

Human Resource Issues in the Gaming Industry

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Abstract

The gaming industry is currently experiencing unprecedented growth and with this growth, a myriad of business concerns have emerged. Perhaps the single greatest priority is to understand the needs of our most important industry asset: our employees. As with any service business, success is predicated on the quality of the product delivered by workers and employee performance often has its roots and can be traced to the degree of job satisfaction and training realized by the workforce.

This article examines job satisfiers and training needs identified by gaming employees working in the United States as determined through a national survey. The responses to the survey should help gaming executives, human resource directors, and training directors to focus on key issues paramount to workers in the casino entertainment industry.

Introduction

As the gaming and casino entertainment industry continues to develop and as competition within the industry intensifies, more traditional managerial concepts, approaches and principles are being applied by gaming operators. For years, due to a lack of significant competition and inherent favorable house odds and percentages built into the games, some operators were afforded the luxury of running their casinos at less than maximum efficiency and often times were successful *in spite of themselves*. Typically,

employees were regarded as payroll liabilities, a necessary evil who were told to "dummy-up and deal" and frequently secured employment based not on top qualifications or business acumen but rather "juice"....whom they knew versus what they knew. The human resource office (then referred

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to as the personnel office) was located in the catacombs of the casino, by the time office and usually next to the trash compactor on the loading dock to keep the "riff-raff" (aka job applicants) from entering the property. Employees working in the personnel office

were viewed as paper shufflers who created mountains of unnecessary paperwork and no one viewed personnel as a viable career path. In fact, to quote Dirty Harry Callahan, personnel was for "idiots" (expletive deleted).

Today, the Human Resource (HR) function has become an integral ingredient in the success formula for gaming operations. Employee training and motivation have become high managerial priorities and employees are being asked to participate in the business as team members and/or are being empowered to "own" their jobs. Virtually every large casino operation has developed a management succession plan to ensure the long term stability of the business and allow for growth within the organization.

With this in mind, the UNLV International Gaming Institute conducted a national survey of gaming employees focusing on two key HR issues: training needs and job satisfiers.

Methodology

Instrument Design

The primary goal of the survey was to ascertain casino/gaming employee perceptions of the type of training needed to enhance their career growth and which benefits or job satisfiers were regarded as most important. A survey instrument was designed to capture this information as well as other data that could lead to a more in-depth analysis of the responses.

The instrument was entitled, "The University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) International Gaming Institute's Survey of Gaming/Casino Employees" and began with a statement that respondents were not to reveal their identity. The actual survey instrument included the following seven questions related to the demographics and work conditions of respondents: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) working shift (days, swing, grave), (4) if the employee worked weekends, (5) department or job title, (6) current wage/salary, and (7) place of employment (e.g. riverboat, Nevada casino, New Jersey casino, Native-American tribal casino, etc.)

Tables 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the three main questions of the survey. Table 1 pertains to training assessment while Table 2 and 3 deal with job satisfiers. As can be noted, each question began with a listing of selection criteria accompanied by benchmarks (1-5) intended to determine those items deemed most important or desired by respondents. Initially, employees could select multiple items as a "number one" but then were asked to prioritize their "first training choice" and the "5 most important" (job satisfiers).

Table 1. Question on Training Assessment in Gaming Industry

Question: "Using a scale of 1-5, rank the following types of training you feel would be the most needed to prepare you for a desired promotion or transfer within the casino organizational structure."

Scale:

- 1 = Most needed
- 2 = Very needed
- 3 = Needed
- 4 = Not so needed
- 5 = Not needed at all

- _____ Technical casino skills (learning to deal 21, etc.)
- _____ Knowledge of internal control procedures/gaming regulations
- _____ Written communication skills
- _____ Oral communication skills
- _____ Accounting/financial analysis skills
- _____ Administrative/management development skills
- _____ Human resource/motivational skills
- _____ Customer service skills

- ___ Computer skills
- ___ Clerical skills (typing, etc.)
- ___ English language skills
- ___ Other (specify)

Which of the above would be your first training choice? _____

Table 2. Question on Perceived Importance of Work Conditions

QUESTION: "Rank the items below using the following scale:"

- 1 = Extremely Important to Me
- 2 = Very Important to Me
- 3 = Important to Me
- 4 = Less Important to Me
- 5 = Not Important At All

- ___ Wages
- ___ Health/Medical/Hospital Insurance
- ___ Participating in decisions that directly affect me
- ___ Pension/Retirement
- ___ Personal recognition by management for work/effort
- ___ Promotion/Transfer opportunities
- ___ Educational assistance program
- ___ Smoke-free work environment
- ___ Fair disciplinary policy
- ___ Days of the week I work
- ___ Shift that I work
- ___ Bonuses
- ___ Job Security
- ___ Being trusted to do my job without oversupervision/ownership of my job
- ___ Quality meals provided by the employer
- ___ Amount of vacation time
- ___ Number of paid holidays
- ___ Profit-Sharing
- ___ Confidential help from employer with personal problems
- ___ Being kept informed of new or pending company changes
- ___ Periodic, formal performance evaluations
- ___ Daycare facility at work
- ___ Other (specify) _____

Table 3. Question on Ranking of Job Satisfiers

QUESTION: "Based on your rankings for the question in Table 2, list by top priority, the five (5) most important items to you. *The 5 most important items to me as found in Table 2 are*: (i.e. your #1 answer would be the most important to you, your #2 answer would be next important and so forth.)"

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Survey Distribution

Sixty-eight casino-style gaming operations were randomly selected for participation in the survey. Operations with sizeable staff were sent 100 surveys while smaller casinos were mailed 50 surveys. All selected properties were contacted to secure the name of either the director of human resources or the director of casino operations. It was believed a higher response factor would result if the surveys were forwarded in a more personalized manner.

A letter was inserted in each mailing indicating that the responses from employees as well as the properties would be recorded anonymously. The letter also asked that the surveys be distributed throughout all departments of the casino to ensure a broad based response.

A total of 5,750 surveys were mailed to the following gaming jurisdictions:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Nevada | 3,100 surveys |
| New Jersey | 700 surveys |
| Riverboats | 650 surveys |
| Native American Gaming Operations ... | 1,300 surveys |

Several points of clarification are needed. First, although Nevada casinos represented the bulk of mailings, this should not be construed as strictly Las Vegas casinos. Contacted Nevada gaming operations included casinos in Las Vegas, Laughlin, Reno, Lake Tahoe, Sparks, Jean, Incline Village, Stateline and Mesquite. Second, all contacted New Jersey casinos were located in Atlantic City. Finally, solicited Native American Gaming Operations and Riverboats were located throughout the United States.

Survey Responses

A total of 869 usable surveys were returned. Workers at Nevada casinos represented the largest number of respondents (524); Native-American tribal casino employees placed second with 160; and New Jersey and riverboat workers recorded 108 and 77 responses respectively. Females represented 54% of the respondents. The respondents represented the following age groups: ages 21-30 - 24%; ages 31-40 - 34%; ages 41-50 - 26%; ages 51-60 - 13%; and ages over 60 - 3%. The job categories of the respondents were broken down as follows: table games - 401 respondents (46.1%); slots - 240 respondents (27.6%); cage workers - 48 respondents (5.5%); Keno workers - 34 (3.9%); casino marketing - 11 respondents (1.2%); and other or related casino departments (e.g. surveillance, security, cocktails, etc.) - 135 (15.5%). Table 4 provides a further breakdown of job types by survey respondents.

Table 4. Job Types by Survey Respondents**1. Table Games**

| Job Title | No. of Respondents |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dealer | 257 |
| Supervisor | 139 |
| Pit Clerks | 3 |
| Shill | 1 |
| Other | 1 |
| Total | 401 (46.1% of total) |

2. Slot Employees

| Job Title | No. of Respondents |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Floorpersons | 53 |
| Supervisors | 48 |
| Change Persons | 48 |
| Slot Booth Cashiers | 27 |
| Slot Mechanics | 20 |
| Slot Club Attendants | 14 |
| Slot Carousel Attendants | 11 |
| Hard Count | 9 |
| Slot Hosts | 8 |
| Slot Soft Count | 2 |
| Total | 240 (27.6% of total) |

3. Cage Employees

| Job Title | No. of Respondents |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Cashiers | 26 |
| Supervisors | 13 |
| Credit Administration | 7 |
| Total | 48 (5.5% of total) |

4. Keno Employees

| Job Title | No. of Respondents |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Writers | 17 |
| 2nd/3rd person/assistant | 7 |
| Supervisors | 7 |
| Runners | 3 |
| Total | 34 (3.9% of total) |

5. Casino Marketing

| Job Title | No. of Respondents |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| Casino Host | 7 |
| Supervisors | 4 |
| Total | 11 (1.2% of total) |

Assessment of Training Needs

In response to the question regarding the perceived importance of training needs (Table 1), "Knowledge of internal control procedures/gaming regulations" ranked number one with a frequency rate of 163. In other words, 163 respondents said this would be their first training choice. Table 5 provides a ranking of training needs/assessment as indicated by the survey respondents.

Table 5. Training Needs Assessment by Gaming Industry Employees

| Type of Training | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Knowledge of Internal Controls/ Gaming Regulations | 163 | 22.5% |
| Administrative/Management Development Skills | 138 | 19.1% |
| Computer Skills | 123 | 17.0% |
| Technical Casino Skills | 101 | 14.0% |
| Customer Service Skills | 61 | 8.4% |
| Oral Communication Skills | 44 | 6.1% |
| Accounting/Financial Analysis Skills | 33 | 4.6% |
| Human Resource/Motivational Skills | 31 | 4.3% |
| Written Communication Skills | 10 | 1.4% |
| English Language Skills | 6 | .8% |
| Clerical Skills | 2 | .3% |
| Other | 11 | 1.4% |
| No Response | 146 | |

Responses by gaming jurisdictions revealed some deviations to the overall industry trend. Of the 96 New Jersey casino workers who responded to this question, 23 people chose "Administrative/Management Development Skills" as their first training choice with "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations" ranking second (19 responses) and Computer Skills (15 responses) third. A total of 123 workers at Native-American tribal casinos answered this question and "Administrative/Management Development Skills" ranked as the number one training choice (30 responses). "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations" ranked second (21 responses) and "Computer Skills" (16 responses) was third.

Sixty-six riverboat employees answered this question choosing "Knowledge of Internal Controls/Gaming Regulations" as the number one training choice (19 responses), with "Technical Casino Skills" and "Administrative/Management Development Skills" tied for second with 11 responses each. Of the 438 Nevada workers who answered this

question, 104 (23.7%) selected "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations" number one, 83 workers chose "Computer Skills" second and "Administrative/Management Development Skills" ranked third (74 responses).

As previously indicated, table game and slot department employees composed the largest percentage of all respondents. Table game employees viewed the top four training needs as (1) "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures" (28.4% of employees who answered this question) (2) "Administrative/Management Development Skills" (18.7%) (3) "Technical Casino Skills" (16.4%) (4) "Computer Skills" (12.9%). No other item received more than 8% of the total tabulation. Slot department employees ranked their needs as follows:

1. Computer Skills (21.2%)
2. Administrative/management development skills (19.2%)
- 3 Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations (17.2%)
4. Technical Casino Skills (12.6%)

All other training selections ranked below ten percent. Females at riverboats operations, Nevada and New Jersey casinos all ranked "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations" as their number one training need and "Administrative/Management Development Skills" as number two. Females at Native-American tribal casinos ranked "Administrative/Management Development Skills" number one and "Oral Communication Skills" number two. "Accounting/Financial Analysis Skills" was ranked as the least needed training by *all females in all reporting districts*.

Males at riverboat operations, Nevada casinos and Native-American tribal casinos ranked "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations" as their number one training need while male employees in New Jersey felt "Administrative/Management Development Skills" was most important. Male riverboat and Nevada casino workers listed "Customer Service Skills" number two; males in New Jersey casinos ranked "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations" as their second choice and "Administrative/Management

Table game and slot department employees composed the largest percentage of all respondents.

Development Skills" achieved a second place ranking according to males at Native-American tribal casinos. The least desired training by male employees?: "English Language Skills" with the exception of New Jersey workers who ranked "Oral Communication Skills" last.

No major deviations occurred per age groupings. All age groups ranked "Knowledge of Internal Control Procedures/Gaming Regulations" as most important statistically. Older workers (i.e. 51-over 60) ranked "Technical Casino Skills" and "Clerical Skills" as their two least training needs.

Assessment of Job Satisfiers

The second goal of the survey was to determine job satisfiers most desired by casino workers. The first question (Table 2) asked employees to identify job satisfiers deemed extremely important to them allowing multiple items to be ranked "number one." The second question (Table 3) then created a forced distribution ranking requiring employees to prioritize their top five job satisfiers. The results proved quite interesting.

In response to the first question, (Table 2) employees were asked to place a "1" next to any/all items deemed "Extremely Important." Thus, a perfect score (i.e. all employees selecting the same item as number one) would have resulted in a "1.00 Frequency Response" factor. Therefore, job satisfiers with the lowest frequency response factor should be viewed as most desired (i.e. lower is more important). Choices are listed below.

Table 6. Job Satisfiers Among Gaming Industry Employees

| Job Satisfiers | Frequency Response Factor |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Medical Insurance | 1.48 |
| 2. Wages | 1.56 |
| 3. Job Security | 1.57 |
| 4. Being Trusted to Do My Job Without Oversupervision/Ownership of my job | 1.81 |
| 5. Pension/Retirement | 1.92 |
| 6. Participating in Decisions That Directly Affect Me | 1.92 |
| 7. Fair Disciplinary Policy | 2.00 |
| 8. Personal Recognition of Effort | 2.20 |
| 9. Promotion/Transfer Opportunities | 2.27 |
| 10. Information on Changes in the Company | 2.29 |
| 11. Profit Sharing | 2.34 |
| 12. Bonuses | 2.35 |
| 13. Shift That I Work | 2.37 |
| 14. Amount of Vacation Time | 2.38 |
| 15. Number of Paid Holidays | 2.57 |
| 16. Periodic Formal Evaluations | 2.66 |
| 17. Days of the Week I Work | 2.74 |
| 18. Educational Assistance Program | 2.86 |
| 19. Help with Personal Problems | 2.96 |
| 20. Quality of Meals | 3.06 |
| 21. Smoke Free Work Environment | 3.43 |
| 22. Daycare Facility at Work | 3.73 |

Medical Insurance received the highest overall Frequency Response Factor albeit Wages and Job Security ranked a close second. However, when respondents were asked to select (Table 3) *the number one job satisfier....Wages pulled an astounding 405 of the 869 responses (47%)*. Medical Insurance then came in second (18%) while Job Security ranked third (11%). It is interesting to note that *no other job satisfier* received more than 4% of the vote.

There are a number of other general observations that can be concluded from the results based on age and gender:

1. Younger employees ranked promotion and transfer opportunities as more important than older employees.
2. Medical Insurance was equally important to *all* groups.
Employees aged 21-30 recorded a 1.53 Frequency Response Factor; employees 31-40 recorded a 1.41 Frequency Response Factor; employees 41-50 recorded a 1.47 Frequency Response Factor; employees 51-60 recorded a 1.50 Frequency Response Factor and employees over 60 years of age recorded a 1.40 Response Factor. Female employees indicated a slightly higher importance rate regarding medical insurance than their male counterparts in all but one age grouping.
3. Pension/Retirement was deemed more important to males and females in the 31-60 age group than males and females in the 21-30 and over 60 age groups.

4. Educational assistance programs were viewed as being more important to workers aged 21-40 versus those in the 41 to over 60 age bracket. Generally, females rated this item more significant than males.
5. A fair disciplinary policy received high marks by gender rating and employees aged 41-50 found it especially important.
6. A smoke free work environment was not deemed a high priority when analyzed by age indicators and gender; females aged 41-50 ranked this as the second least important job satisfier, next to daycare facilities at work.
7. Generally, as the age of the worker increased, days of the week worked became less important. Conversely, although preference for shifts worked was viewed as an "important-to-very important" job satisfier by all employees, no major deviations occurred by gender or age segments.
8. Bonuses were viewed equally important by all employees.
9. Daycare facilities at work received the lowest overall rating. Females, 21-30, gave this item the best rating but the importance of daycare dropped *dramatically* with each subsequent age group.
10. Personal recognition by management for work/effort was viewed as "very important - extremely important" by males over 60 years of age.
11. Job security, viewed as one of the most important job satisfiers, was given its best marks by males 31-40.
12. There were no major fluctuations in the ratings pertaining to the item, "Being trusted to do my job". (i.e. by age, gender, etc.)
13. Participating in decisions was consistently ranked more important by females than males.
14. Females, 51-60, gave the best rating to, "Getting Help with Personal Problems."
15. The amount of vacation time was viewed more importantly by males aged 41-50 and females over 60.
16. Quality of meals was viewed equally "important" by all age and gender classifications.
17. Profit sharing received its highest/best ranking from "middle-aged" employees (i.e. 41-60).
18. The number of paid holidays had only one major deviation: females over 60 regarded this as more important than their counterparts.
19. Females, 51-60, were most concerned about receiving information on changes in the company.
20. Males 41-50 were least concerned about formal periodic evaluations.

Table Games and Slot employees in the various gaming jurisdictions represented nearly 75% of all survey responses; therefore, it was deemed important to not only analyze

their statistical impact on the study but to determine if there was a deviation to the number one job satisfier response, wages, by gaming jurisdiction and employee job classifications. Stated in other terms, do slot department and table game employees in New Jersey, on riverboats and Native-American tribal casinos agree with slot

department and table game employees in Nevada that wages are the number one job satisfier. The following Frequency Response Factor reviews this data. Remember, the lower the Frequency Response Factor, the more important as viewed by employees.

Wages overwhelmingly proved to be the number one job satisfier.

Table 7. Wages as Job Satisfier among Gaming Industry Employees

| Jurisdiction/Employees | Response Factor |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Riverboat/Table Games | 1.48 |
| Riverboat/Slots | 1.40 |
| Nevada/Table Games | 1.53 |
| Nevada/Slots | 1.46 |
| New Jersey/Table Games | 1.50 |
| New Jersey/Slots | 1.44 |
| Native-American Casinos/Table Games | 1.65 |
| Native-American Casinos/Slots | 1.45 |

Dealers in New Jersey gave this item an amazing 1.1 Response Factor (1.00 being a perfect score) while riverboat dealers, Nevada casino dealers and Native-American tribal casino dealers recorded Frequency rates of 1.45, 1.50 and 1.75 respectively. Table game supervisors showed a slight deviation rating with scores ranging from 1.53 for Riverboats to 1.73 for New Jersey.

The only appreciable number of responses by job title in the slot departments occurred with change persons (41), floor persons (49) and supervisors (28) all in Nevada casinos. All three of these classifications recorded Frequency Response Ranks of under 1.50.

Observations and Conclusions

Although no conclusive industry-wide statements can be based on the response of 869 casino workers, some general observations can be made and several questions may be posed:

1. Wages overwhelmingly proved to be the number one job satisfier based on forced distribution. This is the third and most extensive survey done through the University of Nevada Las Vegas dealing with hotel/casino job satisfiers and all three have resulted in wages ranking as the number one job satisfier. It would appear that casino workers have either not progressed beyond the survival stage in Maslow's hierarchy of needs or, worse, have regressed to the survival level. Casino human resource directors would be well advised to look at *why* wages are the primary motivator or job satisfier in an industry replete with other employee benefits.
2. Overall survey responses should not be necessarily interpreted as applicable to all gaming jurisdictions or employee classifications. Training needs and job satisfiers will vary based on gaming jurisdictions and employee job functions. Overall responses can serve as the rationale for the foundation of a training or benefits program but should not be viewed as the conclusive, universal panacea solution or indicator for all employees.
3. Job satisfiers and training needs that did not rank high should raise questions among gaming executives, human resource and training directors. For instance, "Accounting/financial analysis skills" are *critically* important managerial tools yet the overall survey opinion ranked this near the bottom. Job security, another of Maslow's basic survival indicators, still is a *major* concern with casino workers. Why? With all of the talk about primary and secondary smoke hazards, it might be assumed workers in smoke-filled casinos would rank "A smoke-free

work environment” high on their list of job satisfiers; the survey revealed just the opposite. Likewise, “Day care facility at work” did not receive an extremely high ranking.

4. “Being trusted to do my job without oversupervision/ownership of my job” and “Participating in decisions that directly affect me” both ranked extremely high on the list of job satisfiers. Thus, the concepts of employee empowerment and participative management seem to be alive and are a significant concern for casino workers.

Survey results often ask more questions than answering them. Results should be viewed as light indicators on the dashboard of a car and investigators need to lift the hood to find the real answers. Also, surveys can help management readjust its perceptions. Many times management believes it is in touch with employee needs only to discover that these perceptions are not factual. Human resource management in the gaming industry is a dynamic process requiring constant evaluation and reassessments. The effort will result in the enhancement of the organizational environment, a goal everyone should keep in mind.

