Measuring job satisfaction in surveys: Estonia

Comparative analytical report
Questionnaire

Editorial disclaimer
This report has not been subjected to the standard Foundation editorial procedures

This Estonian national report is part of a comparative overview (EF/06/55/EN) of how job satisfaction is measured in national working conditions surveys based on 16 national contributions for the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO).

Aim and structure of the comparative analytical report questionnaire

The main objective of this comparative analytical report is to assess if and how the job satisfaction issue is dealt in the national surveys and to bring forward some data and trends on job satisfaction. This comparative analytical report shall reveal how national surveys produce data on job satisfaction, focusing on the methodologies used and shall present available data on job satisfaction.

Thus, the questionnaire is divided into three main sections. The first section is mainly focused on the national surveys dealing with job satisfaction (priority given to the national working conditions surveys) and the methodological frame used. In this section, the national correspondents are basically asked to identify which surveys deal with job satisfaction, what questions are made, how questions are made and what definitions are used in those questions.

The second section is addressed to gather available data on general job satisfaction and job satisfaction broken down by some of its determinants. Whenever it is possible, trends should be identified.

Finally, the last section is focused on the analytical aspects of job satisfaction. In this section, national correspondents are asked to identify correlations between job satisfaction and other
variables related to organisational practices that may be present in national surveys data reports and to identify interesting pieces of conceptual or meta analysis of job satisfaction.

1. Survey sources and questions

Q1. Is job satisfaction an issue addressed in your national working conditions surveys? Do other national surveys include any questions on job satisfaction?

Please identify sources and survey methodology (also mention first year of implementation, regularity (periodicity), time frame (e.g. over the last twelve months), population, sample size and frame, data collection methodology, etc.).

General working conditions and employment, as well as living condition surveys address job satisfaction issues. There are two nationally representative surveys in Estonia and in addition, there are some occasional surveys investigating different aspects of job satisfaction.

Working life barometer (WLB) is designed to analyse labour market situation and working conditions. WLB has been conducted twice (in 1998 and 2002), at the initiative of the Finnish Ministry of Labour. WLB is based on nationally representative sample of around 1,000 individuals. In 1998 the proportional probability sample was drawn from the population of working wage earners and entrepreneurs in the age 16-64, in 2002 the age span of respondents was 18-64. The data were collected using a structured face-to-face interview, carried out at the respondents’ homes. Unemployed people were not interviewed. The publication Working Life Barometer in the Baltic Countries 2002, by Juha Antila and Pekka Ylöstalo (2003) summarises the findings about Estonia.

Living conditions survey NORBALT is designed to describe the changes in living conditions in the rapidly changing economic situation in Estonia. Special focus is given to the issues of poverty and economic resources, education, labour market, social integration etc. The first survey – NORBALT I – was carried out in 1994 and the second one – NORBALT II – in 1999. These surveys were conducted in close cooperation of Ministry of Social Affairs, Statistical Office, University of Tartu and the methodological support come from Institute of Applied Social Research Fafo (Norway). NORBALT II is based on nationally representative sample of around 5,500 households. All residents’ households formed a population of the study and a stratified clustered sample was drawn. The publication Living Conditions Study in Estonia 1999 and Living Conditions in Estonia Five Years Later present the results of these surveys.

Labour force surveys (LFS) are designed to analyse labour market situation and working conditions continuously. LFS is conducted by Statistical Office of Estonia since 1995 and since 2000 it is quarterly survey. It covers around 4000 individuals in one quarter and is nationally representative. In 2003, LFS had a supplement (which was included to the questionnaire in two quarters), investigating working conditions of respondents. As this supplement has added to the original questionnaire only once, then trends in working conditions cannot be depicted. Also, the results of the data from supplement are not published by the Statistical Office.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions conducted their European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) in the acceding and candidate countries in 2001. The questionnaire includes one general question about workers job satisfaction. However, as the data is not presented in as much detail as would be needed for the current report, they are not presented in this report.

Together, these surveys cover many different aspects of job satisfaction and describe their evaluation over the years. The following sections will refer more to the WLB and NORBALT surveys, as these give a more detailed overview of workers’ job satisfaction.
Q2. The questions regarding job satisfaction in national surveys are single-item questions? Or multi-facet questions? Are there ‘indirect’ job satisfaction questions in the survey, e.g. scale questions of the type ‘Your job gives you the feeling of work well done’?

- Please specify how questions are formulated (i.e. the text of the questions used in the surveys) and, if applicable, identify different facets used.
- If possible, briefly mention the evolution in questions used in national surveys: which questions were added, which questions were removed, etc.
- Is there a scale being used? What kind of scale?

