

ORIGINAL PAPER

Human Resources' Satisfaction in the Healthcare Sector: A Case of a Specialized Not-For-Profit Hospital in Greece

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Abstract

Background: In the healthcare sector, a traditionally resource-intensive sector, Human Resources stand at the centre of the discussion on efficiency and performance improvement, and, ultimately, improved quality of care provided to patients and citizens. In the light of their important role in the internal development of the organisation and the externally realized "added value", employees are the targets of various communication efforts, either upwards or downwards, by human resource departments, which aim primarily at asserting the satisfaction employees get from their job.

Aim: This paper presents the findings of a satisfaction survey conducted among healthcare employees in a specialized, not-for-profit hospital in Greece.

Methodology: To conduct this research and measure healthcare employees' satisfaction, the authors created and used a novel questionnaire in 244 employees of a hospital. The hospital, although a part of the Greek National Health Service (NHS), enjoys a unique legal status, which gives room for manoeuvre and managerial flexibility.

Results: The survey showed that, despite the fact that employees lack the benefit of permanency of the public servant status that the rest of the NHS staff enjoy in Greece, they are quite satisfied with their jobs. They all, irrespective of grade and specialization, expressed satisfaction with the following: (a) the working environment, (b) the working hours and (c) the anxiety caused by work. Nonetheless, with the exception of higher-level medical personnel, employees seemed dissatisfied with their salaries, promotional opportunities and education. It appeared as well that an employees' satisfaction survey: (a) can support the efforts of a healthcare organisation to get ISO certification and (b) enhances the communication between the management team and the employees.

Conclusions: It is open for discussion whether these findings would be either valid in a longer term perspective or transferable and directly applicable to different organisational settings.

Keywords: human resources, job satisfaction, satisfaction survey, employees, health sector

Introduction

Human Resources (HR) in the healthcare sector

Healthcare organisations have been characterised as traditionally resource-intensive, with staffing costs and wages representing, in most countries, more than three quarters of recurrent health expenditure in United Kingdom (Health Statistics, 1992; Golna et al., 2007). It has been reported that healthcare organisations are social systems where human resources are the most important factors affecting the quality of care, effectiveness and efficiency. It has been a valid proposition that the investments in workforce performance lead to improved business performance and increased quality of care services provided to patients and citizens (Torrington & Hall, 1998; Golna et al., 2007). It appears that the strategic value of healthcare organisation's workforce is undoubted in the normative literature. Also, HR management can no longer afford to see employees as replaceable inputs but should invest on and work with them, as: (a) healthcare organisations are becoming more competitive and (b) employees with the skills and abilities needed to obtain competitive advantages are becoming scarcer. Thus, HR managers should successfully implement a strategy to manage their human resources (Pfeffer, 1994). Success depends on the implementation capability that derives from the organisation's people, how people are treated, their skills and competencies and their efforts on behalf of the healthcare organisation. HR managers should systematically invest in building the capabilities of their forces (in advance of the need to use them) and work relentlessly to make them realise their strategy (Beer & Nohria, 2000).

More than implementing the organisational strategy, employees are increasingly getting involved in developing that strategy themselves. This HR driven model places Human Resource strategy in prime position to the organisational strategy. If people are the

key to competitive advantage, then organisations need to build on their people's strengths. Butler and Glover identified this model as a shift from "Human Resources as the implementers of strategy" to "Human Resources as the driving force in the formulation of strategy" (Butler & Glover, 2007). Accordingly, HR function moves from the stage of achieving "efficiency" (by improving its key indicators when asked to implement a strategy), through realizing "effectiveness" (by enabling the development of a strategy), to ultimately reach "excellence" (by driving the future vision of the organisation towards innovation and people-related competitive advantage). Therefore, employees become more than the "soldiers" that fight the fight, as they grow to help shape the battlefield itself. Therefore, employees must be viewed as valuable contributors whose opinions and perceptions are important sources of knowledge (Rousseau & Parks, 1992). It appears that the healthcare organisations' HR managers should identify and consider the opinions and perceptions of their employees, as the latter can affect the services offered to patients and citizens, which in some cases can be a life matter.

