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# Employee Job Satisfaction in Major Cruise Lines

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# Employee Job Satisfaction in Major Cruise Lines

## **Abstract**

A survey of 244 crew members with six major cruise lines indicated the most satisfaction with organization and supervision, satisfaction with working environment and ship life, and least satisfaction with rewards. The study suggests that the analysis of job satisfaction level may be used to develop organizational strategies to improve shipboard employee job satisfaction.

## **Keywords**

Employees, Satisfaction, Major, Cruise, Sustainabilities

# Employee job satisfaction in major cruise lines

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*A survey of 244 crew members with six major cruise lines indicated the most satisfaction with organization and supervision, satisfaction with working environment and ship life, and least satisfaction with rewards. The study suggests that the analysis of job satisfaction level may be used to develop organizational strategies to improve shipboard employee job satisfaction.*

**T**he Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) states that cruising is currently the fastest growing segment of the travel and tourism industry, estimating that the cruise industry generates \$12 billion in revenues per year. Between 1981 and 2000, vessel passenger capacity grew from 41,073 to 165,381 passengers, with an average growth of 7.8 percent per year. During the same period of time, passengers increased from 1.43 to 6.88 million, an average annual increase of 8.4 percent. Various companies have commissioned 63 additional vessels to be built over

the next five years, which will dramatically increase passenger capacity.<sup>1</sup>

As the number of cruise passengers and vessels increases, so will the number of crew required to deliver the many services on board. Given the estimated large number of new builds on order over the next five years, 150,000 additional staff and crew jobs will be generated.<sup>2</sup>

Main<sup>3</sup> and Martin and Hunt<sup>4</sup> stated that job satisfaction or dissatisfaction has a direct effect on an employee's intention to stay in or leave the organization. Heskett, et al., in their book, *The Service Profit Chain*<sup>5</sup>, stressed the importance of employee satisfaction in the profit chain of a service organization. Although there are many studies of employee satisfaction in other industries, only a few studies related to employee satisfaction on a single cruise line exist,<sup>6</sup> but there is no industry-wide cruise line specific research.

Unlike employees in other

industries, shipboard employees work and live in a unique captive environment, seven days a week, working long hours within a paramilitary ship-command structure offering little privacy.<sup>7</sup> There is an urgent need to explore job satisfaction levels of shipboard employees in the cruise line industry. With an increasing number of employees aboard in the coming years, such a study will be beneficial to cruise line management to better understand employee needs and expectations and formalize better human resources strategies in employee recruitment and retention.

This study assesses the level of shipboard crew members' job satisfaction in six cruise line companies. By understanding factors affecting job satisfaction, organizations could improve working conditions and develop organizational strategies to control shipboard employee turnover and to increase shipboard employee retention rates. The research explores the factors which have the greatest impact on overall shipboard job satisfaction and employee turnover and the differences among demographic groups when they respond to employee job satisfaction factors.

### **Employees are assets**

The Brookings Institution stated that an employee is one of the most important "intangible assets" in the organization.<sup>8</sup> Employee satisfaction is important to an organization's success. Weisman and Nathanson argued

that job satisfaction influences behaviors and attitudes of employees,<sup>9</sup> while Main reported that the level of employee job satisfaction could positively or negatively affect the overall level of service provided.<sup>10</sup> Job dissatisfaction has a direct effect on an employee's intention to leave or stay in the organization. Satisfied employees will increase productivity and creativity and eventually increase revenue, which leads to a higher return on investment.<sup>11</sup>

### **Many factors relevant**

Researchers have argued about many relevant factors that may affect job satisfaction. Smith, Kendall, and Hulin<sup>12</sup> identified work environment factors as pay, promotion, supervision, the work itself, and coworkers. Locke<sup>13</sup> combined the various specific factors into broader classes, namely, events and agents. Events were categorized as work (task activity, amount, achievement, etc.); rewards (promotion, responsibility, money, etc.); and context (social and physical working condition, benefit, etc.). Agents were categorized as self (supervision, co-worker, company and management, etc.) versus others. Other factors affecting job satisfaction are centered around demographics. These characteristics include age, gender, education level, origin, and tenure of employment.<sup>14</sup>

