Research paper.

How differently do men and women perceive “ideal work” and to what extent do their “ideals” coincide?

Introduction

There is a view in society that “ideal work” for a woman is that, connected with care taking and nursing, a job, that serves as the extension of the household activities. Whereas for a man the “ideal work” is that which is connected with career opportunities and high salary. In my research paper I will try to find out how true to reality this view is. Thus, my research question is - How differently do men and women perceive “ideal work?”

I argue that there are some criteria that everybody keeps in mind when he or she is looking for “ideal work”. On the basis of my research I would rather say that there is no sharp distinction in the way men and women perceive “ideal work”. The difference is based on individual characteristics of a person, rather than gender. Moreover, there is the number of important things which men and women put in the order of preference and very often the order of important things in minds of both coincide.

The structure of the paper will include several sections. I will begin with the literature review, where I will present the findings of different authors on the given issue. The next part of the work will deal with the data description, where I plan to speak about the interviewees and types of questions that were asked. The data analysis will be presented in the third section of the research paper. Here I plan to focus in detail on different criteria of “ideal work” for men and women. In the final section of the paper some concluding remarks will be given.
**Literature review**

It is already in the mid-sixties that work and working behavior of employees becomes an issue for a study by many researchers. Many of the authors agree that work plays an important role in the life of an individual and thus they examine different aspects of work. The problem that the researchers studied usually concerns motivation (e.g. Victor Vroom, 1964; R. M. Steers and L. M. Porter, 1991), attitude of employees to work and satisfaction at work (e.g. Yanowitch, 1985; H. Gardner, 2001). However, it is necessary to mention that analyzing the extent of satisfaction at work and proposing the techniques on improving the contentment of employees the researchers do not differentiate between male and female workers. The issue they mainly deal with is how to make occupation closer to the “ideal work”.

In my research paper I try to analyze how the stereotype of “ideal work” for a man and a woman coincides with the perception of contemporary young people about “ideal work”. This issue was mentioned in the book written by Christine L. Williams, who speaks about gender differences at work, namely men and women in non-traditional occupations and their attitude to the work they do. Surveying males and females in occupations non-traditional for them Williams examines the stereotypes of female and male work. Her study reveals that even in non-traditional occupations “sexes rarely engage in the same activities on the job” and it means that “certain specialties can be feminine-identified and others masculine-identified”(Christine L. Williams, 3). Williams finds out that the type of work that female-marines and male-nurses do conforms the expectations of society about the work stereotype. Unlike her I choose to survey people working in both traditional and non-traditional occupations and find out if the way young people today perceive “ideal work” corresponds to the stereotype of “ideal work” for males and females which exists in society.
Analyzing the studies and researches on the given issue I could find books only slightly related to the problem I study. Thus I can say that this issue has not been studied before. And in this respect I consider that the results of the research paper will be interesting and useful.

**Data description**

The research paper is based on the analysis of interviews. I interviewed 4 people men and women who are engaged in different fields of work. All of them are young people in their mid-twenties. I choose to focus on this category of people because they have already had working experience and are still young to take up high positions, so they have something to achieve yet. I also thought that people at the age between twenty and thirty still preserve some ‘youthful maximalism’ and they strive to achieve their “ideals” more eagerly.

I decided that in order to find differences between men’s and women’s ideal work it is necessary to interview a man and a woman working in male-dominated occupation, and a man and a woman working in female-dominated occupation. I expected that the ideals of men as well as women working in either female or male dominated occupations should differ.

The questions can be divided into sections. Some of the questions were concerned with the present working conditions of the interviewees, another set of questions dealt with the interests and expectations, the third set of questions presented imagined situations and the last number of questions aimed at finding the background of the respondents for a particular occupation.

The types of the questions that were asked are open-type ones. In my opinion this kind of questions gives more possibility to an interviewee to express his or her thoughts and ideas.
All of the interviews were conducted tete-a-tete, and respondents were not my friends or relatives. This gives us the possibility to presume that answers are honest. For all of the interviewees it was rather easy to speak about the work they have now and speculate about what occupation they would like to have. I found that respondents were eager to share their opinion about the issue.

Interviewing the respondents I expected that the stereotype about “ideal work” would correspond to how contemporary youth see it. Two first my informants conformed my expectations. However, the other two proved my expectations to be wrong. I was really surprised at the answers of the other two respondents. But thanks to them my research paper became more interesting and unusual.

