

Distance Education Program: Worth of a University Scroll On Workers Satisfaction

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Abstract

Globalization waves had motivated individuals to seek knowledge as they realize the opportunities and rewards down the road upon completion of the structured education program such as distance education program. Further, the encouragement from the government and incentives during the program motivated them to enter the distance education program. On the other hand, the government seeks more knowledge workers to be in carry out the duties and instructions for the benefit of the public. The view of substantial respondents from School of Distance Education was considered. Interim result indicated their eagerness of pursuing status, recognition, and attention as their personal objectives in pursuing knowledge. Thus, this paper will explore the phenomena of a new society of knowledge workers in the public sector on the worth of the university scroll on workers satisfaction. The results of the study will be used to gauge the distance education students towards the challenges of globalization and become the new breed of knowledge workers in the public sector on their work satisfaction.

Keywords: distance education, work satisfaction, continuous learning, knowledge worker

Introduction

Every year the number of distance education students increased tremendously. This can be seen as they registered themselves at various universities in Malaysia. The drive for them to register as distance education students was due to the promotion and rewards that awaits them upon completion of the education program. As the nation's move into the era of globalization, the government encouraged their workers to equip themselves with new knowledge and become knowledge workers. This new breed of knowledge workers will become the government's most valuable asset. They will be entrusted to carry out the duties and instructions of the government in ensuring the nation's objectives are achieved. Most importantly, these workers will be first line of workers to interface with the challenges and demands from the public.

Inputs given by the distance education students indicated that their purpose of pursuing the education program as a stepping stone towards getting a higher place in the organization. They indicated that as long as they follow through the distance education program, then they will achieve what they dream for – promotion and rewards. Thus, if the mentality of the distance education students remains as it is until the completion of their education program, then the government and the nation will not benefited from them. They will become complacent and comfortable with the new position and salary hike. Therefore they will remain as what they are before even though they had graduated from the distance education program. Further, the purpose of the nation having a pool of knowledge workers in serving the public will not be materialized.

This paper will explore the phenomena of a new society of knowledge workers in the public sector on their work satisfaction. The results of the study will be used to gauge the distance education students

toward the challenges of globalization and become the new breed of knowledge workers. Do distance education students benefited from the worth of the university scroll in relation to their work satisfaction?

Knowledge Workers

The term of 'knowledge worker' was introduced in the mid 90s. Knowledge workers have been the fastest-growing type of workers in Canada. Today, one in every eight workers in Canada is a "knowledge worker" (HRDC, 1997). According to Peter Drucker, knowledge workers are those whose work primarily requires the use of "mental power rather than muscle power." Further, knowledge workers are involved in analyzing information and applying specialized expertise to solve problems, to generate ideas, or to create new products and services (Zidle, 1998).

The drive to strengthen American competitiveness has resulted in new interest in finding training and development programs that support improvement in worker productivity at all business levels. Capital expenditures for the latest in high-tech equipment need to be accompanied by providing education for more so called "knowledge workers" (Gordon, 1997).

McGinn and Raymond (1998) indicated that knowledge workers as those highly educated, and high-earning professionals. Those are the people who thrive in the new economy. Further, a study indicated that knowledge workers are required to have a good deal more formal education and continuous learning than their predecessors, the blue-collar worker (Anonymous, 1996). Moreover, 20% of the jobs by the run of the century would be unfilled unless many present industrial workers are retrained to be knowledge workers.

In summary, distance education students whom are seeking continuous learning and knowledge through systematic tertiary programs are the people whom to be classified as knowledge workers. Moreover, those who are highly educated and continuously learning new tasks and gathering information in their career also will be identified as knowledge workers.

Career Motivators

Job satisfaction had been defined as a general attitude toward one's job (Hossain et al., 2001). Further, Herzberg et al. (1952) identified motivation and hygiene factors. Motivation factors led to satisfaction on the job such as achievement, recognition, advancement, responsibility, growth, and work it self). On the other hand hygiene factors led to job dissatisfaction such as regulations, supervision, work conditions, salary, peers and subordinates relationship, personal life, and status.

Meanwhile, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1954) proposed that within every human being was a hierarchy of five needs: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Robbins & Coulter, 1999). Each level in the hierarchy must be substantially satisfied before the next was activated and that once a need was substantially satisfied it no longer motivates behavior.

Study on senior level executives of Bangladesh by Hossain et al. (2001) found that there was presence of motivators and hygiene factors. They also discovered that hardly any gender difference regarding job satisfaction existed. In terms of promotion possibility, male executives felt that there was less scope in their organization.

