

Happiness is Leaving an Unhappy Job

By

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Employees who leave jobs they dislike tend to find a greater happiness in their new jobs, a survey due to be released today has found.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, collated by the University of Melbourne's Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, found that the job satisfaction level of unhappy workers rose by a greater amount after they changed employers than the satisfaction level of similarly unhappy workers who stayed put.

The annual HILDA Survey tracks the changing life circumstances and attitudes of almost 13,000 respondents on a range of personal, social and financial topics, including family life, employment and life satisfaction.

Unlike "cross-sectional" figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the HILDA survey describes itself as "longitudinal", in that it charts the evolving attitudes and circumstances of a broadly constant group of households and respondents over time.

The findings are based on five consecutive years of data, though the latest data included were collected in 2005, a time-lag Melbourne University professor and HILDA Survey director Mark Wooden put down largely to bureaucratic government processes.

“The most recent publicly available data is 2006 but, as part of our contract, the government asks us to write a big report, summarising interesting findings. So we start writing that when the data becomes publicly available – we spend six months writing it – but the government spends 12 months sitting on that and looking at it,” he said.

Today’s report found that 56.2 per cent of men and 51.8 per cent of women who reported low levels of job satisfaction in 2001 had changed jobs by 2005, while 28.3 per cent of men and 26.2 per cent of women who were unhappy in their jobs in 2001 were still with the same employer in 2005. (The remainder had left the labour force altogether.)

On a satisfaction scale of 0 to 10, employees who had switched jobs (including those who became self-employed or switched to family duties) rated their job satisfaction in 2005 about a point higher than those who remained with their 2001 employers.

Organisational psychologist Christopher Shen said that this suggested that employers with “accurate self-insight” were able to change to jobs that more appropriately suited their interests.

“Research indicates that employees need to have accurate self-insight as to what are their drivers, what are their motivators and what are their disinclinations and seek to strategically align those needs with a workplace.”

But Mr Shen cautioned that not all employees would necessarily find satisfaction through a change of job.

“There are individuals within the workplace population who are vexatious and generally miserable employees no matter what circumstances, activities or

environment they are in and these individuals very often have particular underlying traits that evoke this sense of extreme dissatisfaction.”

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Based in Melbourne, Australia, Christopher Shen Consulting brings organisational psychology solutions to workplaces, helping people become stronger leaders and teams become better performers.

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