

## **Cooperative Extension Employee Satisfaction in the Workplace: Does Race Matter?**

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## **Abstract**

Race has been shown to impact employee satisfaction. We developed scales for five antecedents of employee satisfaction and tested them to determine if there are statistical differences between white and non-white U.S Extension employees at 1862 land-grant institutions. Results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in all five scales as well as the dependent variable, employee satisfaction. In addition, for both groups, income was found to be least correlated to job satisfaction relative to the five scales.

## **Literature Review**

Cooperative Extension in the United States has been a successful institution for many years. Forerunners of extension education as we know it began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Richter, 1962). The installation of the Land-Grant system was in full swing by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the passage of two national legislative acts, the first in 1862 and the second in 1890. With passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, Land-Grant campuses were extended beyond their borders into all areas of the states in which they resided. Thus was born the institution of Cooperative Extension as we know it.

In 1976, Edwin Locke (1976, cited in Bartel 1981) identified over 3,500 peer reviewed publications and dissertations that addressed issues of job satisfaction, including race. Still, 30 years later, the question lingers of whether job satisfaction is related to race. Bartel (1981) approached the issue from an economics perspective and tried to determine what factors can account for how different races feel about a job in total, not merely particular aspects of the job. Using National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience for Mature Men samples for the years 1966, 1969, and 1971, she found that black men reported being more satisfied with their jobs as a whole than did white men with similar personal, job, and location characteristics. She attributed this to racial discrimination leading blacks to have lower aspirations than whites; therefore, they reported higher satisfaction for the same jobs than did whites.

Despite Bartel's findings, a plethora of studies conducted on race and job satisfaction have come up with varied and often contradictory results. For example, McNeely (1989) cites a variety of studies that disagreed with each other in terms of findings. Some indicated that Blacks are less satisfied than Caucasians (Forgionne & Peeters (1983), and O'Reilly & Roberts (1973) while other studies found that Blacks were more satisfied than Caucasians (Jones et al. (1977), and Gavin & Ewen (1974). Still others found that there were no differences between the races (Katzell et al. (1974) and Weaver (1977)). McNeely's (1989) study sought to reveal whether or not racial differences for job satisfaction existed among participants working in the same field. McNeely found statistically significant differences between the races when examined with bivariate methods; however, these differences disappeared when multivariate techniques were used. Therefore, McNeely found no statistical conclusions for differences in job satisfaction between Blacks and Caucasians. Brush et al. (1986) conducted a meta-study comprised of data collected in various past studies to ascertain the degree to which job satisfaction correlates with race. They found that such an association varies with organization type.

More recent studies attempt to refine their objectives in order to further clarify whether or not racial differences in job satisfaction exist. For example, Friday et al. (2004) hypothesized that previous studies arriving at inconsistent results were due to overgeneralizations arising from the use of overarching definitions of race. They defined "socioethnicity" as a less observable type of racioethnicity. Thus, the researcher can measure the number of cultures a subject identifies with. Their results supported the hypothesis that multicultural members of a majority

group in a racioethnically diverse work environment will report being more satisfied with their coworkers than monocultural members.

### **Purpose, Objectives and Methods**

In late 2006, we conducted a study using Zoomerang® an online web-based survey provider. One objective of the study was to understand Extension employee perceptions about job satisfaction. Over 18,000 1862 Land Grant University-based Cooperative Extension Service employees from the United States were sent an email and an invitation to take the survey. The list of email recipients was compiled by going to each state's Extension website and copying/pasting emails into a master database. For states that did not have employee emails listed on their websites, Extension upper administrators were contacted directly. At the end of the process, four states declined to have their employees participate. In addition, all 1890 Extension administrators were contacted via email and invited to have their employees participate. We received no responses from this population. Therefore, the study is limited to 1862 universities.

Two emails with a description of the study and the link to complete the questionnaire were sent three weeks apart. We received 2,749 useable responses. Accounting for undeliverable emails and emails sent to non-Extension employees, the adjusted response rate was 20 percent. The remainder of this article conveys results segmented by race comparing whites and non-white respondents. Of the 2,671 respondents that identified their race, 92 percent were white. The remaining respondents, grouped into a non-white category were represented as follows: four percent African-American, two percent Hispanic, one percent Asian and one percent Native American.

### **Results**

Using two-tailed t-tests, significant differences (at  $\alpha=0.05$ ) were found between white and non-white respondents for gender (white=48% female; non-white=57% female), age (means: white=57 years old; non-whites=62 years old), 2005 income (white=\$60,000; non-white=\$51,000), and size of respondent community with white respondents living in communities of roughly 147,000 people and non-whites living in communities of an average of 290,000 people.

White and non-white respondents, on average, were employed in Extension positions for 12 years and 11 years, respectively, a non-significant difference. In addition, no differences were found for education level. On average, 18% of white respondents and 16% of non-white respondents, respectively, have a bachelors degree while 76% and 81%, respectively, have an advanced degree (Masters or PhD). Finally, there was no statistical difference in percent of extension appointment (white=91%; non-white=89%).

### **Employee Satisfaction**

Income is a strong indicator of employee worth and value to an organization. Income is also an important metric of employee satisfaction because it signals to the employee his/her perceived worth to the organization. Income is often looked at to identify disparities between groups of people in similar positions.

In the study, using a two-tailed t-test, a statistically significant difference in income was found between white and non-white respondents ( $p=0.013$ ). Using Pearson bivariate correlations (2-tailed), we first looked at some of the demographic variables to determine if there were

relationships between those variables and income for each group. As one might expect, for both white and non-white respondents, age and level of education were highly correlated to income at the .01 level of significance. One interesting finding is that the size of the community where a respondent lived was inversely correlated to income for white respondents and was significant at the .01 level of significance ( $p=0.000$ ). While this inverse relationship held for non-white respondents, it was not statistically significantly different ( $p=0.189$ ). In other words, the smaller the community, the lower the average income.

