The Event Workforce

Understanding job satisfaction, stress and job experience in the events industry

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Executive summary

- This report provides insight into the experiences of employees within the events industry, focusing on job satisfaction, stress and attitude to employer-led workforce strategies. Information presented can help employers and event organisations better understand the needs and experiences of their employees.

- The research was undertaken by the UK Centre for Events Management at Leeds Beckett University.

- An online survey was distributed to event professionals via the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers (ABPCO), LinkedIn and Facebook. 98 responses were received. Data was collected during May and June 2015.

- The survey was based around the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), a well-established and widely used measure of job satisfaction.

- The findings were analysed to assess satisfaction with 7 facets of employment in the events industry – the job in general, co-workers, management, day-to-day tasks, pay, promotion, stress – and the role of employer-led initiatives (such as flexible working and bonus schemes) in job satisfaction.

- The main findings of the study are as follows:
    - Employees are broadly satisfied with their jobs in the events industry. In particular employees value co-workers, quality of management, day-to-day tasks and opportunities to travel.

    - Employees are not dissatisfied with levels of pay in the events industry, but believe pay to be relatively low and would be motivated by higher basic pay and bonus and incentive schemes.

    - Employees feel that opportunities for promotion and development are limited. Promotions happen irregularly.

    - The events industry is identified as a high-pressure working environment. Many employees value the variety of their roles but pressure can lead to stress at peak times.

    - Employees appreciate different employer-led initiatives at different points in their career. Support with career planning and shadowing senior colleagues

are appreciated at the beginning of an events career; at mid-career financial incentives (pay and bonuses) and networking opportunities are valued; and at senior levels management training and lifestyle support (e.g. childcare provision, pension schemes) are appreciated.

o Results show that human resource management (HRM) practices (e.g. flexible working, training) can mitigate the stress and pressure of work in the events industry but that these practices need to be tailored to career stage and family circumstances of the individual employee.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- Job satisfaction is a key indicator of employee motivation, intention to stay with their current employer and level of engagement in their current role (commitment). Job satisfaction influences customer satisfaction and service quality, which in turn impacts on company financial performance.

- Understanding job satisfaction can help managers plan workforce strategies and make decisions over investment in initiatives, such as training, flexible working opportunities, performance management etc.

Job satisfaction can be defined as a general positive feeling an individual has towards their job (Robbins et al., 2013). Models to improve and explain workplace motivation recognise job satisfaction as the main predictor of behaviour (Stanton et al., 2001). Existing research into working practices has shown that job satisfaction is also a key determinant of organisational commitment (Bai et al., 2006). Employees who are satisfied in their work are less likely to leave their position in search of alternative employment and this impacts on performance: job satisfaction influences customer satisfaction and service quality (Khalilzadeh et al., 2013). This in turn impacts on company financial performance (Chi & Gursoy, 2009).

Job satisfaction influences employee motivation, workplace performance, customer satisfaction and service quality – all key aspects of success within the events industry. There is no previous research on job satisfaction within the events industry, but that done within allied industries such as hospitality illustrates the importance of job satisfaction in reducing labour turnover, burnout, stress and poor performance (Yang, 2010). There are individual and organisational benefits to understanding job satisfaction within the workforce.

Human resource management (HRM) practices can contribute to improved job satisfaction. Training opportunities, support from colleagues and managers, and salary and benefits have been found to contribute to positive job satisfaction (Chaing et al., 2005; Gu & and Sen Su, 2009). Managers can improve job satisfaction and performance by ensuring that employees understand what is expected of them in their jobs, and how their performance will be appraised and rewarded (Way et al., 2010). HRM

practices of recruitment, training, appraisal and performance management have an important role to play in job satisfaction.