In the hospitality industry, researchers have studied job satisfaction of hotel employees<sup>15</sup>, restaurant managers<sup>16</sup> and employees<sup>17</sup>

and hospitality management graduates.<sup>18</sup> The results of those studies indicated that some of the issues, such as wages, security, opportunities for advancement, working conditions, and loyalty to employees, were greater concerns when employees, managers, and graduates rank the levels of job satisfaction. Ghiselli, et al.,<sup>19</sup> found food service managers had the highest satisfaction levels of satisfaction in activity, social service, security, and moral values, but the lowest level of satisfaction in compensation, recognition, company policies and practices, and social status. Huncer and George<sup>20</sup> also found restaurant employees ranked security, social service, moral values, activity, plus responsibility with the highest satisfaction levels, but advancement and compensation with the lowest levels. Their study indicated there were significant differences in job satisfaction scores with the subgroups of age, job tenure, gender, and job type.

#### **Questionnaire is created**

In 1998, Testa, Williams, and Pietrzak created The Cruise Line Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (CLJSQ) which focuses on the unique aspects of a shipboard lifestyle in the cruise industry, including 31 items which measure overall job satisfaction.<sup>21</sup> The researchers did four experiments to test and retest reliability and validity to approve the usability of the instrument, though several variables, as they suggested,

might need to be "revised or removed."

During July and November of 2001, the researchers surveyed cruise line employees at the Port of Miami and Port Everglades in Florida. A convenient sample was selected. The self-report questionnaires were distributed to 244 willing participants at the Seaman Centers and calling stations at the two ports during the time when ships of six major cruise lines operated in and out of the ports.

The questionnaire was written in English because English is the requisite working language aboard cruise vessels and employees must understand English before being hired. Oral explanations and instructions were given to the participants in English by the researchers. All respondents exhibited no language barriers. Participants were allowed to complete the survey with no time limitations. Responses were collected immediately after completion and participants were assured that complete confidentiality would be maintained.

A modified CLJSQ was used to measure job satisfaction levels of respondents. Some of the variables in the previous instrument were combined and those more closely related to the employee satisfaction factors were selected. In this survey instrument, 19 work environment factors were selected and grouped into subcategories such as organization, supervision, rewards, working conditions, and ship life. Demographic measures were age, gender, origin, marital status, job

level, and tenure of employee. The researchers conducted a pilot study among graduate students in a "Problem Solving in the Cruise Line Industry" course at Florida International University.

The instrument ranked answers on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). Respondents were asked to rate their level of job satisfaction for organization policies, salary, benefits, work schedule, supervisors, quality of employee food, and living accommodation. The survey instrument also included questions for demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, job title, tenure of employment, and length of current contract.

Data were analyzed by using the SPSS 10. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the participants and frequencies and percentages were computed. Coefficient Alpha was used to study the reliability of job satisfaction subscales. The relationships between demographic variables and five subcategories of job satisfaction were examined by using t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). These analyses were conducted at the  $p < 0.05$  level. T-tests and ANOVA would help researchers understand if there are significant differences among demographic groups such as male versus female, married versus unmarried, different groups, such as age, job level, and birth origin when the participants respond to job satisfaction variables.

The majority of respondents were males (87.7 percent), unmarried (60.7 percent) and young, aged 21-34 years old (72.5 percent). Respondents were mostly from three continents, Europe (36.5 percent), Asia (34.8 percent), and the Americas with 16 percent from Central and South America and 10 percent from North America; 69.7 percent of respondents were crew, 16.0 percent staff, and 14.3 percent officers. Nearly one-third (32.4 percent) of respondents indicated they did not know what they would do in the future, while 24.6 percent indicated they intended to stay for one to two years and 23.8 percent planned to stay for two to five years.

