. Finally, we report and discuss our results in the discussion section before concluding.

OVERVIEW OF JOB CHARACTERISTICS AND JOB SATISFACTION

Research over the previous three decades has extensively explored the construct of job satisfaction and how it is related to workplace characteristics and conditions, such as job security, pay, job autonomy and interesting work (Westover, 2010b; Llorente & Macias, 2005; Chiu and Chen, 2005). Studies have consistently found a significant degree of association

between workers' job characteristics and job satisfaction. Job characteristics and indicators of job quality can be classified as intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Westover, 2010b; Handel, 2005).

Additionally, research has shown job satisfaction to be closely linked to a variety of individual-level, organizational-level, and societal-level outcomes. For example, it been shown that satisfied workers are more productive and perform at a higher level (Schleicher, Watt & Greguras, 2004; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Judge *et al.*, 2001; Souza-Poza & Souza-Poza, 2000; Westover, 2010a). On the other hand, low job satisfaction reportedly leads to higher absenteeism and turnover (Clark, Peters, and Tomlinson, 2005; Bardsley and Rhodes, 1996; Dwyer and Ganster, 1991; Leigh and Lust, 1988; Adler and Golan, 1981; Ronan, 1970; Vroom, 1964).

Following Westover's (2010a) study in Hungary, this study sought to explore changing job quality and job satisfaction within Israel with respect to global economic shifts that may have impacted this change.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data and Measures

We used non-panel longitudinal data from the International Social Survey Program (Work Orientations modules I and II: 1989 and 1997-various survey questions on job characteristics and job quality). The International Social Survey Program (Work Orientations modules I and II: 1989 and 1997) utilized a multistage stratified probability sample to collect data for each of country. Data was collected via self-administered questionnaires, personal interviews, and mail-back questionnaires between 1989 and 1997¹.

The Variables of interest included work orientation, job satisfaction, interesting work, job autonomy and workplace relations. Work orientations focused on the general attitude toward work and leisure, work organization, and work content. These variables were measured using single-item indicators on a Likert scale. For the purpose of this study, the unit of analysis was individuals within the state of Israel. Handel (2005) has characterized 12 variables from the General Social Survey into intrinsic and extrinsic job quality factors. The variables used in this study are shown in appendix A.

Control Variables. Though the literature has identified many important individual control variables, limitations due to data availability restricted us to control for full-time/part-time status, self-employment status, gender, age, marital status, and education (Hammermesh, 1999; Souza-Poza and Souza-Poza, 2000; Hodson, 2002; Carlson and Mellor, 2004).

Country specific variables. We also considered variables specific to Israeli context to capture the changing context from 1989 to 1997. The variables considered were sourced from the CIA World factbook and included a) Population, GDP and GDP per capita, Economic Sector Composition, Unemployment Rate, Labor Force Participation, Inflation Rate and Industrial Production Growth Rate.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, trend analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis were used. The ordered nature and discrete nature of the dependent variable, ordered probit regression analysis was considered to be most appropriate method of analyzing the effect of job characteristics on job satisfaction. However it has been argued that ordinary least squares regression analysis is appropriate when looking at satisfaction variables on a Likert scale since most respondents

¹ A summary and description of the ICPSR Study Scope and Description Summary is available at <http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR-STUDY/03032.xml>.

understand that the difference between responses of 1 and 2 is the same as the difference between responses of 2 and 3, and so on. Additionally, using OLS regression analysis enabled us to report an overall fit statistics for the models i.e. the R-square and to compare coefficients across models, which is not possible with probit models. We thus preferred regression analysis over probit regression analysis even though the dependent variable was ordered and discrete, due to the simplicity and parsimonious nature of the regression models. Further a comparative re-run of data analysis using probit regression method did not yield and notable differences from the OLS regression results. The ordered probit regression analysis results are provided in available for comparison in appendix D.

