

Satisfaction guaranteed?*

How communication professionals in Asia Pacific assess their work situation.

BY MAY O. LWIN AND ANSGAR ZERFASS

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Most large organisations place great importance on customer and client satisfaction. While this is undoubtedly of primary importance, executives also need to consider the demands of internal stakeholders. Job satisfaction among employees is paramount in any successful organisation. A positive work climate ensures that talent is retained and that the overall corporate climate nurtures and motivates productivity and excellence. Research has shown that motivated employees are an important driver for both individual and organisational performance and that high levels of satisfaction ultimately result in greater work output and enhanced task performance.

On the other hand, employees who are dissatisfied are not only spending time making and seeking exit strategies. They are also more likely to contribute to the creation of negative work environments, which can create contagious damaging effects on fellow employees.

They are detrimental to the construction of strong affirmative corporate culture.

Job satisfaction is even more critical amongst “frontline” staff departments of which communication professionals typically are a part. Communicators play an indispensable role in projecting the organisation to external stakeholders, imparting relevant messages and playing intermediary roles between the organisation and mass media. Communication employees in particular have an important added task of shaping organisational image and perception. Hence any dissatisfaction amongst these frontline personnel is likely to harm organisational reputation and contribute to negative perceptions by external parties.

However, little is known about the satisfaction of communication professionals in particular and its drivers. Much of the available data about employee satisfaction has been industry-targeted; in other words, insights are often related to people working in specific sectors.

Communication professionals however work across many industries as well as types of organisations and have the

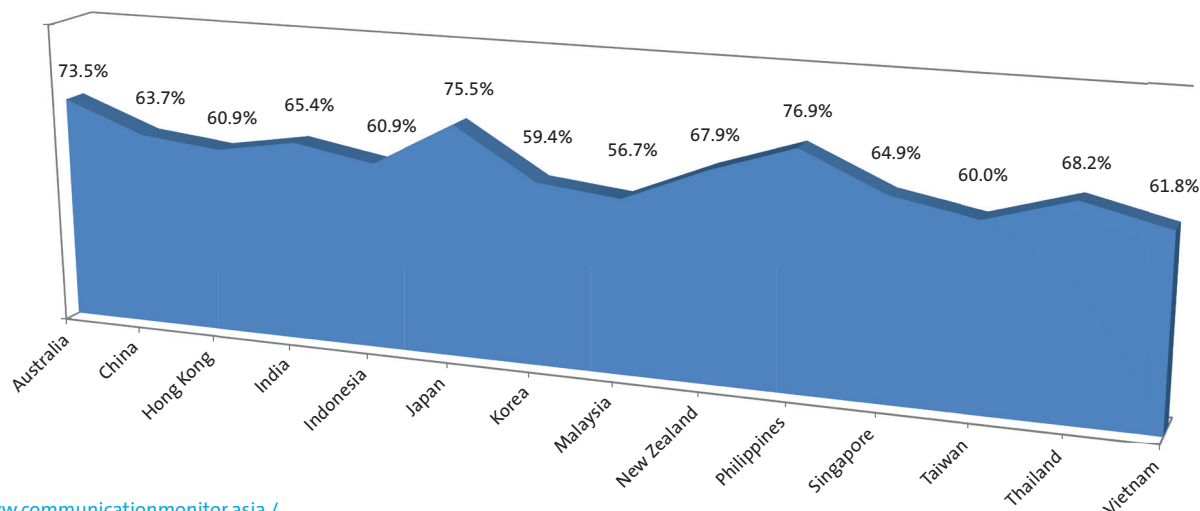
unique role of interfacing between the organisation and external stakeholders. This is especially the case in Asia Pacific. Our research fills this knowledge gap.

Empirical design

The insights provided here are based on a survey of 1,200 communication professionals in 23 countries across Asia Pacific. Three out of four respondents are communication leaders. 62.7 per cent of the professionals interviewed have more than 10 years of experience in the job, 56.9 per cent of respondents are female and the average age is 41.0 years. A quarter of the respondents work in multinational organisations with roots in Asia Pacific, another 31.8 per cent represent multinational organisations headquartered in another continent, while 38 per cent work in organisations with a national or local scope. Almost three out of four respondents work in communication departments, while 24.9 per cent are communication consultants working freelance or for agencies.