Healthcare employees' satisfaction

Concerns about employee job satisfaction are just as critical in the health care industry as they are in other business sectors. Similarly, the motivation to investigate job satisfaction among health care employees is similar to the interest of research concerning job satisfaction in industrial settings (McBride, 2002). It appears that the effective measurement and enhancement of employees' satisfaction: (a) is a critical function of contemporary human resource management and (b) is perhaps the most frequently studied construct in the HR management sciences, with over 5,000 articles and dissertations having been written on the topic to date (Cranny et al., 1992; Schneider & Brief, 1992). Employees' satisfaction is an attitude that people have about their jobs and the organizations in which they perform these jobs. Methodologically, we can define job

satisfaction as an employee's affective reaction to a job, based on a comparison between actual outcomes and desired outcomes (Mosadeghrad, 2003). Job satisfaction is generally recognized as a multifaceted construct that includes employee feelings about a variety of both intrinsic and extrinsic job elements. It encompasses specific aspects of satisfaction related to pay, benefits, promotion, work conditions, supervision, organizational practices and relationships with co-workers (Misener et al, 1996).

It appears that employees' satisfaction and retention are instrumental. Berry stated that whether managing customers or employees "*the central purpose remains the same: the attraction of patronage through the satisfaction of needs and wants*" (Berry, 1981). Employee needs and wants are satisfied when they perceive that rewards from the organization (e.g. pay, promotion, recognition, personal growth, meaningful work) meet or exceed their expectations. High satisfaction has been linked to retention of employees. Employees who are satisfied have higher intentions of staying with an organization, which results in decreased turnover (Mobley et al., 1979). Retention and turnover of staff, particularly highly skilled personnel, are important issues for managers in the current health care environment (McBride, 2002). Employees who experience job satisfaction are more likely to be productive and stay on the job (McNeese-Smith, 1997). Furthermore, more satisfied employees have more innovative activities in continuous quality improvement and more participation in decision-making in organizations. Job satisfaction is also found to be positively-related to patient satisfaction (Kivimaki et al., 1994).

Methodology

Research approach

Having presented the theoretical background of this research, this section provides information on the research method. The

authors evaluated a variety of research strategies as proposed by Yin (Yin, 1994; Business Research Lab, 2006) and in doing so, were allowed the research focus to dictate their choice to use a case study. A case study strategy suites the objectives and the research parameters of this study that involves a single hospital and a novel phenomenon to be researched. Since, the authors cannot generalise the data derived from a single case study, they suggest that the research findings will allow others to relate their experiences to those reported herein. Hence, this paper offers a broader understanding of the phenomenon. A suitable research methodology that acts as the blue print for the research process has been developed and consists of the following stages: (a) research design, (b) data collection and (c) data analysis, which will be analysed below.

The starting point (research design) is to review the literature, thus developing an understanding and obtaining insights into the literature on satisfaction with hospitals. From the literature review, several research issues emerged for a more focused study on employees' satisfaction in healthcare organisations. This led to a specific research area and identified a research need.

Questionnaire

Within the protocol, a quantitative research method was developed to gather data as required by the units of analysis. The method was in the form of a questionnaire, which is a series of questions, related to the units of analysis, and designed to guide us in gathering information directly from actual employees of the hospital (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). We utilised an Employees' satisfaction survey, which is a systematic means of collecting the view of employees on most issues pertaining to the function and the direction of the organisation (Torrington & Hall, 1998). In the context of this research, questionnaires were the main data source that the author used to collect data and to capture the verbatim. Questionnaires were based on a

systematic series of questions designed for this research. The Employees' satisfaction questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of employees by the HR department. Unlabeled sorting has been used to improve the quality of the final questionnaire. Moreover, we surveyed the company's size and used it as a control variable. Finally, the authors used a five-point Likert scale to measure the answers to some of the questions. This format has been recommended for healthcare surveys (Elbeck, 1987).