#### **Job satisfaction ranked**

Respondents ranked their level of satisfaction among the variables differently.

Generally, respondents were satisfied with the following:

- the organization in terms of professional development, fairness of company policies, regulations and rules, company concern for well-being, and job security
- the working environment based upon contract length, schedule, time off, and equipment
- the supervisor related to their concern for employee well-being, level of respect shown, and fairness
- and most variables associated with the ship life category

**Table 1**  
**Shipboard employee job satisfaction**

Variable	Responses					Total N
	Very Satisfied n (%)	Satisfied n (%)	Dissatisfied n (%)	Very Dissatisfied n (%)	Missing n (%)	
<b>Organization</b>						
Company concern for professional development	33 (13.5)	178 (73.0)	30 (12.3)	3 (1.2)	0	244
The fairness of company policies	19 (7.8)	151 (61.8)	54 (22.1)	19 (7.8)	1 (0.5)	244
Employee policies, regulations and rules	27 (11.1)	170 (69.6)	41 (16.8)	6 (2.5)	0	244
Company concern for well-being	27 (11.1)	172 (70.5)	43 (17.6)	2 (0.8)	0	244
Job security	33 (13.5)	170 (69.6)	32 (13.1)	9 (3.8)	0	244
<b>Rewards</b>						
Opportunity for growth	40 (16.3)	150 (61.4)	44 (18.0)	9(3.8)	1 (0.5)	244
Benefit package	25 (10.1)	112 (46.0)	74 (30.3)	32(13.1)	1 (0.5)	244
Salary based upon responsibilities	27 (11.0)	118 (48.4)	74 (30.3)	24 (9.8)	1 (0.5)	244
<b>Working Environment</b>						
Length of the contract	37 (15.1)	136 (55.7)	58 (23.8)	12 (4.9)	1 (0.5)	244
Work schedule	30 (12.2)	152 (62.3)	50 (20.5)	11 (4.5)	1 (0.5)	244
Amount of time off	25 (10.2)	136 (55.7)	62 (25.4)	21 (8.7)	0	244
The quality and maintenance of job-related equipment	37 (15.1)	170 (69.6)	22 (9.1)	13(5.4)	2 (0.8)	244
<b>Supervision</b>						
Supervisor concern for well-being	34(13.9)	156 (63.9)	42 (17.2)	11(4.5)	1 (0.5)	244
The level of respect shown by supervisor	39 (15.9)	148 (60.6)	48 (19.7)	8 (3.3)	1 (0.5)	244
The fairness of the supervisor	32(13.1)	156 (63.9)	45 (18.4)	10(4.1)	1 (0.5)	244
<b>Ship life</b>						
Living accommodation	29(11.9)	155 (63.4)	43 (17.6)	16(6.6)	1 (0.5)	244
The quality of employee food	24 (9.9)	105 (43.0)	78 (32.0)	37 (15.1)	0	244
Availability and quality of health and fitness staff and facilities	51(20.9)	145 (59.5)	34 (13.9)	11(4.5)	3 (1.2)	244
Availability and quality of recreation staff and facilities	34 (13.9)	141 (57.8)	55 (22.5)	13(5.3)	1 (0.5)	244

Respondents, however, indicated a significant level of dissatisfaction among some of the factors which cannot be overlooked by the management of the cruise lines. Nearly half (48.1 percent) the respondents (32.0 percent dissatisfied and 15.1 percent very dissatisfied) ranked the level of quality of employee food the least satisfactory variable. For benefit packages, 43.4 percent expressed dissatisfaction (30.3 percent dissatisfied and 13.1 percent very dissatisfied). Regarding salary based upon responsibility, 40.1 percent were not satisfied (30.3 percent dissatisfied and 9.8 percent very dissatisfied). If managers intend to sustain their companies and reduce the turnover ratio of employees, they should pay close attention to the critical issues of food, compensation, and employee benefits.

