The Quality of Work Life of Australian Employees – the development of an index

Working Paper 73

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Introduction

Thirty years ago an international conference was held in Los Angeles on the Quality of Working Life, papers from that conference subsequently appeared in a book, with the same title, edited by Louis Davis and Albert Cherns. At the time the interest in developing a meaningful measure of the quality of work life was, in part, a reaction to the extent and rapidity of change, especially technological change, that workers were facing. There was also a strong view that the experience of work can also "encourage positive… attitudes of citizenship and build a more just and humane society".

The pace and scale of change in organisations over recent years has brought about a renewed interest in the issue of the quality of people's work lives. (Kirby & Harter 2001, Bohl et al. 1996). Invariably, different interest groups concentrate on a range of indicators in assessing the quality of peoples work lives. While job insecurity and declining working conditions are of paramount importance to employee groups, perceived employee dissatisfaction and the concomitant effects on productivity and on-costs are of concern to employer groups. Needless to say the measures to include in a quality of worklife index are not without controversy. In addition, there remain significant methodological challenges to overcome in constructing robust measures that can effectively operationalise the indicators.

Measuring the quality of work life

In order to measure relevant issues of interest or importance organisations have long used surveys of employees. Information gathered from such surveys is typically used to identify problems, strengths and weaknesses within a particular organisation or with identifiable groups within that organisation.

The concept of Quality of Work Life, however, goes beyond measuring employee's experiences within a particular organisation and encompasses a wider value set that is specific to individuals. Therefore, measuring issues that are specific or of importance to an organisation, risks overlooking issues that may be important to individuals working in the organisation.

Quality of Work Life is a dynamic multidimensional construct that currently includes such concepts as job security, reward systems, training and career advancement opportunities, and participation in decision making. As such Quality of Work Life has been defined as the workplace strategies, operations and environment that promote and maintain employee satisfaction with an aim to improving working conditions for employees and organisational effectiveness for employers (Lau & Bruce 1998, p. 213).

Richard Walton's article in the Davis and Cherns collection on this subject proposed eight conceptual categories relating to the quality of working life, these being

1. Adequate and fair compensation

2. Safe and healthy working conditions
3. Immediate opportunity to use and develop human capabilities
4. Opportunity for continued growth and security
5. Social integration in the work organisation
6. Constitutionalism in the work organisation (rights to privacy, free speech and equitable treatment and due process)
7. Work and total life space
8. Social relevance of work life (Walton pp93-97)

Our research

The research reported here aimed to provide a national benchmark on the working life issues that concern Australian workers. This provides insights into the positives and negatives of Australian working life from an employee's perspective.

Our survey sought to gauge workers' feelings about a range of 14 key items that affect their quality of work life. The items that we sought opinions about were:

- Fair and reasonable pay compared to others doing similar work
- Concern over losing one's job in the next 12 months
- Sexual harassment or discrimination at the workplace
- Trust in senior management
- Interesting and satisfying work
- People at the workplace getting on together
- Recognition of efforts by immediate manager/supervisor
- Career prospects over the next 2 years
- Amount of control over the way in which work is done
- Health and safety standards at work
- Balance between the time spent at work and the time spent with family and friends
- Immediate manager/supervisor's treatment of staff
- Amount of work to be done
- Level of stress experienced at work

In addition, respondents were asked to define the most important issue impacting on the overall quality of working life.

How we did it

The Australian Quality of Work Life (AQWL) survey was conducted in June 2001. The survey was conducted nationally, by phone to employees at their home. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents. This ensured that the sample reflected the national workforce in terms of location (metro and rural), state of residence, gender, and age. The

survey represented the opinions and attitudes of 1001 employed persons who were 15 years of age or over.

What we found- worker satisfaction

In general, over 70 per cent of employees held positive attitudes on five of the fourteen indicators:

- The vast majority (78%) of workers indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the occupational health and safety standards at work

- 77 per cent were positive about the treatment they received from their immediate manager

- 76 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the way in which people at work got on together

- 74 per cent were positive about their level of job security

- On an even more positive note, 87 per cent of workers indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied that sexual harassment and/or discrimination was *not* a problem at the workplace.

More in-depth analysis revealed that a number of key factors went a long way in explaining employees' perceptions of the treatment they received from immediate managers[1]. A high level of satisfaction with employees' treatment by immediate managers was explained by having workers' efforts recognised by immediate managers. However, other contributing factors included having high levels of trust in senior management, control over the way in which work is done, a suitable amount of work to be done, not having problems with discrimination or harassment in the workplace and the perception that remuneration is fair and reasonable.

These results highlight the interactive nature of many of the factors that impact on working life. Although being treated well by immediate managers was obviously strongly related to having one's efforts recognised by senior management it was also perceived to be very much dependent on a number of other organisational factors. That is, the way in which immediate managers treat employees was perceived to be reliant on a trustworthy senior management team and an organisational culture that encourages autonomy and respect.

What employees in Australia are dissatisfied with at work.

Overall the level of dissatisfaction among workers about aspects of their worklife was low. Only around one in six workers, on average, were dissatisfied with any aspects of their working life. However, there were a

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[1] None of the other working life issues could be directly attributed to satisfaction with health and safety standards, relationships amongst coworkers, job security, or a lack of discrimination.

number of specific issues that were a source of dissatisfaction for a significant minority (20% or more) of employees.

