Who are Happier at Work and in Life? Public Sector versus Private Sector: A Research on Turkish Employees

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Abstract

Implications of different policies and practices in organizations may result in different individual outcomes. In this study Turkish public and private sector employees’ job and life satisfaction levels are compared. Since both types of organizations have distinct dynamics and structures, individual outcomes are assumed to be different. Thus in the study it is aimed to analyze whether/or not job and life satisfaction of employees working in Turkish private and public sector organizations are different. In addition, this study also intends to examine relationship between job and life satisfaction. In this context, the data required for the research was obtained by 684 employees via the manually distribution and online questionnaires. According to the research findings, both job and life satisfaction of the employees working in public sector scored higher than private sector employees. And positive, statistically significant and moderate (0.517) relationship was found between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Also results indicate that both job and life satisfaction differentiated in terms of income and education levels.

Key words: Job Satisfaction, Life Satisfaction, Public Sector, Private Sector
JEL Classification: M 10, M 12, M 19

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1. Introduction

Research indicates that individual outcomes are influenced by organizational culture (Johnson and McIntyre, 1998; MacIntosh and Doherty, 2010), human resource management practices (Mudor and Tookson, 2011) and management philosophies (Wang, 2011). In this study, Turkish public and private sector employees’ job and life satisfaction compared as individual outcomes. These two types of organizations vary in terms of organizational culture, HRM practices, management philosophies, job security and compensation management issues. In this context comparing two distinct sector employees’ job and life satisfaction will contribute to understand the indirect effect of different sets of organizational implications.

Job satisfaction is one of the most studied topics in the field of organizational behavior. The most-used definition of job satisfaction in organizational research is that of Locke (1976), who described job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience” (Lan et al., 2013: 628). In other words, job satisfaction can be defined as “degree of positive emotions which a member of the organization has in connection with his/her employment” (Llobet and Fito, 2013: 1070). When nature of the job and qualifications of employees are compatible with each other, job satisfaction is provided (Davis, 1984: 6). Nash (1985) has been attributed job satisfaction to many factors, not just a single factor in industrial world. These factors can be stated as promotion, remuneration, supervision, the work itself, working groups and working conditions (Ramayah et al., 2001). Job satisfaction is associated with many organizational variables such as organizational commitment (Shore and Martin, 1989; Lumley et al., 2011), performance (Schermershorn, 1997), organizational citizenship behavior (Mohammad et al., 2011; Swaminetha and Jawahar, 2013), turnover intention (Mahdi et al., 2012; Randhawa, 2007), labor turnover rate (Luthans, 2010; Gregory, 2011) and life satisfaction (Iverson and Maguire, 1999; Keser, 2005; Aşan and Erenler, 2008; Yiğit et al., 2011). In literature, there are also some studies (Linz and Semykina, 2013; Miric and Petrovic, 2013) analyze whether/or not job satisfaction differentiate in terms of demographic variables.

Life satisfaction was proposed firstly by Neugarten in 1961. Life satisfaction includes all aspects of individuals’ life (Yiğit et al., 2011: 3). In other words, life satisfaction is to assess positively the overall quality of person’s own lives. As can be seen in this definition, the concept of life satisfaction expresses feelings of people about their life in general and is considered as a measure of emotional well-being (Aşan and Erenler, 2008: 206). In addition, life satisfaction is not only an attitude about a person’s life, but also it is an acknowledgment, appreciation, being
vivacious or state of being pleasure from life (Jan and Masood, 2008: 33). Life satisfaction reflects an assessment of our lives in many aspects. Physical health, welfare, mental health, social relationships and a sense of achievement can be given as examples (Johnson et al., 2008: 2).

Employees job and life satisfaction are significant individual outcomes that cover both job and life processes. That is why both work and life issues effects employees’ happiness as whole and these two variables are interrelated. Thus in this study these two variable measured together as an indicator of employee happiness.