The findings of research conducted in other sectors provide a useful base for understanding job satisfaction within the events industry as there are many similarities and synergies between events and hospitality (such as long hours and a focus on customer service). However there are also important differences that warrant research focused specifically on the events sector. The pulsating nature of many event organisations makes many jobs fluid and flexible, and the event workforce is highly mobile. Many positions require management skills alongside service excellence and the proliferation of event management courses and qualifications is contributing to the professionalization of the industry. However many event roles remain relatively poorly paid, require individuals to work long unsociable hours and to travel extensively, raising challenges for work-life balance (Dashper, 2013). Job satisfaction is integral to retaining employees, maximising their performance and improving organisational success within the events industry. Greater understanding of levels of and contributors to job satisfaction, and the role of different HRM employment practices within this, can help managers plan employment strategies and capitalise on talent and enthusiasm within their workforce.

1.2 Research aims

- The aims of the research were twofold: (i) To provide ABPCO members with insight into levels of job satisfaction within the events industry, and to highlight any areas of low satisfaction that may require management attention, and (ii) to explore employee attitudes to current and possible management initiatives to enhance satisfaction and motivation within the events workplace.

1.3 Methods

- An online survey was developed, based on an adapted form of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) which is the most widely used and validated measure of job satisfaction. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) was used as a basis for developing 7 questions to assess job satisfaction (Smith et al., 1985). Satisfaction was measured in relation to 7 factors – overall job satisfaction, co-workers, day to day work, pay, promotion, management/supervision and stress. The JDI is one of the most widely used measures of job satisfaction and has strong construct validity (Kinicki et al., 2002). Additional questions were added to assess employee attitudes to employer-led HRM practices of recruitment and selection, training, appraisal and workload. All questions used a 7 point Likert scale to assess satisfaction with different elements of an individual's job and working practices. Four additional questions were developed to provide opportunities for participants to indicate their preference for specific workplace initiatives (such as flexible working patterns) and to offer open-ended responses about their likes and dislikes in the workplace. Demographic information was also sought.

- The survey instrument was validated by a panel of event industry experts who were asked whether the items would be relevant to event professionals. The panel were asked to eliminate things they thought to be irrelevant and make suggestions for additions (see Okpara et al., 2005, for a further example of the development and modification of the JDI to specific industry contexts).

- The survey was distributed online and via ABPCO's networks, including LinkedIn and Facebook, in May and June of 2015.

- ABPCO is a leading source of information on best practice and leadership within the conference and meetings industry in the UK. ABPCO provides members with educational programmes and business resources to keep them informed of the latest developments in the industry.

- Findings were analysed to assess job satisfaction.

1.4 The profile of the sample

- A total of 98 responses were received.

- 70% of the sample were female, and 80% were under age 45.

- 40% of participants identified their current level of job as 'middle management', with 21% at senior management, board or CEO level. 7% were self-employed or freelance, and the rest identified themselves as 'general employees' or interns.

- 57% of respondents work in companies with fewer than 50 employees.

- 84% of respondents were educated to at least degree level, with 37% having undergraduate qualifications in events management.

- 66% of respondents indicated that they, or the organisation they work for, are current ABPCO members. Non-members worked in the wider MICE and corporate events industry. During analysis it was evident that there were no differences between respondents who are currently ABPCO members and those who are not. The findings are applicable to ABPCO and the wider meetings and conferences industry.

2 Job satisfaction in the events industry

2.1 Sources of job satisfaction

- Respondents were asked to rate their level of job satisfaction in relation to 7 facets – the job in general; co-workers; management; day-to-day tasks; pay; promotion opportunities; stress.

- Four of these facets were rated very positively by respondents - the job in general; co-workers; management; day-to-day tasks.

- Overall attitudes to the job in the events industry were rated highly – event jobs are described by respondents as worthwhile, great, and better than most jobs.

- Co-workers were rated very highly by respondents and described as likeable, supportive, dynamic, intelligent and helpful.

- The type and quality of management/supervision received by respondents was positively rated. Managers were described as intelligent, influential, supportive and inspiring.

- Day-to-day work was rated positively. Although some tasks are described as routine, day-to-day work is rated highly as satisfying, rewarding, challenging and providing a sense of accomplishment.