The questions regarding job satisfaction in surveys are mainly multi-facet questions investigating the employees’ satisfaction with their different aspects of working conditions. In WLB and EWCS, there are also single-item questions about respondents’ overall job satisfaction.

WLB includes a multi-facet question measuring satisfaction with different aspects of working conditions.

WLB 85-89: ‘The next statements concern your own job. Please assess on a 5-point scale to what extent do you agree with them, giving one point in case of a total agreement and five points in case of total disagreement.

… my work is well organised,
… my work intensity is too high,
… I can trust my colleagues,
… there is a pleasant atmosphere and a spirit of solidarity,
… my colleagues think only about themselves, their job, and not about others/their colleagues.’

In the WLB 2002 there is an additional question investigating whether workers can influence their working conditions.

WLB 89.1: ‘Do you have possibilities to speak out/make statements about your dissatisfaction concerning working conditions? (yes/no)’.

NORBALT survey contains two questions related to the job satisfaction issue:

NORBALT F08: ‘Does the total number of hours you work per week in your main occupation suit you, or would you prefer a shorter or longer work week? Assume that your wage or salary will increase or decrease accordingly? (longer working hours would suit me better, the present working hours suit me better and do not know/no answer)’.

NORBALT F12: ‘Several aspects might concern your working conditions. For each of them, please tell me if you think they are too high, acceptable or too low in your workplace? (too high, acceptable, too low, not relevant or don’t know)

- intensity of work,
- health protection and safety at work,
- physical strain,
- mental stress,
- salary,'
• competition among employees,
• responsibility,
• professional demands.’

LFS 2003 supplement includes one question investigating satisfaction with working conditions:
LFS M07: ‘How do you rate the following aspects of working conditions at your workplace with …? (too high, medium, or too low)
• work intensity
• physical tension,
• mental tension, stress,
• competition between staff,
• responsibility (for people and fulfilling duties of employment and material value).’

All abovementioned surveys investigate employees’ assessment to their work intensity and competition among employees. NORBALT and LFS supplement questionnaires include also questions dealing with employees’ satisfaction with the physical strain, mental stress and responsibility at the workplace. At the same time, WLB investigates the development during the last 12 months and therefore the results of different surveys in these aspects are incomparable.
WLB 27-34: ‘During the last 12 months, how has changed in your workplace intensity of work, tempo, safety at work, work’s physical and mental stress, control of work results, etc? (considerably increased, somewhat increased, remained the same, somewhat decreased, considerably decreased, do not know).’
WLB asks a direct question about general job satisfaction
WLB 90: ‘How satisfied are you with your present job? (very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied, and do not know)’
EWCS asks the following question.
EWCS 34: ‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with working conditions in your main paid job? (very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied, don’t know)’

Q3. If definitions of overall job satisfaction/job satisfaction facets are used in questions in national surveys, please give them.
None of the survey instruments mentioned does offer a definition of job satisfaction.

2. Survey data and trends
Q4. Provide data, including trends if possible, on general job satisfaction.
Please also provide the latest data available on the following possible job satisfaction correlates:
  - gender
  - age (use, if possible, the Labour Force Survey age classes: 15 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64 and 65 years old or more )
- marital status
- parenting/number of children
- education
- job status (permanent/fixed-term, employee/self-employed, full/part-time)
- occupational background (current job)
- sector of employment/major industry (use, if possible, the standard NACE classification, 1 digit)

2.1. Trends in workers’ job satisfaction

According to WLB data the great majority of employees are quite satisfied with their job. The situation has not changed significantly in the last few years (see Figure 1). In Estonia, according to WLB data, there are no significant differences between men and women, as far as their job satisfaction is concerned (82-83% of respondents are satisfied and 17% dissatisfied with their jobs). The situation was the same in the preceding survey in the latter part of 1998; then men’s and women’s responses were very similar to each other also. Employees’ age has no relation to job satisfaction. The sectoral differences were also very small, in private sector 81% were satisfied and 18 % dissatisfied and in public sector respective numbers were 84% and 16%.

