

Examining Pay Level Satisfaction in the UK Grocery Retail Sector: A Focus on Supermarket Employees

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ABSTRACT

There have been various investigations carried out by researchers on pay level comparisons and pay level satisfactions based on employees from both private and public sectors, but little is known about pay level satisfaction of the UK supermarket employees. This study investigates pay level satisfaction among the UK supermarket employees. Using questionnaire methodology, it was found that over seventy percent of the respondents expressly states that they were dissatisfied with pay. The result of the three-ways analysis of variance (ANOVA) reveals that female employees are more satisfied with their pay when compared with their male counterparts. When job position was compared in relation to pay, the result reveals that while store staffs are generally unhappy with their pay, senior managers are most unhappy. The findings of this research are likely to assist retail managers when contemplating refocusing their pay structure and policy.

INTRODUCTION

Retailing is the business activities of selling goods or services to the final consumer. According to (Brockbank and Airey, 1994; Omar, 1999 and Kent and Omar, 2003), what differentiates retail activities from both wholesales and manufacturing is its emphasis on “final consumer”. And most importantly, this final consumer is the source of wealth for all three. The development of food retailing as business activities could be traced back to the sixteen century, as it grew alongside other retail activities. This was the period when streets shops began to emerge and street traders were being gradually displaced. It has grown rapidly since then as population and urbanisation growth improves and domestics, social and economic being of the population shifts. (McGoldrick, 2002). The industry currently account for about sixty percent of the total retail employment while its 2002 market value is put at around £109bn (Keynote 2003).

Food retailing is increasingly been recognised as one of the more dynamic and rapidly changing industries in the British economy. Its employment strategy built heavily around part-timers most especially female labour workforce flexibility (Sparks, 1992; Dex et-al., 1999; Warren et-al 2001 and Storey et-al., 2002), in their bid to adapt to the changing business environment. Researchers in the past have investigated various aspect of job satisfaction, it is imperative however, that satisfaction with pay deserves additional study for two main reasons. Pay plays a major part in overall level of worker's job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction. It is also one of the elements incorporated in both the original and the revised Job Descriptive Index (Rhoads, et al., 2002). The others been satisfaction with the work itself, satisfaction with promotion, co-workers, supervision, fringe benefits and security

Pay constitutes a substantial and often the major cost in managing any organisation and it represents a common denominator in organisation decision-making (Harris and Ogbonna, 1998). Thus, from the consideration of retail employers (cost) and employees (benefit), pay satisfaction in the UK supermarkets deserves investigations. Within the UK food retail work environment for example, it was found that of the eight elements of job satisfaction, workers were most dissatisfied with their pay and promotions (Brockbank and Airey, 1994; Oshagbemi, 1996). This could be based on the notion that these two elements cannot be completely separated from each other as promotion leads to pay increase. It is therefore necessary to know more about the determination and importance of pay to workers before retail management can be sure of influencing decisions about pay through personnel policies and procedures.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

With numerous studies of pay comparisons and pay level satisfaction among public and private sector workers, the case on relative level of employee satisfaction with pay in the UK grocery retail sector is not common. This study therefore, attempts to throw further light by empirically evaluating pay level satisfaction among the UK supermarkets employees. The main objectives of the study are threefold:

to establish if differences exist in pay level satisfaction among supermarket employees;
to determine if pay level satisfaction is related to supermarket employees' demographic profile; and
to evaluate the possibility that pay level satisfaction is associated with position and/or experience.

In order to achieve these objectives, a three way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the data collected from the supermarket employees, following the literature reviewing process.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Within the UK supermarket environment, employee work experiences could be a combination of three variables related to:

Job characteristics (including salary, wages, workweek, feedback, participation, autonomy, variety, and control);
Psychological outcomes (i.e. job satisfaction, job burnout, organisational commitment and turnover); and
Role stress (for example, overload and conflict).

Collectively, these variables provide a fair picture of the grocery retail work environment. Retail marketing literature (see for example, Commins and Preston, 1997; Kent and Omar, 2003) posited that trainees left the retail chains for reasons including relocation, dislike of job, work schedule, acceptance of a better paying jobs, and long hours” Similarly (Gush, 1996 and Kent and Omar, 2003) has also identified the negative aspects of retailing jobs, such as "long hours, selling lulls, physical exertion and routine”. As implied by (Crosson 1995 and Helliker 1995) such problem might have increased in recent years because, retail cost pressures have frequently led to reductions in the ranks of salaried managers. Consequently, among store managers, workweeks averaged 60 hours and often reached 80 hours. Retailing has become a place to work between 'real' jobs”. Only 31 per cent of college graduates employed in retailing described their job as utilising their education. According to these workers, Gush, (1996) retailing is "a chance to exercise leadership" and "take responsibility”, but not as a place to exercise initiative or to work autonomously.