Job in general

The JDI includes a measure called 'Job in General' which is used to give an indication of overall levels of job satisfaction. Participants are broadly satisfied with their jobs within the events industry. Figure 1 shows the mean scores given in relation to the different aspects used to assess satisfaction with the 'job in general'. It is evident that participants find their work worthwhile and positive.
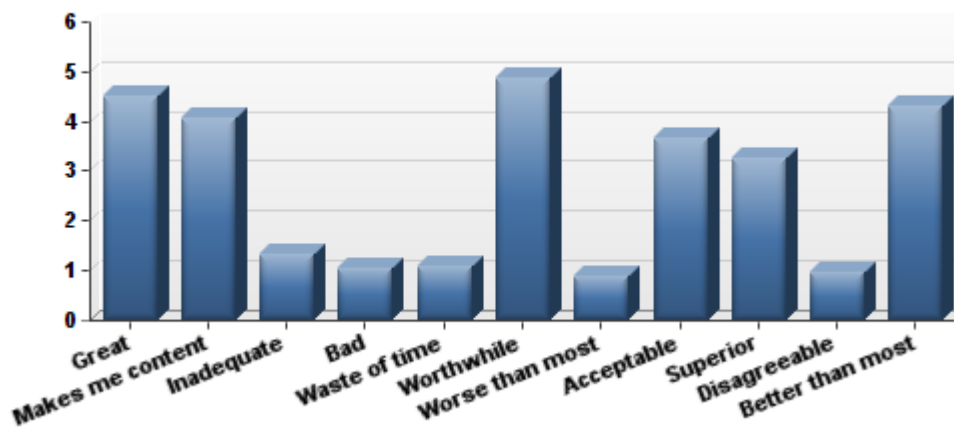
Figure 1: Mean responses for satisfaction with 'Job in general'

Co-workers

An important aspect of job satisfaction is co-workers. Supportive and reliable co-workers make jobs easier and more fulfilling to perform. Levels of satisfaction with co-workers were high. Participants in the study valued their co-workers, rating them highly in terms of being likeable, responsible, helpful, intelligent, supportive and dynamic, as illustrated in Figure 2. As events rely on teamwork this is an important result, suggesting that employees within the events industry value their co-workers.
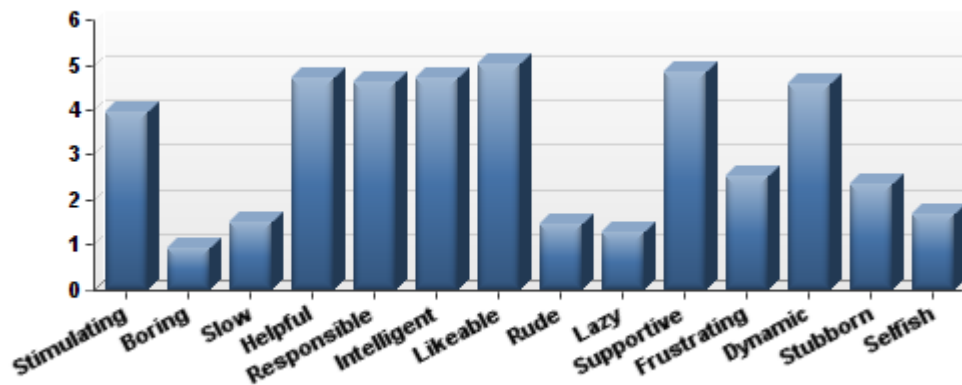
Figure 2: Mean responses for satisfaction with co-workers