- One in five workers indicated that their pay was not fair and reasonable compared to others doing similar work (20%)

- About the same proportion indicated that the work they did was not interesting and satisfying (22%).

- Just over 20 per cent of workers were dissatisfied with their career prospects over the next 2 years

- Nearly a quarter of employees had a distrust of senior management (23%)

- One in four workers (24%) expressed dissatisfaction with the balance between the time they spent working and the time they spent with family and friends

- Twenty nine per cent of workers were dissatisfied with the level of stress experienced at work.

An explanation for some of the dissatisfaction

A number of contributing factors directly lead to dissatisfaction with levels of stress, work and family balance, and career prospects[2]. Further analyses showed that:

- The most significant factor contributing to unacceptable stress levels was the amount of work that had to be done followed by a poor balance between work and family responsibilities, lack of control over the way work is done and being subject to harassment or discrimination at the workplace.

- Difficulty balancing work and family time was directly related to having too much work to do, increased stress levels, lower levels of job security and poor health and safety standards at work.

- Dissatisfaction with career prospects was directly affected by a lack of control over the way work is done, a distrust in senior management, concern over losing one's job in the next 12 months, the amount of work that had to be done, poor treatment by immediate managers, a lack of interesting and satisfying work, and a perception that pay was not fair and reasonable compared to others doing similar work.

These results draw attention to the complicated issue of employee dissatisfaction. In particular, a perceived inability to adequately balance work

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[2] None of the other working life issues could be directly attributed to dissatisfaction with pay or the perception that work lacked interest and satisfaction.

and family life was a factor directly contributing to workplace stress. This finding was not surprising; those who were having troubles balancing work and family responsibilities felt under greater pressure at work. But the obverse of this was also true, and being stressed led to employees being dissatisfied with the balance they could achieve between work and family life. The most likely explanation for this was that workplace stress was impacting on individuals even while at home.

The results indicate that there were a number of other issues that could be addressed that would have flow on effects to improving satisfaction amongst employees. For example, reducing the amount of work that was to be done might lead to additional improvements with perceived stress levels, career prospects, and work and family balance.

But there are differences – (i) Age does weary them!

As might be expected the experience of work was not the same for everyone. One of the most significant findings was the differences in employee opinions based on the age of respondents. The experiences and expectations of younger workers (those under 25 years) were compared to those of prime age (25 to 44 years) and to mature age workers (45 and above). To control for the impact of different working time arrangements only full-time workers were selected for the purpose of age comparisons. Amongst full-time workers there were significant differences on a number of key factors. The most telling concerned the levels of *dissatisfaction* amongst older full-time workers.

Graph 1 shows that for full-time workers dissatisfaction clearly increased with age. With significant differences between young workers (under 25) and mature age workers (aged 45 and above).

Distrust of senior management increased significantly with age, while only 13 per cent of younger workers did not trust senior management, 25 per cent of prime aged workers (25 to 44 year old) and mature aged workers (45 and older) expressed distrust. The other items reported in Graph 1 may indicate the reasons for this level of distrust. Older workers were also more likely to have higher levels of dissatisfaction with the amount of work they had to do, their career prospects and their level of pay relative to other employees doing similar work; issues that are perhaps perceived as under the control of senior management.

These increasing levels of dissatisfaction, in part, reflect the changing nature of work and the manner in which these issues are linked. Dissatisfaction with career prospects amongst prime age and mature age workers was perhaps not surprising given the extent of downsizing in organisations in the late 1980s and 1990s. By the mid 1990s almost half of all Australian organisations had downsized. But of these 71 per cent had downsized twice and 44 per cent had downsized three or more times in the previous two years (Littler et al 1997). A consequence of this dramatic downsizing has been the demise of traditional career paths that employees of this age group could once have expected. (ACIRRT 1999).

The impact of restructuring was also reflected in the older cohort's level of dissatisfaction with the amount of work they are expected to do. Work intensification and longer hours were other legacies of corporate restructuring as survivors of downsizing efforts did the work of those who were retrenched (ACIRRT 1999). In the past 20 years there has been a 76 per cent increase in the number of full-time employed persons who usually work more than 44 hours per week. Furthermore, one third of those working more than 49 hours per week do so because it is an expectation of the job, and another one in five say the hours are necessary to get the job done (ACIRRT 2001).

Dissatisfaction with the amount of work also goes some way to explaining dissatisfaction with pay. If workers feel that the amount of work they have to do is too great, then it could be expected that they will feel they are not being adequately remunerated for their efforts.

The results for prime aged and mature age workers also provided some insight into the more positive attitude of the younger workers. Younger workers were extremely unlikely to work more than 45 hours a week and therefore unlikely to feel the same work pressures with regard to the amount of work to be done and the unfairness of remuneration as older workers. Further, it is possible that younger workers may either have lower expectations of career advancement at this stage of their working life or may feel more positive about their career prospects over the long term. The positive attitude of younger workers was also reflected in their opinions on the quality of work life over the next 12 months. Almost two thirds of workers under the age of 25 believed that their quality of work life would improve compared to just under half of all 25 to 44 year olds and one third of all those aged 45 or older.

