IMPROVING CYPRUS FIRE SERVICE PERFORMANCE THROUGH MODERN HR MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND JOB SATISFACTION

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Abstract.
Purpose and aim of the study: *This study investigates the relationship between staff job satisfaction and the transformation of the Cyprus Fire Service into a modern and flexible National Security Force. The primary aim is to analyse organizational and human resource management theories and their application to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of fire operations.*
Design / Methodology / Approach: *The research employs a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey conducted with 110 members of the Cyprus Fire Service. The survey assesses job satisfaction and its impact on service quality. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using statistical methods, including descriptive, frequency, and correlation analyses.*
Main Findings: *The findings reveal a strong positive correlation between employee satisfaction and service quality. Satisfaction influences service quality both directly and indirectly. The study highlights that job satisfaction encompasses various factors, including salary, promotions, and management practices.*
Originality: *This research is original in its focus on transforming the Cyprus Fire Service by applying modern management principles. It provides insights into how job satisfaction can be leveraged to improve organizational performance in public safety services.*
Implications: *The study suggests that enhancing job satisfaction can lead to improved service quality, which is crucial for the Fire Service's role in ensuring public safety. It proposes alternative strategies for personnel management by comparing successful systems from other EU Member Countries.*

Introduction

The Cyprus Fire Service has been an integral part of the country's public safety framework for over 60 years. Initially, it operated as part of the Cyprus Police. However, as society has evolved, the traditional methods and systems used by the Fire Service have become outdated and are not adequate for today's needs.

Recognising this, the Cyprus Fire Service, after many years of efforts, has managed to gain autonomy and independence from October 2021, allowing it to modernise and improve its operations. This research will explore how the Fire Service can be transformed into a more adaptable and efficient organisation. By implementing a new modern and comprehensive personnel management system, the aim is to enhance its capabilities, making it better equipped, more flexible and stronger to handle both current responsibilities and future challenges more effectively and efficiently in an ever-changing environment.

In today's fast-paced world, organizations in various sectors are recognizing the importance of job satisfaction as a key driver of performance and service quality (Barger & Grandey, 2006). Theoretical perspectives suggest that when employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are more motivated, productive and committed to their roles. This is not only the case for the Cyprus Fire Service but is applicable to any organisation that seeks to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness (Rahman & Simonson, 2020). Theories of organisational behaviour and human resource management posit that job satisfaction can result in superior teamwork and an enhanced public service experience.

The aim of this research is to examine the opportunities for improving Cyprus Fire Service performance through modern HR management practices and job satisfaction.

The current research aims to:
- To assess the current levels of job satisfaction among members of the Cyprus Fire Service and identify the key factors influencing it.
- To evaluate the impact of job satisfaction on service quality and operational performance within the Cyprus Fire Service, providing recommendations for enhancing HR practices.

The work is organized as follows. First, the study begins with a literature review that examines existing theories and research on job satisfaction and organizational transformation. Next, the methodology section outlines the research design, including the survey conducted with members of the Cyprus Fire Service, and the statistical methods used for data analysis. Following this, the results section presents the key findings of the study. The discussion section then interprets these findings in the context of the Cyprus Fire Service's transformation, offering insights and implications for practice. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main points of the research.

Understanding job satisfaction: influences and implications for organizational performance

Job satisfaction is a topic that has garnered significant attention from researchers interested in human behaviour and organizational performance. It is widely recognized that how people perceive their work can greatly influence their efficiency, productivity, and relationships at work (Bitner, 1990). This perception affects not only their attendance and commitment but also their overall attitude towards their jobs (Saari & Judge, 2004). Maslow's hierarchy of needs proves that while many view work as a means to meet basic needs like food and shelter, it also fulfils emotional and psychological needs, contributing to overall well-being.

The global economic crisis has had a profound impact on labour relations, leading to increased frustration and stress among employees. This has resulted in a more negative outlook towards work, colleagues, and supervisors, with many feelings less committed and more pessimistic (Bakker et al., 2004). Job satisfaction is inherently subjective, varying from person to person based on individual feelings and expectations. It is not just about material benefits or salary; personal expectations and the degree to which they are met play a crucial role (Barger & Grandey, 2006).