Figure 1

Proportion of overall satisfied communication professionals in different countries



www.communicationmonitor.asia/

n = 1,174 communication professionals in 14 countries

Overall job satisfaction

Generally, job satisfaction among communication professionals across Asia Pacific is fairly high, the majority of respondents (65.4 per cent) reporting that they are satisfied with their jobs. Another 22.8 per cent reported to be neutral and 11.7 per cent of the sample declare themselves dissatisfied with their current situation. However there were disparities between countries – professionals from the Philippines, Japan and Australia in particular report higher levels of satisfaction, with about three out of four saying they are satisfied with their jobs (see figure 1). On the opposite end of the spectrum, professionals in Taiwan, Korea and Malaysia report much lower satisfaction levels.

Drivers of satisfaction

Obviously the overall assessment is only a top-line indicator. Managers need to know what drives job satisfaction and more comprehensive facets of satisfaction when they want to motivate team members and drive organisational excellence.

Our statistical analysis indicates that job satisfaction among communicators is driven more by interesting tasks, career opportunities, recognition by superiors and clients, and job status than by salary levels, job security or work-life balance. Interestingly, the ranking of those drivers reflects exactly the situation in a similar study conducted in Europe (www.communicationmonitor.eu), although the exact strength of influence for each factor differs between the continents.

The relevance of those dimensions explains why the majority of respondents reported to be generally happy, although less than half of them agreed that their salary and work-life balance are satisfactory (see figure 2). The perception of salary deficiency appears to be particularly strong in South Korea and India, while professionals in Australia and New Zealand are more contented in this respect.

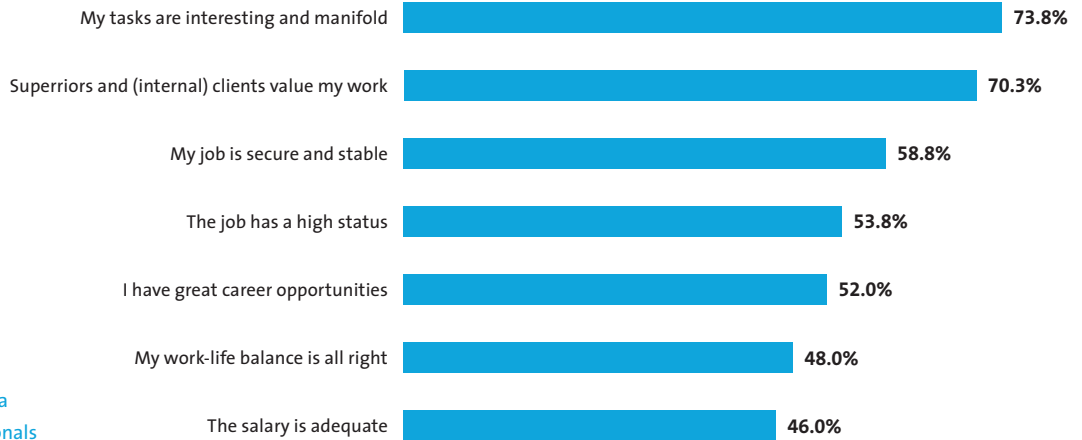
Task interestingness and variety is the major positive feature selected by the respondents. This was especially so in Australia, the Philippines and Indonesia. The second most agreed-upon dimension is the respect and valuation shown by

executives and (internal) clients. Seven out of 10 respondents feel comfortable about this in their current job situation. Thailand, the Philippines, New Zealand, and India are ahead of the rest in the region here.

Organisation types

Amongst different types of organisations in Asia Pacific, respondents from non-profit organisations report most often about interesting and manifold tasks. Those professionals are also ahead regarding the appreciation by clients and superiors and their own work-life balance. Respondents from governmental organisations report most often about high job security and adequate salary. But their career opportunities are significantly worse compared to their peers working in listed or private companies (medium rating 3.30 vs. 3.42 on a scale ranging from 1 to 5). Professionals working in the business sector, on the other hand, rate their job security lowest amongst all types of organisations.

Figure 2
Proportion of communication professionals satisfied with various aspects of their job



www.communicationmonitor.asia
n = 1,183 communication professionals

Satisfaction amongst rank/file and age

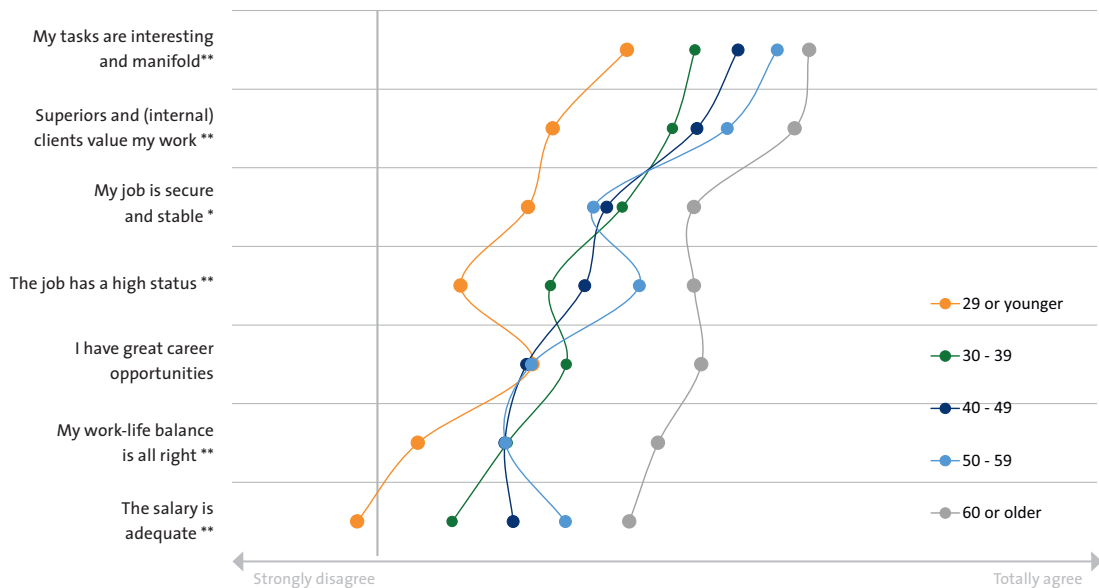
The survey reveals stark differences among communication sector rank and file in terms of facets of job satisfaction. Our findings reveal that job satisfaction clearly rises in a hierarchal manner. Heads of communications and agency CEOs report higher levels of job satisfaction than unit leaders, who in turn are

more positive than team members. With regards to the interestingness of tasks, communicators occupying top level positions agreed strongly with a mean score of 4.24 on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, while unit leaders reported a lower 3.74 mean score and team members/consultants responded with a lagging 3.68 score.

Similar trends were observed amongst age cohorts as shown in figure 3 with the oldest respondents (above 60

years) providing high satisfaction ratings in all dimensions investigated and the youngest group (below 29) reporting the lowest levels. Those below 29 years old, which indicate fresh entrants to the profession, are especially discontented with their salaries. However, they are optimistic about potential job opportunities with scores roughly matching their middle-aged counterparts. Middle-aged respondents between the age bands of 30

Figure 3
Job satisfaction of communication professionals in Asia Pacific across age groups



www.communicationmonitor.asia / n = 1,123 communication professionals / ** Highly significant and * significant differences between age groups (Kendall rank correlation of means, $p \leq 0.01$ / $p \leq 0.05$)



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and 59 years generally fell in between the youngest and eldest cohorts in terms of job satisfaction levels (see figure 3). The oldest cohort (60 and above) reported greatest satisfaction in all task areas.

Challenges for the profession

The results of the study may motivate communication leaders to explore the needs of current and future team members in their organisations.

Some findings on the general trends related to key characteristics of professional communication can probably be found in any organisation: communicators are often forced to work long hours and overtime, but they enjoy a diversified range of tasks. Other aspects are clearly related to roles and markets. Understanding those drivers and how to utilise them helps leaders to maintain a sustainable pipeline of qualified and motivated communication experts. For instance, motivating younger employees beyond offering financial rewards will be as important as opening up opportunities for those in middle ranks, who are not interested in



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Job satisfaction of professionals is a prerequisite for any successful communication department.
- A study of public relations professionals across 23 countries in Asia Pacific shows that overall job satisfaction is reasonably high in the region: 65.4 per cent of the professionals view their situation favourably. However, only a minority are satisfied with work-life balance and salaries.
- Drivers of job satisfaction include interesting tasks, career opportunities, status and recognition. Salary levels, job security and work-life balance are less important.
- Generally, professionals working in non-profit organisations are more contented. The same is true for practitioners in the Philippines, Japan and Australia, whereas their peers from Taiwan, China and Korea are lagging behind.

making it to the top, but remain valuable members of the communication workforce. Obviously, these initiatives have to be aligned with the set of competencies needed in a specific organisation. Mastering this challenge is a prerequisite for any communication department striving for excellence. ●

About the Monitor

This research is part of the Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor (APCM) 2015/16 survey, based on responses from 1,200 communication professionals from 23 countries in the region. The study has been conducted by a core research team of four professors (Jim Macnamara, May O. Lwin, Ana Adi, Ansgar Zerfass) and collaborators from 12 additional universities. Organised by the Asia-Pacific Association of Communication Directors, Quadriga University of Applied Sciences and the European Public Relations Education and Research Association, the project was supported by PRIME Research International, a global leader in communication research. A full PDF report (102 pp.) is available at www.communication-monitor.asia.