Chacko (1991) reported that students perceive a variety of reasons that attracted them in pursuing a career including money, prestige, aptitude, lifestyle, and the working environment. Further, the students perceived that education was the means toward the goal of obtaining a job in the profession that they found attractive. Moreover, the Olsten College seniors found that the graduating class was pragmatic,

directed, and concerned with future financial and professional growth. The graduates also stressed power, money, and rapid promotion in evaluating their career success (Anonymous, 1989).

In summary, there are many career motivating factors that knowledge workers perceive to be important in seeking jobs such as money, prestige, aptitude, lifestyle, work environment, power, financial growth, professional growth, promotion, employer location, job satisfaction, higher wages, and the list is not exhaustive.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomena of a new society of knowledge workers in the public sectors on their worth of their university scroll on workers satisfaction. The random sample of 60 students working in the public sector was taken from School of Distance Education. The respondents were in third and fourth year. A questionnaire was administered to them. The questionnaire was divided into 2 parts that sought demographic information, and important factors on worker satisfaction in relation to the perceived worth of a university scroll. The measuring instrument contained factors based on Herzberg et al. (1952) and Maslow (1954). Students were asked to rate the factors that they desire on a Likert 5-point scale ranging from most unimportant (1) to most important (5). Factor analysis was conducted on the factors, and they were grouped as follows:

Factor 1:

1. Potential workers have chance for promotion.
2. Benefit packages are equitable.
3. Satisfied with the salary increment.

Factor 2:

1. Received fair salary.
2. Benefits received better than other companies.

Factor 3:

1. Felt unappreciated based on salary.
2. Benefits not provided.

Factor 4:

1. Slim chance of promotion.

Factor 5:

1. Infrequent salary raise.
2. Few rewards for workers.

Results and Discussions

Results in Table 1 indicated 71.7% were male respondents and 28.3% were female. By ethnic groups, Malay was represented by 68.3% and non-Malay by 31.7%. More than half of the respondents were aged above 31-year-old. In terms of year of service in the public sector, majority of the respondents were between 6 to 10 years (45%). Almost sixty seven percent of them were earning below RM2,000 per month.

Based on marital status, single respondents were 20%. Meanwhile married respondents were 80%, and 75% of them were having children. Moreover, most of their spouses were serving in the public sector (63.3%). On the other hand, 16.3% were in the private sector, and housewife or not working was 14.3%.

Table 1: Sample Profile

Demographic	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Gender	Male	43	71.7
	Female	17	28.3

Ethnic	Malay	41	68.3
	Non-Malay	19	31.7

Marital Status	Single	12	20.0
	Married	48	80.0
Age	21-25	2	3.3
	26-30	17	28.3
	31-35	22	36.7
	More than 35	19	31.7
Service Length (years)	Less than 6	10	16.7
	6-10	27	45.0
	11-15	15	25.0
	More than 15	8	13.3
Income per month	RM1000-1500	21	35.0
	RM1501-2000	19	31.7
	RM2001-2500	7	11.7
	RM2501-3000	10	16.7
	More than RM3000	3	5.0
Spouse Occupation	Housewife/not working	7	14.3
	Public sector	31	63.3
	Private sector	8	16.3
	Others	3	6.1
Number of Children	None	15	25.0
	One	10	16.7
	Two	14	23.3
	Three	10	16.7
	Four	8	13.3
	Five	1	1.7
	Six	2	3.3

Factor analysis was conducted on ten variables in this study. The variables were grouped into five factors. The overall mean score on each factor of the work satisfaction is in Table 2. In summary, the degree of agreement on the five factors of work satisfaction was on the average except factor 4 was about 2.3. They rank the overall score for the workers satisfaction of public sector was 3.9492 that respondents were happy and satisfied in their work. As for factor 1 (3.2712), respondents indicated that they were concern on the chance of promotion, benefit packages offered, and salary increment. They also indicated a high concern for factor 2 (3.2167) on the salary received and benefits received as compared to the other organizations. Moreover, they indicated their concern also on factor 5 (3.0763) in relation to infrequent salary raise and few rewards to them.

Table 2: Mean for Factors and Worker Satisfaction

	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Worker Satisfaction	1.00	5.00	3.9492	0.8987
Factor 1	1.33	5.00	3.2712	0.7986
Factor 2	2.00	4.50	3.2167	0.5551
Factor 5	1.50	5.00	3.0763	0.8294
Factor 3	1.00	5.00	2.8276	0.8813
Factor 4	1.00	5.00	2.3333	1.0195

Comparison between single and married respondents was made. Work satisfaction factors were ranked and analyzed base on mean as illustrated in Table 3. From the mean ranking, it was discovered that the respondents were in agreement on Factor 1, 3, and 4. Respondents indicated their agreement on chance of promotion, benefit packages, and salary increment.