We do note some limitations of the data used in this study namely; a) key variables were measured using subjective single item indicators, b) the non-panel longitudinal nature of the data meant we that we could not test the directionality of causality relationships among the variables examined as easily as we might with panel longitudinal data, and c) some variables of interest and other important control variables could not be included in the analysis, as pertinent data was not available.

RESULTS

In this section we consider results from descriptive statistics including correlations and means. We then look at the regression analysis results for the 1989 and 1997 models making comparisons.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 below shows the percentages in the correlation strength of job characteristic variables and job satisfaction in Israel between 1989 and 1997. In both periods, interesting job, management/employee relations, and co-worker relations correlated strongly and positively to job satisfaction among full-time workers. Job autonomy, pay, job security, and promotional opportunities had slightly lower correlations with job satisfaction though promotional opportunities had a higher correlation in 1997.

TABLE 1
Correlation between Job Satisfaction on other Job Characteristics in Israel

	1989	1997	% Change
Intrinsic job characteristics			
interesting job	0.43	0.58	35%
job autonomy	0.19	0.19	0%
management/employee relations	0.40	0.35	-13%
co-worker relations	0.35	0.30	-14%
Extrinsic job characteristics			
pay	0.18	0.24	33%
job security	0.15	0.10	-33%
promotional opportunities	0.17	0.30	76%
workload	-0.05	-0.10	100%
physical effort	-0.17	-0.07	-59%
danger	-0.14	-0.15	7%

On the other hand workload, physical effort, and exposure to danger negatively correlated with job satisfaction. Between the two periods, interesting job, pay, promotional opportunities, workload and exposure to danger had a positive percentage change in their correlations with job

satisfaction while management/employee relations, co-worker relation, job security and physical effort dropped their correlations with job satisfaction with job autonomy remaining unchanged.

In table 2 below we note the positive change in mean job satisfaction score between 1989 and 1997 together with five job characteristics.

TABLE 2
Mean Scores for Job Satisfaction and job characteristics

	1989	1997	Percent Change
Job satisfaction	4.18	4.41	5.4%
Job Security	3.25	3.65	12.1%
Pay	3.23	3.52	9%
Promotional Opportunities	3.30	3.47	5 %
Interesting Work	3.44	3.69	7%
Job Autonomy	3.00	3.12	4%

While the change in importance scores of these job characteristics were marked by a positive increased correlation with job satisfaction, we noted the relatively higher percentage increase in importance attached to job security. This meant that Israeli workers attached greater importance to the security of their jobs in 1997 than 1989. However, it is notable that this increased demand for higher security in their jobs was associated with a drop in the correlation with job satisfaction (refer table 1 above). The unmatched lower correlation of job security and job satisfaction could thus be explained by the drop in job security in 1997 compared to 1989 (see table 3 below). We note that while the perceived importance of these key variables increased over the two periods, their actual mean scores, shown in table 3 below, did not change in the same direction or to the same extent, highlighting a possible disconnect between perceived and actual importance given to these indicators. The results from table 2 and table 3 evidence the importance of these variables in the determination of changes in job satisfaction between these two periods.

TABLE 3
Israel Trends in Mean Job Characteristics Scores, by Year

	1989	1997	% Change
Intrinsic Job Characteristics			
Interesting Job	2.26	2.15	-5%
Job Autonomy	2.58	2.13	-17%
Management/Employee Relations	1.99	1.96	-2%
Co-Worker Relations	1.76	1.64	-7%
Extrinsic Job Characteristics			
Pay	3.07	3.11	1%
Job Security	2.35	2.20	-6%
Promotional Opportunities	2.83	3.07	8%
Workload	2.71	2.52	-7%
Physical Effort	3.75	3.72	-1%
Danger	4.18	4.02	-4%

Regression Results

The results for OLS regression analysis are presented in table 5. The results indicate better model fit statistics for 1997 ($R^2 = 0.41$) compared to 1989 ($R^2 = 0.33$). We noted that finding a job to be interesting and management/employee relations to be significant predictors of job satisfaction in both periods. However, workload and co-worker relations were only significant predictors in 1989 and job security and education significantly contributed to the variance of job satisfaction in 1997 only. Physical effort and danger were found to be non-significant variables in either year.