Ethics

The approval of scientific council of "The Hospital" in which our research took place was requested. Before the beginning of the interview, the volunteered employees were fully informed. The proper function of "The Hospital" was never disrupted and there was no additional economic burden for the employees or "The Hospital". Anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of information were strictly observed.

Sample

In 1983, the Greek National Health System was established under the Law 1397/1983 (HAPC, 2003). The Ministry of Health and Welfare is responsible for the healthcare provision as well as for the national health policy and strategy development. The Greek NHS consists of the following three subsystems, which operate almost independently (Koutsouris et al., 2005):

- (a) the National Health System, which comprises of public hospitals, Health Centres and the National Centre of Emergency Care. NHS provides hospital, healthcare and emergency pre-hospital care on a universal basis. It aims to provide free and comprehensive healthcare coverage,
- (b) the Social Security Institution and other Social Insurance Funds, which are dealing with the insurance coverage and

(c) the private sector, with numerous diagnostic centres, private clinics, laboratories etc.

"The Hospital" is based in Greece and operates as a non-profit institution, under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. It provides the complete spectrum of services to the local and international community, including preventive medicine and diagnosis and treatment for heart diseases. The hospital supports research related to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, by providing considerable scientific resources. In doing so, "The Hospital" cooperates with distinguished educational institutions, and specialized research centres, in Greece and abroad. In 2007, it had been estimated that 7.808 patients were hospitalised in "The Hospital" and 1.681 patients had an operation. In terms of services provided, "The Hospital" is organised in the following departments:

- (a) Medical and Nursing Services Department,
- (b) Financial Services Department and
- (c) Managerial Services Department.

Each department has separate management, with the management team comprising of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who heads the "The hospital" and departmental directors (Director of Medical and Nursing, Director of Finance and Director of Management).

The Managerial Services Department is organised in different sub-departments (offices), such as the Quality Assurance Office, Nutrition Office, Technical Office, Education Office, Patient Records Office, Information Systems Management Office, Human Resources Office etc and each office has its own Office Director. The latter (Human Resources Office) supervises, controls and is responsible for the payments of the employees in "The Hospital". The human resource of the "The hospital" consists of the medical doctors, the managers and the technicians.

This case study lasted for 3 months. Overall, 195 of the 244 employees of “The Hospital”, who were given the questionnaire returned it fully complete, giving a response rate of 79.92%.

Statistical Analysis

All analyses were done using SPSS .16 software. For descriptive analysis, we used central tendency and dispersion (Mean±SD). Pearson correlation test was used for exploration of relation between perceived family support and psychosocial factors (depression and anxiety) with in diabetic subjects, with a confidence interval of 95%.

P-value less than 0.05 was considered as significance.

Results

Commencing, an effort was made to establish the personal profile of the average management employee. Consequently, questions of a personal content were made. It was calculated that there is an even distribution between the two sexes with the female sex dominating. The exact percentages were 40% (n=78) for the males and 60% (n=117) for the females, with a mean age of 37,1 (±8,15) years. All demographic characteristics, educational levels and years of work experience show in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Social-demographic characteristics of the participants

	n	%
SEX		
Male	78	40
Female	117	60
MEAN AGE	37.1 (SD ± 8.15)	
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
Basic Educational Level	32	16.4
Technological/University Level	126	64.6
MSc/PhD	37	19
YEARS OF WORK EXPERIENCE		
<10 years	52	26.6
>10 years	143	73.4
MARITAL STATUS		
Married	112	57.4
Single	53	27.2
Other	30	15.4

Table 2. Answers of the participants related to job satisfaction

	Strongly Disagree/Disagree		Moderately so		Strongly Agree/Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Generally I am satisfied with my job	36	18.47	38	19.48	121	62.05
The job that I am actually doing is similar to the job I had in mind before being employed	65	33.34	34	17.43	96	49.23
I would motivate my friends to apply for a position to "The Hospital"	36	18.47	32	16.41	127	65.12
Comparing "The Hospital" to other hospitals, it offers a good working environment	15	7.7	32	16.41	148	75.89

Table 3. Answers of participants related to working hours/amount of work (%) and to work anxiety (%)