Day to day work

The next element of job satisfaction relates to employees' feelings about their day to day work. Routine tasks and projects underpin any job, and consequently are an important indicator for overall job satisfaction. Again, the results from the survey show that respondents are generally satisfied with their day-to-day work. They find their work to be satisfying, rewarding, challenging and to offer a sense of accomplishment. Some find their work to be repetitive and routine at times, as illustrated below in Figure 3. The findings from this question suggest that day to day work in the events industry is generally satisfying but there is room to improve job design to maximise creativity and variation. This may help maintain and even improve overall levels of job satisfaction.
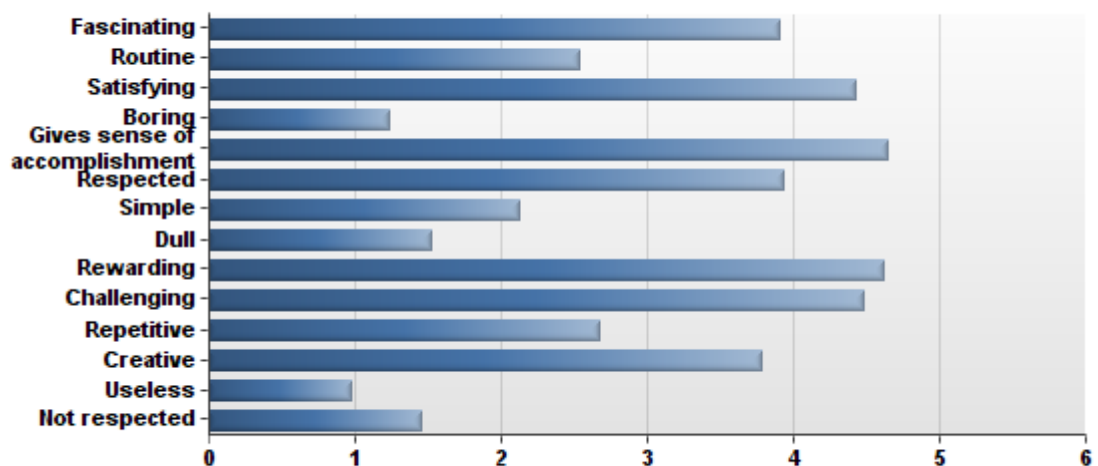
Figure 3: Mean responses for satisfaction with day to day work

Supervision/management

The type and quality of supervision and management an individual receives shapes the overall experience and satisfaction within any job role. Positive and supportive management can be motivating, inspiring and empowering and can encourage employees to stretch themselves and improve their own performance, whereas inconsistent, unfair or inadequate supervision can have a negative effect. Responses to this survey show generally positive evaluations of management and supervision. Managers were described as intelligent, influential, supportive and inspiring.

2.1 Areas of lower job satisfaction

- Three facets were rated lower in terms of satisfaction – pay, promotion opportunities and stress. Whilst respondents did not always rate these facets negatively, responses show ambivalence in relation to these aspects of work in the events industry.

- Satisfaction with pay was neutral. Respondents recognised pay levels as adequate and enough to live on but also felt pay is less than they deserve and cannot be described as generous.

- Promotion opportunities within the events industry are perceived to be limited. Promotions opportunities are recognised as being available on the basis of ability, but are irregular.

- Work in the events industry was identified as demanding, pressured and often stressful. Most respondents did not identify levels of stress as overwhelming, but did indicate the job is more stressful than they would like.