2. Literature Review

In general it is seen that there is a positive relationship between job and life satisfaction. According to research performed in local (Turkish) literature, the correlation coefficients between job and life satisfaction are almost positive and range from “.34” to “.79”. The same positive relationships between these two variables are also observed in international literature. A set of studies in international literature show that the correlation coefficients range from “.18” to “.53”. So it can be said that local researches and international researches are parallel to each other in terms of examining the relationship between job and life satisfaction. In table 1 some selected research for both in local and in international literature are represented.

Table 1: Examples of Job and Life Satisfaction Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yiğit et al.</td>
<td>680 security personnel</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>Adams et al.</td>
<td>163 workers</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duyan</td>
<td>30 individual</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>Iverson &amp; Maguera</td>
<td>286 male mine workers</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doğan et al.</td>
<td>138 health personnel</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>Heller et al.</td>
<td>500 individuals from different professions</td>
<td>.27-.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilge et al.</td>
<td>86 family court experts</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>Rice et al.</td>
<td>16 studies’ correlations from (.04-.58)</td>
<td>(Average) .31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saldamah</td>
<td>101 hotel workers</td>
<td>*Significant</td>
<td>Boardman</td>
<td>830 teachers</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akgündüz</td>
<td>233 housing workers</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>Dolan &amp; Gosselin</td>
<td>459 employees working in 34 car dealership</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Depending on the findings presented in table 1 first hypothesis is defined as follow;

\[H_1: \text{There is a significant and positive relationship between job and life satisfaction.}\]

There are several studies have been carried out to compare the individual outcomes of employees working in public and private sector internationally (Rashid and Rashid 2012; Peklar and Eva 2012; Lyons et al., 2006; Nutt, 2006; Becker and Connor, 2005; Stackman et al., 2005). However public and private sector practices are national and effected by formal and informal institutions. Thus comparison of individual outcomes makes more sense in national context. That is why here it is focused more on Turkish public and private sector context.

Turkish public sector institutions have its practices usually based on bureaucratic processes. This situation might affect employees’ job satisfaction adversely. However the sector has advantages on job security, compensation management issues and in some cases better working conditions and working times. Thus, as a whole it is expected that job and life satisfaction of Turkish public sector employees scores higher than private sector employees.

Considering the other side, Turkish private sector organizations consist of mainly small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) and family organizations. Accordingly procedures and policies are mainly not well defined. But in some cases in institutionalized organizations practices might be advantageous in terms of employee’s satisfaction. However taking everything into account, these differences may result as low job and life satisfaction of the employees working in the private sector. Thus comparison of job and life satisfaction of Turkish private and public sector employees’ may help to understand the indirect effects of different policies and practices. There

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### Table: In local (Turkish) literature vs. In international literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avşaroğlu et al. (2007:123)</td>
<td>173 teachers</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>Judge &amp; Watanabe (1993:944)</td>
<td>804 individuals</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Generated benefiting from literature*
has been limited research conducted to compare public and private sector employees. The research (Çarıkçı 2004; Eğinli 2009) found that public sector employees satisfied more than the private sector’s. However in a developing country organizational practices changes faster than stable economies. That is why current research is needed. Thus the following hypotheses are generated.

\( H_2: \) Job satisfaction of the employee working in public sector is higher than the private sector’s.

\( H_3: \) Life satisfaction of the employee working in public sector is higher than the private sector’s.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Hypotheses

As indicated in literature review, we have three hypotheses. One of them is to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Other two hypotheses are set up to analyze whether job and life satisfaction of employees differ depending on sector. In order to test hypotheses correlation and independent T-test analyses were used.

3.2 Measurement Tool

In this study both job and life satisfaction was measured by one single question. Alternative answers in the form of 5 point Likert were presented to participants and they were requested to respond the expression of “I think in general I am satisfied with my job” as “Absolutely Agree”, “Agree”, “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, “Disagree” and “Absolutely Disagree”. Similarly the same way was also pursued in measuring life satisfaction. Participants were requested to evaluate the expressions of “I think in general I am satisfied with my life” “Absolutely Agree”, “Agree”, “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, “Disagree” and “Absolutely Disagree”.