Figure 1: Respondents’ job satisfaction with their job in 1998 and 2002 (%)

Source: Antila and Ylöstalo, 2003, p. 182.
2.2. WLB: satisfaction with working conditions and possibility to express dissatisfaction

In Estonia, the economic reforms and restructuring of organisations, as well as new functions of organisations established in the course of the reforms have affected all spheres of work. One impact on environmental changes on organisations can be seen in the rise in work intensification. According to labour force survey data (in 2002), nearly 80% of the respondents claimed that their job to be either very intensive or intensive and the working intensity has increased during the last five years. Another fact that shows intensification of work is the spread of overtime work. Approximately 2/3 of the respondents answered that overtime work was usual in their organisation and 16% of employed persons worked overtime in 2002 (Karotom, 2003). These facts show that over the years the pressure on employees has increased and job satisfaction is very tightly connected with work intensity, overtime work, physical and mental stress.

WLB allows analyse different aspects connected with job satisfaction in somewhat more detail:

Work intensity

Over the five years there has been a slight decrease in intensity of working life: in 1998 about 37% of the workers felt that the work intensity was too high; but in the 2002, 33% of respondents thought that way. The share of workers, who think that their work intensity is too low, was the same in both surveys – around 24%. For both men and women, the proportion feeling that the intensity was too high had decreased a little. In 2002, from both men and women, 33% thought that the work was too intensive.

Workplace atmosphere

An enquiry concerning the workplace atmosphere and changes in it in recent years show that in Estonia, there had been progress in a positive direction. There were more satisfied persons, and fewer dissatisfied, than in the previous study. Nearly two-third (64%) of the respondents was at least somewhat satisfied with the atmosphere at their workplace (see Table 1). Among them one-third (30%) were even very satisfied. Those who were dissatisfied totalled 10%.The percentages missing represent those who were indifferent, or were unable to answer the question at all.

There are no significant differences between male and female workers regarding experiences of workplace atmosphere. In all the age groups, a clear majority consider the work atmosphere to be good. The youngest age group (under 30 years old) are most satisfied with the atmosphere (71%). About 10% of respondents in each age group consider it poor. Neither are there any significant gaps in work atmosphere assessment between the public and private sectors. In both sectors, 64% of the respondents think that the atmosphere is good. Those deeming it poor constitute 12% of the public sector and 9% of the private sector workers.

Table 1: Evaluation of different aspects of working conditions in 1998 and 2002 (% of adult employed population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can trust my colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relations between work colleagues

Relations between workers constitute one important factor associated with job satisfaction. Two aspects are enquired about: mutual trust between employees and selfishness or self-centredness among them. Both these topics are aimed at finding out the extent to which trust and solidarity exists between colleagues at workplaces. As WLB shows, the majority of employees consider that they can trust their colleagues at least to some extent and there have been changes over the years. In Estonia, about two-third felt trust toward their colleagues. Gender and sector have no bearing on the trust situation in Estonia. Both men and women, in the public as well as in the private sector have trust in their work colleagues to an equal extent. Age has some degree of significance here. The youngest respondents are more trusting than others. As many as 72% of the under 30-years old trust their colleagues, while the corresponding proportion in the age group older than this is 65%.

Linked to trust, or the lack of it, is solidarity or selfishness among those at the workplace. Over the years no significant change has been taken place in this aspect. There is no connection with sector, gender or age of workers.

Possibilities of expressing dissatisfaction with working conditions

This subject was not enquired about in the previous barometer, so that there is no data concerning any change in it. The possibility of influencing the working conditions, or even of safely expressing any dissatisfaction with them, plays its part in reflecting the state of the working environment. In a good environment, if the need arises, a worker has a chance of talking about problems connected with the working conditions without fear of awkward consequences. In Estonia, a majority of the employees felt that it is possible to make complaints about working conditions at the workplace. In private sector nearly three-quarters (73%) of the workers consider it possible to make complaints about their working conditions, the respective number in public sector was 69% and an average (72%). As analysis shows, the possibility to express dissatisfaction is at the same level for both men and women.

2.3. NORGALT II survey – evaluation of different working conditions

In NORGALT surveys satisfaction with the number of working hours per week are assessed. Figure 2 presents the changes in respondents’ answers in 1994 and 1999. Over the five years the satisfaction with working hours has increased and in 1999 the majority of workers (80%) were satisfied with their present working hours. Table 2 presents the results by different subgroups.
Figure 2: Preferred working hours if paid pro rata in 1994 and 1999 (% of adult employed population)


Table 2: Satisfaction with number of working hours per week by age, sex, ethnicity and company ownership, in 1999 (% of adult employed population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal characteristics</th>
<th>Longer working hours would suit me better</th>
<th>The present working hours suit me</th>
<th>Shorter working hours would suit me better</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Average number of worked hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years old</td>
<td>(14.8)</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>(10.3)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49 years old</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and more years old</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (…) – 20-39 observations.

