

Summary of the SHRM 2016 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

John Sample PhD SPHR/SHRM-SCP

Job satisfaction and employee engagement are important concepts to get right the first time. Both predict important potential positive and negative business outcomes for the employer. Satisfied and engaged employees are more likely to use discretionary effort in creative ways for his or her employer, such as voluntarily initiating creative business processes or exhibiting psychological hardiness in times of challenge and stress. Employees who are dissatisfied or disengaged are more likely to have higher rates of turnover and absenteeism, or engage in negative opportunistic behaviors, such as stealing from a employer or social loafing.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) *2016 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey* identifies factors that are important by employees. The purpose of the survey is to provide employers with data they can use to develop strategic initiatives, programs, and best practices critical for improving employee morale, motivation and engagement.

The 2016 SHRM survey explored 35 facets of employee job satisfaction (divided into four topic areas—career development, relationship with management, compensation and benefits, and work environment). The survey also explored 37 conditions that promote the “look” and “feel” of employee engagement.

Survey Results – Job Satisfaction

According to this study,

- 88% of U.S. employees report that they are overall satisfied with their current job (highly satisfied and moderately satisfied). This is the highest level of satisfaction reported in the past 10 years.
- Employers in the U.S. have room to improve with employee engagement. U.S. employees reported that they were moderately engaged averaging 3.8 on a 5- point scale where 5 is highly engaged and 1 is unengaged.

Employees identified the following factors as their top 10 most important contributors to their job satisfaction.

Rank

1. Respectful treatment of employees at all levels by management ranked first at 67%.
2. Compensation and pay ranked second at 63%.
3. Overall benefits were ranked third at 60%.
4. Job security which ranked first for employees during earlier surveys had dropped to fourth (58%), possibly because economic times have improved.
5. Trust between employees and senior management ranked fifth at 57%.
6. Opportunities to use skills and abilities in your work ranked sixth at 55%.
7. Financial stability of the organization ranked seventh at 53% remains important to employee satisfaction.
8. The employee's relationship with his or her immediate supervisor at ranked eight at 53%.

9. Feeling safe in your work environment ranked ninth at 50% as manifested in feeling physically safe, with employers taking measures to prevent violence in the workplace and acts of terrorism.
10. Immediate supervisor's respect for your ideas ranked tenth at 49%.

Ranked 11-20 on the survey: (11) the work itself (it is interesting, challenging, exciting, etc.), (12) management's recognition of employee job performance (feedback, incentives, rewards), (13) communication between employees and senior management, (14) career advancement opportunities within the organization, (15) autonomy and independence to make decisions, (16) management's communication of organization's goals and strategies, (17) overall corporate culture (e.g., organization's reputation, work ethics, values, working conditions), (18) teamwork within department/business unit, (19) meaningfulness of the job (understanding how your job contributes to organization's mission), (20) and job-specific training (42%).

Intergenerational Results

Baby Boomers, Gen-X, and Millennials scored similarly in several areas related to engagement, they also exhibited some differences. According to the SHRM report,

"they value a few other aspects of their jobs differently. Millennials (88%) placed greater importance on career development opportunities than Baby Boomers did (76%), for example, and members of Generation X (89%) more frequently cited organization's commitment to professional development as a contributor to job satisfaction compared with Baby Boomers (79%)."

Employee in all three generations placed a high value on compensation and benefits related factors. Millennials placed more importance on job-specific training, career development opportunities, and career advancement as contributing to their job satisfaction compared with older generations. This is not surprising given the stage of their careers, but employers need to be aware that differences exist now that Millennials are the majority of workers.

Survey Results – Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is more likely to occur when certain conditions exist. The percentages indicate the overall satisfaction of employees with the listed condition of engagement. The items are listed in order from the employee survey results: most satisfied to least satisfied with the condition in their organization. Employers can maximize employee engagement by improving these conditions.

1. Relationships with co-workers (77%).
2. Opportunities to use skills and abilities (77%).
3. Meaningfulness of job (76%).
4. The work itself (74%).
5. Relationship with immediate supervisor (74%).
6. Organization's financial stability (72%).
7. Contribution of work to organization's business goals (72%).
8. Autonomy and independence (71%).
9. Variety of work (69%).
10. Overall corporate culture (69%).
11. Communication between employees and senior management (64%).

12. Organization's commitment to corporate social responsibility (63%).
13. Management's recognition of employee job performance (63%).
14. Job-specific training (61%).
15. Organization's commitment to professional development (59%).
16. Networking (58%).
17. Career development opportunities (57%).
18. Career advancement opportunities (42%).

Note that four aspects of employee career and professional development fall in the bottom seven for employee satisfaction:

1. Job-specific training
2. Organization's commitment to professional development
3. Career development opportunities
4. Career advancement opportunities

With the percentages noted in both the satisfaction portion of the survey results and the engagement aspects of the survey, employers have some work to do to fully satisfy and, especially, engage employees.