#### Differences are found

When the authors compared the demographic variables—gender, marital status, age groups, origin of birth, and job tenure—with the mean score of the job satisfaction subcategories—organization, supervision, rewards, working environment, and ship life—in Table 2, they found significantly different responses.

- **Gender:** There was a moderately significant difference between genders with regard to their level of satisfaction with the organization ( $t(242) = 1.656, p < .10$ ). Male crew members ( $x = 2.92$ ) reported being more satisfied with the organization than female crew members ( $x = 2.77$ ).

Traditionally, shipboard crew members were comprised of only male workers. Surprisingly, 12.3 percent of all respondents were female. Generally, female crew members reported being more satisfied than male crew members in rewards, working environment, and ship life. Therefore, future research with a larger sampling of female shipboard employees is advisable.

- **Marital Status:** Satisfaction with organization varied significantly with marital status ( $t(244) = 2.449, p < .05$ ). Married employees ( $x = 2.99$ ) reported being more satisfied with organization than unmarried employees ( $x = 2.84$ ). The results of the survey could not give the authors a full explanation as to why married employees are in general happier than unmarried employees with the organization. Further research is needed.
- **Age:** Overall, the group under 44 years of age reported a lower level of satisfaction than the over 45-year-old group, though not significant. The result might imply that younger employees have unrealistic expectations of their jobs. If the younger employees' expectations are not fulfilled, they may leave their jobs. However, if employees adapt themselves well, they may be more likely to return, which could be the reason the over 45-year-old employees reported a higher level of satisfaction.



**Table 2**  
**Demographic variables and job satisfaction**

Variable	Organization		Supervision		Rewards		Working environment		Ship life			
	N	Mean	T-value	Mean	T-value	Mean	T-value	Mean	T-value	Mean	T-value	
<b>Gender</b>												
Male	214	2.92		2.89		2.69		2.83		2.77		
Female	30	2.77	4.35*	2.88	0.83	2.77	0.79	2.89	0.84	2.87	0.54	
<b>Marital Status</b>												
Married	96	2.99		2.92		2.71		2.78		2.76		
No Married	148	2.84	2.45*	2.87	0.64	2.70	0.13	2.87	-1.20	2.8	-0.44	
<b>Age (years)</b>												
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>F-value</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>F-value</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>F-value</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>F-value</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>F-value</b>	
Under 21	8	2.91		2.92		2.67		2.94		2.78		
21-34	177	2.87		2.87		2.71		2.81		2.8		
35-44	48	2.99		2.93		2.61		2.82		2.7		
45-54	9	3.00		2.93		2.93		3.11		2.89		
55 or over	2	3.13	0.88	3.50	0.61	3.17	0.85	3.38	1.35	3.13	0.51	
<b>Job level</b>												
Officer	35	2.81		2.9		2.69		2.99		2.90		
Staff	39	2.78		2.99		2.63		2.97		2.99		
Crew	170	2.94	2.44+	2.87	0.61	2.72	0.37	2.77	3.90*	2.87	0.65	
<b>Origin of Birth</b>												
Asia	85	2.96		2.82		2.76		2.73		2.87		
Europe	89	2.87		2.87		2.75		2.93		2.75		
Africa	6	2.83		3.06		2.61		3.00		2.79		
North America	24	2.71		3.11		2.61		3.02		2.83		
Central & South America	40	2.95	1.60	2.95	1.32	2.54	1.16	2.71	3.16**	2.66	0.40	
<b>Tenure of employment</b>												
Less than 1 year	53	2.86		2.97		2.72		2.85		2.84		
One to less than two years	45	2.80		2.96		2.68		2.92		2.8		
Two years to less than five years	72	2.89		2.78		2.7		2.79		2.61		
Five years to less than ten years	52	2.92		2.88		2.62		2.78		2.95		
Ten years or more	22	3.17	2.45*	2.94	0.93	2.91	0.89	2.92	0.73	2.78	2.82*	