Graph 1. Increasing dissatisfaction as workers age

Dissatisfaction Amongst Workers by Age

Since the 1980s there has been an increase in the take-up of flexible work practices aimed at improving work and family balance (Pearlson & Saunders 2001). Despite the increased interest and debate about work and family balance, the survey found that when it comes to balancing work and family life and managing stress levels there is still a long way to go in the provision of working arrangements that are flexible enough, especially for prime age workers. Graph 2 shows the relatively high percentage of workers over the age of 25 who indicated dissatisfaction with the level of stress they felt and with their ability to adequately balance work and family time. While 33 per cent of all workers over the age of 25 were dissatisfied with the levels of stress they experienced, only 20 per cent of younger workers were dissatisfied with stress levels.

The results surrounding work and family balance and stress highlight the importance of considering life cycle stages in addressing workplace issues. One in three employees over the age of 25 work very long hours (over 45 hours per week). Correspondingly, those over the age of 25 were also more likely to be caring for elderly parents or raising families (ABS 1999). Combined with the increased incidence of two parent households in which both parents are working (Thornthwaite & Buchanan 2001) it is not surprising that the issue of balancing work and family life was a concern for around one third of this group of workers.

On the issues that contributed most to a high quality of work life for different age groups, three quarters of all respondents over the age of 25 felt that people at their workplace got on well together. Although younger workers

were a bit less positive about relationships at work, around 70 per cent were still satisfied with the way people at their workplace got on together. In contrast however, Graph 2 also shows that with regard to interesting and satisfying work, opinions differed. Young and mature age workers were more dissatisfied with the type of work they did than prime aged workers (those aged between the age of 25 and 44). Almost one in four (24%) of workers aged under the age of 25 or over the age of 44 were dissatisfied with the level of interest and satisfaction they gained from their work compared to about one in seven (15%) workers aged between 25 and 44.

Graph 2. Dissatisfaction vacillates with age.

Dissatisfaction Amongst Workers
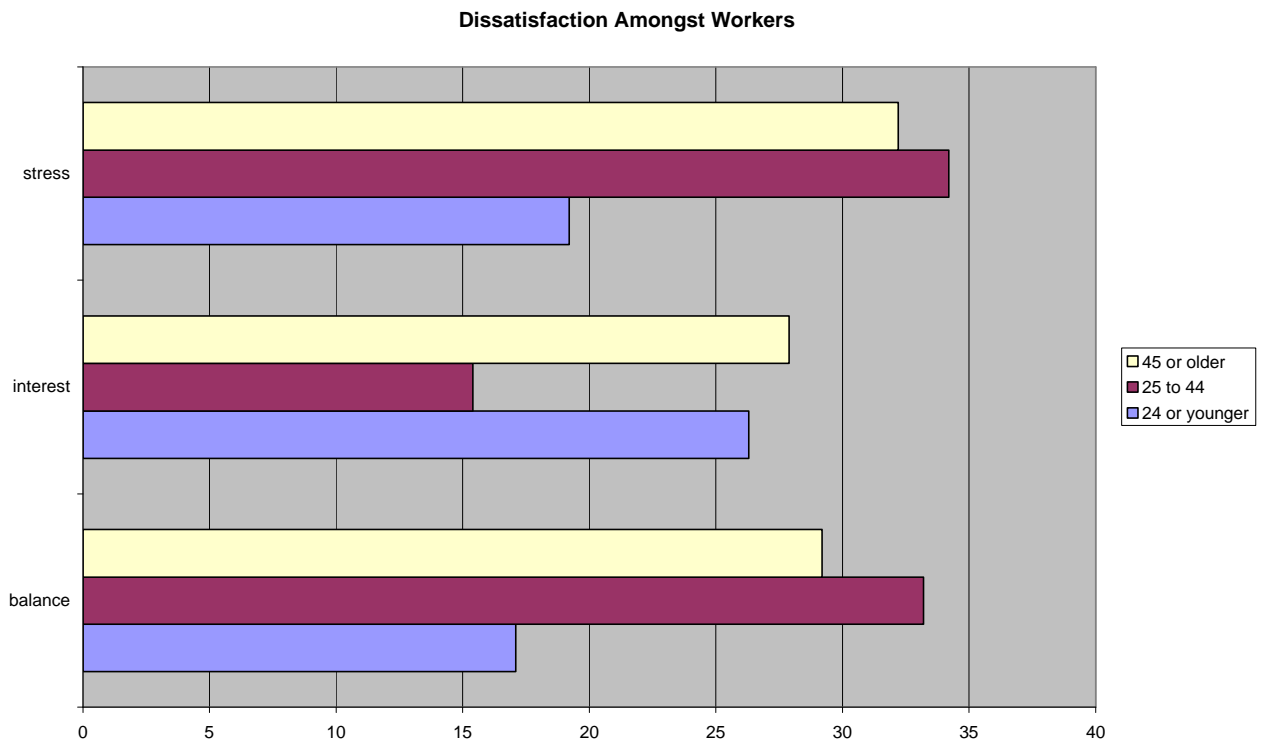
But there are differences – (ii) Small is better than large!
Substantial differences also emerged when comparing employees who worked in small organisations (less than 10 employees) with those who worked in large organisations (1000 or more employees). In general, employees in small organisations had a higher quality of working life than employees in large organisations.

