Assessing Employee Satisfaction at the Zimbabwe Open University

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses employee satisfaction at the Zimbabwe Open University. Employee satisfaction is an essential contributor to employee retention, increased engagement and high productivity. It is hoped that the findings of this employee satisfaction survey would provide ZOU management with the knowledge and tools to build positive employee relations and a positive work environment in the University. The study employs a quantitative descriptive approach. The questionnaire method was used as the main data gathering instrument. Data from the questionnaire was used to calculate the resultant employee satisfaction index. The research revealed that employee satisfaction at the Zimbabwe Open University is at 69%. The main contributors to employee satisfaction were the compensation and benefits package and the leadership of the University which is appreciated by employees. Employees were however worried about job security, lack of clear channels for employees to contribute innovative ideas for the University and inadequate induction training among other concerns. The research recommends that the University improve on availability of resources, induction training for new employees and prior to commencing duties and assure employees of job security.

INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwe Open University in its endeavor to become a world class ODL University aims to attract and retain high caliber employees for the University through innovative human resources best practices. Employee satisfaction is thus a priority for the University in order to attain this objective. Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992 defined employee satisfaction as the combination of affective reactions to the differential perceptions of what an employee wants to receive compared with what he/she actually receives. Hunter & Tietyn, 1997, argue that employees are more loyal and productive when they are satisfied. Potterfield, 1999, suggests that there is a close link between employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and overall organizational productivity. Employee satisfaction is therefore an essential component of the University’ strategy as it has an implication on overall organisational performance.

This study assesses employee satisfaction at the Zimbabwe Open University by evaluating employee responses on seven key organisational aspects identified by Bernard Marr 2012, (key performance indicators/ criteria to use on employee satisfaction survey data collection.)

- Leadership and direction
- Communications
Statement of the Problem

Employee satisfaction is critical to motivation, employee retention and productivity in any organisation. Currently no study has been carried out to measure employee satisfaction at the Zimbabwe Open University. University managers thus do not have accurate information on the major drivers of satisfaction or factors contributing to dissatisfaction of employees at the University.

Aim of the Study
This study aims to measure the level of employee satisfaction at the Zimbabwe Open University. It aims to identify the factors contributing effectively to employee satisfaction and those which can be improved.

Research Objectives
The study sought to achieve the following objectives
- To measure the employee satisfaction index at the Zimbabwe Open University
- To establish the contribution of the key human resources related factors to employee satisfaction
- To review the factors that can be improved to increase employee satisfaction

Research Questions
The study answered the following questions
- What is the Zimbabwe Open University’s employee satisfaction index?
- What is the contribution of the relevant factors to employee satisfaction?
- What could be improved in the University to increase employee satisfaction?

Justification of the Study
This study estimates a statistical measure of employee satisfaction (employee satisfaction index) at the Zimbabwe Open University through the employee satisfaction survey. It is a more understandable indicator for University management in assessing the effectiveness of the human resources policies and the general perception of employees towards the working environment. The study also quantifies the perceptions and opinions of employees towards important organisational aspects such as leadership, conditions of service, culture, communications and other variables. It is hoped that the findings of this study will assist the University in improving the effectiveness of its human resources policies and aligning other aspects of the organisation with the needs of the employees.
Literature Review

- **Equity theory**

The Equity Theory suggests that if an individual thinks there is an inequality between two social groups or individuals, the person is likely to be distressed because the ratio between the input and the output are not equal. Huseman, Hatfield, & Mile, 1987; O'Neil & Mone 1998 suggested that there are basically three response patterns to situations of perceived equity or inequity. These three types are benevolent, equity sensitive, and entitled. The level of each type affects motivation, job satisfaction, and job performance.

1. Benevolent-Satisfied when they are under-rewarded compared with co-workers
2. Equity sensitive-Believe everyone should be fairly rewarded
3. Entitled-People believe that everything they receive is their just due

It is the responsibility of the organisation to create a conducive work environment and compensation strategy that will be viewed as fair by employees so as to enhance satisfaction.

- **Herzberg's Two-factor theory**

Herzberg's two-factor theory, there are factors whose absence cause dissatisfaction while their presence do not necessarily result in satisfaction, these he called them hygiene or maintenance factors. He also identified factors whose presence result in satisfaction of employees. According to Herzberg, understanding what causes employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction is important for management.

The hygiene factors symbolized the physiological needs which the individuals wanted and expected to be fulfilled. Hygiene factors include: Pay, Company Policies and administrative policies, Fringe, Physical Working conditions which are safe, clean and hygienic, Good interpersonal relations with other employees and Job Security

Motivational factors- The motivational factors yield positive satisfaction. These factors are said to be inherent to work. These are factors involved in performing the job. Employees find these factors intrinsically rewarding. The motivators symbolized the psychological needs that were perceived as an additional benefit. Motivational factors include: Recognition, Sense of achievement, Growth and promotional opportunities, Responsibility, Meaningfulness of the work

The Human Relations perspective posits that satisfied workers are productive workers (Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960). Thus, organizational productivity and efficiency is achieved through employee satisfaction and attention to employees’ needs.