	Strongly Disagree/Disagree		Moderately so		Strongly Agree/Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
WORKING HOURS/AMOUNT						
The scheduling of working hours is fair	55	28.2	25	12.8	115	60
I am satisfied with the hours I work per day	47	24.1	24	12.3	124	63.6
The amount of work is fairly distributed between the employees	114	58.4	17	8.7	64	32.9
ANXIETY						
I feel anxiety while working	40	20.5	37	19	118	60.5
The personal initiative is encourages	128	65.6	36	18.4	31	16
"The Hospital" encourages personal creativity	119	61	43	22	33	17

Figure 1. Answers related to working environment (%)

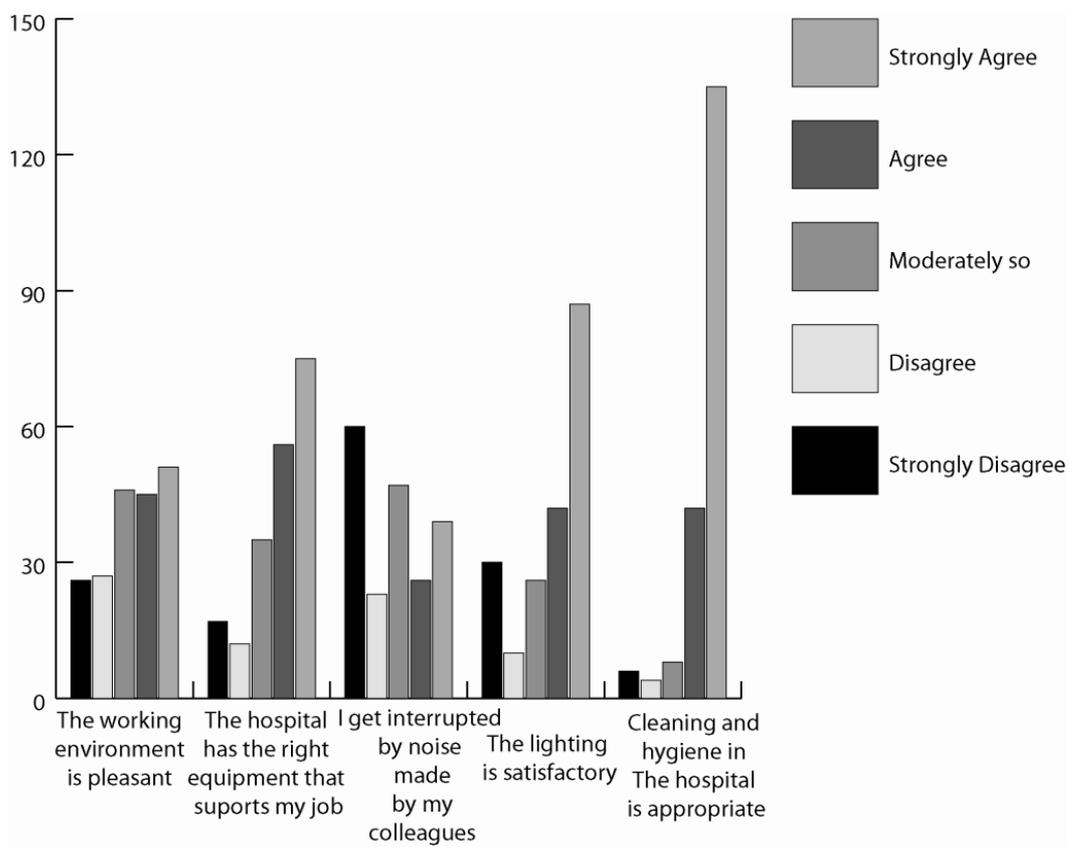


Figure 2. Answers related to education and promotion prospects (%)