+P<0.1; \* P< 0.05; \*\* P<0.01

- **Job Level:** There was a moderately significant difference between both job level and organization ( $F(2, 241) = 2.44, p < .10$ ), and job level and working environment ( $F(2, 241) = 3.895, p < .05$ ). Crew members ( $x = 2.94$ ) were more satisfied with the organization than officers ( $x = 2.81$ ) or staff ( $x = 2.78$ ). Crew members had the lowest satisfaction mean score ( $x = 2.77$ ) in the working environment, and reported having longer length of contract, longer working hours, and less time off than officers and staff. In order to provide a more satisfactory working environment, it seems that management may want to give careful consideration to the length of crew contracts and work schedules so as to better motivate them.
- **Origin of Birth:** Respondents were asked to write their origin of birth on the survey. The research found there were some differences in the level of job satisfaction based upon the origin of birth of respondents. For organization, crew members from Asia and Central and South America were more satisfied, while those from North America were least satisfied. For supervision, crew members from North America were more satisfied, while those from Asia were least satisfied with supervision. The authors suspect that cultural diversity as well as expectations of different levels of management affected

responses to organization's policies, rules and regulations, and supervision. It also seems that supervisors need more training in order to effectively deal with a multi-cultural employee workforce.

There was a significant difference among the responses based upon origin of birth in working environment ( $F(4, 239) = 3.16, p < .05$ ). Crew members from Europe ( $x = 2.93$ ) and North America ( $x = 3.02$ ) were more satisfied with working environment than those from Asia ( $x = 2.73$ ) and Central and South America ( $x = 2.71$ ). This may occur because Asian and Central and South American crew members were employed in non-managerial positions with longer contracts, longer work schedules, and less time off. Crew members might not be satisfied with employee food on board nor the compensation they receive for their effort. Management needs to fully examine all these issues.

- **Tenure of Employment:** Tenure with present employer was found to be a significant factor associated with job satisfaction in the cruise lines. Crew members employed for less than one year were slightly more satisfied than those employed from one to less than two years. The most dissatisfied group were those working from two to five years. This could indicate that after the novelty of the job has worn off,

crew members may become dissatisfied. If management is intent on cultivating long-term employees, they should carefully identify factors that create dissatisfaction among crew members and take corrective measures to develop employment strategies which encourage tenure and enhance the quality of internal service. Based upon the responses, the level of job satisfaction and the length of tenure increased after five years of employment. Maturity and work experience may lead crew members to adjust their expectations to a more realistic level of satisfaction. The result of the research supported a previous study by Duke and Sneed<sup>22</sup> that employees with the most tenure may have grown accustomed to

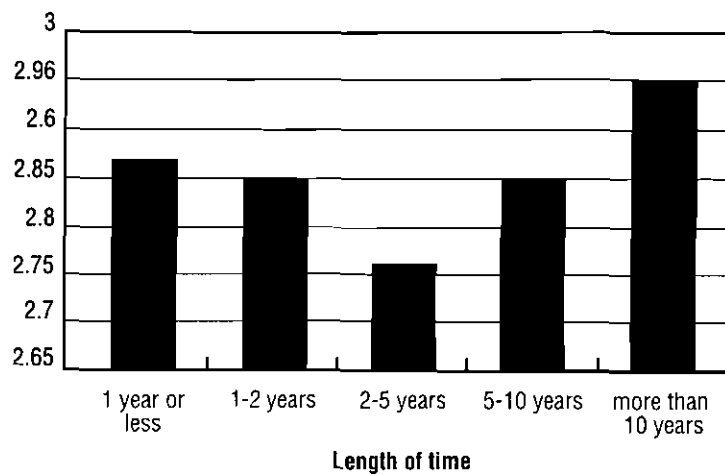
the work place, adjusted their expectations toward the organization or gained better financial status through longevity of employment.

**Results provide guidance**

By understanding shipboard employee satisfaction factors, management could improve job design, working conditions, and appropriate compensation to provide better internal quality service for the employees. In turn, employees will provide better service for customers, and subsequently enhance performance and profitability of the organization.