TABLE 4
Regression Coefficients for job characteristics in 1989 and 1997

	1989 (N = 363)	1997 (N = 367)
Intrinsic Job Characteristics		
Interesting Job	0.320***	0.485***
Job Autonomy	0.005	0.056
Management-Employee Relations	0.240***	0.150**
Co-Worker Relations	0.159**	0.086
Extrinsic Job Characteristics		
Job Security	0.063	0.138**
Pay	0.044	0.014
Promotional Opportunities	-0.011	0.061
Workload	-0.109*	-0.018
Physical Effort	-0.073	-0.049
Danger	-0.053	-0.081
Control Variables		
Gender	0.045	-0.009
Age	-0.075	-0.057
Education	-0.056	0.117**
R-Squared	0.359	0.435
Adjusted R-Squared	0.33	0.407

*Significant at .05; ** Significant at .01; ***Significant at .001

DISCUSSION

While many studies have examined job satisfaction and its determinants in various countries around the world, very few have been specific to Israel. The period covered in this study was characterized by dramatic changes in economic and political arena. These changes likely impacted on job characteristics and satisfaction experienced in Israel in the 1990's.

An overview of the Israeli economy between 1989 and 1997 is shown in table 5. While Israel experienced significant population increase and a substantial rise in overall GDP and GDP per-capita, sectoral composition of its economy experienced a minor shift especially in the agricultural and service sectors. However, Israel did experience a notable decrease both the inflation and unemployment rate, with the overall labor force doubling from 1989 to 1997 and the industrial growth rate going from a -3 percent rate in 1989 to a positive percent rate in 1997.

In addition to these economic changes from 1989 to 1997, Israel has its own unique set of social, cultural, and political. The literature describing the Israeli workplace and its unique

socio-political-economic environment, suggests a shift in cultural characteristics and an underlying erosion of communal goals that may explain the changes noted in this paper.

TABLE 5
Israel Country Contextual Descriptive Characteristics

	1989	1997
Population	4,371,478	5,534,672
GDP (in trillions of \$)	\$0.036	\$0.09
GDP - real growth rate	0.010	4.6%
GDP - per capita	\$8,400	\$16,400
Agriculture	5.50%	3.5%
Industrial	22.80%	22.0%
Service	71.70%	74.5%
Inflation Rate - Consumer Price Index	16.0%	11.3%
# in Labor Force (in millions)	1	2.2
Unemployment Rate	8%	6.5%
Industrial Production Growth Rate	-3%	8.0%

Harpaz (1999) found that other than an increasing number of Israelis in the workforce, there was no significant change in the composition in the Israeli workforce in the late 1980's and 1990's, thus the changes in job characteristics and job satisfaction cannot be attributed specifically to a changing workforce composition. However, he reported an increasing importance ascribed to both work and leisure in the Israeli worker's life during that same time period, which "suggests that the Israeli worker consistently places money or wages paid for work above other work goals. Israeli workers have become more individualistic and materialistic in the 1990's and less collectively oriented, as instrumental achievements outweigh contributions to society" (Harpaz, 1999: 48). He goes to say, "In the current climate, workers tend to place themselves in the center, pursuing materialistic values, self-benefit, career growth, status, and prestige. As workers place the satisfaction of their personal needs above the needs of society, they may become less committed and loyal to their organizations. The competition that characterizes individualistic societies can also influence the interpersonal and social relations system in the workplace" (Harpaz, 1999: 48). His findings suggest that the shift from the more traditional collective-oriented society which created a collective/communal identity with shared goals to individualism and materialism from Israel had an impact on both intrinsic and extrinsic work characteristics relationship's relationship with worker satisfaction.