Job satisfaction is a multifaceted concept, encompassing various aspects of work such as rewards, opportunities for promotion, communication, safety, and relationships with supervisors and colleagues. It is influenced by both work-related factors, like the nature of the job and working conditions, and personal factors, such as personality and individual needs (Furnham et al., 2009; Barling et al., 2003). These factors can be grouped into three main categories: the work environment, specific job dimensions, and individual characteristics.

Another important contributor is supervisors who play a critical role in enhancing job satisfaction. When management actively addresses employee concerns and provides support, it boosts satisfaction levels. Assigning responsibilities and offering opportunities for growth and promotion can positively impact satisfaction, whereas limited prospects for personal development can hinder it (Kraimer et al., 2011).

Organizational culture also significantly affects job satisfaction. When employees embrace and identify with the culture, they tend to feel more satisfied. Conversely, a lack of alignment can lead to poor performance and conflicts (Kraimer et al., 2011). Job security is another important factor; part-time jobs often lack this security, offering limited opportunities for personal growth and advancement (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Balancing multiple roles at work and in personal life can lead to dissatisfaction and stress. However, achieving harmony between these

roles can enhance both job and life satisfaction, as they are closely linked. A dynamic balance between work and family life is essential, as conflicts between the two can reduce job satisfaction (Aruldoss et al., 2022).

Cultural values and interpersonal relationships within a society also play a significant role in influencing job satisfaction. Factors such as age, gender, salary, and educational level can all impact how individuals perceive their work environment and their level of satisfaction (Ghafoor, 2012). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for organizations aiming to improve employee satisfaction and, consequently, organizational performance.

Method of data collection

For the needs of collecting the necessary data, a specialized questionnaire was created, which was circulated in all the provinces of Cyprus.

The target population was defined, and a total of 150 questionnaires were circulated throughout the Cyprus Fire Service. The target population included fire-fighters, while at the same time it was foreseen in the target population that there would be workers in administrative services and office positions in order to investigate the research questions of the total of 640 firefighters who made up the entire Cyprus Fire Service force.

A total of 110 fully and correctly answered questionnaires were returned. The 110 people who answered the questionnaire were also the sample of this research.

The first section includes questions concerning the individual demographics in order to collect information about the person (number, age, marital status, educational level, service, rank, years of service, nature of work, hours).

The second section includes questions about job satisfaction. For the needs of this study, the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) questionnaire was used, which assesses nine dimensions of job satisfaction related to overall satisfaction, one of the most used methods in the literature. 14 representative questions were selected using the 5-point Likert scale, from "1. Strongly disagree' to '5. I totally agree »

The third section includes questions about job satisfaction. For the needs of this study, the questionnaire was used, which included questions especially about the quality of the services offered to the public by Cyprus Fire Service.

From the set of questions of the original questionnaire, which were collected, representative questions were selected using a 5-point Likert scale, from "1 - Strongly disagree" to "5 - Strongly agree".

The PSPP statistical data analysis program was used for data analysis and empirical investigation. Descriptive, frequency analysis, correlation analysis, factor analysis through crossovers and factor analysis were used in the empirical investigation.

Research results

The demographic profile of the respondents in this study reveals a diverse group of individuals within the Cyprus Fire Service. The majority of respondents are male (71.8%), with females making up 28.2% of the sample. Age distribution shows a balanced representation across different age groups, with the largest segment being those aged 36-45 years (34.5%). In terms of marital status, nearly half of the respondents are married with children (49.1%), while others are single, married, or divorced/widowed. Educationally, most respondents have attained tertiary education (47.3%), followed by those with secondary education (23.6%). The predominant job title among respondents is Firefighter (72.7%), with smaller numbers in other ranks such as Sergeants and Officers. Regarding work experience, a significant portion has served between 16 to 20 years (31.8%). The nature of work is primarily operational, with 72.7% working outdoors, and the majority having fixed working hours (71.8%).

The study reveals a strong commitment among firefighters to public service, with 62.7% of respondents agreeing that they should always be willing to help the public. This result underscores the dedication of the Cyprus Fire Service personnel to their roles and responsibilities. It reflects an organizational culture that prioritizes public welfare and responsiveness, which is essential for maintaining high service standards (Ostrom & Whitaker, 1974). Furthermore, the trust placed in the Fire Service by the public is mirrored by the respondents' belief in the necessity of this trust, with 95.5% agreeing that citizens should have confidence in the Service. This trust is a cornerstone of effective service delivery, as it fosters a positive relationship between the Fire Service and the community it serves.

