

A picture of well-being and happiness in various employment sectors in South Africa

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The beginning of the year marks a time when many people enter the employment sector as new starters, fresh from school or the tertiary environment, or start new jobs having changed their job or the company they work for.

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Companies spend large sums of money, every year, training their employees, improving their knowledge and developing their skills only to find that the most well-trained and skilled employees leave, most often to competitor companies. A recent online employee commitment survey of 880 people conducted towards the end of 2008 by TNS Research Surveys, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, shows us the bigger picture of how people function in their work environment in terms of their commitment to their job, their feelings towards the kind of work they do and the company they work for. These issues are combined in a simple model to give us a profile of employees in various employment sectors.

Segmenting employees and linking well-being and happiness to work commitment

The employee commitment survey segments employees into four quadrants. People who are committed to both their job and their company are contrasted with those uncommitted to both. These segments illustrate how enmeshed people's everyday well-being and work satisfaction are.

Ambassadors are employees who are committed to both their job and the company they are working for. Ambassadors are the achievers, the more productive workers, are healthy, take fewer sick days and lead healthier, well-balanced lives. Seventy-six percent of ambassadors said that they considered themselves as happy and cheerful people and 67% said that they felt their lives had meaning and purpose. They are more likely to take care of themselves, have drive and ambition and, if they have a work-related problem, they are more likely to talk to someone about it. Fifty-four percent said they have someone at work they can talk to if they have a problem and 70% said that they take good care of their health. These employees are unlikely to leave the company they are working for or change career paths because they are satisfied with both. In turn, this satisfaction maintains their overall feelings of well-being.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, uncommitted employees are uncommitted to both their job and the company they work for. Uncommitted people will be sicker, in poorer physical and mental condition, have less drive and motivation, be more bored and depressed and feel insecure in their job. Forty-six percent of uncommitted employees said that their work does not make them happy, only 30% said they feel well and in good health and 41% said that they experience feelings of depression and loneliness. Uncommitted employees are also more likely to experience harmful stress. Thirty-eight percent of uncommitted employees said that they are very stressed at work. Uncommitted employees are more likely to leave the company they work for and potentially change their career direction or path as well.

In addition to the uncommitted and ambassadors, there are employees who are career orientated - they are committed to their job but are not committed to the company they are working for - and employees who are company orientated - they are committed to the company they work for but not to their jobs. Career orientated employees, like the uncommitted, are

more likely to leave the company.

The four quadrants can be illustrated as follows:

Career orientated (18%): Committed to the job but not the company	Ambassador (48%): Committed to the job and the company
Uncommitted (29%): Not committed to the job or the company	Company orientated (4%): Committed to the company but not the job

The survey indicates that a significant percentage of employees who are uncommitted or career orientated are actively seeking employment elsewhere (42% and 34% respectively). Fifty-two percent of committed employees and 67% of company orientated employees have no plans to leave the organisation.

The segmentation indicates how important job satisfaction is in creating happy, healthy and well-balanced employees as well as that a happy employee is easy to work with and is productive, ultimately creating a happy work environment. Happy people have a better understanding of how to make relationships work and therefore make better team players and are better at customer service. Uncommitted employees who are easily stressed out and unhappy pose a threat to customer relations.

The segmentation can also provide employers with possible guidelines to providing a better work environment for their employees. For employees who are career orientated, employers need to try to understand and address the reasons why employees have a low commitment to the company. For employees who are company orientated, employers should try to find out why employees are unhappy with their job and perhaps move them to another position or division within the company. Ambassadors should not be ignored, but should be kept happy; these employees are assets to any company. Uncommitted employees need the most attention and employers should try understand the reasons why these people are uncommitted to the company and the work they do.

Profiling employment sectors

It is interesting to profile the various employment sectors according to the above four segments. This creates a picture of how employees in the different sectors feel about their jobs and the companies they work for.

In the information technology (IT) and related job sectors (such as systems developer, programmer, java architect, web developer, data warehouse analyst), a significant number of people in these jobs are career orientated (20%) or uncommitted (41%). Employees working as sales agents (insurance brokers, car salesmen, estate agents) are also uncommitted (79%). People in these jobs may be career orientated and uncommitted to the company they work for as many of these types of employees are not necessarily associated with a particular company and may work freelance - their jobs involve the constant migration to different types of companies, or where their work takes them.

The marketing and financial industries both present similar pictures. Most employees in these employment sectors collectively, can be found in the company orientated (18%) and committed quadrants (61%) (types of jobs in these two sectors are accountants, financial specialists, account executive, marketing manager, brand manager). This shows that companies in these industries have committed employees most probably due to companies striving for stress-free, employee focused work environments.

Furthermore, 47% of people doing clerical or administrative work (secretary, PA, bookkeeper, bank teller, librarian) as well as 70% people in the multimedia industry (graphics designer, web designer, video editor, animator) are committed employees. Employees in customer services (call centre agent, cashier, beauty consultant, waitron, cabin attendant, hotel steward) are more career orientated (15%).

Summary

Employee satisfaction is driven by more than remuneration and status. Happiness and well-being plays a vital role in creating balanced and committed employees who are productive and contribute to the smooth running of a company. In turn, companies need to provide for the happiness and well-being of their employees by making sure that, through effective employee satisfaction analysis, employees are doing the job they were born to do, in an environment that fosters their human potential.

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