Pay

Salary and benefits are important contributors to overall job satisfaction and motivation. Remuneration packages often reflect the perceived value of a specific job role or individual so are important to employees' sense of accomplishment. The results from the survey show lower levels of satisfaction with pay than with other elements of the JDI measure of job satisfaction. Responses do not show dissatisfaction with pay, but could be interpreted as neutral in relation to satisfaction. Respondents feel that their current levels of pay are broadly fair (perhaps in comparison to others in their company or in similar positions across the industry) and provide them with enough to live on. However, they also feel that pay is less than they deserve and for many inadequate, as illustrated in Figure 4. On the issue of pay there is clearly some way to go to improve employee levels of satisfaction. Pay levels across the industry are relatively low for the level of skill, qualification and responsibility required in many roles (Dashper, 2013). Pay is an area employers may need to consider in relation to maintaining and improving overall job satisfaction.
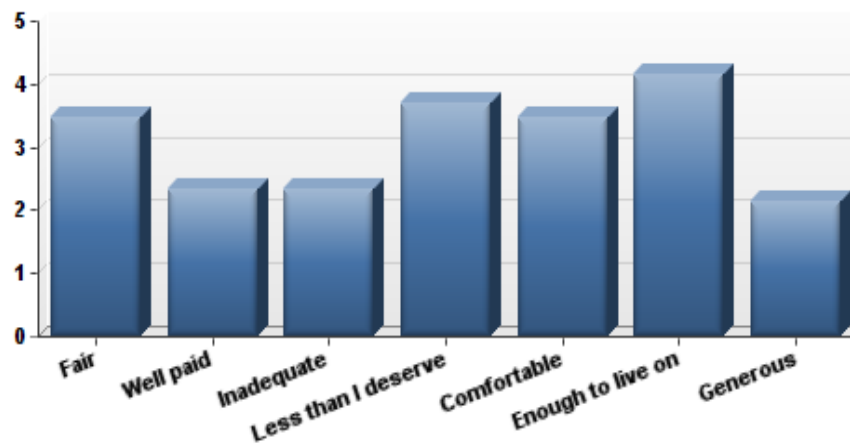
Figure 4: Mean responses for satisfaction with pay

Promotion

Opportunities for career progression and promotion are important motivating factors and lack of development avenues can reduce organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Results from the survey show neutral responses in relation to satisfaction with promotion opportunities, as illustrated in Figure 5. Whilst respondents recognise that promotion opportunities are awarded on the basis of merit, rather than personal connections for example, most felt that there were few and irregular opportunities for promotion, limiting their own prospects. This may negatively impact on motivation, commitment to their current employer and overall job satisfaction.

Figure 5: Mean responses for satisfaction with promotion opportunities

Stress

The final measure of job satisfaction assessed related to stress. Events is seen as a fast-paced, high pressure industry with individuals required to work long, often unpredictable hours under tight and volatile circumstances. There is thus potential for individuals to experience high levels of stress within their jobs, which may negatively impact job satisfaction. Results from the survey support this assessment of the events industry as a demanding and high pressure sector in which to work. Although the majority of respondents did not describe their jobs as more stressful than they can handle, many did indicate their roles are more stressful than they would like, as illustrated in Figure 6. Stress levels are, therefore, an aspect of jobs in the events sector that needs careful monitoring and managers need to be aware of the demands placed on employees.

Figure 2: Perceptions of stress

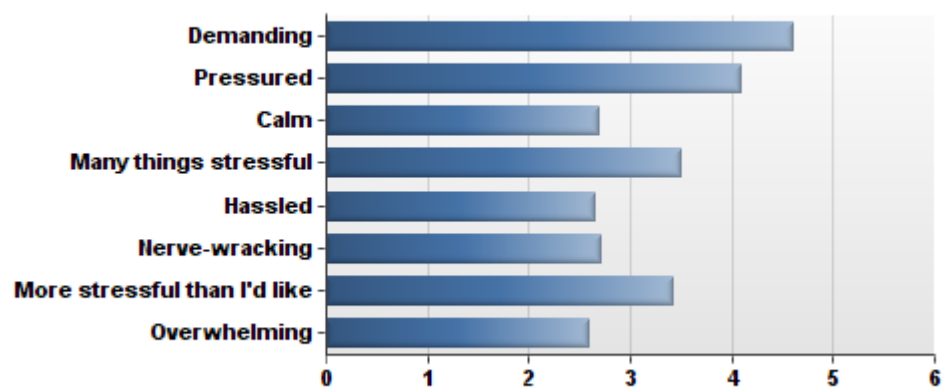# 2.3 Overall job satisfaction

- Overall the results indicate that participants are broadly satisfied with their current jobs which they see as rewarding, challenging and fulfilling. Co-workers and managers were praised and this indicates the importance of teamwork within event roles. Areas which managers need to pay further attention to relate to stress levels, promotion opportunities and pay levels.