On each issue measured, a higher percentage of employees from small organisations indicated satisfaction compared to employees from large organisations. On a number of specific issues the differences between employees in small organisations and those in large organisations was quite significant (greater than 20 percent difference in the percentage of people indicating satisfaction).

The major issues of difference may be a consequence of organisational size and the contact workers have with management. For example, 89 per cent of employees in small organisations were satisfied with the recognition their

efforts were given by immediate managers compared to 60 per cent of employees in large organisations. Similarly, 81 per cent of employees in small organisations trusted senior management compared to only 45 per cent of workers in large organisations. In small organisations, senior management and immediate manager are likely to be synonymous.

Another issue on which the differences between large and small organisations were substantial was not as readily explained, and in some sense was counter-intuitive. Employees in small organisations were much more satisfied (65%) with their career prospects than employees in large organisations (44%). This was despite the expectation that there are relatively limited opportunities for career advancement within small organisations. The findings may, however, indicate that employees in small organisations had lower expectations of career advancement than employees in large organisations and were nevertheless satisfied with the limited available options or saw their career prospects beyond their current employer (see Graph 3).

Graph 3. Employees of small organisations substantially more satisfied than employees of large organisations.

Satisfaction Amongst Employees of Small and Large Organisations
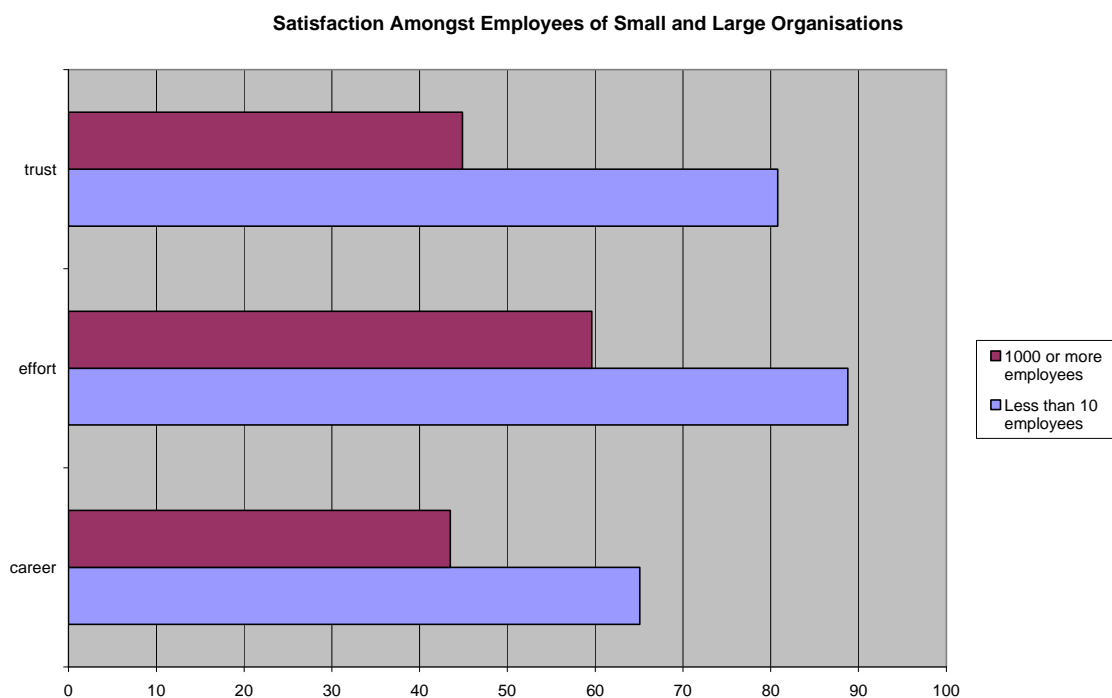
To a lesser extent employees of small organisations were also far more satisfied than employees of large organisations with the:

- treatment they received from immediate managers/supervisors (90% versus 71%),
- control they had over the way in which they did their work (82% versus 63%),
- relationships between coworkers (88% versus 71%),

- amount of work they had to do (69% versus 53%),
- levels of stress experienced (46% versus 30%),
- balance between work life and family life (57% versus 44%).

Graph 4 Satisfaction by organisational size.