The transformation of work in Israel was not purely a cultural phenomenon. In terms of sociological shifts, Harpaz (1999:49-50) states, "Many of the changes taking place in Israeli society and its labor market are due to economic and technological developments that are part of global processes not unique to Israel. Individuals are investing more in their training and preparation for the world of work, increasing their human capital, for example, to improve their prospects in the labor market. Although many of these changes have resulted in higher living standards and other economic benefits, their negative consequences should not be ignored". Thus, the global economic shift following the post-war era has also had an important impact on changes in Israeli. Certainly, additional research into the cultural and structural transformation of Israel in the 1990's may provide more conclusive answers to the question of why Israel perceived work characteristics and job satisfaction changed so much in the 1990's.

CONCLUSION

Regression results confirm the findings of previous research (Westover, 2010b) and show that both intrinsic and extrinsic work characteristics strongly impact worker job satisfaction. With regards to Israel specifically, the same is true, while that impact has also shifted somewhat over time. Thus it is important for organizations (such as multinational corporations, global NGO's, local and national governments, and labor unions) to be cognizant of these shifts in the perceptions of Israeli workers. Since workers' job satisfaction impacts a variety of individual-level, organizational-level, and societal-level outcomes, organizations need to recognize and embrace these workplace attitudinal shifts in Israel "to tailor management philosophy and policy to create a unique work atmosphere that will benefit the interests of both the employer and the employee" (Westover, 2010a: 92).

Future research should continue to track the changes in work quality characteristics in Israel. Have there been additional changes since 1997? Moreover, future research should explore further other country-level variables that may be important to include in such an analysis. Ideally, future research efforts would include cross-national comparisons between a variety of nations, not just in Israel, but also in other Middle Eastern nations, other "Westernized" nations, the rapidly emerging economies in Asia, and other developing "third world" countries. As Westover (2010b:92) noted, "Such analysis would better allow for the disentanglement of state-level contextual variables that truly impact work characteristics, worker orientations, and overall worker satisfaction".

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APPENDIX A

Measurement instruments

Respondents were asked to rate the relative personal importance given to various job characteristics using a 9-point Likert scale (1= completely satisfied, 2 = very satisfied, 3 = fairly satisfied, 4 = neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 5 = fairly dissatisfied, 6 = very dissatisfied, 7 = completely dissatisfied, 8 = can't choose, 9 = no answer).

How important is in a job ...

- is job security?
- is high income?
- are good opportunities for advancement?
- is an interesting job
- is a job that allows someone to work independently?

V54	Job Satisfaction	How satisfied are you in your main job?
V38	Interesting Job	My job is interesting
V39	Job Autonomy	I can work independently
V52	Management- Employee Relations	In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between management and employees?
V53	Coworker Relations	In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace between workmates/colleagues?
V36	Pay	My income is high
V35	Job Security	My job is secure
V37	Promotional Opportunities	My opportunities for advancement are high
V42	Workload exhaustion	How often do you come home from work
V43	Physical Effort	How often do you have to do hard physical work?
V45	Exposure to Danger	How often do you work in dangerous conditions?

APPENDIX B
Israel—1989 Summary Statistics

Variable	1989 (N = 363)				1997 (N = 367)			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
jobsat	2.82	1.03	1	7	2.59	1.31	1	7
jobinterest	2.26	1.01	1	5	2.15	1.05	1	5
jobautonomy	2.58	1.12	1	5	2.13	1.08	1	5
Mgtempl_rel	1.99	0.83	1	5	1.96	1.00	1	5
coworker_rel	1.76	0.80	1	5	1.64	0.80	1	5
pay	3.07	1.09	1	5	3.11	1.07	1	5
job_security	2.35	1.15	1	5	2.20	1.12	1	5
prom_opp	2.83	1.10	1	5	3.07	1.11	1	5
workload	2.71	1.12	1	5	2.52	1.04	1	5
physical_effort	3.75	1.30	1	5	3.72	1.40	1	5
danger	4.18	1.15	1	5	4.02	1.36	1	5
female	0.44	0.50	0	1	0.41	0.49	0	1
widowed	0.02	0.13	0	1	0.01	0.10	0	1
divorced	0.05	0.21	0	1	0.07	0.26	0	1
separated	0	0.00	0	0	0.00	0.05	0	1
single	0.26	0.44	0	1	0.21	0.41	0	1
age	38.33	15.23	18	89	38.40	11.86	18	75
Educ_yrs	12.5	2.72	2	22	13.62	2.77	6	23