In literature it is seen that above mentioned variables can be measured by a single question. (Kuşçuluoğlu, 2008:14). In measuring life satisfaction by one question, it is requested from participants to evaluate the item “I think in general I am satisfied with my job” (Quinn et al., 1974). Wanous et al. (1997) in their research performed a-meta analysis of 17 studies with 7682 employees and found a positive relationship (r: .67) between measuring job satisfaction by a single question and measuring it by multiple questions. And then they claimed that by measuring job satisfaction by a single question, more accurate results could be reached rather than measuring job satisfaction by multiple questions. Besides this, Robbins and Judge (2012) advocated that by measuring job satisfaction by a single question exposed more accurate results. But measuring satisfaction by a single question may be accepted as a restricted measurement because it cannot produce the participants’ satisfaction in dimensions. One important reason of accessing these variables by one single question is to make the questionnaire form as short as
possible. Because participants are either bored or not willing to fill the questionnaire form. That is why it is assumed that accessing these variables by one single question might be reasonable.

3.3 Data

Required data collected through standardized questionnaire forms. Questionnaire forms delivered to participants by hand and online. Totally 684 valid questionnaire forms were obtained. Participants include employees working private and public sector organizations in Turkey.

4. Results and Discussion

Totally 427 (62.4 %) male and 252 (36.8 %) female employees participated to research. 355 of the participants (51.9 %) are working in public sector while 325 of the participants (47.5 %) are working in private sector. Within the distinction of white/blue color workers, 420 employees (61.4 %) are white collar and 261 employees (38.2 %) are blue collar. When the sector in which employees are working is analyzed it is obtained 647 employees (94.6 %) are working in service sector, 28 employees (4.1 %) are working in industry sector and 5 employees (0.7 %) are working in agriculture sector. So a huge part of participants are working in service sector. According to income distribution of participants, 228 participants (33.3 %) have 1000 TL or below, 165 participants (24.1 %) have 1001-2000 TL, 186 participants (27.2 %) have 2001-3000 TL, 91 participants (13.3 %) have 3001-4000 TL, 9 participants (1.3 %) have 4001-5000 TL and only 2 participants (0.4 %) have 5001 TL or above.

When the educational level distribution is analyzed it is seen that 40 of participants (5.8 %) graduated from primary education, 94 of participants (1.7 %) graduated from high school, 199 of participants (29.1 %) graduated from associate degree, 241 of participants (35.2 %) graduated from bachelor degree, 82 of participants (11.8 %) graduated from master degree and 21 of participants (3.1 %) graduated from doctorate degree.

According to findings most of participants have bachelor degree or above educational level. When working period of participants are analyzed; there are 184 participants (26.9 %) in 0-1 year interval, 238 participants (34.8 %) in 2-5 years interval, 107 participants (15.6 %) in 6-10 years interval, 47 participants (6.9 %) in 11-15 years interval, 29 participants (4.2 %) in 16-20 years interval and 70 participants (10.2 %) in 20 or above 20 years interval.

4.1 Frequency analysis related to job satisfaction question

The distribution of participations’ answers concerning the item of “I think in general I am satisfied with my job” was analyzed. So 95 participants (13.9 %) answered as “absolutely agree”, 197 participants (28.8 %) as “agree”, 156 participants (22.8 %) as “neither agree nor disagree”,

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162 participants (23.7 \%) as “disagree” and 66 participants (9.6 \%) as “absolutely disagree”. According to these findings it may be said 292 employees are satisfied whereas 188 employees aren’t satisfied with their job.

4.2 Frequency analysis related to life satisfaction question

The distribution of participations’ answers concerning the expression of “I think in general I am satisfied with my life” was analyzed. So 99 participants (14.5 \%) answered as “absolutely agree” and 214 participants (31.3 \%) as “agree. Accordingly it may said that 313 (45.8 \%) employees are satisfied with their life. In other words almost half of employees are satisfied with their life. On the other hand 172 participants (25.1 \%) answered as “neither agree nor disagree”, 147 participants (21.5 \%) as “disagree” and 44 participants (6.4 \%) as “absolutely disagree”. Accordingly it can be concluded that 191 employees (27.9 \%) aren’t satisfied with their life.