Satisfaction Amongst Employees of Small and Large Businesses
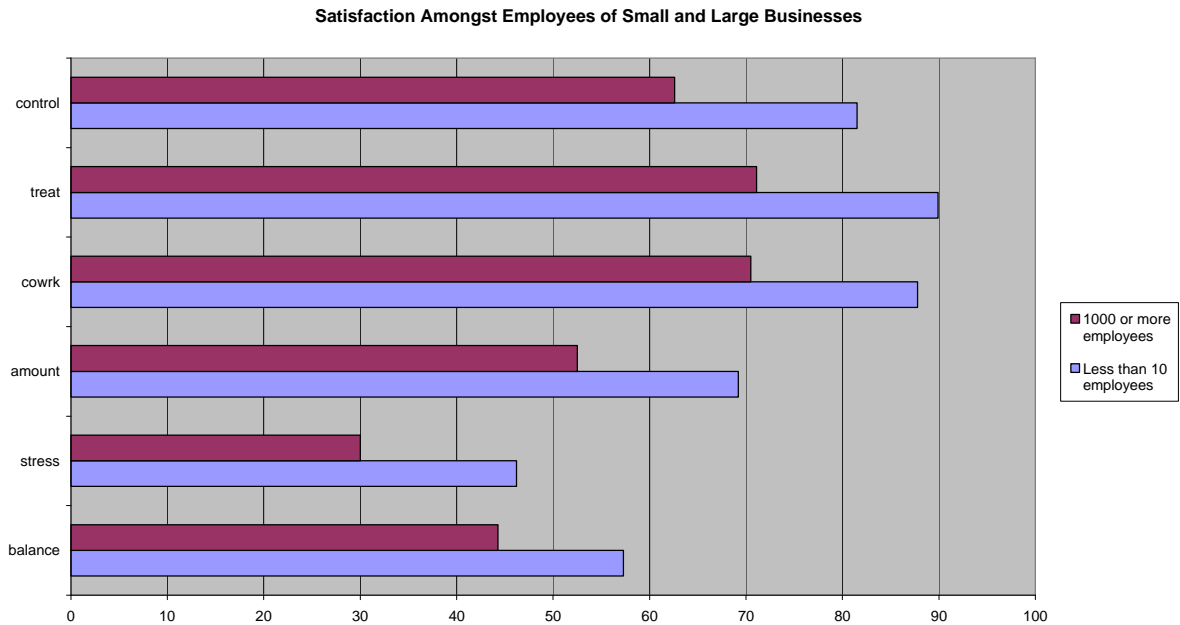
*There are differences – (iii) The benefits and costs of being a high-income earner.*

Being a high-income earner comes at a cost. Full-time high-income earners (those earning more than $70,000) were much more likely to work extended hours than full-time low-income earners (those earning between $20,000 and $29,999). Of all full-time high-income employees earning more than $70,000, 70 per cent usually worked more than 44 hours per week. In contrast, 80 per cent of full-time employees who earned between $20,000 and $29,999 usually worked 35 to 44 hours per week.

High-income and long hours also meant more stress (see Graph 5). The most significant cost for full-time high-income earners was in their perceived levels of stress. High-income earners were twice as likely to be dissatisfied by the level of stress they experienced at work compared to low-income earners. In total 39 per cent of all high-income full-time employees were not satisfied with their levels of workplace stress compared to just under 19 per cent of all low-income full-time who were dissatisfied at the level of stress at work.

Not surprisingly given the hours that the majority of high-income earners worked, a significantly higher percentage of high-income full-time employees were also dissatisfied with the balance they were able to achieve between time at work and time with family and friends. As with stress, 36 per cent of all high-income earners were dissatisfied with balancing work and family time. In contrast 25 per cent of low-income workers were dissatisfied with their ability

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to balance work and family time. In addition, 23 per cent of all high-income earners were dissatisfied with the amount of work they had to do compared to 14 per cent of low-income earners.

Graph 5. The cost of a high-income.

Dissatisfaction Amongst Full-time Low and High Income Earners
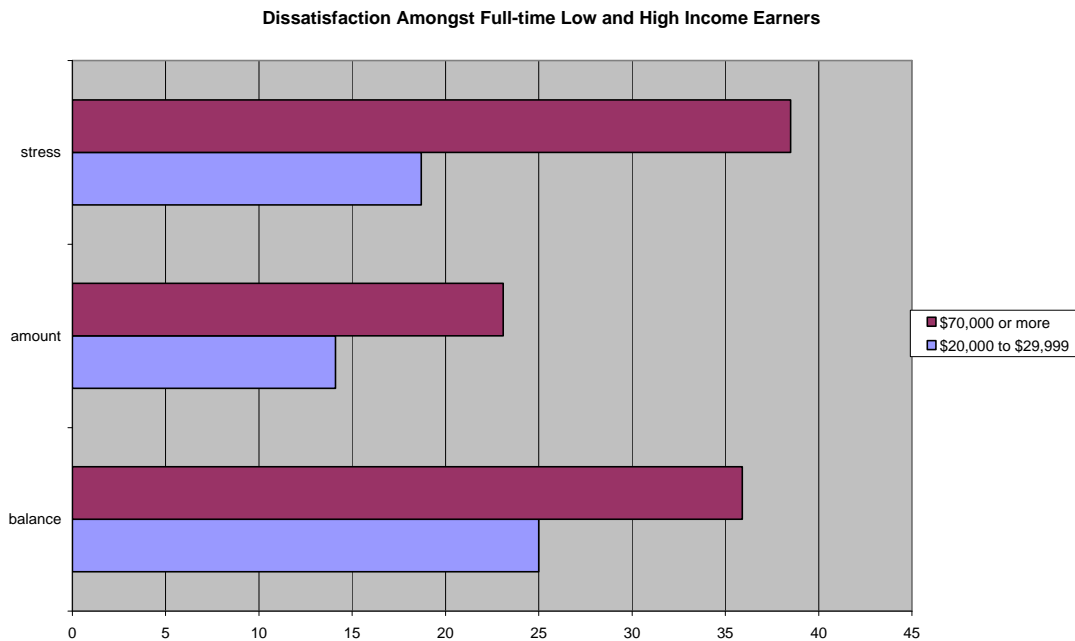
The trade-off for high-income earners were the benefits associated with a higher income. Compared to low-income full-time workers, high-income full-timers saw themselves as having better career prospects, more interesting and satisfying work, greater recognition of efforts, and not surprisingly, they were more satisfied with their remuneration. As can be seen in Graph 6 the most significant differences between low and high income full-timers on these issues were with the satisfaction gained from the type of work done and with remuneration.