Herzberg (1966, pp. 72) has classified pay as a "hygiene factor" in the work environment and maintained that pay can only lead to feelings of dissatisfaction, but not to satisfaction. Writers like (Porter 1961 and Locke 1969) has also stressed that satisfaction is a function of the employee's comparison of what exists on his or her job with what he or she seeks on the job. Thus pay satisfaction happens when existing pay corresponds to, or is greater than, desired pay. Similarly, dissatisfaction occurs when existing pay is less than the desired pay (Kovach, 1993 and Weiseberg, 1994). Graham and Messner (1998), similarly view pay satisfaction, as a continuum possessing that is likely to produce both positive and negative values.

While some researchers report that pay satisfaction is positively related to organisational level (Rogers et al., 1994; Berkhoff, 1996 and Williams, 1998) others report that when pay level is controlled, pay satisfaction will be negatively related to organisational level. This is because employees will compare both the absolute and relative pay to decide whether or not they are been fairly paid. For example Graham and Messner, (1998) implied that compensation policies and amounts influences level of absenteeism, employee turnover decisions, and workers' decision on their productivity. This therefore, (Weisberg, 1994 and Abbott, 2001), means that pay satisfaction is not only an issue of financial adequacy, but can also that of psychological adequacy.

There have been various literatures outlining the impact of work environment on employees' psychological outcomes for example, (job satisfaction, stress, burnout, turnover, and commitment (Kelloway and Barling, 1991; Singh, et al., 1996). Others like (Weisberg 1994 and Ducharme and Martin, 2000) has also suggests a strong relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction and the effect that emotional exhaustion could have on employees. Similarly, research focused on the retail context has documented the impact of the work environment on the psychological outcomes of retail employees (Harris and Ogbonna 1998).

However, no reported studies have studied the psychological outcomes of retail store managers vis-à-vis other marketers. Gush (1996) found differences between the needs and expectations of retailers and their college-graduate employees. He reported that graduates in store-based positions seek more autonomy and decision-making authority than that provided them. Other research (Commins and Preston 1997; Walter and Rands 1999 and Ko and Kincade, 1997) work outcome on the retail work environment, suggest that if work environment is less supportive, highly routine, less challenging, and underused the skills of employees, then the psychological outcomes of retail store managers (but not corporate ones) would likely be less positive than those associated with other marketing-related careers.

Indeed, it is important to recognise that pay is as psychological as much as been economic phenomenon. A study by Lee and Martin (1996) found that employees' loss of high-tier status possibly explained their pay dissatisfaction when they changed from high-tier to low-tier jobs. This is despite the fact that their pay was increased in the low-tier jobs. In a study by Oshagbemi (1997), overall job satisfaction was positively and significantly related to rank but not gender or age. Directors were most satisfied with their overall jobs followed by senior managers, and supervisors in that order. Hence the objective of this study is to explore the pattern, if any, between pay satisfaction and rank, gender and/or age.

Kovach (1993) surveyed over 900 employees in manufacturing jobs across a number of industrial organisations in the USA to determine levels of pay and benefits and satisfaction level with each. He found, among other things, that in the area of pay, workers in private organisations received higher absolute levels and were more satisfied with their monetary compensation compared with workers in public organisations. In the area of benefits, however, the relationship reverses with public sector employees receiving more and indicating a higher level of satisfaction.

Roberts and Chonko (1994) research work on the relationship of satisfaction with pay and turnover (the intention to seek new jobs) for men and women in retail sales. The study found no difference in the effect that satisfaction with pay had on men and women's intention to turnover. Vest et-al., (1994) investigated the relationship of self-rated performance to pay level satisfaction, among other issues. Self-rated performance exhibited a significant negative relationship with pay satisfaction. This study has explored the relationships between genders; ranks, age and satisfaction with pay in the UK supermarkets and discount food stores.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study selected four leading food retail organisations (Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda, Safeway) all with strong perceived image, quality reputation and sell both national and own-label brands. The selected stores are based in London to enhance similarity in business environment and standard of living. These four leading retailers collectively have the necessary market powers to influence the direction of British grocery retail market and have good pay structure in place.

