

Age-related differences in job characteristics and in their relation to job satisfaction

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Age-related differences in work attitudes and behavior are due to psychosocial and biological aging, the cohort under study, and the time period of the measurement.

Some general findings from earlier studies on the aging worker can be summarized. Older workers attach greater importance to security and affiliation and less importance to self-actualization than younger workers. These differences are primarily related to various career stages and life cycles. Older workers usually have a higher job satisfaction than younger ones. They also display a higher level of internal work motivation and job involvement. Moving to a better job with age probably accounts for the increased satisfaction (1).

The average age of the Finnish working population is increasing together with the rapid and simultaneous change in work conditions and job structures. Special attention should therefore be paid to creating a good fit between work demands and individual resources.

This study has focused on age-related differences in job characteristics and on their relation to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction during the active worklife span of 15–64 years.

Subjects

The study was a part of the “Finnish Study on Working Conditions” conducted by the Central Statistical Office of Finland in 1984. (See, eg, reference 2.) A representative sample of 5 000 workers was drawn from the Finnish working age population of wage earners. Interviews of a total of 4 502 workers were done in 1984 (response rate 89 %). Fifty-two percent of the respondents were men and 48 % women. Their age and sex distributions are given in table 1.

A higher level of basic and vocational education was clearly related to the younger age, among both the men and the women. In the age groups below 35 years, the women had a better basic education than the men. About three-fourths of the age group 25–34 years had some vocational education, whereas among those over 45 years only one-half had had vocational training.

The percentages of various occupational groups within the study sample were the following: professional work (technical, physical, social sciences, humanistic and artistic work) 22 %, administrative, man-

agerial and clerical work 17 %, sales work 7 %, agricultural, forestry and fishing work 3 %, manufacturing and mining work 30 %, transport and communications work 7 %, and service work 14 %. According to the social status of the occupation, 49 % were blue-collar workers, 37 % were lower white-collar employees, and 14 % were upper white-collar employees.

Results

Meaning of work in one's life

The men rated the meaning of work in their life higher than the women. The meaning of work increased with age among the men but not among the women.

Among both the men and the women the meaning of home and family life was highest in the age range of 25–44 years, and it gradually decreased thereafter. Home and family life was preferred to worklife in these age groups.

Job satisfaction and mental work load

Overall job satisfaction was high, and it increased with age. It was highest in the oldest age group (99 %) and lowest in the youngest age group (79 %). However, in the youngest age group of upper white-collar employees, all the workers were satisfied with their jobs (figure 1). The most dissatisfied were the women in industry (9 %) and the women in transport and communications (11 %).

Mental work load was experienced as heavy by 44 % of the men and 49 % of the women. The men expe-

Table 1. Age and sex distribution of the study sample in the Finnish Study on Working Conditions in 1984.

Age group (years)	Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%
15–24	334	15	336	15
25–34	720	31	632	29
35–44	682	30	652	30
45–54	393	17	407	18
55–64	156	7	182	8
Total	2 285	100	2 209	100

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rienced the mental load as heaviest in the age range of 35–44 years (55 %) and women in that of 25–44 years (52 %). The mental work load among the upper white-collar employees was in general high, and it increased until the age of 55 years. Of two single factors indicating mental work load, a low variety of work content was related to young age, especially among the men, and too much work to older age.

Sources of job dissatisfaction

The most important sources of job dissatisfaction were low salary (37 %) and time pressure at work (36 %) (table 2). Most of the job characteristics were age-related. Bad workhours, strict external control over work, poor social work climate, and lack of developmental possibilities were more typical causes of job dissatisfaction for the younger age groups (up to 35 years). Especially younger men perceived the low pay as causing job dissatisfaction. In blue-collar occupations also poor work conditions decreased job satisfaction among the younger men. Job insecurity caused dissatisfaction more typically in the younger age groups as well, but among the blue-collar workers it was present also at middle age (35–54 years). Time pressure at work as a cause of dissatisfaction was related to older age, increasing up until the age of 54.

Sources of job satisfaction

The main sources of job satisfaction were independence (69 %), high content variety (58 %), the job itself (52 %), and job security (51 %) (table 2). When the various social statuses are compared, the upper white-collar employees often reported self-determination, learning possibilities, and appreciation of work as sources of satisfaction.

At a younger age job satisfaction was more related to favorable possibilities to learn new things (figure 2) and advancement in work. With increasing age job satisfaction in all the occupational groups was more related to job security, appreciation of work, and independence. Both the social work climate and relations with one's supervisor were seen as important sources of satisfaction among young and old men, as compared to middle-aged men.

Discussion

Various types of relations between age and job characteristics were found. Some factors had a linear relation to increasing age, eg, the meaning of work and job satisfaction. Many factors, especially in the youngest group, were related to job dissatisfaction, eg, poor work conditions and poor possibilities for development, whereas in the older age groups many factors were related to job satisfaction, eg, job content and organization.

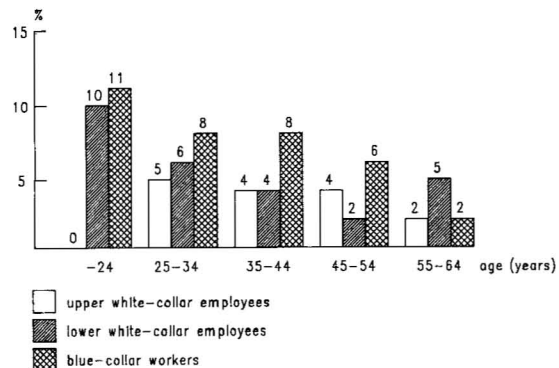


Figure 1. Job dissatisfaction (percentage of those very or rather dissatisfied) among workers of various social statuses according to age.



Figure 2. Possibilities to learn new things at work as a source of job satisfaction among workers of various social statuses according to age.

Table 2. Factors causing job dissatisfaction and satisfaction.

Factor	Dissatisfaction (%)	Satisfaction (%)
Work and work environment		
Work conditions	18	23
Commuting to and from work	11	28
Pay	36	19
Workhours	16	36
Job content and organization		
Appreciation of work	23	23
Job itself	—	52
Monotony/variety	18	58
Independence	—	69
Paced work	16	—
Rhythm of work	35	14
Self-determination	14	29
External control	5	—
Job security	13	51
Social relations		
Relations with supervisor	7	34
Social climate	12	47
Relations with clients/pupils	14	28
Developmental possibilities		
Advancement	24	8
Possibilities for learning	15	36

Most of the age-related differences found are probably closely linked to psychosocial aging, which reflects various stages in career development and life cycles. The cross-sectional study design makes it difficult to draw conclusions as to which of the findings are based on the type of cohort or, especially, on the time period of measurement.

References

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