Interpreting Satisfaction Scores with the Job Satisfaction Survey©

I am frequently asked how to interpret scores on the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). The JSS assesses job satisfaction on a continuum from low (dissatisfied) to high (satisfied). There are no specific cut scores that determine whether an individual is satisfied or dissatisfied, in other words, we cannot confidently conclude that there is a particular score that is the dividing line between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Where there is a need to draw conclusions about satisfaction versus dissatisfaction for samples or individuals, two approaches can be used.

The normative approach would compare the target person/sample to the norms for the sample. My website provides norms for several different groups. One can reference the norms and describe given individuals/samples as being more satisfied, dissatisfied, or about the same as the norms. These norms are limited in three ways. First, there are a small number of occupations and organizations represented. Second, the norms are not from representative samples, but rather are an accumulation of mostly convenience samples people send me. In other words, they are a convenience sample of convenience samples. Third, the norms are mainly from North America—Canada and the U.S. Mean levels of job satisfaction varies across countries, so one should not assume these norms are representative of other countries, particularly those that are culturally dissimilar from North America.

The absolute approach picks some logical, if arbitrary cut scores to represent dissatisfaction versus satisfaction. Given the JSS uses 6-point agree-disagree response choices, we can assume that agreement with positively-worded items and disagreement with negatively-worded items would represent satisfaction, whereas disagreement with positive-worded items, and agreement with negative-worded items represents dissatisfaction. For the 4-item subscales, as well as the 36-item total score, this means that scores with a mean item response (after reverse scoring the negatively-worded items) of 4 or more represents satisfaction, whereas mean responses of 3 or less represents dissatisfaction. Mean scores between 3 and 4 are ambivalence. Translated into the summed scores, for the 4-item subscales with a range from 4 to 24, scores of 4 to 12 are dissatisfied, 16 to 24 are satisfied, and between 12 and 16 are ambivalent. For the 36-item total where possible scores range from 36 to 216, the ranges are 36 to 108 for dissatisfaction, 144 to 216 for satisfaction, and between 108 and 144 for ambivalent.

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