Data Collection

The data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire personally handed to 1000 employees at their various stores in July 2003. Only 250 questionnaires were distributed in each store. Structured response questions and Likert rating scales constituted the main enquiry format. The questionnaire was highly structured to aid data collection and analysis. Each of the questionnaire was measured from a range representing '1' extremely dissatisfied to '7' extremely satisfied. Thus '4' on the scale represents 'no opinion', i.e. neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. After four weeks cut-off period, 457 usable questionnaires were returned (Tesco, 120; Sainsbury, 164; Asda, 145; and Safeway 28) representing 45.7 per cent response rate. The difference in response rate among the retail stores was not investigated.

Statistical method

In order to investigate pay satisfaction and its relationship with age, gender and rank, a three-way analysis of variance, ANOVA, was performed. The analysis enables the researcher to examine the individual as well as the joint impact of the independent variables on pay satisfaction. Thus, the direct effects of age, gender and rank on pay satisfaction and all the interactive effects among age, gender and rank were investigated. Descriptive statistics were computed to examine different levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with pay. In addition, histograms showing the nature of the relationships between genders, rank, age and satisfaction with pay were presented to depict the nature of the relationships graphically. This approach was necessary to ensure the reasonability of the data and to query any snag within the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1. shows a breakdown of the retail employees who responded to the questionnaire. The table shows the distribution of respondents' age, gender, position, length of service in present retail company (work experience), and their leadership or management responsibilities. The information contained in Table 1 shows that the retail experiences of the respondents were very wide and covers most areas of food retailing functions. The distribution of the length of service spent in retailing shows that respondents included relative newcomers who had spent less

than five years (about 46 per cent) to workers who had spent more than 30 years in the industry (about 2 per cent). As would be expected, perhaps, a large percentage of workers (almost 91 per cent) fall in between the newcomers, and the workers whose service had been for a much longer period.

Table: 1. Background of Respondents

Age		Percentage
18-30 years		12.0
31-40		40.0
41-50		38.2
51+		9.8
		100.0
Position (Post)		
Director		8.5
Senior manager		15.5
Manager		20.0
Supervisor		22.0
Shop floor staff		34.0
		100.0
Gender		
Male		39.2
Female		60.8
Work Experience (years)	Previous	Present
0-5	46.0	56.0
6-10	30.0	25.0
11-20	15.2	10.0
21-30	6.8	5.6
31+	2.0	3.4
	100.0	100.0

It was useful to find that 56 per cent of the respondents had not worked for more than five years in their present company. This percentage is about 10 per cent above the corresponding percentage of respondents who had worked in food retailing during the same period. The comparison suggests some rates of staff turnover, retirement, or new recruitment necessitated perhaps because of expansion of the industry, which makes about a third of the retail staff relatively new in their present companies. In fact, 80 per cent of the respondents had worked for ten years or less in their present firms.

The corresponding figure for those who had worked in food retailing during the same period is 76 per cent. It is possible, however, that these figures would compare favourably with similar figures of the length of service of workers within other employment sectors, especially workers within other private sector organisations. As Table.1 also shows most of the respondents were shop floor workers (about 43 per cent) while 22 per cent were of supervisory rank. The relatively few managerial staff appears to be representative of the percentage of these top officers in the food retail sector. In terms of gender, about 61 per cent of the respondents were females. However, considering the estimated proportion of females in the total population, the percentage of those who responded to the questionnaire can be considered adequate. It was observed from the results of the data analysis, that 12 per cent of respondents were between 18 and 30 years of age. It is uncertain whether this finding suggests an ageing retail employees or whether the average age of grocery retail employees tends to be higher than the average age of workers in other employment sectors. It was further observed that the percentage of respondents who were less than 35 years old was about the same percentage of those who were older than 45 years. Over 70 per cent of the respondents were within the 35-44-age bracket. About 42 per cent of the respondents held managerial posts as Directors, senior manager, store managers. The percentage of those who held other supervisory posts, such as buyer, area manager, etc. was about 22 per cent. Clearly, the majority of the respondents were not currently in charge of a store. However, it does not follow that this group did not have some administrative assignments, at least on an occasional if not on a regular basis.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table two presents a frequency distribution and some statistics showing satisfaction, dissatisfaction and indifference of grocery retail employees with their pay. It can be seen that only 32 per cent of employees are satisfied with their pay and this points out the gravity of the problems with pay satisfaction in UK food retail industry.