Satisfaction with promotions, salaries, and management

The study's findings on satisfaction with promotions, salaries, and management reveal a more nuanced picture. The responses indicate a division among the participants, with some expressing satisfaction and others dissatisfaction. Specifically, when asked about promotion opportunities, the responses were spread across the spectrum, with a significant number neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This suggests that

while some employees perceive clear paths for advancement, others may feel stagnant in their roles. Similarly, perceptions of salary fairness were mixed, with a notable portion of the respondents expressing dissatisfaction. This division highlights potential areas for improvement in labour policies, particularly regarding career advancement and compensation. Addressing these concerns could enhance overall job satisfaction and, consequently, service quality.

The statistical findings of the survey demonstrate the significant correlation between work status and the belief that the salary is satisfactory. As a result, whether the employee is in office duties or works a shift system or some other fixed work schedule is related to the degree of satisfaction with the salary.

Job satisfaction of firefighters is directly linked to the management of their careers, their reward and the support they receive from the service. Maintaining a fair and transparent promotion system, ensuring satisfactory and competitive salaries, as well as investing in an effective and supportive human resource management mechanism can improve the overall satisfaction and performance of firefighters. However, the management of these parameters requires continuous review and flexibility in order to respond to the evolving needs of personnel and operational requirements.

Correlations between work status, job position, and salary satisfaction

Analysing the relationship between employment status, job positions and salary satisfaction in the fire service, we can highlight that these conditions are directly linked to the professional performance and personal well-being of employees. The balance between remuneration and the riskiness of the profession, the recognition of professional development and the stability of the employment status are important factors for increasing the satisfaction of firefighters and improving the services they offer to society.

The study has found that salary varies depending on the employment status, as working in a shift system in the Cyprus Fire Service includes a bonus, unlike office duties. In addition, the position of the employees has a direct correlation with the belief that the salary is satisfactory, since due to the position the salary varies (the higher the position, the higher the salary). The degree of satisfaction of the employee when performing his/her duties, in relation to the employment status and the job position, includes, among other things, the degree of satisfaction with the salary. In conclusion, a certain percentage of the satisfaction of the employee seems to be affected depending on his/her job position and the schedule-system where the fire-fighter works.

The fire-fighters working shifts, who receive additional allowances, are more likely to perceive their salary as satisfactory compared with those in clerical roles with no opportunity to earn extra. This finding suggests that compensation structures that account for the demands of different work schedules can positively impact salary satisfaction. The study also explored correlation between work status and perceptions of fair salary (Table 1).

Table 1. The correlation between work status on the perceptions of fair salary (Chi-Square Test) (compiled by the author)

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.72	4	.020
Likelihood Ratio	11.06	4	.026
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.91	1	.167
N of Valid Cases	110		

A significant finding was the correlation between work status (office hours, shifts) and perceptions of fair salary, with a Pearson Chi-Square value of 11.72 and a significance level of 0.020. This shows a statistically significant association between the two variables.

Table 2 presents the correlation between position rankings and salary satisfaction.

Table 2. The correlation between position rankings and salary satisfaction (Chi-Square Test) (compiled by the author)

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.11	4	.276
Likelihood Ratio	5.22	4	.265
Linear-by-Linear Association	.01	1	.917
N of Valid Cases	110		

Table 2 indicates that higher-ranking positions are associated with greater salary satisfaction (Pearson Chi-Square value of 5.11); however, the correlation between job positions and salary satisfaction was not significant (0.276). This result only partially allows us to draw a conclusion on the importance of aligning compensation with job responsibilities and ensuring that salary structures reflect the demands and responsibilities of different roles.

Non-significant correlations

Other correlations tested in the work between gender and promotion or education level and willingness to help, were not statistically significant. This suggests that these factors may not have a substantial impact on job satisfaction or perceptions of service quality within the Fire Service. The lack of significant correlation in these areas indicates that other factors, such as the working environment and management practices, may play a more critical role in influencing job satisfaction. This dimension includes more general opportunities for career development and job rotation. Development opportunities enable firefighters to advance their careers by acquiring new skills and responsibilities.