According to the NORBALT II, perceived high responsibility, mental stress and low income are the most spread stress-causing factors at work (see Figure 3 and Table 3). Young people and non-Estonians suffer more from physical stress, Estonians and elderly people say that mental stress is dominating. White-collars feel more mental stress, but their wages are higher as well. Blue-collars feel physical stress and they are more dissatisfied with their salaries. Non-Estonians and elderly tend to complain more about their low wages.

Figure 3: Evaluation of different aspects of working conditions in 1999 (% of adult employed population). Source: Living Conditions Study in Estonia 1999, 2000, p. 76.

Table 3: Dissatisfaction with different working conditions in 1999, (%)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Physical strain is too high</th>
<th>Mental stress is too high</th>
<th>Salary is too low</th>
<th>Health protection and safety at work are too low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years old</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>(14.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49 years old</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and more years old</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other nationality</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>(15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic education or less</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher managers</td>
<td>(6.0)</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle managers</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>(6.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Secondary analysis of survey data on job satisfaction

Q5. Is there any assessment of the relationship between job satisfaction and other variables related to organisational practices/independent work-related practices in national surveys data analysis/reports? Briefly mention the main findings on the cross-tabulation between the following factors and job satisfaction: job autonomy, working time and WLB issues, and worker participation/involvement.

NORBALT II analyses workers’ satisfaction with number of working hours in different household income quintiles (see Figure 4). In the highest income quintile almost 85% of respondents said that the present number of working hours suits them, in the lowest quintile the respective figure was only 72%. The dissatisfaction with working hours is spread quite evenly: 16% of workers in the first quintile would like to work longer hours and 12% would like to work shorter hours. In other quintiles the situation is quite the same, only in the highest quintile there are fewer workers who would like to work longer working hours.
Q6. Please answer one of the following questions:

6a – Are there any examples of interesting conceptual or meta-analysis of job satisfaction per se – interpretative approaches to job satisfaction? Please summarise the main findings.

6b – Are there any examples of interesting survey approaches to quantifying and measuring job satisfaction – methodological aspects of capturing job satisfaction data in surveys? Please summarise the main findings.

6c – Is there any interesting piece of analysis of job satisfaction and its correlations? Please summarise the main research findings (preferably in relation to one of the job satisfaction correlations identified in 5).

Q6b

WLB investigates workers’ satisfaction with their extra agreements in working contracts. Since it is laid down by law that employment contracts have to be made in writing, it is possible that the employee has been made to sign an extra agreement by employer. The purpose of these
supplementary agreements is often to make the employee surrender some of his/her rights or benefits for the employer’s benefit. Antila and Ylöstalo give the following example of an extra agreement: an extra document could be, a notice of dismissal signed by the employee and left with the employer with the date field open. This document could then subsequently be used by the employer.

Questions asked about extra agreement in the survey were:

WLB 3: ‘Beside the employment contract, have you, through the initiative of the employer, signed any other extra agreement (such as a shorter paid leave, large volume of work to be covered, and agreement on your enrolment and dismissal with no specification of the date, etc.)? (no/yes)’

WLB 3a: ‘How satisfied are you with this agreement? (completely satisfied, rather satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, rather dissatisfied, and completely dissatisfied)’

Over the four year, the making of extra agreements has decreased in Estonia. Proportion of employees who have signed some extra agreement with their employer was in 1998 10% and in 2002 only 6%. Respondents’ satisfaction with the content of an extra agreement is presented in Figure 5. The answers of men and women were similar to this question.

Figure 5: Satisfaction with content of extra agreement in 2002 (%)*

Note: only respondents who have signed an extra agreement.
Source: Antila and Ylöstalo, 2003, p. 149.
One-tenth of the employees declined to answer this question. Antila and Ylöstalo (2003, p. 148) conclude that it can therefore be assumed that the matter is too sensitive to be dealt with in a survey. They argue that those who declined to answer to this question probably do not want to report about such kind of activities. However, if those who declined to answer to the abovementioned question have made an extra agreement, then the proportion of workers who have made some sort of extra agreement will be significantly greater than indicated above.

There are also some other studies (Eamets and Masso, 2005; Paas et al, 2003) about employment protection in Estonia, which conclude that the main international and EU labour standards and the overall strictness of labour regulations is close to the EU level. But in practice, it appears that state regulations are not always followed, especially in the private sector and there is evidence of violations of these regulations.

References


European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Survey on Working Conditions in the acceding and candidate countries 2001*, (http://www.eurofound.eu.int/working/surveys/)


Kaia Philips, University of Tartu