Table 2: Frequency distribution (Employee responses)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
1 = Extremely dissatisfied	54	11.8
2 = Very dissatisfied	62	13.6% dissatisfied = 55.2
3 = Dissatisfied	136	29.8
4 = Indifferent	58	12.7% indifference = 12.7
5 = Satisfied	102	22.3
6 = Very satisfied	30	6.5% satisfied = 32.1
7 = Extremely satisfied	15	3.3
Total	554	100.0
Mean	3.21	
Standard deviation	1.34	
Median = mode	3.0	

Table showing frequency distribution of supermarket employees' satisfaction /dissatisfaction with pay.

Over 55 per cent of employees indicate that they are dissatisfied, very dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied with their pay while about 16 per cent reported indifference. With a mean of only 3.21 and a mode and median of 3, the message from these employees is that they are mainly dissatisfied with their pay. An insight from some of the factors which employees listed as contributing mostly to their dissatisfaction with pay was obtained via content analysis of responses. For example, complaint on salary scale seems to centre on the procedures for determining salary increases; the inadequacy of the salary levels to enable respondents to have the desired standard of living in London, and retailers' policy towards pay levels. Thus, in a list of factors, that contributed to employees' satisfaction and dissatisfaction, pay accounted for 3 cent and 6 per cent respectively. This means that pay accounted more for their dissatisfaction than it did for their satisfaction.

Our observation of the responses received from these employees reveals that female employees are more satisfied with their pay (mean job satisfaction score of 3.752) compared with their male counterparts (mean job satisfaction score of 3.028). Thus, the differences in the satisfaction levels between male and female employees on pay are statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level. This means that although both male and female employees are dissatisfied with their pay, men are significantly more dissatisfied compared with the women and reflecting the reality of life.

Table 3: A three-way ANOVA result showing satisfaction with pay

Source	Df	F-value	Pr > F
Age	4	1.093	0.385
Gender	1	6.744	0.006*
Rank	4	5.398	0.001**
Gender x Age	6	2.891	0.007*
Rank x Gender	6	3.848	0.002**
post x Age	7	2.920	0.005*
Post x Gender x Age	7	1.678	0.105
Notes: * = $p < 0.01$ ** = $p \leq 0.001$			

It may be that pay and career may be less important to women compared with the men and that may be the reason why the position of female employees is significantly lower than the male employees in the UK retail sector. For example, in a publication (see Retail Week 12 October, 1998), it was revealed that just seven per cent (7%) of supervisors in the UK supermarkets are women. This compares with 18 per cent in the USA and 14 per cent in Australia. The above comments perhaps explain the background between gender and satisfaction with pay. Similarly, according to Kinman (1998, p. 17) many women complained about the negative impact of work on their family lives and expressed difficulty in maintaining an appropriate balance between demands of work and the home.

The nature of relationships between position and satisfaction with pay is that directors (3.087) and senior managers (3.126) have the lowest mean job satisfaction score followed by store managers (3.204) and supervisors (3.260). This means that directors and senior managers are least satisfied with their pay while store supervisors are relatively satisfied. Satisfaction with pay, therefore, does not relate to position or indeed follow any pattern with position in the company. The observation here is that senior managers are least satisfied with their pay while their actual pay tends to be higher than the pay of supervisors. One reason for this could be the age of senior managers and the corresponding family obligations.

The observed difference in the level of satisfaction with pay amongst various employment positions (ranks) is statistically significant at the 99.9 per cent confidence level. The difference in pay level satisfaction of employees is an important issue for retail management because performance is usually associated with pay level satisfaction. In this case, while store employees are generally unhappy with their pay, senior managers are most unhappy. This may result in mismanagement and lack of interest to push forward retail marketing policies. Ideally, a comprehensive review of retail work environment across all positions is a recommended approach.

In terms of the nature of relationships between age and satisfaction with pay, four age groups were identified in the analysis. The mean job satisfaction scores are 3.073, 3.146, 3.325 and 3.434 respectively. It can be observed that the mean job satisfaction scores are very close to one another for all age groups. This means that there are no wide satisfaction variations with the possible exception of employees who were less than 31 years of age and who recorded the lowest mean job satisfaction score on pay satisfaction. There are no statistical differences with respect to age variations relating to pay level satisfaction among these employees. The interactive effects between age and gender and age and position are each significant with respect to pay level satisfaction at 99 per cent confidence level. This means that although satisfaction with pay is not significant with respect to age alone, it becomes significant when interacted with gender or position, each of which is statistically significant independently. The explanation is that pay level satisfaction is high enough with gender or position independently that interaction of either gender or position with age continue to be statistically significant. However, the satisfaction level for the interaction of either gender or position with age is at reduced *F values* in each case and at a reduced level of significance for interactions between position and age. The interaction between rank, gender and age is, however, not statistically significant with respect to satisfaction with pay. Overall, pay satisfaction in supermarket is largely explained by variations in gender and position but not age.