A Comment on Survey Methodology

Many readers of survey results may not be interested in how a survey was constructed, administered, or even its sample size. The "scholar practitioner" in me says we need to pay attention to survey methodology!

Much to the credit of 2016 SHRM survey, "the sample of employees used in this research was randomly selected by an outside survey research organization's web-enabled employee panel. In total, 600 individuals completed the online 2015 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey" (p. 51). In this instance, we do not know how many employees failed to respond to the survey, leaving us in doubt as to the response rate, usually stated as a per cent.

In addition to the reported standard demographics (race, gender, age, education, etc.), the survey population was also distributed to 22 types of organizations. For example, "retail trade" made up the largest number of respondents at 19% (or 114 respondents), whereas "public administration" made up only 3% (or 18 respondents) of the survey population.

We navigate a slippery slope when we attribute too much meaning to rank order results from a general survey to a specific organization. For example, if I were working in the public sector, I might be concerned that the rank order of survey items may not be representative for my agency (or similar agencies) since only 18 of the 600 respondents were from the public sector.

For this reason alone, I encourage organizations big and small to conduct their own applied survey research. Use the **Employee Perceptions Exercise: Job Satisfaction** on the next page to jump start such a dialogue. Compare your organizations results to those from the results of the general survey. Compare results between employees and managers; encourage useful dialogue that explain factors that increase or decrease job satisfaction.

Survey items are from the *2016 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey*. SHRM members may download the complete report at no cost at <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/Pages/Job-Satisfaction-and-Engagement-Report-Revitalizing-Changing-Workforce.aspx>

The “Employee Perceptions Exercise: Job Satisfaction” on the following page is a work product courtesy of Sample & Associates LLC. Organizations are welcome to use this survey questionnaire within their organizations if proper attribution is given to both the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Sample & Associates LLC. Independent consultants are asked to seek permission from both SHRM and Sample and Associates before using the questionnaire with clients.

Employee Perceptions Exercise: Job Satisfaction

Directions: Think for a few moments about the factors that contribute the most to your job satisfaction where you work.

- A. Working alone, rank order the twenty factors below in Column "A" (1 = most important, 20 = least important).
- B. Discuss in small groups. Place employees in group B1 and managers in group B2 if enough people to create groups of 5 to 7 employees. Come to a consensus in Columns "B1" or "B2" (avoid bargaining, averaging, and voting).
- C. The facilitator will provide employee rankings based on 2016 SHRM survey results for column "C".

	"A" Individual Work	"B1" Group Consensus Employees	"B2" Group Consensus Managers	"C" Results From 2016 SHRM Survey
Immediate supervisors respect for your ideas				
Organizations financial security				
Opportunities to use your skills and abilities in your work				
Compensation, overall				
Respectful treatment of all employees at all levels				
Relationship with immediate supervisor				
Benefits, overall				
Trust between employees and senior management				
Job security				
Feeling safe in your work environment				
Teamwork within department/business unit				
Communication between employees and senior management				
Overall corporate culture (organizations reputation, ethics)				
The work itself (it is challenging, exciting, etc.).				
Autonomy and independence to make decisions.				
Job specific training				
Meaningfulness of job (importance to business mission)				
Management's recognition of employee job performance.				
Management's communication of organizations goals/strategies.				
Career advancement opportunities within the organization.				

--	--	--	--	--

Summary of the SHRM 2016 Employee Job Satisfaction

John Sample PhD SPHR

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) 2016 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey identifies 40 factors that are important by employees. The purpose of the survey is to provide employers with data they can use to develop strategic initiatives, programs, and best practices critical for improving employee morale, motivation and engagement.

The 2016 SHRM survey explored 35 facets of employee job satisfaction (divided into four topic areas—career development, relationship with management, compensation and benefits, and work environment).

Top 20 Ranked Job Satisfaction Factors

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Respectful treatment of employees at all levels | 11. The work itself is interesting, challenging |
| 2. Compensation | 12. Managements recognition of employee's job performance |
| 3. Benefits | 13. Communication between employees ad senior management |
| 4. Job security | 14. Career advancement opportunities within the organization |
| 5. Trust between employees and managers | 15. Management's communication of organizational goals |
| 6. Opportunities to use skills and abilities | 16. Autonomy and independence to make decisions |
| 7. Financial stability of organization | 17. Overall corporate culture, reputation |
| 8. Relationship with immediate supervisor | 18. Teamwork within departments/business unit |
| 9. Feeling safe in in your work environment | 19. Meaningfulness of the job |
| 10. Immediate supervisor's respect for your ideas | 20. Job specific training |

The consensus seeking exercise on the flip side of this page is designed to assess factors that are important to individual employees (Column A) and other employees (Column B1) or managers (Column B2) when compared to a ranking reported in the SPHR 2016 Job Satisfaction and Employee Survey (Column C). This group exercise may take 30 to 40 minutes to complete, and more time may be useful for strategizing how to increase job satisfaction in an organization.

Contact John Sample at john@sampleandassociates.org if you would like to discuss a complementary opportunity to have him facilitate this exercise with your employees and managers.