

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Cooperatives in Education: Teacher Job Satisfaction and Gender Differences

Objectives

Cooperatives whose activity is undertaken in the field of education need to optimize their management to survive and achieve competitive advantage. As they are labor-intensive organizations that provide services with high intangibility (transformation knowledge, characteristics and individuals' behavior), their staff's job satisfaction is one way of achieving these advantages (reputation, strategic positioning, attracting talented employees, etc.). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to analyze how education cooperatives can achieve job satisfaction through certain human resources management practices (work-life balance culture and availability of work-life balance practices, hiring, training, performance assessment and compensation). The gender perspective is also considered in the analysis.

Methodology

An empirical study conducted with the data obtained from a sample of 101 teachers from education cooperatives in the Murcia Region (Spain) (5% response rate). Data were collected by a personal survey that included measures used in previous studies. They were all assessed with a 7-point Likert scale (1: totally disagree, and 7: totally agree) according to teachers' perception of the different variables.

Teachers' job satisfaction, measured according to: professional satisfaction (with the school and learning activities), satisfaction with student achievement, teachers' experience in the educational center, and treatment received by the center.

Work-life balance culture, divided into positive and negative perspectives. The positive one includes: talking about personal life at work, starting a family -expecting a child or adopting it-, leaving the workplace to care for children or dependent family members, and prolonging maternity/paternity leave. The negative work-life balance culture includes: maintaining a family structure that requires a lot of involvement, spending many hours at work on a daily basis, taking work home regularly, and prioritizing work over private life.

Work-life balance practices, with measures adapted to the context (education cooperatives) to specifically ask about a reduced working day with a cut in salary, maternity/paternity leave longer than the legal minimum, leave of absence to care for either sick or dependent family members or sick or dependent children.

Hiring, assessed according to teachers' perception of if: recruiting processes that are rigorous and formalized, teachers' continuity is high, and appropriate teachers are hired at each school level.

The variable training, measured by considering if training actions are carried out according to the teaching staff's needs, training plans are tailored to the teaching staff, and the training suggestions made by the teaching staff are taken into account.

Performance assessment, to consider if the objectives to be met are communicated to those responsible for achieving them, the performance and development of each teacher's activity are evaluated, and if the evaluation of teachers' performance is adequate.

Finally, the variable compensation includes the perception of whether the performance evaluation is linked to the salary paid, the salary paid is independent of the teaching staff's performance, and salaries are at similar to those paid to public school teachers.

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations of the variables are included, as is a hierarchical linear regression model to test the hypotheses. The general model obtained with all the sample data is also analyzed by taking into account gender as a selection variable.

Results

The study results reveal that adequate training ($\beta = .478$) and rigorous formalized hiring ($\beta = .336$) are the most valued factors to generate job satisfaction among teachers of education cooperatives in the Murcia Region. However, some gender differences appear in the variables that generate job satisfaction, despite there being no significant differences between male and female teachers' perception of their job satisfaction.

In particular, male teachers (31% of the sample) negatively perceive the effect of availability of work-life balance practices ($\beta = -.238$) and compensation ($\beta = -.374$) on their job satisfaction, while training has a positive impact ($\beta = .706$). These variables explain 52.6% of the male teachers' job satisfaction variation. For the female teachers (69% of the sample), hiring ($\beta = .440$), training ($\beta = .345$) and work-life balance practices ($\beta = .233$) have a positive effect on their perceived job satisfaction, and explain 63.8% of the variation in their job satisfaction.

From these gender results, the most striking aspect is that the greater availability of work-life balance practices and linking pay to performance reduce male teachers' job satisfaction. One explanation could be that males consider that work-life balance practices only benefit women, and when female teachers use these measures, male teachers must face a heavier workload, which affects their level of satisfaction. The negative relationship between satisfaction and performance assessment may be a consequence of the service type (training), and the possible uncertainty and mistrust that a performance measure can generate because the methods to determine it are not the most suitable ones, or do not reflect all the work they do to perform their teaching activity.

Females differ for the idea that hiring and work-life balance practices are a key influence on their job satisfaction. Perhaps the females in the Spanish studied region still assume the reproduction and care role of the family to a greater extent, and the tools that support their labor participation, such as work-life balance practices, possibly have a positive effect on their perceived satisfaction. Additionally, hiring is the most important factor that generates job satisfaction among females. Rigorous formalized processes where the most appropriate candidates are hired, with a high probability of continuity, are well assessed by females as a way to assure gender equality and to banish certain gender stereotypes, occupational segregation (horizontal and vertical) and the glass ceiling.

In any case, both males and females agree that training is essential for their job satisfaction, perhaps because this will improve the education service that they provide, as well as their students performing better.

Practical conclusions and original value

This work offers guidelines to education cooperatives about the aspects that create more job satisfaction, and how to manage and optimize it according to each employee's gender.

This work shows some gender differences among teachers of educational cooperatives in relation to the variables that generate their job satisfaction. These differences must be carefully analyzed by the management of cooperatives in an attempt to develop those human resource management policies and strategies that tend to favor high job satisfaction among male and female teachers given its effect on other variables, e.g. performance (better service provision, perception of higher quality), productivity or the cooperative's outcomes (attracting new customers, better internal and external reputation, etc.).

In general, education cooperatives can increase job satisfaction by mainly offering a training program suited to teachers' needs that can be put into practice, if possible, in their working hours, and that does not require travel, to avoid work-life conflict problems. This should be complemented with formalized rigorous hiring processes that ensure having highly trained motivated staff. The different perception of work-life practices between males and females shows a clear need for more training and awareness about work-life balance issues and co-responsibility. Educational cooperatives should put the necessary resources (hiring temporary staff to cover possible reductions in days, leave, or absence) so teachers' satisfaction (and productivity) does not disturb those situations.

The importance of education cooperatives, together with their labor-intensive character and the absence of studies that analyze the problems addressed herein, justify their relevance from both the academic and business points of view.

KEYWORDS: Cooperatives in education; teaching staff; gender; job satisfaction; work-life balance; human resources management.