Less than half (47%) of all full-time low-income earners were satisfied that their pay was fair and reasonable compared to others doing similar work. In contrast three-quarters (73%) of full-time high-income earners were satisfied with their remuneration. Similarly, only half of those on low-incomes were satisfied that the work they did was interesting and satisfying compared to 70 per cent of high-income earners. This last finding suggests low income earners are doubly disadvantaged; with low income and unsatisfying work.

Graph 6. Full-time high income earners more satisfied than full-time low income earners with intrinsic rewards of the job

**Satisfaction Amongst Full-Time Low and High Income Earners**
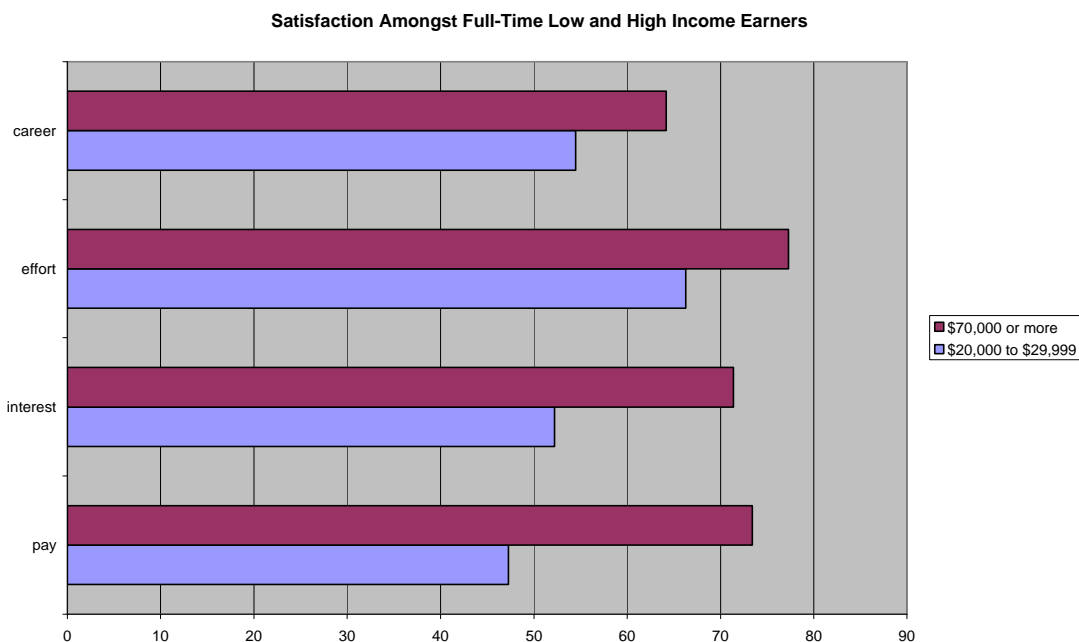
There are differences – (iv) Union members and non-union employees.

There were some differences between unionised and non-unionised workplaces. As non-union employees are more likely to be found in small organisations, only examining results for employees in large organisations controlled for the effect of workplace size. After controlling for size of organisation, union members typically expressed lower levels of satisfaction with quality of work life compared to non-union members.

In the majority of cases the differences between union and non-union employees were around ten percentage points in satisfaction levels. When considering the levels of dissatisfaction however, there were two notable exceptions. Union members were far more likely to be dissatisfied with the level of stress experienced at work, and were far more likely to distrust senior management than non-union employees.

Graph7 shows that 43 per cent of all union members from large organisations were dissatisfied with the level of stress they experienced in the workplace compared to 31 per cent of all non-union employees from large organisations. Over a third of all union members (36%) indicated they distrusted senior management compared to almost a quarter (23%) of all non-union employees.

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Graph 7. Problems for union members.