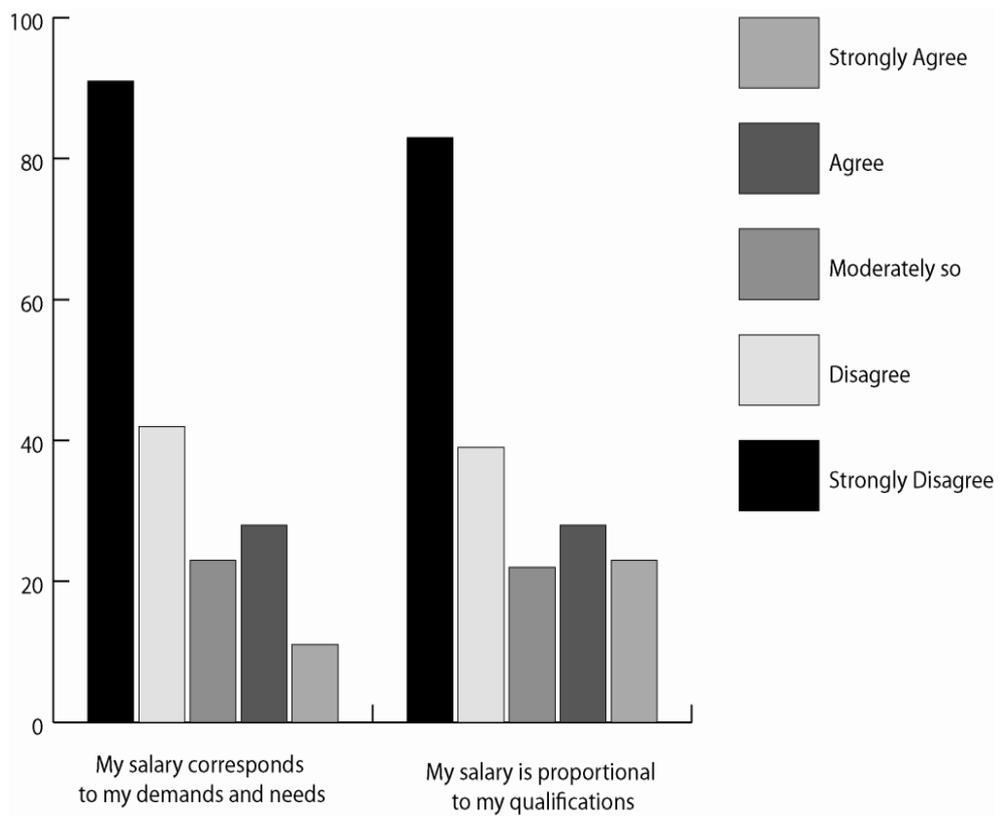
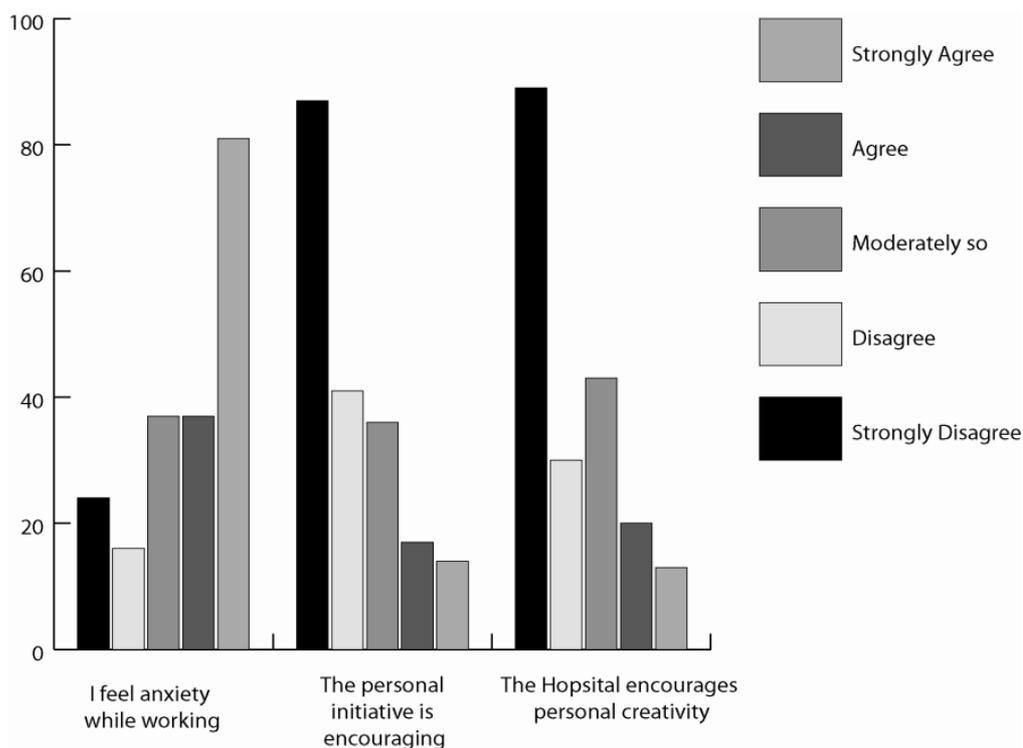