Human relations researchers further argue that employee satisfaction sentiments are best achieved through maintaining a positive social organizational environment, such as by providing autonomy, participation, and mutual trust (Likert, 1961).

It is from this motivational background that this study assesses the level of employee satisfaction at the Zimbabwe Open University.

**Methodology**

The study employs a quantitative descriptive approach. The questionnaire method was used as the main data gathering instrument. The questionnaire was designed to suit the key performance
indicators on employee effectiveness suggested by Bernard Marr, 2012. Data from the questionnaire was used to calculate the resultant employee satisfaction index. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 50 ZOU employees at the Zimbabwe Open University National Centre and the Harare Regional Centre. Respondents were randomly chosen for the survey.

Research Findings

- **Background of the ZOU employees**

  The study focused on a sample of 50 ZOU employees. 60% were male while 40% were female as shown on the pie chart below.

  60% of respondents were below 40 years, 30% were in the age ranges 41-50 years while 10% were between 51 and 60 years of age.

  The study revealed that the majority of ZOU employees were married (70%). 20% were divorced while 10% were single.

  40% of respondents had served at ZOU for less than five years, 30% had served in the University between 6-9 years while 30% had been employed by ZOU for above 10 years.

![Figure 1: Years serving at ZOU](image)

When asked whether they were generally satisfied with the Zimbabwe Open University as their employer, 80% of respondents agreed, 10% were not sure while only 10% indicated that they were not satisfied.
The study revealed that 80% of ZOU employees fully understood their job descriptions; only 20% were either not sure or did not understand.

Concurring with the findings on employees fully understanding their job descriptions, the study also revealed that 90% of ZOU employees generally understood how their roles at departmental level contribute to the realization of the organisation’s mission.
Though employees are conversant with their job descriptions, there is doubt regarding performance appraisal. The study revealed that 40% of respondents were not well informed of the criteria used when their performances were appraised.

![Figure 5: Clarity with criteria for performance evaluation](image)

The study revealed a huge endorsement of the University’s leadership by the employees. 90% of respondents indicated that they had confidence in the leadership of the institution, only 10% disagreed.

![Figure 6: Employee confidence in leadership](image)

Though the leadership has the general endorsement of the employees, the study revealed that there are some areas which require improvement from the University’s leadership.

It is the general perception of employees that the University’s leadership is not open to input from employees. 40% of respondents consented that the University’s leadership was open to input from employees. 40% were not sure while 20% disagreed.
Communications

The study also revealed that there are no clear convenient channels for ZOU employees to suggest innovative ideas and make suggestions for consideration by University authorities. 70% of respondents indicated that there are no known channels for employees to make suggestions for uptake by the University authorities.

The study revealed that the University was not effectively giving feedback to employees regarding performance at organisational level. When asked whether they had a general understanding of the performance of the organisation regarding the achievement of its objectives, only 50% of respondents indicated that they understood the general performance level of the University.
The findings suggest that changes which affect employees are not communicated to them in time prior to their taking effect. Only 40% of respondents indicated that changes that affect them are communicated to them prior to implementation, the other 60% disagreed.

- **Local line management**
  Generally employees revealed that their supervisors treated them fairly. 70% of respondents indicated that their supervisors treated them fairly while 30% disagreed.
70% of respondents indicated that their supervisors provides them with work related feedback and tells them when their work needed improvement.

The study suggests that positive reinforcement is not consistent and is inadequate in the University. Only 50% of respondents indicated that their supervisors acknowledged when they do their work well or surpass targets.

With respect to handling of work related issues, 50% of respondents indicated that their supervisors handled their work related issues satisfactorily while the other 50% were not satisfied.
60% of respondents however indicated that their supervisors handled their personal issues satisfactorily, 10% were neutral while 30% of respondents were dissatisfied.

Training and employee development
The University needs to improve on its orientation programme to include essential training to adequately prepare workers for their duties. The study revealed that the University was not providing adequate initial training, only 40% of respondents were satisfied by the initial training they received after joining ZOU.
The research revealed that the University has managed to provide opportunities to learn and grow to a considerable proportion of its employees. 60% of respondents indicated that they had opportunities to learn and grow in the University.

**Company working culture**

The study revealed that cooperation between individuals from different departments was moderate. 60% of respondents indicated that they get cooperation from those outside their departments while the other 40% were not in agreement.
80% of respondents did not see the obvious link between performance and reward through promotion at ZOU. Only 20% of respondents indicated that they were confident that good performance would enable them to be promoted.

