

Survey finds fewer Americans like their jobs

Americans are less satisfied with their jobs and the significance of their work than they were just four years ago, the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center (SRC) reports.

Workers do not, however, report more problems on the job.

The findings emerged in an eight-year study of employees' attitudes, expectations, and experiences in 1969, 1973 and 1977.

Is there a growing gap between the changing needs, aspirations, and potentialities of the American work force and the qualities of jobs and work environments?

Robert P. Quinn and Graham L. Staines, authors of a report on the study, found that there was little change in workers' satisfaction between 1969 and 1973, but an appreciable drop between 1973 and 1977.

The study also shows that in 1977 fewer workers felt their jobs were useful and relevant to future productivity. The number of workers who believed their job skills would be useful and valuable five years hence declined significantly, from 68 percent in 1973 to 62 percent in 1977.

In 1977, similarly, 36 percent of workers reported underutilization of their skills, compared to such reports by 27 percent in 1969 and 25 percent in 1973.

Findings from the 1977 national survey of 1,515 workers were compared with results from similar surveys in 1969 and 1973.

The majority of workers have considerable job security, according to Quinn and Staines, but they think their options are limited.

"People feel more locked into their jobs," Staines explains. "They don't see themselves as having viable alternatives to their present employment."

In 1977, only 20 percent of workers thought it would be very easy to find a job with similar income and fringe benefits, a marked drop from the 27 percent in 1973 and 40 percent in 1969 who said they could easily find comparable employment.

Only 37 percent of workers in 1977 perceived a shortage of workers with their experience, training, and skills, compared to almost half of the workers (48 percent) contacted in 1973. In addition, 54 percent of those not reporting a worker shortage mentioned a possible shortage of jobs available for people with their background.

The SRC researchers noted that, surprisingly, despite the decline in satisfaction, the percentage of workers mentioning job problems remained fairly stable over the eight-year period, and the severity attributed to such job problems actually declined somewhat. Problems related to income and fringe benefits were mentioned most often and were rated as the most severe.

Fewer workers reported inadequate family income in 1973 compared to a 1969, a period when real income (adjusted for inflation) increased slightly. The adequacy of family income appar-

ently remained unchanged between 1973 and 1977 surveys, even though inflation caused real income to decline.

While the findings showed no gain in direct monetary returns, there were fairly steady gains in fringe benefits over the period. The most significant gains were found in paid vacation, retirement programs other than social security, medical contingency insurance, and maternity leave.

In 1977 respondents were asked

whether they would prefer a 10 percent increase or some other improvement in benefits. Of the numerous options offered, workers were most willing to trade inducements in pay for economic fringe benefits: 54 percent preferred better retirement benefits to a pay increase; 48 percent preferred more paid vacation; and 47 percent would trade for better medical insurance benefits.

"If, as seems likely, increases in the

total economic package have come over the last eight years in the form of more fringe benefits rather than as additional earnings," the U-M researchers say, "roughly half of the wages and salaries workers interviewed in 1977 indicate that they approve of such a trade-off."

Quinn and Staines also asked whether many workers perform under conditions that are necessarily onerous,

harmful, inconvenient, and inefficient.

A large proportion of the respondents (78 percent) said their job exposed them to at least one health or safety hazard. Of the 13 hazards specifically listed in the questionnaire, air pollution was the most frequently mentioned (40 percent). Next most mentioned were hazards of fire or electric shock (30 percent), noise (30 percent), and dangerous chemicals (29 percent).

County to self-insure for mishaps

Oakland County has turned to a workers' compensation self-insurance plan.

Facing increasing insurance premiums, Oakland officials decided to drop the county's conventional insurance plan. They intend to pay most compensation claims from current income rather than buy insurance against them.

Officials estimated that 1979's premiums for workers' compensation insurance would total more than \$1.16 million.

"The escalating rates got to the point where they presented us with almost no choice but to become self-insured," said County Executive Daniel Murphy. Other officials said many insurance companies had no interest in providing workers' compensation insurance for governmental units.

Under the new plan, the county will be liable for up to \$400,000 in workers' claims in the program's first year. It will pay \$192,000 for insurance to cov-

er claims in excess of \$400,000.

But county officials anticipate paying out far less than \$400,000 in workers' compensation settlements. They expect to pay only \$132,000 in the first year.

The remaining portions of the \$400,000 in losses would be gradually paid out to claimants as claims are settled over the next 10 years, they said.

In addition to the immediate savings the plan opened investment possibilities, Oakland officials said.

The self-insurance plan, official-

said, would make available \$746,000 for investment. By this means, they said, Oakland County would have a continuing cash flow to invest which would produce an investment income of nearly \$770,000 at the end of 11 years.

"This is exactly the way private insurance companies make money," Murphy said. "Since not all the losses need to be paid in the year they are incurred, substantial sums of money are made available for investment purposes," he said.

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