Another inverse relationship with income that was statistically significant for both groups was with the percentage of extension appointment. In other words, the higher the extension appointment, the lower the respondents average salary (white:  $p=0.000$ ; non-white:  $p=0.017$ ). The final demographic variable we compared to income was how many years the respondent had been employed in extension. In this case, income was highly significant and positively correlated at .01 for both and white ( $p=0.000$ ) and non-white respondents ( $p=0.000$ ).

These preliminary results led us to examine other drivers or antecedents to job satisfaction besides income or the respondent is in this study. From the literature, 48 job status action-related statements or items were extracted from previous scales that hadn't been tested in the literature. We needed to modify some of these items to be consistent with a five-point scale anchored on one equals strongly disagree to five equals strongly agree. Statements that were phrased in a negative manner were recoded when entering the data for directional consistency. This recoding and subsequent rephrasing of these questions aids ease of reading and interpretation. We used these items from the literature to develop new scales or constructs that would be tested for their efficacy as antecedents to job satisfaction.

From set of items in the survey, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was used to measure reliability (internal consistency) of four antecedent constructs of job satisfaction. High ( $\geq 0.70$ ) Cronbach's alphas indicate that the measures are reliable and summated scales for each construct can be used in subsequent statistical testing. The dependent variable scale is *Employee Satisfaction*. The independent variable scales are: *Control* over one's job, *Challenge* of the job, *Feedback* received on job performance, the *Relevance* of the job to society and the *Security/Stability* the employee receives from the job. **Table 1** lists the items in each construct.

**Table 1.**  
Construct Items

<b><i>Feedback received on job performance</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I receive feedback from my supervisor concerning the extent to which I achieve my goals.</li> <li>• I receive enough feedback from my supervisor on how well I'm doing.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Relevance of the job to society</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other professions are actually less vital to society than mine.</li> <li>• The importance of my profession is sometimes under stressed.</li> <li>• If ever an occupation is indispensable, Extension is the one.</li> <li>• I do not work on unnecessary things.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Security/Stability the employee receives from the job</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am satisfied with the pay I receive for my job</li> <li>• I am satisfied with the financial security my job provides me.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Control over one's job</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am able to act independently of my supervisor.</li> <li>• I have the freedom to do pretty much what I want on my job.</li> <li>• I have the opportunity for independent thought and action.</li> <li>• I have control over the pace of my work.</li> <li>• I have much control and final say about what I do on my job.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Challenge of the job</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have challenging work.</li> <li>• In light of my training, education, and preparation, my job is very appropriate to my abilities.</li> <li>• I find my work challenging, exciting, and giving me a sense of accomplishment.</li> <li>• My job gives me the opportunity to learn new skills and techniques.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Employee Satisfaction</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am satisfied with the degree of respect and fair treatment I receive from my supervisor.</li> <li>• I am satisfied with the variety of activities my job offers.</li> <li>• I am satisfied with the freedom I have to do what I want on my job.</li> <li>• I am satisfied with the opportunities my job provides me to interact with others.</li> <li>• My job has enough opportunity for independent thought and action.</li> <li>• I am generally satisfied with my work situation.</li> </ul>

Using two-tailed t-tests, **Table 2** shows that for three of the five independent constructs there are significant differences between white and non-white responses at  $\alpha=0.05$ . These are Feedback, Relevance and Security/Stability. The remaining two constructs (Control and Challenge) and the dependent construct Satisfaction are statistically different at  $\alpha=0.10$ . Means for White respondents was higher for all constructs.

**Table 2.**  
Construct Statistical Differences between White and Non-White Respondents

	<b>Significance 2-tailed</b>	<b>Significant at <math>\alpha=0.05</math></b>	<b>Significant at <math>\alpha=0.10</math></b>	<b>Directionality W=White NW=Non-White</b>
FEEDBACK	0.006	X		W>NW
RELEVANCE	0.010	X		W>NW
SECURITY	0.045	X		W>NW
CONTROL	0.064		X	W>NW
CHALLENGE	0.071		X	W>NW
SATISFACTION	0.095		X	W>NW

As shown in **Table 3**, we examined the correlations between Satisfaction and the independent variables. In addition we look at the correlation between respondent income and Satisfaction. For both respondent groups, income was least correlated with job satisfaction and in the non-white group, this relationship was not statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.05$ . With regard to the correlation between job satisfaction and the independent variables, for both groups, Challenge had the highest correlation to job satisfaction followed by Control.

**Table 3.**  
Correlations between Satisfaction and Income and Independent Variables  
for White and Non-White Respondents

		<b>INCOME</b>	<b>CONTROL</b>	<b>CHALLENGE</b>	<b>FEEDBACK</b>	<b>RELEVANCE</b>	<b>SECURITY</b>
<b>White Respondents</b>							
<b>SATISFACTION</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.145	0.610	0.665	0.346	0.435	0.428
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	2,335	2,374	2,361	2,375	2,374	2,385
<b>Non-White Respondents</b>							
<b>SATISFACTION</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.135	0.524	0.655	0.432	0.271	0.458
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.056	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	201	202	193	199	204	202

**Conclusion**

This study suggests that differences in job satisfaction do exist between Caucasian and non-Caucasian Cooperative Extension employees. By understanding the drivers of satisfaction, administrators and policy makers can better craft structures and implement measures or training that can improve job satisfaction for both groups.

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