Work, personal and cultural factors in engineers’ management of their career satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Managing engineering professionals is critical if organizations wish to retain talented employees. Enhancing engineers’ career satisfaction through work, personal and cultural conditions is a fundamental tool to address their aspirations and increasing performance. This empirical research examines all this with data from 846 Spanish engineers. With a hierarchical regression analysis, the results show that organizational commitment, level of income, suitability for the job, and work-life balance supporting culture improve engineers’ career satisfaction. Organizational commitment is the most important issue. Level of income and suitability for the job are the second most important factors for determining men's and women’s career satisfaction.

1. Introduction

In today’s competitive, complex and global environment, engineers play a key role in all phases of new knowledge creation and innovation processes. The importance of Engineering is increasing in the global world, particularly in high-tech corporations. Therefore, managing engineering professionals is critical.

Simultaneously, organizations require a flexible workforce with competent and talented employees to adjust to a changing environment. Managing engineers’ professional and personal capabilities is quite important, as well as their entrepreneurial roles and managerial competences, to improve organizational performance. Engineers are, therefore, considered a strategic asset for their employers, and a carefully monitored workforce (Mignonac and Herrbach, 2003). As good, talented competent professionals are scarce and of strategic importance, organizations (and their managers) may consider it critical to keep them in the organization by considering some professional, personal and cultural conditions.

Furthermore, engineers currently face a very high diversity of career prospects (Igbaria et al., 1999), such as technical, manager, project, technical transfer and entrepreneurial orientations (Kim and Cha, 2000). Since companies require the right mix of people and
skills at appropriate levels, organizations must provide career paths that retain and motivate workers by finding matches between organizational and individuals’ needs (Igbaria et al., 1999). The increase in both flattening corporate hierarchies and the number of engineering professionals diminishes engineers’ opportunities to reach higher management positions. Internal mobility is thus an important tool for retaining experienced and skilled expert employees to avoid corporate uncertainty and to cut adaptation costs (Mignonac and Herrbach, 2003). Engineers’ traditional career development has, therefore, changed drastically, and the transition to management as the only means toward a successful career has significantly reduced.

In these circumstances, corporations manage a large group of engineers without being able to guarantee them traditional career paths. When considering the new specific socio-demographic and psychological trends (Dries, 2013), career satisfaction is an important tool for dealing with this situation. Career satisfaction is a perception that is affected by work, personal and cultural factors if we consider that the time and energy spent on family/personal roles limits availability for work roles, and vice versa. It is, therefore, essential that these organizations identify the current aspects that influence engineers’ career satisfaction.

For professional or work factors, many studies describe objective and subjective career success outcomes (Ng et al., 2005), such as income, status and promotions (DeMello and Deshpande, 2011; Judge et al., 1995; Lepnurm et al., 2006; Martins et al., 2002; Wayne et al., 1999). Full-/part-time work, job position, pay and suitability for the job determine career satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2011; Peiró et al., 2012; Saravanabawan and Uthayatharshika, 2014). The above first three factors are considered objective work conditions because they are based on facts rather than on feelings or opinions whereas, given its characteristics, suitability for the job is viewed as a subjective work condition. Objective and subjective work factors predict career satisfaction (Judge et al., 1995; Martins et al., 2002; Wayne et al., 1999), and are positively related to subjective career success (Judge et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005; Jang, 2008; Valcour and Ladge, 2008; Albert et al., 2010).

Work-family conflict (Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Martins et al., 2002) and organizational commitment (Aryee and Debrah, 1993; Cable and DeRue, 2002; Erdogan et al., 2004) are considered personal factors that influence career satisfaction in this research. Traditional socio-demographic variables, such as age, marital status and level of education were not selected (Tremblay et al., 2002; Traavik and Richardsen, 2010; Ituma et al., 2011) because the chosen variables reflect personal situations in a better and more up-to-date way, which make them more powerful and consistent than others.

An organizational culture that supports the work-life balance is a cultural factor, which has a huge impact on employees’ lives and performance, as well as organizational outcomes (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012)2 such as career satisfaction. Accordingly, we relate this cultural factor to the work-family conflict to understand its influence.

Based on a population of 846 Spanish engineers, this paper reports an analysis of how certain work conditions (full-/part-time job, job position, level of income and suitability for the job) and personal and cultural variables (work family conflict, organizational commitment and the work-life balance supporting culture) impact engineers’ career satisfaction by differentiating these effects between men and women. Gender differences in career satisfaction are analyzed (Igbaria et al., 1999; Tremblay et al., 2002; Martin, 2011) by considering the overall underrepresentation of women in engineering, the influence of gender roles and stereotypes, and lack of studies among Spanish engineers.

2 The existence of a WLB supporting culture rather than the availability of WLB practices offered by the company is the main determinant of job satisfaction.
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