The study revealed that decision making in the University is generally centralized at managerial level as only 40% of respondents agreed that they were given enough authority they needed to make decisions.
A significant proportion of respondents [30%] indicated that they were not sure whether employees were treated fairly at ZOU regardless of race, gender, age or religion. Only 40% of respondents were positive that there was no discrimination while 30% suspected discrimination of some sort.

![Figure 20: Employees evaluation on discrimination in the University](image)

- **Facilities and environment**
  
  50% of respondents indicated that safety was prioritized by the institution while the other 50% disagreed.

![Figure 21: Safety in the University](image)

Availability of resources is a major worry for ZOU workers, 70% of respondents were not happy with the resources they had while only 30% indicated that they had all the resources they needed to do quality work.
50% of respondents were generally not happy with the cleanliness and lighting at their workplaces, the other 50% however indicated that their work areas were adequately lit and clean.

The study revealed that 50% of respondents were confident about job security while the other 50% of respondents were concerned.
70% of respondents indicated that they were overall satisfied with the organisation’s pay and benefits package. 30% were however not satisfied.

The study revealed that the University has made great strides in ensuring employee retention, 80% of respondents indicated that they plan to continue working at the University for at least two more years. 10% were undecided and were not sure while the other 10% indicated that they did not plan to stay for more than two years.
Advocacy

The study revealed that the majority of ZOU employees are confident in the University’s products. 70% of respondents were confident with the University’s programmes and indicated that they would recommend their friends to pursue their academic careers with ZOU.

The study revealed that 80% of respondents were satisfied and would recommend their friends to work at ZOU. The University therefore has a high probability of attracting qualified employee through employee advocates.
The study indicated that the Zimbabwe Open University employees are to a greater extent satisfied with the conditions of service, benefits and other packages. The major concerns of the employees are factors that reduce employee capability to perform effectively such as shortage of resources and unavailability of platforms to suggest innovative ideas and contribute to organisational effectiveness.

The employee satisfaction index at the Zimbabwe Open University as an average of the scores of the different areas considered in this study was 69% as shown below.

**Conclusions**
The Zimbabwe Open University has made significant strides in ensuring employee satisfaction. The major areas receiving positive feedback from employees include the leadership of the University and the compensation and benefits package offered by the University. Though the University’s employees are generally satisfied with many aspects of the University, there are several issues which the University could improve. These among others include job security, availability of adequate resources and employee involvement. Orientation and induction training programmes are generally viewed by employees as inadequate hence new employees may be commencing their jobs unprepared.

The University enjoys high loyalty levels of employees; the research also indicated that the employees are willing to be advocates for the University. The study thus concludes that the Zimbabwe Open University has an important asset in satisfied employees. It is essential for the University to leverage on this asset and improve student enrolment and retain more qualified employee.

Recommendations

The Zimbabwe Open University employees are highly motivated and committed to the success of the organisation. The University has an incentive of enhancing employee satisfaction as it may improve effectiveness and also help the University to retain its valued employees. The study thus recommends the following;

- Creation of platforms for tapping into employees innovative ideas
- Improve trust between the Human resources department and employees to allay fears of job security
- Improve availability of work related resources
- Communication of changes that affect employees in time
- Expand the scope and depth of orientation and induction training prior to new employees commencing duties

The Zimbabwe Open University has highly motivated employees; it is hoped that adoption of the above recommendations would help in maintaining and increasing employee satisfaction.

REFERENCES

Bernard Marr (2012), “Key Performance Indicators – the 75+ measures every manager needs to know”, FT Prentice Hall, Harlow


APPENDIX

Figure 30: Years serving at ZOU
Figure 31: Satisfaction with the Employer
Figure 32: Understanding of job description
Figure 33: Understanding of role department/ Faculty plays in the organisation’s mission
Figure 34: Clarity with criteria for performance evaluation
Figure 35: Employee confidence in leadership
Figure 36: University leadership openness to input from employees
Figure 37: Availability of communication channels to suggest innovative ideas
Figure 38: Employee understanding of organisational performance

Figure 39: Communication of changes to employees
Figure 40: Supervisor treatment of employees
Figure 41: Positive reinforcement from supervisors
Figure 42 Supervisor handling of work related issues
Figure 43 Supervisor handling of employees’ personal issues
Figure 44: Evaluation of training
Figure 45: Opportunities to learn and grow
Figure 46: Cooperation with between departments
Figure 47: Employee perception regarding performance and chances of promotion
Figure 48: Adequacy of authority given to employees
Figure 49: Employees evaluation on discrimination in the University

Figure 50: Safety in the University

Figure 51: Adequacy of resources at employees’ disposal

Figure 52: Lighting and cleanliness of the working environment

Figure 53: Job security

Figure 54: Employees general evaluation of the University’s compensation packages

Figure 55: Employees’ commitment to the University

Figure 56: Employee advocacy for University programmes

Figure 57: Reference for other potential University employees

Figure 58: Overall ratings