Table 3: Mean Comparison between Single and Married Respondents

Rank	Single	Mean	Married	Mean
1.	Factor 1	3.1389	Factor 1	3.3050
2.	Factor 5	3.1250	Factor 2	3.2604
3.	Factor 2	3.0417	Factor 5	3.0638
4.	Factor 3	2.5000	Factor 3	2.9043
5.	Factor 4	2.0000	Factor 4	2.4167

On the other hand, single respondents placed Factor 5 (3.1250) as their second important factor of work satisfaction and Factor 2 (3.0417) as the third factor. Meanwhile, married respondents indicated Factor 3 (3.2604) and Factor 5 (3.0638) in the second and third place respectively. Thus this can be seen that single respondents were more concern on receiving salary increment on a constant basis and pursue rewards in their working environment. Whereby for married respondents, they were more on the acceptance of receiving a fair salary and benefits provided by their employers for themselves and family members. This can be concluded that married respondents had settle down with their family members as they with the organization. Moreover, they had concentrated their efforts for the benefit of the organization.

Majority of the married respondents have children. This was represented by 90% of them were having between one child to six children. On the other hand, only 10% respondents were married and yet to have a child. Comparison of worker satisfaction were made that married respondents with children indicated a higher mean as compared to married respondents without any child. This can be said that married respondents with children were motivated and encouraged by their family members in work satisfaction. Moreover, married respondents with spouses who work in the public sector shown even higher mean of work satisfaction as compared to those spouses who work in the private sector. As both of them were working in the public sector, they do share some common discussions and motivations between respondents and their spouses. The results were illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Worker Satisfaction Mean

Worker satisfaction	Mean
With children	4.0426
Without children	3.5833
Spouses work in public sector	4.2000
Spouses work in private sector	3.8750

In line with Herzberg and Maslow's theories, respondents can improve themselves through promotion. Thus the only mean of getting a promotion to them was to enroll and complete the continuing education program, such as distance education. Once they were promoted, they can contribute and improve their work productivity in serving the public.

Based on t-test, it was discovered that single and married respondents did not show any significant different between their view on worker satisfaction. Therefore this can be concluded that individuals who are graduated from distance education program do perform their duties as required by the organizations.

Correlations were done between factors and worker satisfaction is depicted in Table 5. It was discovered that worker satisfaction and Factor 1 indicated tendency for respondents to pursue promotion, gain fair salary, and receive better benefits. However, worker satisfaction can be reduced as the worker feel unappreciated based on the salary received and benefits provided; thus an improvement was needed to ensure the worker satisfaction to remain at best.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Worker Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Factor 1	0.508**	0.000
Factor 3	0.285*	0.030

* p<0.05, **p<0.01

Conclusion

Government needs to consider individual's effort to pursue a distance education program as part of their workers training program. Therefore they need to encourage and support for those who wish to pursue higher education. Moreover through internal training and realization, the new knowledge workers will realize their potential and the purpose of them working to serve the public. Paradigm change is needed to be cultivated within the new society of knowledge workers. They need to be realized that their contributions are needed by the organization and the nation. Although continuing education is a motivator for them to obtain promotion and rewards, they need to realize that becoming a knowledge worker is their main objective. Thus they will become the valuable workers in the organization.

Continuing education at a higher learning institutions need to be supported continuously by the government. Various supports may be needed in helping the workers to achieve their dream of getting a university scroll especially from the individual's immediate superior. Thus a university scroll does serve as motivator for workers whom are looking forward to excel themselves in the organization. With the scroll, they can seek promotion within the organization even getting another job for betterment with different public sector organizations. Nevertheless the bottom-line for the workers, they do seek motivation factors and try to reduce hygiene factors within their working environment. Finally, workers do move their needs from a lower level to a higher level as they fulfill their needs at the lower level in the Maslow's theory (1954).

Interestingly, married workers with dependents will indicate higher work satisfaction. Moreover, workers with spouses that work in the same sector even indicate a higher work satisfaction. Therefore encouragement should be given to them to pursue any continuing education, as it will further enhance the couples work satisfaction. Further as the distance learners are mature adults, they can appreciate the employer that provided them with the time off for them to attend the intensive programs for certain period of time per year through out the whole program. Moreover for individuals that received full pay of salary and/or given the study leave do appreciate their indebtedness with the employer as they allow them to pursue their career.

Thus the role of the university is not only producing number of graduates from distance education program with outstanding results, but they also guide them to abide with the ethics and behavior as new breed of knowledge workers. The whole program did not become successful as until the graduates' of distance education programs perform their duties beyond expectation for the benefit of the organization that they served.

Finally, indeed a university scroll from a distance education program does make a different to a worker for him or her to enter a new society of knowledge workers in the public sector's organization – not just for themselves but also for the nation in facing global challenges.

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