APPENDIX C
Correlations (1989, N=363)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	jobsat										
2	jobinterest	0.43									
3	jobautonomy	0.19	0.34								
4	mgtempl_rel	0.40	0.22	0.12							
5	cowork_rel	0.35	0.16	0.03	0.55						
6	pay	0.18	0.18	0.27	0.14	0.08					
7	job_security	0.15	0.28	0.22	0.08	0.03	0.30				
8	prom_opp	0.17	0.25	0.13	0.19	0.10	0.45	0.34			
9	workload	-0.05	0.16	0.01	0.08	0.01	0.06	0.24	0.08		
10	physical effort	-0.17	-0.03	-0.01	-0.03	-0.03	0.05	0.08	-0.03	0.35	
11	danger	-0.14	-0.02	0.02	-0.08	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.19	0.52

Correlations (1997, N=367)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	jobsat										
2	jobinterest	0.58									
3	jobautonomy	0.19	0.22								
4	mgtempl_rel	0.35	0.23	0.08							
5	cowork_rel	0.30	0.20	0.08	0.55						
6	pay	0.24	0.14	0.13	0.12	0.07					
7	job_security	0.10	0.07	-0.10	0.05	0.05	0.22				
8	prom_opp	0.30	0.30	0.11	0.22	0.16	0.46	0.18			
9	workload	-0.10	-0.07	-0.03	0.00	-0.07	-0.09	-0.04	-0.01		
10	physical effort	-0.07	-0.03	-0.05	-0.06	0.00	0.01	-0.03	-0.01	0.26	
11	danger	-0.15	-0.05	0.00	-0.18	-0.15	0.00	-0.12	0.04	0.14	0.43

APPENDIX D
Ordered Probit Regression Results

	1989 (N = 326)				1997 (271)			
	Coeff.	S. E.	C.R.	p-value	Coeff.	S. E.	C.R.	p-value
job_security	0.25	0.06	3.96	0.00	0.20	0.08	2.59	0.01
pay	0.08	0.07	1.09	0.28	0.02	0.08	0.24	0.81
prom_opps	0.05	0.06	0.89	0.37	0.05	0.07	0.62	0.54
jobinterest	0.40	0.07	5.89	0.00	0.60	0.09	6.96	0.00
jobautonomy	0.12	0.05	2.16	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.57	0.57
workload	0.00	0.07	0.02	0.99	0.13	0.08	1.72	0.09
Mgtempl_rel	0.21	0.07	2.81	0.01	0.34	0.09	3.94	0.00
coworker_rel	0.09	0.08	1.13	0.26	0.28	0.10	2.77	0.01
female	-0.11	0.14	-0.78	0.44	-0.23	0.16	-1.45	0.15
age	-0.01	0.01	-1.32	0.19	0.00	0.01	-0.11	0.91
widowed	-0.24	0.57	-0.42	0.68	-1.04	0.57	-1.82	0.07
divorced	0.48	0.79	0.61	0.54	1.01	0.50	2.03	0.04
separated	-0.27	0.41	-0.65	0.52	0.23	0.83	0.27	0.79
single	-0.20	0.17	-1.20	0.23	0.14	0.20	0.72	0.47
educyrs	0.04	0.02	2.66	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.91	0.36
Response variable: Job satisfaction $\chi^2 = 138.41$, df = 15, p-value < 0.001 Log likelihood = -410.13, pseudo-R ² = 0.144 Significance: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001					Response variable: Job satisfaction $\chi^2 = 168.55$, df = 15, p-value < 0.001 Log likelihood = -320.42, pseudo-R ² = 0.21 Significance: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001			