DISCUSSION

Pay systems have traditionally been predicated on the size of the job (see Omar and Ogenyi, 2004). In the UK grocery retailing, the main task in the administration of pay has been to equitably determine a level of pay for any given job in the retail organisation, primarily based on the relative size of the job. This is the same in any other UK industry. Other components are usually factored into the equation such as the market forces for supermarket jobs and the retailer's pay philosophy. The outcome of the equation thus usually results in each job's rate of pay. This rate was usually stated as a range of pay to give employees some latitude to move upward through tenure, cost of living and/or merit increases. Under this system, the highly trained manager working in a supermarket, managing a large budget, a large number of people and very profitable retailing could well expect a large pay package. Conversely, a clerical assistant responsible for more repetitive work in the same supermarket would receive (and expect) a much smaller pay package. Many of the UK retail pay systems and, more importantly, its thinking about the whole field of compensation are based on this job size method of pay. However, it is important that in today's highly networked, ever-changing retail organisations in which jobs are also constantly changing, it is apparent for retailers to reconsider the traditional practices of pay and compensation if they are to keep their employees satisfied.

Traditionally, the challenge for compensation in the UK supermarket sector has been to objectively develop and manage the pay system, both within the retail organisations as well as between the retail organisations so that it supports the retailer's purposes, is cost-effective and is accepted by the workforce. In a highly complex, supermarket retailing with many types of jobs in a variety of specialty areas, this is obviously not an easy task. Retailers therefore tend to use factor analysis for this complex system. This system is based on an established set of job factors that are important to the supermarket retailing. These are usually factors such as retail expertise, decision-making requirements, management of others, financial responsibilities and so on. Each factor is weighted in relationship to other factors in a matrix. This matrix is used to allocate points to each and every job in the supermarket. Typically, those jobs that entail controlling large budgets and managing large numbers of people generally receive more points and consequently, a higher rate of pay. As an employee, if your job changes, it is re-evaluated, and if it receives more (or less) points than your previous job, your pay is adjusted proportionately. It is important to note that it is not the remit of this research paper to criticise particular methods adopted by supermarkets in rewarding their employees, but to establish if supermarket employees are satisfied with their pay. Thus this study has investigated pay level satisfaction among the supermarkets employees in the UK. The findings show clearly that the UK supermarkets, employees are dissatisfied with their pay. Over 55 per cent of the industry employees expressly stated so in the questionnaires. In particular, they complain about the procedures for determining pay increases and the supermarkets reward policies. The results of three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that female employees are relatively more satisfied with their pay when compared with their male colleagues and that there are no statistical differences with respect to age variations relating to satisfaction with pay among the supermarket employees surveyed. When position was examined in relation to pay, senior managers were most dissatisfied followed by store managers, and supervisors in that order.

The differences in satisfaction levels of pay with position or gender are statistically significant. The ANOVA results also confirm that the interactions of gender with age, gender and position, and position and age are statistically significant. This demonstrates the high levels of significance between gender and pay level satisfaction and between position and pay satisfaction in the first instance as age and pay satisfaction are not statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated pay level satisfaction of the supermarket employees in the UK. The analysis of the findings shows clearly that the UK supermarket employees are dissatisfied with their pay. Over 50 per cent of supermarket employees expressly stated so in their responses to the questionnaires. In particular, they complain about the procedures for determining salary increases and retail management policy towards pay levels and pay structures in the UK grocery retailing sector. The overall conclusion of the findings is that gender and position are

related to employee satisfaction with pay but not age. It is however appropriate to highlight the fact that the relationships found in this study are only associations, not cause-and-effect relationships. For example, finding that female employees are more satisfied with their pay does not imply that gender is the cause of their satisfaction with pay.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

As a direction for future research, more extensive studies can be carried out to examine other relevant aspects of pay determinants in retailing including, pay structure, procedural justices, and group incentives. We have only managed to cover pay level satisfaction of supermarket employees. Future research should include wider spectrum of retail industry - to include fashion, electronic or even e-tailing.

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