Dissatisfaction Amongst Large Unionised and Non-unionised Organisations
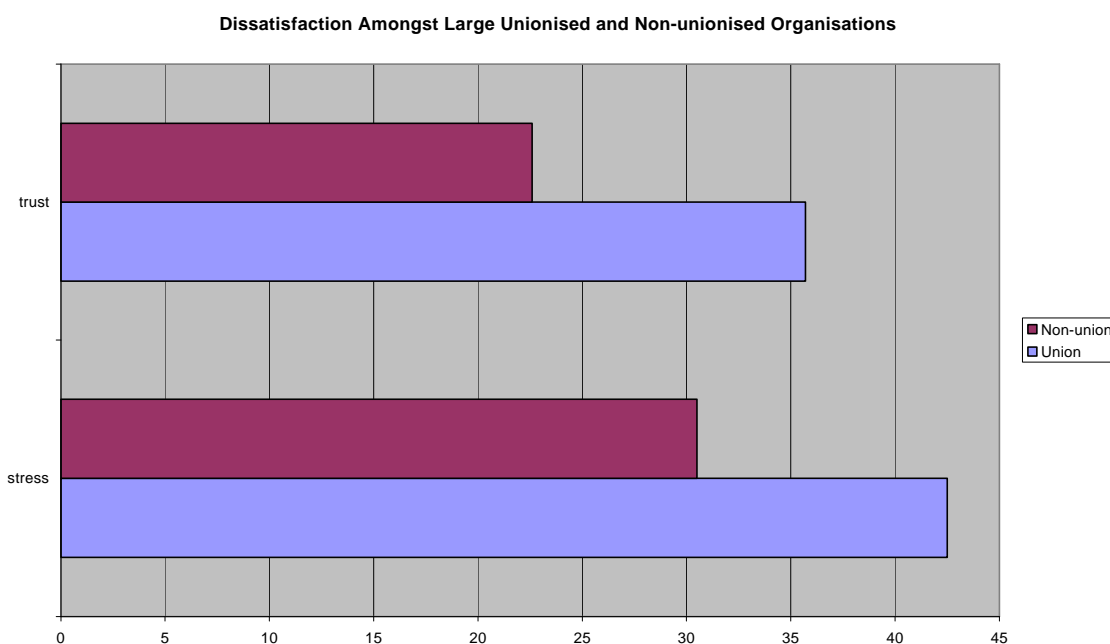
(v) Other differences.

Additional comparisons were made across a number of other workforce characteristics. Specifically, differences in the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction were examined by:

• Gender
• Public versus private sector
• Blue collar versus white collar workers
• Part-time versus full-time workers
• Casuals versus permanent on-going employees

Although there were some differences between these groups the differences were not significant on most individual items. For example, women were more likely to agree that they trusted senior management but their opinion did not differ significantly from men (78% of women trusted senior management compared to 72% of men). Similarly, private sector employees were more satisfied with the extent to which they could exercise control over the way in which they did work but, once again, this only differed slightly from public sector employees (72% for private sector employees compared to 65% for public sector employees).

Interpreting satisfaction and dissatisfaction with specific items.

The patterns that emerge with regard to levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction across various employee groups suggested a maze of possible solutions to improving employee satisfaction levels. For example, examining ways of improving perceptions of trust in senior management may increase

satisfaction levels for older workers but is unlikely to do anything for younger workers who already have relatively high levels of trust. Adding to the confusion, there seems to be little to distinguish factors impinging on satisfaction levels for men and women. However, these results take the specific issue at face value and fail to account for relative overall levels of satisfaction. From these extremes one might conclude that older workers are generally less satisfied than younger workers but that there is little difference in the levels of satisfaction between men and women. This conclusion might be intuitively obvious for different cohorts of workers because of the high number of issues with which older workers are less satisfied. However, applying the same rule of logic to groups of men and women and concluding that there is little difference between men and women's level of satisfaction ignores the cumulative impact of slight differences in satisfaction.

To take into consideration small differences in levels of satisfaction a Quality of Work Life Index was developed that included all the indicators and that also recognised that some issues were more important to workers than others.

The Australian Quality of Work Life Index

The Australian Quality of Work Life (AQWL) index provides a measure of employees' overall perception of quality of work life on a 10-point scale. An index of 10 would indicate a perception amongst employees that quality of work life was at its optimum and could not be improved. An index between 6 and 9 would reflect varying levels of overall satisfaction amongst employees regarding their quality of work life, with 6 indicating a slightly positive perception and 9 a strong positive perception. An index of 5 would indicate that employees' experience of work life was neither a positive nor a negative one. An index between 0 and 4 would reflect negative overall experiences of work, with an index of 4 indicating that employees were generally dissatisfied with working life in Australia and an index of 0 would indicate that employees were extremely dissatisfied with all aspects of working life.

The index was calculated by aggregating the sample scores of each of the items and converting each item score to reflect a value out of 10. Each item score was weighted to derive a total index out of one hundred. For each of the items that were indicated as being the 'most important' to an overall positive work experience, the weightings were doubled for the value of each of the scores. Item scores were then summed to provide an index score out of 10.

The Australian Quality of Work Life Index for all Australian employees was 7.1. This indicates a generally positive attitude to the quality of work life in Australia, though it also suggests that there are still improvements that can be made to employees' level of satisfaction on a range of working life issues.

However, examining the Work Life Index for different groups of employees illustrates the problem with only focussing on extreme opinions. Taking the examples of age and gender discussed above, the assumption was made that for age groups it was reasonable to conclude that satisfaction levels with quality of work life declined with age but that there was little difference in

satisfaction levels between men and women. The AQWL indexes for different age groups confirm the first assumption that older workers were less satisfied with quality of work life than younger workers. The AQWL index for young full-time employees was slightly higher than the national average at 7.2. Full-time workers of a prime age had a slightly lower index at 7.0 while full-time mature age workers had an even lower index at 6.8. However, an examination of the AQWL indexes for men and women show that the second assumption is not supported and in fact, that the discrepancy in satisfaction levels between men and women is almost as great as that between older and younger workers. The AQWL for women was 7.2 while the AQWL for men was 6.9.

Remaining sub-groups of employees were also tested with regard to the relevant AQWL index. When comparing employee groups from large and small organisations the AQWL index supported the earlier finding that employees of small organisation had a higher perceived level of satisfaction than employees of large organisations. The AQWL index for employees from small organisations was 7.2 compared to 6.7 for employees of large organisations.

Interestingly however, the benefits of being a high-income earner outweighed the costs in comparison to low-income earners and overall quality of work life. The AQWL index for full-time high-income earners was in fact slightly higher than for full-time low-income earners. High-income earners had an index score of 7.2 whilst low-income earners had an index of 7.0.

On the remaining employee sub-groups analysed a number of results again highlighted the reason for caution when interpreting individual items only. At the individual item level there appeared to be little difference between public and private sector employees, white collar and blue collar employees, part-time and full-time workers, union and non-union workers, and casual versus permanent employees. When comparing the AQWL index for each of these comparisons however, the finding that there was no significant difference between groups was only supported for casual and permanent employees. Both casual and permanent employees had an index of 7.1.

For the remaining groups there was a difference of at least .3 index points in overall the AQWL index indicating that there were differences in overall levels of satisfaction between these groups. White-collar workers were substantially more satisfied than blue-collar workers (7.2 versus 6.7). The same magnitude of difference was found between part-time (7.4) and full-time (6.9) workers. Indeed, with an index 7.4, of part-time workers was the group with the highest AQWL index of all groups compared. Private sector employees indicated that they had a higher quality of work life than public sector employees did with an AQWL index of 7.2 compared to 6.9. Finally, non-union employees from large organisations had a slightly higher index (7.0) than did union members in large organisations (6.7).

Looking at the results presented so far only demonstrate where the differences in opinion between different groups of employees can be noticed. What these results haven't highlighted is that although these differences may

be large in some cases, the absolute figures indicate relatively good attitudes towards different aspects of work. One of the most extreme examples of this can be illustrated by examining more closely the results of the most discrepant age difference: the level of dissatisfaction with regard to "trust in senior management". Although there was a 20 percentage point difference in the percentage of older workers who were dissatisfied with the trust they had in senior management compared to that of younger workers, there was still only 28 per cent of older workers who were dissatisfied.

What do Australian workers value most highly at work?

Employee satisfaction levels highlight one of the most confounding problems faced by management. Across various employee groups there were a number of differences in satisfaction levels on specific indicators. For example, the differences seen between age groups clearly demonstrate the relevance of life-stages and competing interests of different age groups both with regard to specific issues but also from an overall quality of work life perspective. Human Resource Managers could quite reasonably devote significant resources to managing life-stage issues alone. However, devoting attention to either specific details or to a more generalist approach without any further information remains an ad-hoc approach.

To ensure a more thorough approach, consideration also needs to be given to quantifiable differences in the importance of specific issues. This has already been touched upon in the previous section where mention was made of the higher weighting given to items that had been nominated by employees as being the 'most important' factors in contributing to a high quality of work life. The survey asked employees to indicate the most important factor to them in making work a positive experience. This particular item was unprompted by response options, so responses reflected workers' own free opinion of the issues that matter most to work life. This approach provided an indication of the issues that would make a substantially larger difference than other issues to employee satisfaction if addressed

Australian workers felt that the two most important factors that make work a positive experience were *'co-workers getting along together'* and *'interesting and satisfying work'*. Over a quarter of all workers (29%) believed that having interesting and satisfying work was the most important factor contributing to a positive work experience and another quarter (26%) felt that people getting on well together at the workplace was the most important factor. These two indicators were found to be far more important for workers than factors typically attributed to employee satisfaction such as having your efforts recognised, having control over the way you do work, being treated well by your immediate supervisors or even having fair and reasonable pay.

On a positive note, the survey found that the majority of Australian workers believed that relationships amongst co-workers *were* positive. In total 76 per cent of employees indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that people at their workplace got on well together. Only 8 per cent of employees

said they were employed in workplaces where people did not get on well together.

Similarly, the majority of employees agreed or strongly agreed (61%) that their work was interesting and satisfying though one in four workers (22%) felt they were not engaged in interesting and satisfying work.

More importantly, these results held across different employee groups showing that regardless of employee characteristics, employee satisfaction could be most effectively managed by addressing relationships in the workplace and by providing suitably interesting and challenging work tasks. The implication of these results is that Human Resource managers can, with a high degree of confidence, direct attention towards two aspects of working life that can make a substantially greater difference to employee satisfaction than other general issues.

Conclusion

Australian workers responding to this survey had a relatively good quality of working life. The Quality of Working Life index for 2001 was 7.1 indicating that although there was room for improvement with regard to some issues of working life, the majority of employees are fairly satisfied with most aspects of working life.

More specifically, the Quality of Work Life Survey offers new insight into those aspects of working life that Australian employees felt contributed most to a good working life. The results of these findings showed that the majority of Australian workers felt that having good relationships at work and having interesting and satisfying work were the most important issues for a high quality of working life. More importantly most workers were satisfied with both of these aspects of working life.

However, there were also issues of concern. A large minority of employees were dissatisfied their stress levels, work and family balance, and career prospects over the next two years. Furthermore, there was a number of contributing factors that impacted on perceived outcomes with these particular issues.

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