Figure 3. Answers related to financial matters / salary (%)



Job satisfaction and the possibility motivate their friends to apply for a position to “The Hospital” shows in Table 2. The most of employees are satisfied with their job and mentioned that they would possibly motivate their friends to apply for a position to “The Hospital” (Table 2).

Similarly, as the above the answers given for the question of satisfaction with the working hours per day were satisfied with it (Table 3). Following, the questionnaire continued into another specter of questions strongly related

to work anxiety (Table 3). An impressive extend of 60.5% (n=118) in total answered that they feel anxiety while working. This can be explained since the employees are in a complex and large working environment with diverse but also dependent sectors. However, the percentages indicated waste and inappropriate treatment of the human resource of the company.

Regarding the working environment, employees of “The Hospital” appeared to be satisfied. More specifically, 51 employees

(26.15%) believe that the working environment is pleasant and 75 (38.46%) stated that they have the right equipment that supports their job. A great percent of the participants (n=112, 57.43%) referred that they do not get interrupted by noise in their workplace environment. They also seemed to be happy with the lighting, temperature and cleaning/hygiene of "The Hospital" (Figure 1).

As displayed in Figure 2, most of the employees are satisfied with the education offered to them by "The Hospital". However, they are not satisfied with the promotion prospects they have in "The Hospital" and believe that the promotions are not fair and meriocratic. Only 72 (36.92%) of the participants referred that their job gives them the possibility to use their qualification and capabilities to improve them. Also, 72.3% (n=141) believe that their job cannot offer promotion prospects.

In Figure 3, it appears that the employees (n=133, 68.2%) were not satisfied with the salaries, as it does not correspond to their qualifications, results and needs. In addition, some of them also reported (in the comments section of the questionnaire) that the fact that they had short term contracts was really worrying for them.

Discussion

In investigating employees' satisfaction, one of the well-known and most used forms of bottom-up organisational communication are the employees' satisfaction surveys. Upwards communication within an organisation is increasingly acquiring added importance, as it supports:

- (a) top managers understand employees' concerns,
- (b) managers realise and consider employee's attitudes and values,
- (c) managers to realise potential problems and provide solutions or, at least, provide information for appropriate decision making, and

(d) employees feel that they are participating and contributing, and can, thus, encourage motivation and commitment to future courses of action and change initiatives (Torrington, 1998; Rohini & Mahadevappa, 2006).

More particularly, employees' satisfaction surveys can be used to gauge current levels of satisfaction and identify opportunities for improvement as perceived by the employees themselves. Organisations traditionally use employees' satisfaction surveys to:

- (a) learn about their organisational strengths and identify key retention factors, thus increasing retention levels,
- (b) improve morale through discovering opportunities for growth,
- (c) reduce turnover and enhance productivity,
- (d) introduce positive change, through giving added value to employees' opinions and utilizing their recommendations,
- (e) curb absenteeism through making the working environment employee friendlier and
- (f) increase employees' motivation and commitment levels.