Results of the study found that, overall, crew members were satisfied with their jobs in the cruise lines. They were more satisfied with organization and supervision and satisfied with working environment

**Table 3**  
**Tenure with current employer and mean satisfaction scores**



and ship life. Results indicate they were least satisfied with rewards, in particular, pay and benefit packages. The results echoed the findings of Ghiselli, et al.,<sup>23</sup> and Hancer and George<sup>24</sup>. Management needs to be creative and innovative in its approach to improvements in benefit package offerings. It might be advisable to establish incentive programs in the benefit packages. Compensation should be based upon employees' responsibilities, and payment for overtime might be considered.

Crew members were most dissatisfied with the quality of employee food. Although it is seemingly a small issue, food is the most fundamental of human needs. If management does not address shipboard employees' dissatisfaction with food, it may create an adverse reaction which could jeopardize all efforts of management to make employees happy. Management should quickly address the issue and suggest the need for providing culturally diverse menus using fresh and healthy ingredients. When possible, crew members should be invited to participate in the design of the employee menu and their suggestions for change in the menu should be seriously considered.

The research also found that gender, marital status, origin of birth, job level, and tenure were related to job satisfaction. The sample of female crew members was quite small. Interestingly, the study reported that in most categories surveyed, female crew

members were more satisfied with their jobs than males. Future research may wish to focus more specifically on female crew member job satisfaction by using a larger, more representative sample. Based upon overall levels of job satisfaction reported, cruise organizations may change their recruitment policies and give thoughtful consideration to the recruitment of female workers and married employees.

The study indicates that 90 percent of shipboard laborers are from foreign countries. Respondents from various origins of birth reported different levels of job satisfaction. Cruise line management should be sensitive to the cultural traditions and diversity. They should respect employee cultural differences and encourage tolerance aboard ship by creating various culture-related programs such as cultural fairs and celebrations of different cultural holidays.

Shipboard management leads mostly a young and multi-cultural workforce. However, based on the study, this group seems to lack vision for their career development in the cruise line industry; 80 percent of the respondents do not have a plan to stay beyond five years. This creates a challenge for management to establish career development training programs to compel young employees to realize long-term benefits and opportunities of a career path in the cruise line industry. Through these training programs, management might reduce the turnover ratio and training cost of new employees and

sustain more skillful employees to provide consistent quality services to its customers and seize competitive advantage.

### **Services should improve**

Global labor recruitment could be restricted by governments, causing a labor shortage; on the other hand, there is an increasing demand for labor in the cruise line industry, but there are many drawbacks to working and living in the very limited space on board. If cruise lines are to sustain themselves against competition, improve morale, and retain skilled employees, it is important to provide superior *internal quality services*, increase compensation, and enhance employee career development by creating internal promotion opportunities. Specifically, to increase job satisfaction levels and build strong relationships between management and employees, management should put a human resource department on board to do the following:

- resolve the day-to-day human resource problems
- be specifically trained to deal with culturally-related issues
- be a good communicator and listener to employees' grievances and suggestions
- be empowered to proactively identify problems and resolve them quickly
- develop measures to monitor employee satisfaction

Data were collected with a convenient sample over a limited period of time between July and November 2001. Respondents may not be representative of all crew members working on board in the major cruise lines. Follow-up research should be conducted with a random sample selection to accurately represent the cruise line industry. More satisfaction factors can be added to the survey to more effectively analyze levels of satisfaction. Using the four-point scale created difficulties in analyzing levels of job satisfaction. Future study should use a five-point scale to better measure satisfaction levels.

This study lays a foundation for future research regarding job satisfaction as it relates to promised service level and effective growth in the cruise industry. Employee job satisfaction and perceived importance of job facets may change over time. Thus, research should be conducted periodically and management should alter its employment strategies to meet the needs of employees and cruise lines. It will be valuable to research how job satisfaction levels impact the employees' performance and the evolutionary service expectations of cruise line customers and management.

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