

# Experiential Exercise

What factors are most important to your job satisfaction?

Most of us probably want a job we think will satisfy us. But because no job is perfect, we often have to trade off job attributes. One job may pay well but provide limited opportunities for advancement or skill development. Another may offer work we enjoy but have poor benefits. The following is a list of 21 job factors or attributes.

Autonomy and independence	Management recognition of employee job performance
Benefits	Meaningfulness of job
Career advancement opportunities	Networking
Career development opportunities	Opportunities to use skills/abilities
Compensation/pay	Organization's commitment to professional development
Communication between employees and management	Overall corporate culture
Contribution of work to organization's business goals	Relationship with coworkers
Feeling safe in the work environment	Relationship with immediate supervisor
Flexibility to balance life and work issues	The work itself
Job security	The variety of work
Job-specific training	

On a sheet of paper, rank-order these job factors from top to bottom, so that number 1 is the job factor you think is most important to your job satisfaction, number 2 is the second most important factor to your job satisfaction, and so on.

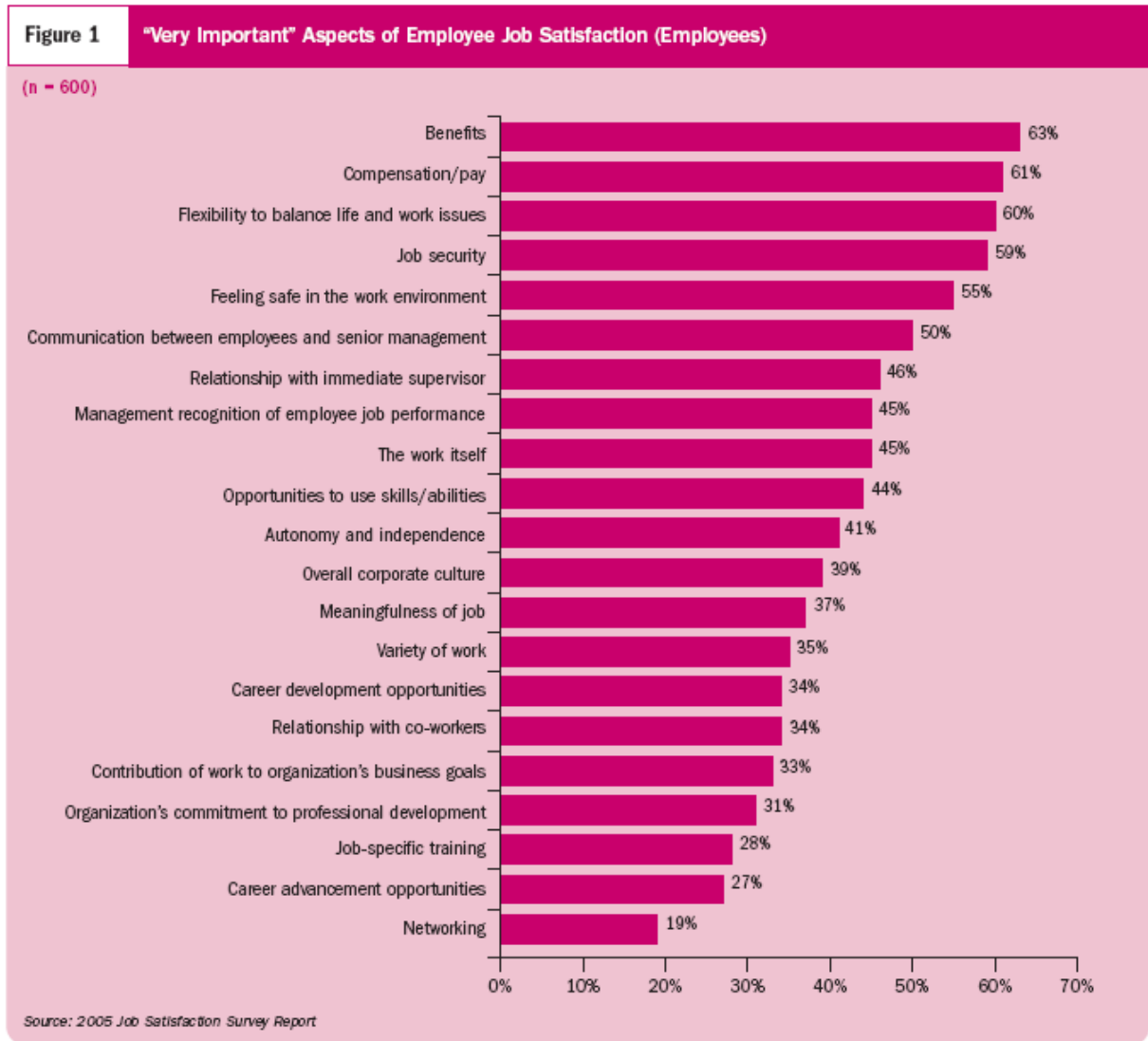
Now gather in teams of three or four people and try the following:

1. Appoint a spokesperson who will take notes and report the answers to the following questions, on behalf of your group, back to the class.
2. Averaging across all members in your group, generate a list of the top five job factors.
3. Did most people in your group seem to value the same job factors? Why or why not?
4. Your instructor will provide you with the results of a study of a random sample of 600 employees conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). How do your group's rankings compare to the SHRM results?

When employees were asked how important the following factors were to their job satisfaction, the figure below represents the percentage who listed the factor as "very important" (as opposed to "important," "neither important nor unimportant," "unimportant," or "very unimportant").

The chapter says that pay doesn't correlate all that well with job satisfaction, but in the SHRM survey, people say it is relatively important. Can your group suggest a reason for the apparent discrepancy?

Now examine your own list again. Does your list agree with the group list? Does your list agree with the SHRM study?



Source: Esen, SHRM Job Satisfaction Series: 2005 Job Satisfaction (Alexandria, VA: Society for Human Resource Management, 2005).

# Ethical Dilemma

## Are Americans Overworked?

Europeans pride themselves on their quality of life, and rightly so. In a recent worldwide analysis of quality of life, the United States ranked 13th. The 12 nations that finished ahead of the United States were all from Europe. Factors considered in the analysis were: material well-being, health, political stability, divorce rates, job security, political freedom, and gender equality, among other factors.

Many Europeans would credit their high quality of life to their nations' free health care, more generous unemployment benefits, and greater emphasis on leisure as opposed to work. Consider that most European nations mandate restricted workweek hours and a month or more of vacation time, but Americans have among the fewest vacation days and longest average workweek in the world. Juliet Schor, a Harvard economist who has written on the subject, argues that the United States "is the world's standout workaholic nation," and that U.S. workers are trapped in a "squirrel cage" of overwork. Some argue that mandated leisure time would force companies to compete within their industry by raising productivity and product quality rather than by requiring workers to put in more hours.

Many European nations also place limits on the hours employers can require employees to work. France, Germany, and other nations limit the workweek to 35 hours. Recently, after much debate, the French parliament voted to do away with the rule that set 35 hours as the maximum workweek. The justification was that more flexible rules would allow French companies to compete more effectively so that, if business required it, they could pay employees for longer hours. Opponents of the new rules argue that it puts the decision of how much to work in the individual's hands. These people argue that it will inevitably detract from quality of life and give employers power to exploit workers. A French union leader said, "They say it's the worker who will choose how much to work, but they're lying because it's always the employer who decides."

### **Class Exercise:**

There are several ways to approach the topic to this case. Some ideas are:

- Ask students to do some research on European work rules such as the 35-hour workweek. You may also ask them to determine what the average vacation time is for Europeans vs. workers in the United States.
- Ask students whether or not the United States could ever move toward a European model.

Responses to this exercise will vary; however, you may want to discuss the following questions when discussing the case.

### **Questions**

1. Why do you think quality of life is lower in the United States compared to many European nations? Do you think it would improve if the United States government required a minimum number of vacation days or limited workweek hours?

**Answer:** Quality of life is a relative term. Students may argue that the quality of life in the United States is better than that in many European nations. An important issue to discuss here concerns health-care costs and access to health care. Quality of life may be enhanced through more affordable and more accessible health care. This could be an interesting area

to discuss with students. In most European countries, health care is delivered at low to no cost to employees and citizens. One could argue that quality of life (healthy lifestyle) may be correlated with overwork, insufficient number of vacation days, etc.

2. Do you think the French parliament was right to eliminate the 35-hour workweek limit? Do you think the quality of French life will suffer? Why or why not?

**Answer:** This is clearly an opinion issue. Ask students to itemize the factors that contribute or detract from a positive quality of life. Some aspects to consider are healthy lifestyles, home-work balance, standard of living, etc.

3. Do you think employers have an obligation to watch out for the quality of life of their employees? Could such an obligation mean protecting employees from being overworked?

**Answer:** It is in the best interest of employers to help ensure that employees have a positive quality of life. This is correlated with number of sick days, absenteeism, and turnover, all of which pose considerable cost to employers. Whether or not it is an obligation is debatable, but one could argue that it is a good business practice.

4. Do you think it makes a difference in the research results that the unemployment rate in Europe is roughly double that of the United States and that Europe's gross domestic product (GDP) is about half that of the United States?

**Answer:** It makes a significant difference across a number of dimensions including standard of living, the economic vitality of the country, the economic stability of the country, etc. All of these factors (as well as a number of others that can be identified by students) play a role in the relative quality of life of citizens.

Sources: Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), C. S. Smith, "Effort to Extend Workweek Advances in France," *New York Times*, February 10, 2005, p. A9," *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Quality-of-Life Index*," *The Economist*, 2005 ([http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/QUALITY\\_OF\\_LIFE.pdf](http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/QUALITY_OF_LIFE.pdf)); E. Olsen, "The Vacation Deficit," *Budget Travel*, October 29, 2004 (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6345416/>).