3 Employer HRM initiatives

3.1 Employee attitudes to employer HRM strategies

- Human resource management (HRM) practices and policies are ways in which organisations explicitly try to manage their employees' working experiences and expectations, and so employee attitudes to these practices are useful indicators of overall satisfaction.

- Recruitment and selection practices and policies are usually the first interaction a (potential) employee has with an organisation and so set expectations on both sides. Results indicate that respondents are satisfied with the recruitment and selection practices within their current organisations, which they describe as fair and transparent and based on relevant job-specific criteria.

- Jobs become more rewarding when there is an element of learning and development within them. Training opportunities motivate and empower staff to perform at their best. Training can be expensive and time consuming, but the pay-offs in terms of staff commitment and satisfaction can be considerable. The survey results indicate that participants are satisfied with the training and development opportunities available to them.

- Reward systems are in place to recognise good performance and motivate staff to perform well. Results indicate that respondents are broadly satisfied with appraisal processes in their organisations which are deemed to be relatively fair and consistent. The area of lower satisfaction was in relation to rewards and bonuses.

- The events industry is often perceived to offer poor work-life balance, due to working long unpredictable hours and frequent travelling. Some individuals will enjoy these characteristics of their job, whilst others may find it stressful and difficult to manage with family life. Results indicate that many of the respondents to this survey thrive on the fast-paced, high pressure aspects of working in events, and enjoy the opportunities it offers them for travel. However, for some this can make work overwhelming and difficult to balance with family commitments. Managers need to be aware of the

different life circumstances of their employees in designing and managing roles and workloads.

Recruitment and selection

Recruitment and selection practices and policies are usually the first interaction a (potential) employee has with an organisation and so set expectations on both sides. Results from the survey indicate that respondents are satisfied with the recruitment and selection practices within their current organisations, which they describe as fair and transparent and based on relevant job-specific criteria, as illustrated in Figure 7. However, respondents do not believe that recruitment and selection panels are diverse, which may limit the diversity of those selected to new positions. A diverse workforce is known to bring organisational benefits in terms of creativity and innovation (Kirton & Greene, 2010).

Figure 7: Mean responses for satisfaction with recruitment and selection policies and practices

Training and development

Jobs become more rewarding when there is an element of learning and development within them. Training opportunities motivate and empower staff to perform at their best. Training can be expensive and time consuming, but the pay-offs in terms of staff commitment and satisfaction can be considerable. The survey results indicate that participants are satisfied with the training and development opportunities available to them, as illustrated in Figure 8. This is likely to contribute positively to overall job satisfaction.

Figure 8: Mean responses for satisfaction with promotion opportunities

Appraisals and rewards

Reward systems are in place to recognise good performance and motivate staff to perform well. As indicated above, satisfaction levels are neutral in relation to pay. Appraisals and performance management meetings are important for assessing performance, monitoring progress, setting goals and rewards (including but not limited to pay) and so can have a positive impact on overall satisfaction. Results indicate that respondents are broadly satisfied with appraisal processes in their organisations which are deemed to be relatively fair and consistent, as illustrated in Figure 9. The area of lower satisfaction was in relation to rewards, which is consistent with previous findings in the study.
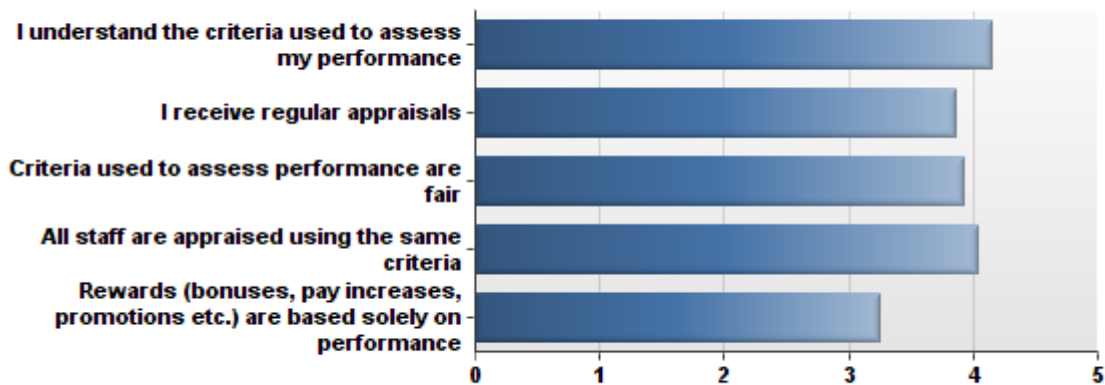