It appears that an employees' satisfaction survey can add value to a healthcare organisation, which is expected to show increased responsiveness and adaptability to the constantly changing parameters of their internal and external environments (Sharma & Chahal, 1996; Business Research Lab, 2006). On the whole, the normative literature states the following: *through improved bottom up communication techniques (such as employee satisfaction surveys), the organisation can, at an internal level, achieve greater retention rates, improved motivation levels and thus, employee buy-in in change initiatives.* Ultimately, and at an external level, employees' satisfaction surveys have the potential to contribute to improved quality of services and customer satisfaction, thus resulting in a revenue increase and a sustainable competitive advantage for the organisation (Brady & Cronin, 2001).

This paper stemmed from the belief that job satisfaction surveys are a critical tool for the

enhancement of employee participation in the management process (Andaleeb & Simmonds, 1997). The research presented above is novel, as (a) the survey was performed in a not for profit hospital under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and (b) there are not any other published data available on employee satisfaction in the same type of hospital in Greece. Through this increased participation, employees become motivated to perform more effectively and the organisation gains a unique chance to infuse the executive “chosen” organisational culture to them and drive them towards the achievement of its value creation goals.

Moreover, it is through these surveys that management can obtain a clear understanding of the balance of internal relationships and the importance its employees place on various management, and particularly change management, initiatives.

One of the limitations of this research is that the outcomes presented herein are based on a single case based strategy (Ramchandran & Rajalakshmi, 2009; Sharma et al., 2011). Thus, the data and the observations derived from this case cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, it is not the intention of this paper to offer prescriptive guidelines about which actors are affected and affect the adoption process.

The purpose of the paper is to allow others to relate their experiences to those reported herein. Therefore, this paper offers a broader understanding of the phenomenon of HR satisfaction in the area of healthcare (Kyriopoulos et al, 2002; Chandrinou et al., 2013).

Moreover, it is open for discussion whether the findings of this research would be either valid in a longer term perspective or transferable and directly applicable to different organisational settings (i.e. other hospitals, even within the Greek NHS). It would be interesting to evaluate whether the immediate action taken by the management of “The Hospital” would increase: (a) the

satisfaction levels of the employees and (b) the participation of the employee participation in the management process (Zineldine, 2006; Sodani et al., 2010; Pavlakis, 2011).

At the end of the research, the findings presented above, were discussed and analysed by the managers of “The hospital” in a meeting. The opinions of the employees were considered and the most important is that action was immediately taken. Furthermore, the HR department distributed a 2-page report in order to inform the employees of the results of the survey and the actions that will be taken.

The report summarised the findings as well as the action that was immediately taken by the managers of the healthcare organisation. As a result: the way that the management of “The hospital” changed the way employees were paid and decided to make two year contracts to all of the employees.

The fact that the report was distributed to the employees and immediate action was taken, made the employees feel that they are an important asset of the organisation and that they participate in the management process. Moreover, the employees’ satisfaction survey was a driving force and supported the efforts to get the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 9001:2000) certification. Through the satisfaction survey the hospital proved to have a high quality working environment, which can enhance the services provided to citizens and patients.

Conclusions

Through the empirical evidences presented in the previous sections, we studied the area of HR satisfaction in healthcare organisations. No claim for generalisation is made for interpretive research of this type. Thus, the lessons learnt are a result of the description provided and do not seek to be prescriptive. These lessons might be helpful to healthcare organisations as well as to researchers and HR practitioners and are summarised below. This should be of future concern regarding the employment of new personnel since services

become more demanding and exquisite. Besides, usually academic knowledge provides and enforces managerial skills such as innovation techniques and decision-making, element that constitute a contemporary approach to the administrative services marketing.

Job satisfaction surveys are a critical tool for the enhancement of employee participation in the management process. Employees' opinions should be considered, as they become motivated to perform more effectively and the organisation gains a unique chance to infuse the executive "chosen" organisational culture to them and drive them towards the achievement of its value creation goals. The employees' satisfaction surveys can support the efforts of a healthcare organisation to get a quality certification. At last, through the employees' satisfaction surveys, management can obtain a clear understanding of the balance of internal relationships and the importance its employees place on various management, and particularly change management, initiatives.

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