Discussion and implications

The study highlights the critical role of job satisfaction in influencing service quality within the Cyprus Fire Service. The findings suggest that addressing issues related to promotions, salaries, and management practices could enhance employee satisfaction and, consequently, service delivery. By implementing fair and transparent promotion and compensation practices, the Fire Service can improve job satisfaction, leading to better performance and higher service quality. Additionally, fostering a culture of trust and commitment to public service can further strengthen the relationship between the Fire Service and the community, ensuring that citizens receive the high-quality services they expect and deserve.

Conclusions

The study on job satisfaction and its impact on service quality within the Cyprus Fire Service provides several key insights and conclusions. These findings have important implications for both organizational policy and practice, highlighting areas for improvement and potential strategies for enhancing service delivery.

The research underscores the strong commitment of firefighters to public service, as evidenced by the majority's willingness to assist the public and their belief in the necessity of public trust. This commitment is a fundamental component of service quality, as it ensures that firefighters are motivated to perform their duties effectively and responsively. The high level of trust that the respondents believe citizens should have in the Fire Service further emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive

relationship with the community. Building and sustaining this trust is crucial for the Fire Service to fulfil its mission and meet public expectations.

The study reveals a division in satisfaction levels regarding promotions, salaries, and management practices. This division suggests that while some employees feel adequately supported and compensated, others do not share this sentiment. To address these disparities, the Fire Service should consider revisiting its labour policies to ensure fair and transparent promotion and compensation practices. By aligning career advancement opportunities and salary structures with employee expectations and job responsibilities, the organization can enhance job satisfaction and, in turn, improve service quality.

The correlations identified in the study highlight the importance of aligning compensation with job demands. Employees working shifts, who receive additional allowances, are more likely to perceive their salary as fair, suggesting that compensation structures should account for the varying demands of different work schedules. Similarly, ensuring that salary structures reflect the responsibilities of different job positions can enhance satisfaction and motivation among employees, but only partially.

While some factors, such as gender and education level, did not show significant correlations with job satisfaction, this finding suggests that other elements, such as the working environment and management practices, may play a more critical role. The Fire Service should focus on these areas to further enhance job satisfaction and service quality.

To overcome the challenges, Fire Service officers must act as proactive and open-minded leaders, implementing substantive rather than merely routine formal changes. This process must be consistent with the high stakes of national existence and social order in order to yield maximum benefits.

In order to enhance employee satisfaction, it would be useful to consider proposals for better recognition of their work, increased support and training in the most dangerous positions, and improvement of their wage policy, in order to reduce inequality and dissatisfaction in the sector.

Innovative personnel management and optimization of efficiency and effectiveness in the Cyprus Fire Service require the implementation of modern strategies that combine training, technology, collaboration and restructuring of administrative structures. At the same time, an integrated approach is required that will ensure the service's ever-growing response to modern challenges. The criticism, however, lies in the fact that the implementation of such strategies requires significant investments and coordinated efforts from all the authorities involved. While technology and innovation can offer significant advantages, the proper utilization of the human factor and the creation of an environment of continuous learning

and collaboration are equally important for achieving sustainable and successful results.

The correct, adequate and modern management of human resources in the Fire Department is a fundamental factor in improving and enhancing the effectiveness of the services offered to the citizen. However, the management of human resources in such a demanding and critical sector, such as firefighting, requires a combination of strategic planning and the implementation of innovative methods in order to respond to the constantly changing needs and challenges of the social and natural environment.

The management of human resources in the Fire Department requires a multidimensional approach that primarily includes professional support, leadership, innovation and social cooperation. A strategy that focuses on strengthening the capabilities of firefighters, improving working conditions and implementing modern practices that can have a decisive impact on the effectiveness of the Fire Department and the overall quality of services to the citizen.

At the same time, in future research, it would be interesting to examine whether there is a system of evaluation and rewards and allowances in the Fire Service, such as the allowance for hazardous occupations, as well as how this can affect the quality of services provided, either directly or indirectly through the influence of intermediary factors such as job satisfaction.

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