Figure 9: Mean responses for satisfaction with appraisal and reward systems

Workload

The responses above indicate that participants consider their current jobs relatively demanding. Stress may be caused by many different factors but workload is one important element. The events industry is often perceived to offer poor work-life balance, due to working long unpredictable hours and frequent travelling. Some individuals will thrive on these characteristics of their job, whilst others may find it stressful and difficult to manage with family life. The responses to this question indicate that many of the respondents to this survey thrive on the fast-paced, high pressure aspects of working in events, and enjoy the opportunities it offers them for travel, as illustrated in Figure 10. However, for some this can make work overwhelming and difficult to balance with family commitments. Managers need to be aware of the different life circumstances of their employees in designing and managing roles and workloads.

Figure 10: Mean responses for satisfaction with current workload

3.2 Workplace initiatives to support employees

- In addition to standard HRM practices such as training and appraisals organisations can implement specific initiatives aimed at supporting, motivating and satisfying their employees to be the best they can be within their job. Respondents were asked to rank a number of workforce initiatives in relation to whether they would motivate them now in their current position, would motivate them in their future careers or would have motivated them earlier in their careers.

- Table 1 illustrates that increased basic pay and individual bonuses and incentives are the initiatives most likely to motivate respondents at this point in their careers. This is consistent with findings reported above about neutral levels of satisfaction with current pay and rewards. Childcare provision and pension schemes were identified as the initiatives most likely to be motivating in future.

Rank	Motivating to me at this point in my career	Will motivate me in the future	Would have motivated me earlier in my career
1	Increased basic pay	Childcare provision And Improved pension scheme	Bonuses and incentives (individual)
2	Bonuses and incentives (individual)		Childcare provision
3	Flexible working hours And Bonuses and incentives (team)	Opportunities to work from home And Longer holidays	Longer holidays And Bonuses and incentives (team)
4	Opportunities to work from home	Flexible working hours	Opportunities to work from home And Flexible working hours
5	Longer holidays	Increased basic pay And Bonuses and incentives (team)	
6	Improved pension scheme		Improved pension scheme
7	Childcare provision	Bonuses and incentives (individual	Increased basic pay

Table 1: Ranking of preference for workplace initiatives

- Table 2 illustrates that different types of initiative will be useful to employees at different stages in their careers. The top answer for support in developing skills and career at their current career stage was the provision of networking opportunities and regular appraisals. Respondents anticipate that management training courses will be beneficial to them in their future careers, while help with career planning and shadowing a senior colleague would be useful in the early stages of a career in the events industry.

Rank	Would be useful to me now	Would be useful to me in the future	Would have been useful earlier in my career
1	Networking opportunities	Management training courses	Help with career planning
2	Regular appraisals	Opportunities to work/travel internationally	Shadowing a senior employee
3	Mentoring And Opportunities to work/travel internationally	Shadowing a senior employee	Mentoring
4		Mentoring And Help with career planning	Regular appraisals
5	Management training courses		Networking opportunities And Opportunities to work/travel internationally
6	Shadowing a senior employee	Networking opportunities And Regular appraisals	
7	Help with career planning		Management training courses

Table 2: Ranking of preference for workplace initiatives to support skill and career development

Favourite and least favourite aspects of roles in the events industry

The final parts of the survey enabled the respondents to leave open ended answers about what they liked most and least about their jobs, and the reasons for this. These answers backed up the findings reported above, providing some additional insight into individual's satisfaction in their current roles in the events industry.

In relation to **the positive aspects** of their jobs, many respondents stressed the variety of their roles:

> *Never a dull day, always a challenge, always an opportunity to meet new people and learn new skills.*

> *No day is ever the same, although certain tasks may become routine there's always something different to do and new events come up to work on.*

> *Task variation, constantly meeting new people and stepping out of my comfort zone with the different situations I find myself in on a daily basis.*

Others stressed the sense of accomplishment they felt from their jobs:

> *Being able to work on an event from start to finish and deliver the end product.*

> *Seeing a conference grow from just a title to a successful event.*

> *Sense of accomplishment at the end of an event.*

For others it was their co-workers and supervisors that made their job rewarding and enjoyable:

> *I work in an extremely positive and supportive team environment. There are many leaders in my organisation who display traits of a good leader.*

> *Meeting different people, going to new places, discovering new knowledge.*

In relation to **the least favourite aspects** of their jobs, respondents identified a number of points. For some poor management and/or co-workers are perceived to be an issue:

Having to learn to adapt and bite my tongue with managers' big egos. It makes me feel inadequate and angry.

The incompetence of my manager who doesn't know how to develop a small company with a lot of potential into a large company. And who also has no time management skills.

Inexperienced people trying to tell me how to run events.

Some identified issues with internal processes and polices, and pay and conditions:

Internal politics!

Repetitive internal processes.

Lack of understanding of complexity of role, lack of recognition for role, inconsistent salaries across team.

For others the pressure of the job caused them stress:

Stressful, long hours, clients expect more and more for less and less money, poorly paid.

Pressure to achieve and perform constantly, exhausting and stressful.

Pressure of workload and expectations.

The open-ended responses support those found in the earlier questions and indicate that respondents enjoy their work, the variety and challenges it brings and opportunities to travel and meet new people. However, they are often frustrated by poor managers and supervisors and the bureaucratic elements of their jobs. They feel under pressure but do not think their roles are valued in terms of pay and respect.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

- This study assessed job satisfaction amongst employees working within the events industry and found that general levels of satisfaction are high.

- Respondents enjoy their work within events which is seen as fast-paced, varied, exciting and challenging.

- Opportunities to travel and meet new people are attractive to many and good relationships with co-workers and managers help facilitate effective working environments.

- HRM practices and policies are perceived as generally positive by employees in relation to fairness, transparency and development.

- However, although the survey indicates that respondents are broadly satisfied with their jobs within the events industry there are some areas highlighted for further attention and possibly improvement.

- Pay and rewards are perceived to be relatively low and this can make some individuals feel that their work is not valued.

- The excitement and dynamism of working in events may be attractive for many, but can also lead to feelings of stress and unpleasant pressure.

- Workplace initiatives can help motivate employees within the events industry and improve job satisfaction.

- Different initiatives will be attractive to employees at different stages in their careers and in their personal lives. Flexible working patterns and childcare provision may be appealing to those with young children, whereas pay levels and bonuses are important to those at middle management level.

4.2 Recommendations

- Managers need to take into account the stage of career and personal (family) circumstances of employees when designing job roles, tasks, support networks and reward systems.

- Levels of pay and reward systems are perceived to be adequate but not high/attractive. Whilst it may not be financially viable to increase pay in all cases, other forms of reward can be employed to acknowledge good performance and increase motivation and satisfaction.

- Paths for progression and promotion are not clear for many working within the events industry. Career guidance and regular appraisals can help employees plan their careers, maximising their talents and ambitions and consequently their job satisfaction.

- Working within the events industry is often pressured and stressful. Managers should acknowledge and monitor the potential for stress and burnout and consider measures to mitigate employee stress, especially at peak times.

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