Independent T-test findings intended for analyzing whether job and life satisfaction differentiate or not according to specific demographic variables:

According to independent T-test findings job satisfaction and life satisfaction did not differentiate depending on gender. But significant differences observed depending on employee category (blue/white collar) and the type of organization (public/private). The differences are presented in Table-2.

Table 2: Independent T test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>3.3390</td>
<td>1.18882</td>
<td>4.555</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>2.9198</td>
<td>1.20102</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>3.3293</td>
<td>1.20028</td>
<td>5.311</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>2.8308</td>
<td>1.16671</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>3.5584</td>
<td>1.10912</td>
<td>7.245</td>
<td>.325</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>2.9414</td>
<td>1.10148</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>3.5409</td>
<td>1.11432</td>
<td>8.410</td>
<td>1.172</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>2.8154</td>
<td>1.05292</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is seen in Table-2 employees working in public sector scored higher on both job and life satisfaction. Since “p” value is “.000” these difference is statistically significant. That is why H_{2} and H_{3} accepted. Also blue color employees scored higher on both job and life satisfaction. And these differences are statistically significant (p=.000).

4.3 One way Anova Analysis results

Life satisfaction has no difference depending on tenure. However, it was differentiated depending on the level of education and income. Accordingly, the life satisfaction of the
participants who hold a bachelor degree or further, satisfied from their life more than the participants who hold high school and primary school degree. Also life satisfaction of the employees who have between 1000 Turkish Lira¹ average monthly income is more than the employees who earns less than 1000 Turkish Liras.

Job Satisfaction has no difference depending on tenure. On the other hand, significant differences observed depending income and education level. Job satisfaction of employees having primary school degree is found to be lower than the employees holding a Phd degree. Also employees who have more than 1000 Turkish Liras average level of income, satisfied from their job more than employees who earns less than 1000 Turkish Liras.

4.4 The relationship between job and life satisfaction

According to the correlation analysis between job satisfaction and life satisfaction a positive, statistically significant and moderate relationship has been found with 0.517 correlation coefficient value. Thus H₁ is accepted.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the study, it was found that nearly half of respondents were satisfied with their job and life. Life satisfaction has no difference depending on gender whereas significant differences observed depending on organization type (public/private sector), employee category, education level and income.

On the other hand, life satisfaction has no difference depending on gender and tenure. However, it was differentiated depending on employee category (blue/white collar), organization type (public/private) and the level of education and income variables. Accordingly, job satisfaction and life satisfaction is both associated with the level of income, organization type, education level and employee category. It is expected that in a developing country, the level of income and employee category are important variables for individual’s happiness.

In order to analyze the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction a number of studies were performed both nationally and internationally and low/moderate relationships were identified between these two variables. Similar to these findings, a moderate correlation was found also in this study.

1 Turkish Lira equals to approximately 0.32 Euros (7/24/2014)
This research carried out with the participation of employees working in the public and the private sector organizations in Turkey. In this regard the study is important to present a comparison of the public and private sector employees’ life and job satisfaction, since these two types of organizations have some significant differences in terms of organizational policies, management philosophies and human resource management practices. When Turkish public and private organizations’ practices are compared, it is assumed that public sector employees satisfied from their job and life more than the private sector. The findings supported this assumption. The results contribute the assumption of certain organizational practices effect individual outcomes indirectly. So as a suggestion it can be said that some improvement should be made by Turkish government and related institutions by using legislation bodies. By this way, different sector organizations’ management philosophies, organization policies and human resource practices might be similar. Thus, indirect negative effects of differences can be eliminated and the level of job and life satisfaction of employees in private sector as well as in public sector can be increased. Besides that private sector managers can benefit from public sector practices which might help them to increase job and life satisfaction of their employees and motivate them.

For the further research, the sample might be taken from the same industries both for public and private sector which might provide more generable results. Also job satisfaction might be evaluated with its dimensions. Then it provides the researchers to make a comparison of both sectors by dimensions. Furthermore to test the direct effect of distinct practices on employee happiness, variables such as perception of organizational culture, policies and practices could be measured directly in the context of Turkey. This way would help using statistical method. Thus the limitations of this study can be reduced to some extent. Besides other individual outcomes might be examined such as turnover rate, commitment etc. within public and private sector contexts.

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