

Job Quality and Job Satisfaction Among Casino Workers: The Case of Foxwoods

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Abstract

This article examines the quality of casino jobs at the largest Indian casino in the United States. It uses survey responses to measure how Foxwoods' employees evaluate various aspects of their jobs, and it also considers other aspects of job quality such as wages, fringe benefits, and wage inequality. The results are part of the growing literature that considers issues important to the gaming industry in the United States. **Key words:** job quality, job satisfaction, casino employees

In 1988, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act opened the door to the current proliferation of Indian casinos around the country. The Mashantucket Pequot of southeastern Connecticut opened the first Indian casino east of the Mississippi river on February 15, 1992. The casino now employs more than 10,000 people and is the largest casino in the Western Hemisphere. It is also perhaps the most profitable casino.

The Foxwoods Resort Casino is the second largest employer in Southeastern Connecticut. Located in New London County, near the rural towns of Ledyard, Preston, and North Stonington, it is surrounded by rural countryside and reachable only by two-lane highways. It is about 10 miles from the city of Norwich to its west, about 15 miles from the county's two other cities—New London and Groton—to its south, and near the Rhode Island border. Its prominence is increased by the effects of the decline of military spending in the region, which had the most negative impact on the area's largest employer, General Dynamics' Electric Boat division. From 1988 through 1992, the New London Labor Market Area lost 8,000

goods-producing jobs and added 1,400 service jobs (out of total employment that averaged 125,000 over those years). In 1993, these trends continued, with the loss of another 2,000 goods-producing jobs and the addition of 3,800 service jobs, many of them at Foxwoods. The only broad employment category to show a gain of more than 100 jobs over the five year period is Services (defined by Connecticut as including personal and business, health and other services; it does not include transportation, wholesale or retail trade, or finance, insurance and real estate). Since Foxwoods' employment had reached 7,000–8,000 by the end of 1993, *all* the net job creation in services can be attributed to it. Because of its prominence in the Amusement and Recreation Services category, however, state law prohibits release of Foxwoods' employment data, and employment in the entire category is not revealed in labor market data (Connecticut Labor Department, 1994a).

As defense cutbacks continue to reduce employment at Electric Boat in Groton, and as expansion plans of the Mashantucket Pequot proceed, it is likely that by 1997 the tribe will be the largest employer in Southeastern Connecticut and one of the largest in the state as well. Consequently, it is important to examine

some of the characteristics of these new jobs, not only because they are so crucial to that part of Connecticut, but also because Indian gaming—casinos in particular—is spreading so rapidly around the country.

Other studies of casino employees have looked at job satisfaction similarly to this study (Frey and Carns, 1988) or looked at the factors that contribute to employee satisfaction and motivation (Darder, 1993; Eade, 1994). None of those studies examined other aspects of the quality of casino jobs.

The dimensions of job quality include salary, fringe benefits, wage inequality, and job satisfaction (Rosenthal, 1989), of which the first three are most often mentioned in the job-quality debate that raged among economists during the 1980s. (See Bluestone and Harrison, 1988; Burtless, 1990; and Costrell, 1990.) Jencks, et al. (1988) add to those items a number of the other variables we use, but their intention was to formulate an entirely new scale for assessing job quality. Among the common items, however, are earnings, risk of job loss, and some aspects of autonomy. The questions asked of Foxwoods' employees enable us to evaluate their jobs compared to their previous ones and compared to most of the criteria suggested in the literature.

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Methodology

To answer questions about the quality of these new jobs, we conducted a survey of Foxwoods' employees in 1994. The survey was designed to be comparable to others widely discussed during the 1980s (see Mottaz, 1985; 1986; 1987)

and to allow us to examine various aspects of job quality that have been raised frequently (Burtless, 1990). We obtained the names and addresses of persons holding gaming licenses at Foxwoods from the Division of Special Revenue, Department of Revenue Services of the State of Connecticut. We took a systematic sample from the 6,164 people on this list—every third name—for a total of 2,053 names.

We received 615 surveys, 611 of which were usable. Another 43 surveys were returned as undeliverable by the Post Office. The response rate was 30.6 percent, representing usable surveys from about ten percent of the entire population of gaming license holders. Table 1 contains demographic information on our respondents. We believe that our response rate is good and that it has provided us with a sample that represents all but the management tier of employees at the casino (an anonymous caller to one of the authors stated that management would not be doing the survey).

Table 1. Demographic Data Describing Survey Respondents

AGE (N=610)	Percent
18-34	42.6
35-49	40.5
50-64	16.4
65 +	.5
EDUCATION (N=610)	
Less than high school	5.1
High school graduate	34.6
Some college	38.2
College graduate	17.2
Graduate work	4.9
SEX (N=610)	
Female	49.3
Male	50.7
RESIDENCE BEFORE TAKING JOB (N=611)	
Southeastern Connecticut	58.6
Rest of Connecticut	18.3
Rhode Island	15.1
Elsewhere	8.0
RESIDENCE AFTER TAKING JOB (N=609)	
Southeastern Connecticut	65.8
Rest of Connecticut	16.7
Rhode Island	16.4
Elsewhere	1.0
CASINO JOB CATEGORY (N=597)	
Dealer	29.8
Cashier, count clerk, other money handlers	20.4
Supervisory	9.2
Server	7.5
Security	7.2
Maintenance	6.7
Slot attendant/technician	5.4
Other	13.8

The Survey

The survey contained questions that asked for demographic data and information about the respondent's previous employment. For example, we asked where respondents lived before and after taking their Foxwoods jobs; about their previous and present job titles, pay, and benefits; and the reason for leaving previous employment. We also asked for the month and year in which respondents left their previous jobs and the month and year they started at Foxwoods. These questions allow us to compare annual incomes and fringe benefits of their most recent job to their Foxwoods job, to check on the locational effects of Foxwoods' hiring, and to estimate the effects of these jobs on unemployment.

We used a variety of scales to measure work satisfaction and its presumed causal factors: job characteristics (autonomy, significance, involvement), social aspects (supervisory and collegial), and rewards (promotion opportunities, pay equity, fringe benefits, job security, and working conditions). These correspond closely to those suggested by Locke (1976), Mottaz (1985; 1986; 1987), Katz and Van Maanen (1977), and Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater (1988). The questions dealing with aspects of the job are in a four-point Likert-type format with answers ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The questions also fall into two more general headings: *intrinsic rewards*, such as task involvement, task autonomy, and task significance, that inhere in the nature of the work; and *extrinsic rewards*, such as social and other rewards, that arise from the context in which the individual works (Mottaz, 1987).

The three job characteristics scales (involvement, autonomy, and significance) consist of seven questions each and have Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of .84, .82, and .82, respectively. (Cronbach's alpha is a measure of scale reliability. Ranging between zero and one, with higher numbers indicating more reliability, it measures the internal consistency of questions that attempt to measure the same thing (Anastasi, 1998).) For example, *involvement* includes questions asking about sense of accomplishment, whether the job is a self-rewarding experience, and whether the person has an opportunity to use his or her abilities and skills. *Autonomy* is based on the opportunity to exercise one's own judgment, ability to make decisions, exert control over daily tasks, and the ability to make changes in their tasks. *Significance* is affected by whether the work is seen as important and worthwhile, whether it makes a significant contribution to the organization, whether the respondent understands how his or her work fits in with the work of others, and whether the person's work counts for very much.

In the social rewards category, there are two work context variables: supervisory assistance (four items) and coworker assistance (four items). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for these variables are .76 and .84, respectively. *Supervisory assistance* depends on whether supervisors are helpful, can be depended upon, expect too

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much, and leave workers without supervision. *Coworker assistance* relies on judgments about whether coworkers are friendly, helpful, and supportive.

In the other rewards category are working conditions (four items), pay equity (two items), opportunities for advancement (two items), job security (two items), and adequacy of fringe benefits (two items). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for these variables are .72, .64, .67, .82, and .56, respectively. (The relatively low reliability scores for pay equity, advancement, and adequacy of fringe benefits make these categories less useful than those categories of questions with higher Cronbach's alpha scores. Mottaz (1987) found much higher reliability for the same sets of questions: .83, .82, .73, respectively.) *Working conditions* includes judgments about whether adequate time and resources are provided to do the job, whether the person knows what is expected of her or him, and an assessment of whether Foxwoods is a good place to work. *Pay equity* is based on the degree of satisfaction with one's salary and the comparability of one's salary with others doing the same job. There are two questions that make up *promotion opportunities*; one asks about them directly and the other asks whether the person believes he or she is treated unfairly. *Job security* asks whether the respondent believes that he/she could be fired or lose the job at any time. The *fringe benefits* variable depends on evaluation of the adequacy of current benefits and a comparison of present benefits to the benefits of the respondent's previous job.

Table 2. Income and Fringe Benefit Gains/Losses as Result of Taking Foxwoods Job

	Annual Income		Fringe Benefits	
	% Gained ≥ \$2500	% Lost ≥ \$2500	% Better	% Worse
All Respondents ^a (N=577)	54.4	29.0	71.4	8.0
Former Military Contractor ^b Employees (N=84)	26.2	56.0	43.7	18.4
Other, Non-Military Contractor Employees (N=462)	59.3	23.4	77.4	5.9
Left Previous Job Voluntarily (N=410)	59.9	24.8	77.7	7.0
Left Previous Job Involuntarily (N=159)	40.1	35.7	60.4	10.1

^aFormer military personnel, employees of the Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC), former homemakers, and students are excluded from these data, as are respondents who did not answer some or all of the questions that yield the table.

^bExcludes former NUWC employees.

Results

Earnings and Fringe Benefits

We found that, overall, most Foxwoods' employees had improved both their incomes and fringe benefits compared to their prior situations. As Table 2 shows, about 54 percent of respondents had their annual incomes rise by more than \$2,500, and 71 percent got better fringe benefits as a result of changing jobs. Concern over the loss of defense-related jobs caused us to look more closely at the data to attempt comparisons between defense-contractor jobs and Foxwoods' jobs.

An interesting finding is the differential experiences of those who left defense contractor jobs and those who left jobs in non-defense-related firms (see Table 2). On a salary basis, Foxwoods' jobs compare unfavorably to the defense-related jobs, with the majority of respondents having their incomes fall by at least \$2,500 per year, while the majority of all other categories experienced some gain. With respect to fringe benefits, the picture is better: about 44 percent previously in defense-related jobs experienced some improvement, with improvement being the experience of an overwhelming majority of all those who had previously held non-defense-related jobs. Table 2 also shows significant differences in outcomes for those who left their prior jobs "voluntarily" compared to those who had been laid off, anticipated layoffs, or were fired. Obviously, one reason to leave a job voluntarily is to improve one's pay or fringe benefits.

One context in which to place Foxwoods' wages is the local average annual wage. The Connecticut Labor Department calculates an overall average annual wage for the New London Labor Market Area of \$28,839 in 1993. The average annual wage for manufacturing jobs was \$38,038 (Connecticut Labor Department, 1994b). For the 600 respondents who answered this question, the average wage, including tips, was \$21,339. (Foxwoods gives annual bonuses to its employees, but our figures do not include the bonus amount.) This figure also falls below the average wage for all service occupations in the New London Labor Market Area, \$24,670. However, it is important to keep in mind that our data do not include any management salaries, but do include respondents who are not only part-time workers but also workers at the bottom of the job hierarchy at Foxwoods.

While these results support the contention that many service jobs are inadequate replacements for disappearing manufacturing jobs—the deindustrialization hypothesis (Bluestone, 1990)—they also have clearly been a benefit to those who got them. Our findings suggest that the region should focus its economic development efforts on retaining and attracting jobs in the higher paying sectors of its economy rather than the entertainment services sector that has produced the recent

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growth. However, with the construction in 1996 of a new casino and resort complex just ten miles or so from Foxwoods, it would appear that the growth of this type of service job will outstrip the growth of better-paying jobs.

The pay of Foxwoods' jobs is also behind the pay of comparable jobs in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. According to a local newspaper report of research done by Local 217 of the Hotel, Restaurant and Bartenders Union, many Foxwoods' workers are paid up to \$3.00 to \$4.00 less per hour than their counterparts in Las Vegas and Atlantic City (Collins, 1994). This information arose as part of the union's efforts to organize Foxwoods' employees.

Inequality of Earnings

The incomes of our respondents range from about \$5,000 to \$52,000, and using two different measures of inequality, our respondents' incomes are more equally distributed than are incomes in the overall population. We calculated ratios of the top and bottom quintiles to the middle quintile, as well as the variance of the log of incomes. If all incomes were equal, the ratios reported in Table 3 would equal 1. However, there are disparities between the middle quintile and both the top and bottom quintiles, as Table 3 shows. The average worker in the highest paid quintile makes 1.8 times the average salary of the middle group of employees, and the average person in the lowest paid group makes about 60 percent of what the average middle-group person earns. The table also shows that inequality among men and women is no different from the overall degree of inequality.

Table 3. Earnings Inequality Measured by Quintile Ratios and the Variance of the Log of Income

	T/M ^a	B/M ^b	VARLNINC ^c
All Respondents (N=600)	1.83	.61	.162
Men (N=305)	1.78	.60	.162
Women (N=294)	1.82	.62	.157

^aRatio of the average earnings in the top quintile to the average earnings in the middle quintile.

^bRatio of the average earnings in the bottom quintile to the average earnings in the middle quintile.

^cVariance of the log of annual total income.

Note: One respondent did not indicate her/his sex.

Part of the reason for these results is the truncated nature of our respondents' incomes, which leads to substantially smaller amounts of inequality than found in all wage earners (Burtless, 1990) or among Entertainment and Recreation Services workers (Bluestone, 1990). In contrast to the results shown in Table 3, Burtless found a top quintile-to-middle quintile ratio of 2.41 for male earners and 2.68 for female earners in 1986. He also found that the bottom quintile to middle quintile ratios were .14 and .12, respectively, roughly one-fifth of those for Foxwoods' employees (Burtless, 1990, p.116). Bluestone found that the variance

of the log of earnings (a measure of the dispersion of earnings) among entertainment sector workers in 1987 was 2.61 (Bluestone, 1990), substantially higher than among Foxwoods' employees.

Job Satisfaction

The data presented in Table 4 allows us to compare our results for individual variables with those of two studies featuring broader cross-sections of workers (Mottaz, 1985; Gruenberg, 1980). What we find is that our respondents are less satisfied with their jobs and rate both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors less favorably than did workers in the two other studies. For example, Gruenberg found that overall satisfaction among a sample of American workers living in metropolitan areas was 1.77, but he used somewhat different questions to determine satisfaction (Gruenberg, 1980, Table 1). The mean of our respondents' responses (2.20) is still on the side of satisfaction (<2.5), but is not as strongly positive as Gruenberg's sample.

Table 4. Responses to Job-satisfaction Questions and Overall Job Satisfaction

Variable ^a	All Workers		Dealers		All Others	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Autonomy	577	2.59	167	2.71 ^b	410	2.54
Involvement	584	2.47	175	2.41	409	2.50
Significance	582	1.98	171	1.90 ^b	411	2.02
Coworker Assistance	598	1.93	176	1.79 ^b	422	1.98
Supervisor Assistance	601	2.19	175	1.97 ^b	426	2.28
Fringe Benefits	596	1.63	174	1.65	422	1.61
Job Security	604	2.50	177	2.37 ^b	427	2.55
Pay Equity	598	2.31	175	2.33	423	2.30
Promotion Opportunity	596	2.26	178	2.04 ^b	418	2.35
Working Conditions	596	2.02	175	1.85 ^b	421	2.09
Job Satisfaction	600	2.20	178	1.93 ^b	422	2.31

^aMeans could range from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating the most positive assessment.

^bMean is different from the All Others mean at the .025 level of significance.

The number of responses differs in each case because of missing responses.

Mottaz used virtually the same questions and scale that we did, but he reported his results for different job groupings. However, three of his five groupings reported higher satisfaction (scores < 2) than did our respondents, and only blue-collar workers had lower mean satisfaction than the mean of our sample. The first three items in Table 4 are intrinsic rewards, and the weighted average of their means is 2.35. The next seven items are extrinsic rewards, for which the weighted average is 2.12. It appears that Foxwoods' workers tend toward being satisfied with their jobs, since their overall assessment is 2.20 (with 2.5 equal to the mid-point of the scale, numbers closer to 1 indicate favorable ratings). However, those jobs do not offer as much intrinsically as they do extrinsically. This is in sharp

contrast to Mottaz's (1985) results, in which intrinsic rewards outrank extrinsic rewards for most of the categories.

It is not surprising that casino employees would be less autonomous (2.59) than teachers, factory workers, service workers, hospital workers, and even the police officers whom Mottaz surveyed. As others have noted, by their very nature, casinos subject many of their employees, especially dealers and money-handlers (who make up 50.2 percent of our respondents) to high degrees of supervision and oversight (Frey and Carns, 1988; Skolnick, 1978). Even though they do not rate their jobs particularly well on involvement (2.47), we had expected the excitement and relative novelty (most workers had been on the job less than a year) of the casino environment to lead to a higher score on this aspect of their jobs. However, as Frey and Carns found, Las Vegas dealers thought their jobs were routine and boring. Darder (1993) found that "Interesting work," which is similar to our Involvement variable, ranked sixth or seventh in importance to dealers out of ten job characteristics. Similarly, in looking at job satisfiers, Eade (1994) found that the highest intrinsic factor ranked fourth after extrinsic factors.

Given the findings about the overall improvement in the quality of fringe benefits received by our respondents when they changed jobs, it is not at all surprising that they are most favorable to that aspect of their jobs (1.63). Those who left their jobs for non-voluntary reasons, however, have a significantly lower (but still positive) assessment of their fringe benefits (1.77 compared to 1.57 for those who voluntarily left their prior jobs). The importance of fringe benefits echoes the

findings of Eade (1994), who found that medical insurance was the second most important satisfier to casino employees.

Co-worker assistance is rated highly (1.93), which we suspect is related to the lack of inequality among Foxwoods'

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workers, as well as to the newness of their jobs and the shared experience of being in at the start of a new venture. Our respondents are squarely on the fence—at the midpoint of our scale (2.5)—with respect to involvement and job security.

We had expected respondents to rate the risk of losing their jobs much lower, since there was no excess supply of dealers in Connecticut in 1994 (Frey and Carns report that there was an oversupply of dealers in Las Vegas in 1988), and since the prospect of competition from other casinos in the region—nearby in Connecticut, and also in Massachusetts and Rhode Island—was becoming better known at the time of our survey. That competition can be expected to increase the value of the skills that dealers and money handlers in particular have learned. Darder (1993) and Eade (1994) found that job security ranked quite high in importance to casino employees, with the respondents in Darder's survey ranking it second, and those in Eade's survey ranked it third in importance.

We also asked whether the respondent would support unionization at Foxwoods, and 62.5 percent of those (N=560) who answered the question would *NOT* support a union. And since most (58.9 percent) believe that job disputes are handled fairly, the environment in 1993–94 does not seem to have engendered the substantial discontent or insecurity at Foxwoods that Frey and Carns (1988) found in Las Vegas.

Looking more closely at how dealers might differ in their assessments of their jobs, we found that dealers are more satisfied, believe they have more job security and promotion opportunities, feel better about both their supervisors and their co-workers, have lower autonomy, and rate working conditions better than other employees. The results shown in Table 4 are only partially surprising, given what Frey and Carns (1988) discovered. The close supervision given to dealers can account for the lower autonomy score for dealers, and the rotation on and off the tables, a form of job sharing, could account for a better co-worker assistance rating by dealers. Their higher overall satisfaction might be attributable to better pay, including tips. The chance to move from dealing to pit boss might also help explain the better evaluation of promotion opportunities. Surprisingly, even though outsiders might consider being a dealer the most interesting casino job, the dealers rate this work no better (on involvement) than other employees rate theirs.

Frey and Carns (1988) found that dealers did not rate their jobs highly on autonomy or other intrinsic factors, but that extrinsic factors were not rated highly either. Overall, the dealers were satisfied with their jobs, but, like our respondents, not strongly so. Their data support the view that casinos operate with a suspicious mentality, leading to constant oversight of employees to deter cheating and theft (see also Skolnick, 1978).

Darder's (1993) study of dealers in Las Vegas did not ask respondents to evaluate their jobs but rather the importance of various characteristics of the job. Consequently, it is not possible to compare job satisfaction among dealers in Las Vegas to the dealers at Foxwoods at the same time, i.e., the early 1990s.

Residence of Employees

A very high percentage (92 percent) of our respondents lived "locally," that is, either in Connecticut or Rhode Island. Only 7 percent of them changed their residence from outside the region to inside it, defining the region as Connecticut and Rhode Island (see Table 1). Furthermore, almost 26 percent of our respondents had been laid off from work or left their jobs because of predicted layoffs. Another one-third of them left their previous job for better pay or benefits at Foxwoods. Fully half of those answering the survey had been unemployed for at least four months when they started work at Foxwoods, although this number includes those who were trained by Foxwoods after leaving their previous jobs. We view these numbers as an important plus for a region that depended and continues to rely heavily on defense jobs; the new jobs went to people in the region, rather than attracting new residents to the region.

Conclusion

In a region that has already lost thousands of well-paying defense jobs and expects to lose thousands more over the next four years, the arrival of a new employer offering an almost equal number of new jobs is big news. Our findings indicate that those new jobs are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the pay and fringe benefits associated with them are improvements over their previous jobs for a majority of Foxwoods' employees; they value what their co-workers contribute to the job environment; and the existence of this major employer has absorbed

thousands of people who might otherwise be without work. On the other hand, the pay including tips is below the level in the lost defense jobs and below the average earnings in the region. The new jobs went to local residents, many of whom had been unemployed, but the jobs lack intrinsic rewards and do not reassure their occupants about their long-term prospects.

We are quite cautious about the extent to which we believe our results can be extrapolated to any other new Indian or non-Indian casinos. The labor market in southeastern Connecticut is different from others where casinos may arise, so our respondents may not represent those in any other of the many places casinos exist or may arise. Non-Indian casinos may operate differently from Foxwoods, leading to different reactions among workers to supervisors and other job characteristics. Because Foxwoods is a pioneer, its success will influence the development of other New England casinos, which may affect the conditions under which other employees work. Furthermore, competition among regional casinos may also positively affect the workplace environment.

We believe there is a strong need for further evaluation of casino jobs, both those that have been in existence for many years in Nevada and Atlantic City and those that are now arising in greater numbers in Indian casinos. Those studies would join other investigations of the economic and social impacts of casinos (for example, Goodman, 1994; Sternlieb and Hughes, 1983) as vital contributions to the literature about the industry which is an important part of what *Business Week* has called "The Entertainment Economy" (*Business Week*, March 14, 1994).

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