

Mind the gap: Spain: Employee perspective

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MIND THE GAP

Spain



EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

Marc Grau i Grau

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents information about eight dimensions about employees' perspective to their quality of employment in Spain. When necessary, the author compared Spain with other Southern European countries as well as EU27. This report suggests that employees' perspectives differ notably by age group and gender. The information presented has been selected basically from two data sets: the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS, 2005) and from the National Institute of Statistics (INE).

Organizations that want to remain employers-of-choice must periodically assess how shifts in the business environment might affect the effectiveness of their talent management strategies, policies, and programs. Globalization and changes in the age composition of the workforce—two important 21st-century trends that affect today's businesses—make it important for managers to consider:

- How does age affect employees' preferences for an idealized job and their assessments of their employment experiences?
- Do employees' perceptions of their employment experiences vary from country to country?

What does "mind the gap" mean?

Train stations across England play recorded messages to remind passengers that they should "Mind the Gap." These words of caution urge train travelers to pay attention to the space between the door of the train car and the platform in the station for safe commutes and travels.

For this series of our research publications, we have adopted the phrase, "Mind the Gap." The Mind the Gap series aim to remind employers to pay attention to any gaps that might exist between employees' priorities and need and employers' allocation of workplace-based resources. Our Mind the Gap papers also aim to help our readers to such gaps in quality of employment in other country contexts.

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The Sloan Center on Aging & Work in Boston, in collaboration with the Middlesex University Business School in London, created the Mind the Gap series to provide employers with basic employment-related information country-by-country. There are two types of papers in the Mind the Gap series.

Employee Series: This series examines the perspectives that adults of different ages have about employment and the assessments that they make about their employment experiences. These papers focus on one central question: *Does age affect employees' preferences for an idealized job and their assessments of their employment experiences?*

Employer Series: This series examines the prevalence of human resource policies and programs at workplaces in a selected country. Because most talent-management strategies and programs are age-neutral, we compare the availability of selected human resource policies in practices in the targeted country with the availability of similar policies and practices in a small number of countries with approximate economic circumstances. These papers focus on one core question: *How does the availability of human resource policies and programs in the targeted country compare with other countries?*

Although papers in both series focus on a single country, when the information contained in two or more papers are considered in tandem, it is possible to consider whether employees' perceptions of their employment experiences vary from country to country.



Quality of Employment: Dimensions of a “Good Job” and a “Good Place to Work”

Most people would agree that good jobs are a good thing. High-quality jobs offer benefits to employees and to the organizations where they work.

- **Benefits for Employees:** The quality of employment affects the health and wellbeing of employees. Research confirms that poor-quality jobs (such as jobs requiring extreme work hours or jobs that are very demanding, particularly those where employees do not have access to the resources they need to meet those demands) are associated with negative outcomes, including high stress levels and physiological reactions, like cardio-vascular problems.¹
- **Benefits for Employers:** Employers often connect the quality of employment they offer to employees to their employer-of-choice strategies. There is some evidence that the adoption of policies and practices that promote the quality of employment available to employees is related to positive outcomes for organizations, such as customer satisfaction and organizational performance.² Employer-of-choice strategies can result in enhanced employee engagement which, in turn, can be linked to organizational outcomes, including financial measures. For example, higher employee engagement can reduce costs like those associated with unwanted turnover. One study found that 59% of highly engaged employees report that they intend to stay with their employers in comparison to the 24% of disengaged employees who “intend to stay.”³ A number of studies have linked employee job satisfaction with positive performance indicators. Fortune reports positive relationships between being recognized as a “great place to work” and stock indices.^{4, 5}

In this paper, we focus on eight important dimensions of the quality of employment:

- Fair, Attractive, and Competitive Compensation & Benefits
- Opportunities for Development, Learning & Advancement
- Wellness, Health & Safety Protections
- Opportunities for Meaningful Work
- Provisions for Employment Security & Predictabilities
- Workplace Flexibility
- Culture of Respect, Inclusion & Equity
- Promotion of Constructive Relationships at the Workplace

The following sections of this paper use the Quality of Employment framework as a structure to discuss the perspectives of employees about their employment situations.

QUALITY EMPLOYMENT IN SPAIN:

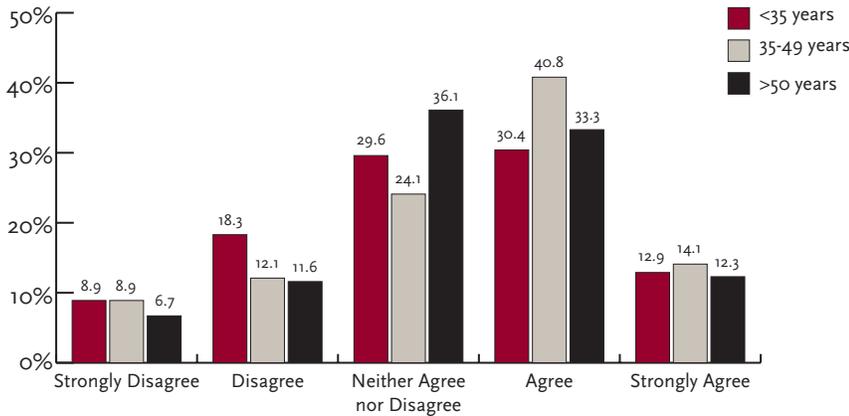
I. Indicators of Fair, Attractive, and Competitive Compensation & Benefits

- Compensation and benefits are distributed in a fair and equitable manner, meeting most of employees' basic economic needs.

- As shown in Figure 1, employees at midlife (54.9%) are much more likely than older employees (45.6%) or younger employees (43.3%) to report that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am well paid for the work I do."⁶
- On the other hand, younger employees (27.2%) are more dissatisfied than employees at midlife (21.0%) and older employees (18.3%) with their salary.⁶
- About 13% and 35% of Spaniards reported that they strongly agreed or agreed, respectively, with the statement "I am well paid for the work I do." Contrary to popular belief, women are more satisfied (49.1%) with their wages than men (46.8%). However, it is also true that 25.2% of Spanish women are dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with their salary for the work they do.⁶
- In 2007, the average annual income for Spanish employees was 20,390€ with a significant difference between men (22,780€) and women (16,944€). As indicated by Table 1, 36,186€ was the 90th percentile of income for full-time Spanish employees and 8,865€ was the 10th percentile.⁷



Figure 1: Responses to the statement "I am well paid for the work I do," by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

Table 1: Average annual income in Spain, by gender

€	Female	Male	Total
Average	16,944	22,780	20,390
Percentile 10	6,919	11,364	8,865
Lower quartile	10,205	14,151	12,521
Median	14,265	18,468	16,718
Upper quartile	20,578	27,385	24,689
Percentile 90	30,652	39,780	36,186

Source: INE Wage Structure Survey (2007)⁷

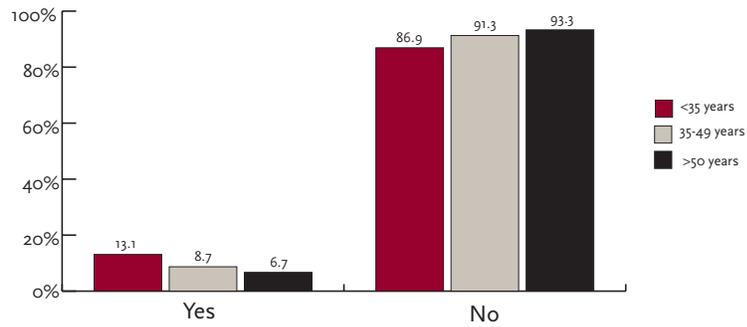


II. Indicators of Opportunities for Development, Learning & Advancement

► *Opportunities for the development of expanded skills and responsibilities are available.*

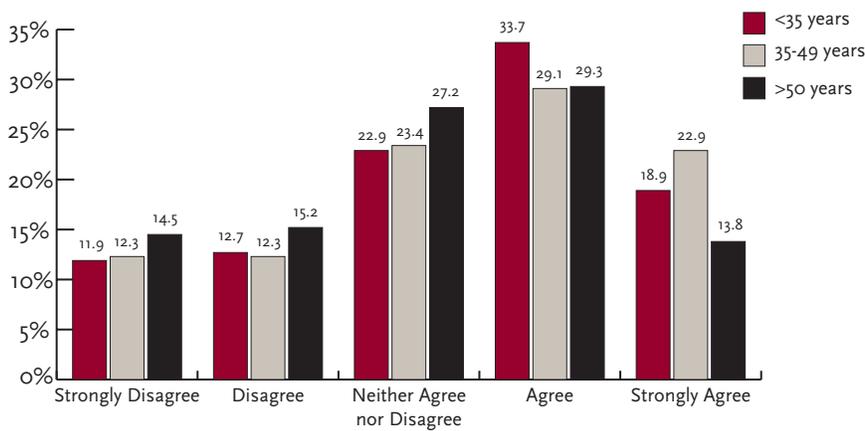
- As Becker (1964) affirms, education and training are the most important investments in human capital. By acquiring more training, worker’s productivity should increase as well as their earnings.⁸ However, as presented in Figure 2, in 2005 only 13.1% of younger employees, 8.7% of employees at midlife, and 6.7% of older employees have received training, either paid for or provided by their employer or themselves, if they are self-employed.⁶
- Middle aged Spanish employees (22.9%) are more likely than younger employees (18.9%) and older employees (13.8%) to report that they strongly agreed they have opportunities to learn and grow at work (See Figure 3).⁶
- Older employees have a high variability of answers regarding career advancement (see Figure 4). While 31.0% of older employees agreed their job offered good prospects for career advancement, 29.4% of those strongly disagreed with this statement. In this case, it would be interesting to distinguish between blue-collar and white-collar positions and the level of education.⁶

Figure 2: Responses to the question “Have you received training from your company?” by age group



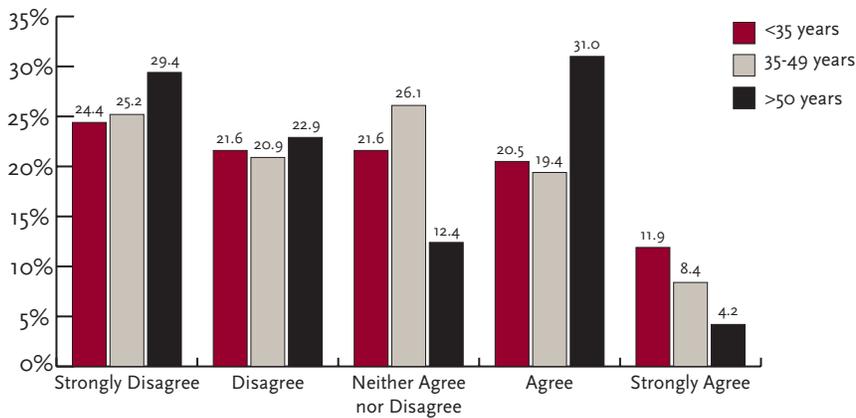
Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

Figure 3: Responses to the statement “My employer offers me opportunities to learn and grow,” by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

Figure 4: Responses to the statement “My job offers good prospects for career advancement,” by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

The survey asked respondents about the statement “My job offers good prospects for career advancement” and the five possible responses were “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.”

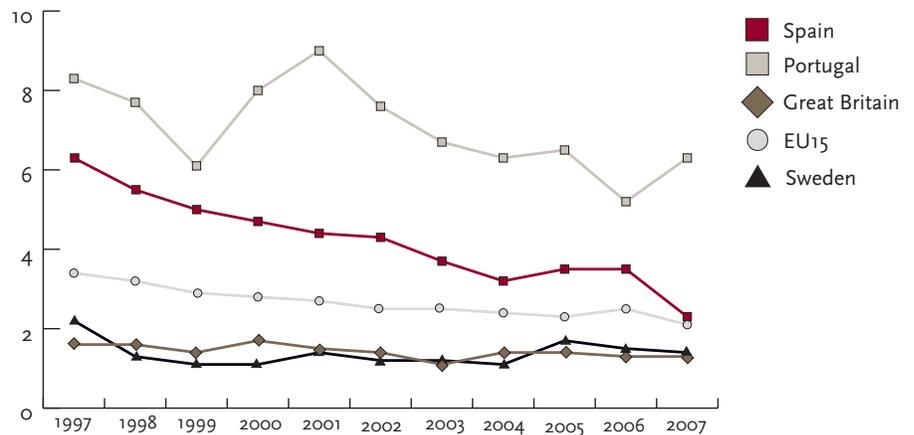


III. Indicators of Wellness, Health & Safety Protections

► *Well-being is promoted through workplace policies, and social protections are offered in case of illness.*

- Over the past few years, Spain has partially corrected one of its weaknesses in workplace safety: fatal accidents.⁹ As Figure 5 shows, Spain had one of the highest incidences of fatal accidents at work in Europe, at 6.3 deaths per 100,000 workers in 1997, as compared to the EU15 average, 3.4 per 100,000 workers. Nevertheless, Spain improved its fatal accidents rate year by year (except in 2005 and 2006) until it reached 2.3 fatal accidents at work per 100,000 people employed, which is similar to the average in EU15 (2.1).¹⁰
- About 37% of Spanish employees report that they think their health or safety is at risk because of their work. Male employees confirm this statement by 45% compared to 25% of female employees.⁶
- Among all working Spaniards, 21.4% reported stress, 11.4% reported irritability, and 8.4% felt anxiety.⁶

Figure 5: Fatal accidents at work in Spain (per 100,000 persons employed) (1997~2007)



Source: Eurostat (2010)¹⁰

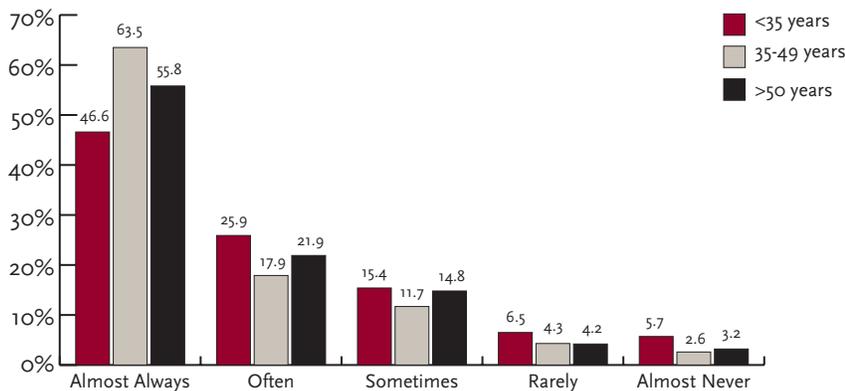
IV. Indicators of Opportunities for Meaningful Work

► *Opportunities for meaningful and fulfilling work are available.*

- About 53% of Spaniards report that they almost always feel that they do useful work and 21.5% report that they often feel that their work is useful. Female workers (58.2%) were more likely to report that they do useful work as compared to male workers (49.4%).⁶
- More than 27% of Spanish employees almost always find their job to be intellectually demanding, while almost 40% reported they rarely or almost never find their job to be intellectually demanding.⁶
- About 35% of Spanish teenagers, who have already finished secondary school and are ready to enter the workforce, report that it is very important that their job should be useful to society.¹¹
- As indicated in Figure 6, employees at midlife (63.5%) are more likely than older employees (55.8%) or younger employees (46.6%) to report they feel they are almost always performing useful work.⁶



Figure 6: Responses to the question “How often do you feel that you do useful work,” by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

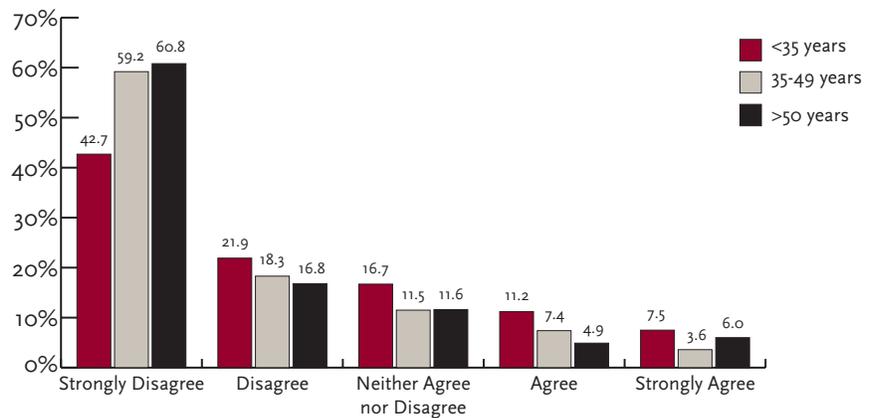


V. Indicators of Provisions for Employment Security & Predictabilities

- ▶ *Terms of employment are communicated clearly, with an emphasis on smooth transitions through jobs and careers.*

- About 52% of Spanish employees strongly disagreed that they might lose their job in the next six months. Female workers were more likely to neither agree or disagree (17.5%) or agree (11.6%) with the potential for losing their job than male workers.⁶
- As portrayed in Figure 7, younger employees (18.7%) are more likely than employees at midlife (11.0%) and older employees (10.9%) to report that they agreed or strongly agreed they might lose their job in the next six months, without taking into consideration the high number of young, unemployed who are not filling this survey.⁶
- Employees in the Nordic countries feel that their jobs are secure as compared to employees in the Southern countries (see Figure 8).⁶ In Spain, the perception of job security is around 70%; in Norway and Denmark, however, this perception is around 88%.

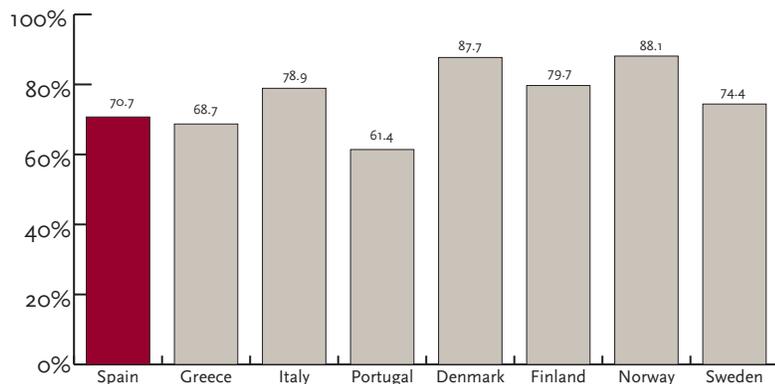
Figure 7: Responses to the statement “I might lose my job in the next six months,” by age group



The survey asked respondents about the statement “I might lose my job in the next 6 months” and the five possible responses were “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “agree”, and “strongly agree”.

Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

Figure 8: Perceptions of job security – EU comparison



The measure, job security, is the sum of responses, “strongly disagree” and “disagree”.

Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

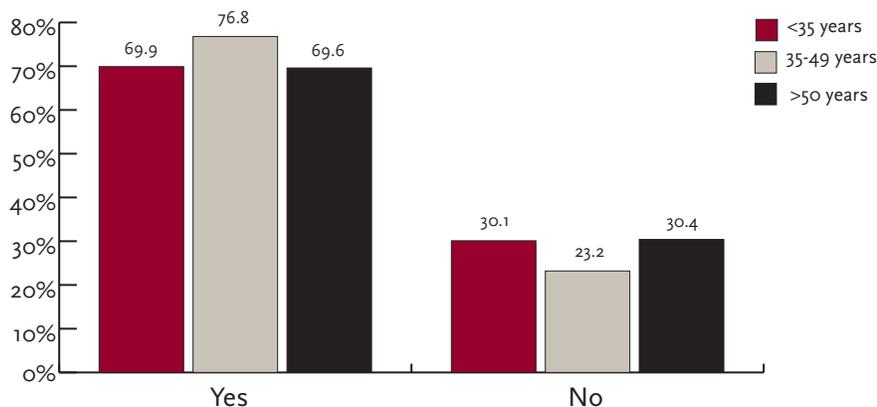
VI. Indicators of Workplace Flexibility

- ▶ *Options, choice, and control over work conditions and hours are available.*

- Spanish employees are more likely to work fixed start and finish times (69.4%) than EU27 (60.7%). Other Southern countries like Portugal (76.9%) are similar to Spain in this regard, while Italy (59.8%) has a rate very close to the European average. Therefore, we can consider Spain to be less flexible than most EU countries.⁶
- Employees at midlife (76.8%) are more likely than younger (69.9%) and older employees (69.6%) to report they work fixed start and finish times (see Figure 9).⁶
- About 30% of Spaniards report that they are free to decide when to take holidays or days off, while 26.1% of the workers consider that they are almost never or rarely free to decide when to take holidays or days off. As presented in Figure 10, younger employees (31.5%) are more likely than employees at midlife (22.3%) or older employees (21.1%) to report that they are almost never free to decide when to take holidays or days off.⁶
- Fully 39.7% of Spanish employees report that they almost always or often can take breaks when they wish. This percentage is below the average in EU27 (44.5%). Women (37.3%) are more likely to report that they rarely or almost never can take breaks when they wish than men (33.0%). With regard to age groups, younger employees (23.2%) are more likely than employees at midlife (17.6%) or older employees (14.2%) to report that they almost never can take a break when they wish.⁶



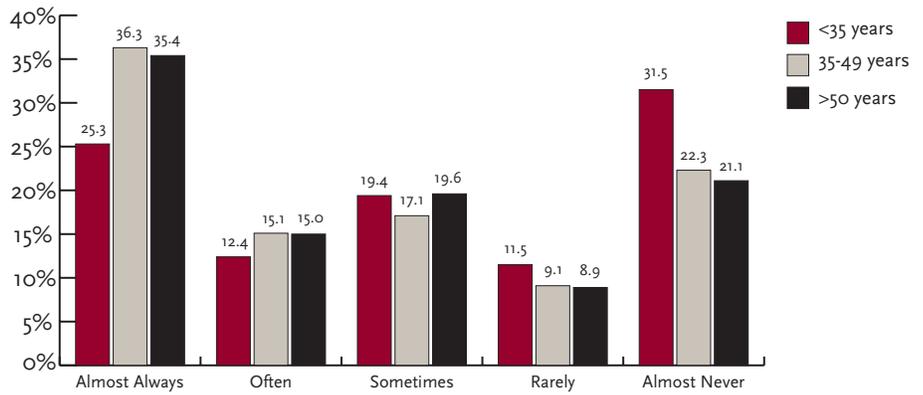
Figure 9: Responses to the question “Do you work fixed start and finish times?” by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

The measure, job security, is the sum of responses, “strongly disagree” and “disagree”.

Figure 10: Responses to the question “How often are you free to decide when to take holidays or days off?” by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

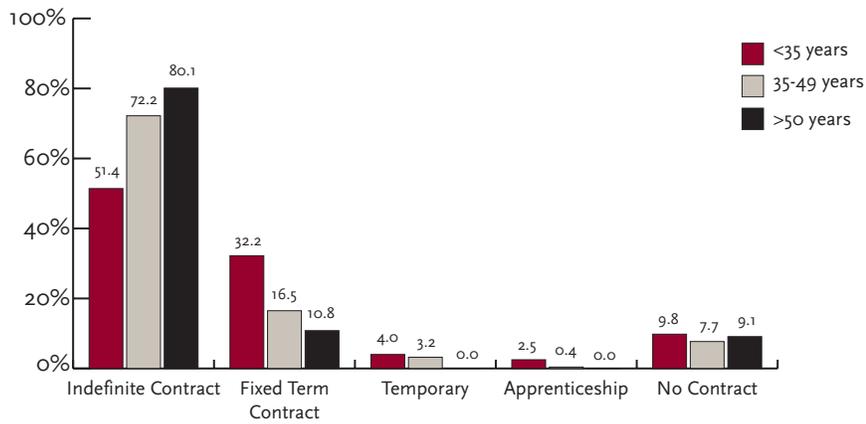
VII. Indicators of Culture of Respect, Inclusion & Equity

- *Diversity, inclusion, and employee personal growth are valued.*



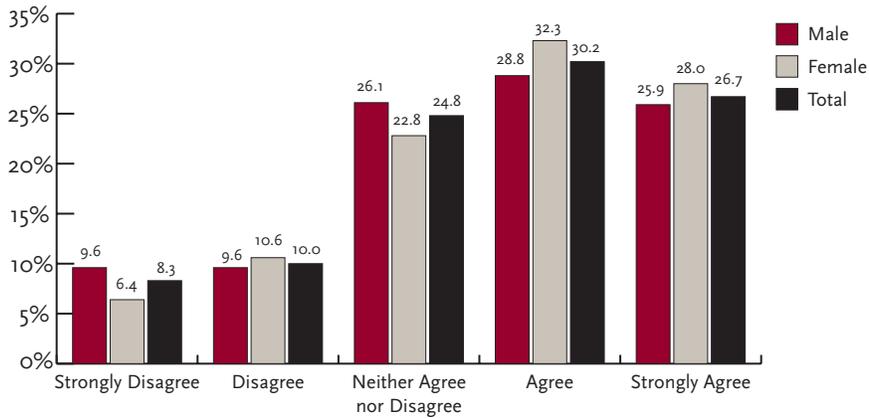
- About 2.8% of Spanish workers have been personally subjected to bullying or harassment at work. This percentage is lower than the EU27 average (5.1%). In terms of type of discrimination, 1.1% of employees have been subjected to discrimination linked to nationality, and 0.4% linked to age.⁶
- In Spain, there are significant discrepancies between age and the type of work contract. As Figure 11 shows, 80.1% of older employees have an indefinite contract, while only 51.4% of young employees have this privilege. Probably, it is the clearest example where age affects one dimension, in this case, the kind of contract.⁶
- About 72.9% of Spanish males have an indefinite contract, while only 55.0% of Spanish female workers have one. In EU27, this discrepancy is not so notable (79.1% for males and 75.6% for females) as it is in Spain.⁶
- As Figure 12 shows, around 56.9% of workers in Spain agreed or strongly agreed they felt “at home” in their organization.⁶

Figure 11: Type of work contract, by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

Figure 12: Responses to the statement “I feel ‘at home’ at my organization,” by gender



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

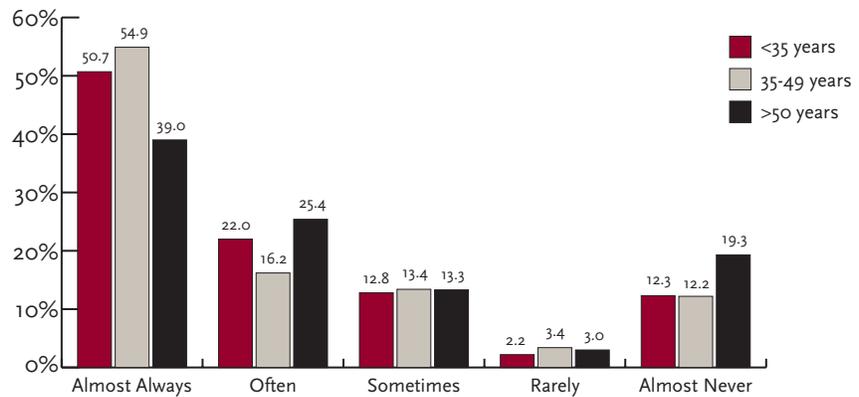
VIII. Indicators of Promotion of Constructive Relationships at the Workplace

► Interactions with supervisors and coworkers are professional and respectful.



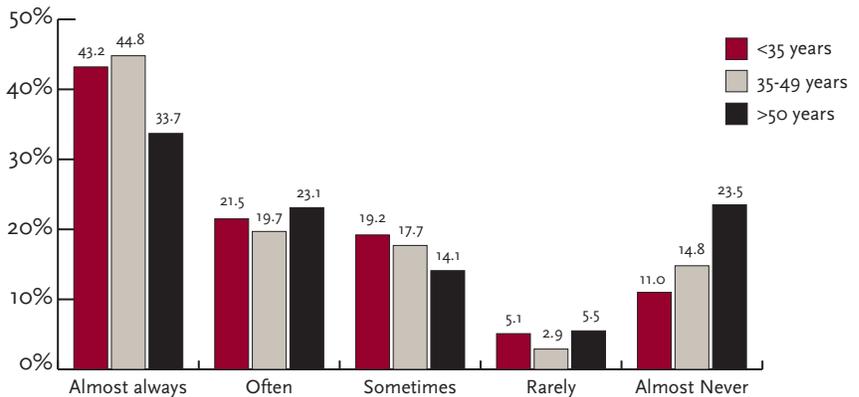
- Around 48.8% of Spanish workers felt they could almost always get assistance from colleagues if they asked. Nevertheless, a significant number (13.3%) reported almost never being able to get assistance from colleagues. As Figure 13 shows, older employees (39.0%) are less likely than employees at midlife (54.9%) and younger employees (50.7%) to report they almost always can get assistance from colleagues.⁶
- About 61.5% of Spanish employees reported that they could almost always or often get assistance from their bosses if they asked. As indicated in Figure 14, older employees (33.7%) are less likely than employees at midlife (44.8%) and younger employees (43.2%) to report they can almost always get assistance from their bosses.⁶
- Finally, more than two thirds of Spanish employees reported that they have very good friends at work.⁶

Figure 13: Responses to the question “How often do you get assistance from colleagues?” by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

Figure 14: Responses to the question “How often do you get assistance from superiors?” by age group



Source: EWCS (2005)⁶

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

MINDING THE GAP

This paper presents information about eight dimensions about employees' perspective to their quality of employment in Spain. This report suggests that employees' perspectives differ notably by age group and gender. Our findings about Spanish employees' perspectives are summarized as follows:

- Younger employees are more dissatisfied than employees at midlife and older employees with their salaries. Contrary to popular belief, women are more satisfied with their wages than men, although their salaries are lower.
- Only a small number of Spanish employees have received training paid for or provided by their employer or by themselves (if they are self-employed.) Spain should make a significant effort to promote more training for employees, particularly to middle aged and older employees.
- Among all working Spaniards, 21.4% reported stress, 11.4% reported irritability and 8.4% felt anxiety. Over the past few years, Spain partially improved one of its weakest points in regards to workplace safety, fatal accidents, though further progress is still necessary.
- More than 27% of Spanish employees almost always find their jobs to be intellectually demanding, while almost 40% report that they rarely or almost never find their jobs intellectually demanding.
- Spanish employees are more likely to work fixed start and finish times (69.4%) than the average EU27 employee (60.7%). Therefore, it could be beneficial for Spanish companies to implement more flexible work policies.
- In Spain, there are significant discrepancies between age group as well as gender and kind-of-work contract. 72.9% of Spanish male employees have an indefinite contract, while only 55.0% of Spanish female workers have such a contract. Similarly, older employees (80.1%) are more likely to have an indefinite contract than younger employees (51.4%). Spanish employers must address these discrepancies between men and women and older and younger employees.

Although Spain is an important world economy, there remains several key areas in the quality of employment that could be improved, particularly in the realm of workplace equality. On the other hand, Spain has done well to decrease fatal accidents and improve safety at work and must continue in these efforts. Finally, all employers should try to offer their employees the opportunities for meaningful and fulfilling work.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

Established in 2007 by the Sloan Center on Aging & Work, the Global Perspectives Institute is an international collaboration of scholars and employers committed to the expansion of the quality of employment available to the 21st-century multi-generational workforce in countries around the world.

The Global Perspectives Institute focuses on innovative and promising practices that might be adopted by employers and policy-makers.

The Institute's research, publications, and international forums contribute to:

- ▶ a deeper understanding of the employment experiences and career aspirations of employees of different ages who work in countries around the world;
- ▶ informed decision making by employers who want to be employers of choice in different countries; and
- ▶ innovative thinking about private-public partnerships that promote sustainable, high quality employment.

In addition to the Mind the Gap series, the Global Perspectives Institute publishes a Statistical Profile Series that highlights workforce demographic trends in different countries and a Global Policy Series that focuses on selected workforce policy in certain country contexts.

For more information on SCAW publications, please visit us online at:
www.bc.edu/agingandwork

The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College promotes quality of employment as an imperative for the 21st-century multi-generational workforce. We integrate evidence from research with insights from workplace experiences to inform innovative organizational decision making. Collaborating with business leaders and scholars in a multi-disciplinary dialogue, the Center develops the next generation of knowledge and talent management.

The Sloan Center on Aging & Work is grateful for the continued support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

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1 For example, see:

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Butler, A. B., Grzywacz, J. G., Bass, B. L., & Linney, K. D. (2005). Extending the demands-control model: A daily diary study of job characteristics, work-family conflict and work-family facilitation. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 78(2), 155-169.

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2 For example, see:

Allen, T. D., Eby, L. T., Poteet, M. L., Lentz, E., & Lima, L. (2004). Career benefits associated with mentoring for protégés: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(1), 127-136.

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3 Towers Perrin. (2005). *Winning strategies for a global workforce: Attracting, retaining and engaging employees for competitive advantage*. Stamford, CT: Towers Perrin. Retrieved from <http://www.towersperrin.com/tp/getwebcachedoc?webc=HRS/USA/2006/200602/GWS.pdf>

4 Great Places to Work Institute. *What makes a great place to work: Financial results*. Retrieved from <http://www.greatplacetowork.com/great/graphs.php>

5 Unfortunately, most of the research linking employer-of-choice strategies with business outcomes tends to focus on correlational relationships. Such studies do not definitively establish that being a “best place to work” causes positive organizational performance; indeed, it also might be true that high profits and strong financial growth cause higher employee engagement and foster perceptions that a particular workplace is an employer of choice.

- 6 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) (2005).
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- 7 National Institute of Statistics (INE). (2007). *Wage structure survey*. Retrieved February 12, 2010, from <http://www.ine.es/jaxi/menu.do?type=pcaxis&path=%2Ft22%2Fp133&file=inebase&L=1>
- 8 Becker, G.S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- 9 Eurostat defines a fatal accident at work as a discrete occurrence in the course of work with physical or mental harm, leading to death within one year of the accident. It excludes accidents on the way to or from work, occurrences having only a medical origin, and occupational diseases. To adjust for differences between the Member States in the distribution of workforce across the risk branches, a standardization is made giving each branch the same weight at national level as in the European Union total.
- 10 Eurostat. (2010). *Fatal accidents at work: incidence rate*. Retrieved March 5, 2010, from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database
- 11 National Institute of Statistics (INE). (2005). *Survey on the transition from education/training to labour market insertion*. Retrieved February 12, 2010, from <http://www.ine.es/jaxi/menu.do?L=1&type=pcaxis&path=%2Ft13%2Fp451&file=inebase>

Mind the Gap Series:

MTGO1: United States, Employee
MTGO1: United States, Employer
MTGO2: Japan, Employee
MTGO2: Japan, Employer
MTGO3: South Korea, Employee
MTGO3: South Korea, Employer
MTGO4: United Kingdom, Employee
MTGO4: United Kingdom, Employer
MTGO5: China, Employee
MTGO6: Singapore, Employer
MTGO7: Australia, Employer
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