**Analysis of data**

As I have already mentioned there are a number of criteria that both men and women consider to be of great importance at work. Unlike Steers and Porter who distinguish only four elements – the social function, which “provides opportunities for meeting new people”, “some form of reward in exchange for his or her service”, “source of status” and “personal meaning of work.” (Steers and Porter, 572-573) – based on the analysis of my interviews I tend to differentiate at least seven criteria which are significant for men and women at work. I accept that my criteria may fit into the categories offered by Steers and Porter (1986), however I feel it necessary to categorize more refined elements. These are interest in what you are doing, result of what you are working at, career opportunities, relations with co-workers, relations with boss, money and recognition by society. Let’s look at each of them in detail.

On the basis of my interviews I argue that *interest* is a very important element at work. Both men and women consider that without interest at work there is no motivation to
do anything and in order to do well at work one must have interest in what one is doing. Three respondents out of four have the same opinion about the role of interest at work. Olessya for example states:

…I don’t think that I could perform well if my job didn’t present any interest to me. I really think that work should bring you some pleasure and not to be a kind of suffering to you. But if you are not interested in what you are doing, what is the use then to do it? May be I am too young and haven’t worked enough yet, but I think that interest is the first thing you are looking for in the occupation.

Other informants also claim that this is “the most important element of work and must definitely be there.” So, interest can be put in the first pace in the order of precedence for both men and women. I dare to make such a conclusion from the answers of the interviewees. The fact that working experience of the respondents is not so long (it ranges from two to five years) let me assume that they did not lose the interest in work yet and work is not the way to escape the family routine for them.

The next thing interviewees consider to be important at work is result. The informants state that result serves as the stimulus to continue work. All of the respondents agree that if the project can not be finished within a reasonable time, it has to be forgotten. That is what for example Peter says about the result at work:

… if you are working at something and it takes you about five or ten years, you will lose interest in your work because it is a never-ending process. You go every day to your working place and see the same thing that will never be finished. At least not in this life. And what do you do? In the long run you will give it up.

Mendy shares his opinion and is wording her view the following way:

… when we sit in a pub with my friends I want to say – “I did it. I finished my project”. But how can I say so if I can not finish it. Now I have been working for already 6 months at the new computer program and we can not
finish it. Every time you think it is ready and you can launch it, some problem emerges. I can not work if there is no result…

Unlike my expectations, women also responded that result is vital for a person to be satisfied at work. Therefore I can conclude that result is also an important element of work.

Hard to believe, but career opportunities is important not only to men. Women whom I talked to say that promotion is very important for them because it does not let them lose interest in their work. When asked what promotion they expect in future interviewees answered that “the next higher position every three years would perfectly satisfy them.” I consider that women attribute an important role to career opportunities because they are not married yet and have no household duties to their husbands and children. I was interested if women changed their opinion about promotion if they were married. Because higher position presupposes more responsibilities. This time answers were different: one woman said that she would not refuse from a higher position even if she was married:

I think I will be able to combine all the roles at one time. For me promotion is very important, it stimulates you to go further and investigate something that you do not know yet. I know many examples of women who can combine family and work. I am no worse than they are. I think I can do it… [Mendy]

However, the second woman said that it would be difficult to balance two things – family and career and she would prefer to pay more attention to the family:

Now I am free, I mean I live with a boyfriend but we have no children and we do not plan them in the nearest future. I don’t know what I will prefer, to be a mother or to make a career. I think it is not so easy to decide what to choose but you will have to choose for sure. I think I will choose the family. There is the moment in the life of every girl when she understands that the family is important, more important than a career. The only difference is when this moment comes… [Olessya]
Analyzing the answers of the informants I may assume that when men and women are in the same position (not married and relatively free from household duties) career prospects is a very significant element of work for them.

The next thing I would like to focus on is money or wages. Contrary to the well-known opinion that “money is power” respondents whom I interviewed marked money only at the fourth stage of significance. The findings of the survey conducted by Vroom also contradict this folk wisdom, but support the results of my research. (Victor Vroom, 31-32). According to Vroom the decision to work usually has nothing to do with money or wage the employees receive. Four interviewees claim that now money is not so significant for them, because they have no grand plans to spend “huge sums of money on”.

Now my salary is not so big but I think after I gain some working experience I can demand for the increase in the salary. Now I don’t think I deserve it yet. And besides, I don’t know what I would spend all this money on. I think first you need to make a career and then the money will come with the respect of the people…[Tom]

It is interesting, however, to notice that women, not men were first to say that they would like to have higher salary.

I would not refuse if one-day boss invites me in to his office and says that my salary is increased because I showed myself as a very reliable and good worker. It would stimulate me to work harder, I think. [Mendy]

I wonder what could explain the fact that most respondents think that now their salary (which is not high according to their words) satisfies them. And I came to a conclusion that the explanation to this can be the fact that two of the respondents live with parents, the other two have financial support from their family and none of them is married yet.

Let’s now look at the attitude of both men and women towards relations with coworkers. In the book written by Steers and Porter I found that “workplace provides
opportunities for meeting new people and developing friendship.” (Steers and Porter, 573)

According to their survey many employees spend more time with colleagues than with their families. My research proves that the workplace is a place of socialization. However, not every respondent considers that relations with co-workers are so important for them.

… colleagues and good atmosphere are very important because you always have to communicate with colleagues and you need to have good relations with the team you are in. Before I found this job I had to give up the other option. I thought that the atmosphere is very tense in the first place where I applied to. I would not be able to work in a place where everybody is waiting for something bad to happen and where no one is helpful or eager to talk to you. I am glad I have good co-workers now. [Olessya]

Tom tends to agree with Olessya saying, “it is much easier to work in a team and with colleagues who will not ignore you or set you up”. In contrast to them, the second woman and the second man said that good relations with the boss are much more preferable, because the boss is the only person whom you depend on at your work:

I think that the quickest way to make your career is to establish good relations with your boss. You should show somehow that you have enough brain to become his successor in future or at least his deputy. I don’t think that anyone would dare to say something bad about you or to somehow hurt you if they know that you have good relations with your boss. It is important. Because he decides who will be in his team and who is not. [Peter]

I could survive in a collective where I have not such good relations with colleagues, but I think it would be impossible for me to work if the boss hated me. If I am to choose, I prefer to have good relations with the boss. [Mendy]

Based on the results of the interviews I should assume that people mark relations with co-workers and boss at different stages of importance in the force of their character. And this choice has nothing to do with gender.
Because some of the respondents claimed that they do not see their work useful without recognition of society I decided to mark it as one of the important criteria for an ideal job. I expected that men would pay more attention to recognition by society, because it somehow would support their status or would be the “source of self-esteem” (Steers and Porter, 573). However, unlike my expectations, Mendy finds this element as a necessary one in her work. She argues:

…I need the work I do to be recognized by society. I really mean what I say. I need it for myself, to know that I do well in the job. It is not just that the boss tells you that you did well or something like that… I really mean recognition by society. I want husband, my children and grandchildren to be proud of me, to be proud of what I did and will do…

Other informants, however, consider that the recognition of society is not so important and it can be an accompanying element but not the main one. Therefore, I tend to conclude that work and the status it brings to an individual mainly depends on the individual characteristics of a person.

When asked about the work stereotype „ideal” which exists in society both men and women said that it is the matter of individual choice rather than view of society. All the respondents agree that:

ideal work is understood by everybody in his or her own way and this „ideal” does not depend on or it is better to say can very often contradict the stereotype which exists. I think it becomes especially obvious in our modern world when girls want to have more power… [Peter]

It is interesting to note that when informants were asked about the work they would like to have no one mentioned duties or responsibilities they would agree to comply with. When they were asked directly about the responsibilities the answer I received can be summerized like this – „duties that you have to perform at work depend largely upon the type of work you do, but if you have all the elements listed above you will eagerly undertake responsibilities.”
Conclusion
Before I make any conclusion I consider it is necessary to mention that the survey is based on the answers of only four respondents. Besides, all of the respondents are of the same age, in their mid-twenties. So, the survey was conducted only on one group of people. And thus it would be wrong to generalize the findings of my research.

Nevertheless, based on the analysis of the research that I conducted I might conclude that women’s and men’s perception of “ideal work” coincide. Both perceive work as an important part of their life and for both “ideal work” includes some necessary criteria. The difference occurs when women and men try to put these criteria in the order of preference. However, the division of important criteria is likely to depend on individual characteristics of a person rather than sex difference. Besides, the existing stereotype of “ideal work” for men and women usually does not correspond to how contemporary women and men perceive “ideal work” for themselves. This is usually a matter of individual choice and perception.

Bibliography:


