
New hires' job satisfaction time trajectory

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Abstract: This study is aimed at quantifying the job satisfaction trajectory of new hires. The authors compared job satisfaction of 815 new hires to 1,925 non-new employees, asking all participating employees a simple daily question for ten months: 'how happy are you today at work?'. With a sample of 187.137 data points, we found a high heterogeneity in job satisfaction among employees from 12 different companies that participated in our study. On the tenets of acculturation theory and more fine-grained data, we support previous research that new hires started with a 27% higher job satisfaction compared to the non-new employees. The level of job satisfaction kept on decreasing (until 64th day), continuing at a slower pace, gradually bottoming out after eight months. The ratio of new hires' job satisfaction to non-new employees began an upward trend between the sixth and the seventh month (195th day).

Keywords: job satisfaction time trajectory; new hires; acculturation theory.

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1 Introduction

Analysing job satisfaction of new hires is important because it can help organisations to implement appropriate policies for improving new employees' emotional wellbeing (Orpen, 1986; Pulakos and Schmitt, 1983). Understanding the trajectory of job satisfaction of new hires can help companies develop strategies not only to improve performance but also to ensure that new employees stay on to contribute more effectively for a longer period of time. This is a critical issue in the 'war for talents', a term coined by McKinsey (*The McKinsey Quarterly*, 2008) to refer to the competition and challenges of firms to attract the high potential young elite at upper management levels. Beechler and Woodward (2009) show that this competition does not only apply to higher ranked employees. Therefore, firms should not only ensure that their new employees do not quit, but also that they feel satisfied with their job in order to get the highest return possible (Tsai et al., 2005).

To the knowledge of the authors, there is not much research on detailed time trajectories of new hires' job satisfaction. We know that employees become less satisfied as their tenure increases within an organisation. Keller and Semmer (2013) offer evidence that satisfaction in their sample of 'young workers' decreased over the first 5 years. However, we do not know exactly at what time a new employee's trajectory of job satisfaction changes. Especially important are the levels of job satisfaction at various points in time as decreasing levels might eventually lead new hires to leave the company (Sanda and Adjei-Benin, 2011).

A study on changes in time trajectory was carried out by Boswell et al. (2009) providing a thorough background on job satisfaction of new employees. Their research was based on a sample of 132 newly hired employees from a public service sector organisation located in the southeast of the USA. They surveyed new employees' job satisfaction on three occasions (three month intervals). Feedback from the first questionnaire enabled them to compare job satisfaction of new employees, and supported earlier research that job satisfaction of employees who changed lately their job was higher at the new firm than it was at the firm they quit. The authors found that on average, job satisfaction of new hires would have its highest point at the beginning ($t = 1$). From then onwards, a gradual decline was found for the following three months, before job satisfaction again started to slightly increase from that plateau.

Employee job satisfaction is commonly evaluated by applying the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) with its long form covering 100 questions; the short form contains 20 questions (Spector, 1997). Boswell et al. (2009) attempted to investigate this construct with fewer items in order to elicit a higher response rate from employees. They measured job satisfaction using only three items, e.g., one of them as: 'All in all, I am satisfied with my job' (1: strongly disagree; 5: strongly agree).

In the present study, we aimed to shed light on the trajectory of job satisfaction of new hires compared to non-new employees on a daily basis. Based on the tenets of the Acculturation theory, we examined job satisfaction of employees from 12 companies in various sectors. We investigated job satisfaction using a computer application software downloaded to a mobile device (an 'app') to ask one simple question: 'How happy are you at work today?'. Our research design, therefore, allowed us to ask all employees on a daily basis to assess their job satisfaction. To the knowledge of the authors, this research design is novel and more precise in receiving information than any other research undertaken so far on job satisfaction of new employees.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section describes the Acculturation theory to compare the fit of new hires to their companies. This is followed by the method, where the sample, data and analysis are introduced. After the results are presented, a discussion is provided. The last section concludes and summarises the salient points of the study.

2 Job satisfaction and acculturation theory

We investigate job satisfaction of new hires *vis-a-vis* that of other employees (non-new employees) to determine the extent to which new hires acculturate to their new firm. Job satisfaction is defined by Locke (1976) as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p.1304). Employee job satisfaction is an important topic that has been extensively investigated (Chen et al., 2011; Albrecht, 2006). It is to say that especially the turnover link is heavily examined (Liu et al., 2012). Sanda and Adjei-Benin (2011) note that cultural role conflicts of employees have a negative impact on job satisfaction. There is also evidence that higher job satisfaction of employees leads to more positive psychological outcomes such as a better commitment or a better identity (Ismail and Bebenroth, 2016). Also, there is evidence that higher job satisfaction leads to a lower turnover rate of employees (Coccia, 2001; Joshi and Goyal, 2012). Job satisfaction is also frequently linked to expatriate research. Not surprisingly, a common finding is that non-satisfied expatriates quit their jobs more often than satisfied ones (Shaffer and Harrison, 1998; Naumann, 1993; van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007).

The so-called ‘why questions’ soliciting reasons for job satisfaction or dissatisfaction have been mainly answered in the literature (Rusbult et al., 1988; Sanda and Adjei-Benin, 2011). Early literature such as Pulakos and Schmitt (1983) indicates that prediction of satisfaction is possible. Orpen (1986) examined the relationship between perceived task attributes of employees and job satisfaction among 82 plateaued (having more than 7 years of experience at the company) and 130 non-plateaued managers (new managers). He found that job satisfaction of the plateaued managers correlated with four of the five task attributes compared to that of the non-plateaued managers where such association was found with only one attribute. Also, employee satisfaction was found to moderate the positive relationships between stress and employees’ use of assertiveness and coalition building (Zhang, 2017). Prior research also demonstrated the importance of both situational factors and individual differences in determining employee attitudes toward their jobs (e.g., Gerhart, 1987; Steel and Rentsch, 1997). It is to say that also generational differences are important to consider in this regard (Akhavan Sarraf et al., 2016).

This research focuses on the acculturation of new hires. Acculturation is a cultural learning process experienced by individuals who are exposed to be integrated into a new company. Acculturation was investigated as early as 1936. Redfield et al. (1936) stated: “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p.149).

The acculturation theory originally proposes that when the integration process between two groups starts, the original culture of one or both may alter having four possible scenarios in the frame of cultural adjustment. In assimilation, individuals from non-dominant cultures adjust entirely to the values of the dominant group. In contrast,

separation indicates the process in which individuals identify with their own culture when they reject the values of the dominant group. Marginalisation refers to minimal identification with both cultures while integration shows double identification, i.e., with their own culture and with that of the dominant group. Chun et al. (2003) prefer to think of acculturation as a more complex phenomenon or bi-dimension with interactive perspectives instead of unidirectional school of thoughts simply known as assimilation. This phenomenon can be investigated for a home or a guest country (e.g., Tadmor et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Chen et al. (2013) researched the psychological aspects of bicultural integration. Guarnaccia and Hausmann-Stabile (2016) investigated acculturation from an anthropological angle. Acculturation also received attention from business and management scholars whose findings have proven useful to the advancement of human resource management theory (e.g., Samnani et al., 2012).

In our research, the acculturation theory provides the framework for our investigation since we hypothesise that new hires have to adopt successfully to the culture of their company in order to be job satisfied. We employ the Acculturation theory to gain insights into the multifaceted and often versatile interactions between new hires and their non-new peers. The culture of an organisation is defined by an overall combination of corporate values, employee beliefs and norms (Appelbaum et al., 2007). The complexity of acculturation is rooted in the fact that an organisation comprises individuals and groups, each integrated in networks of subcultures (Elsass and Veiga, 1994). The degree and rate of acculturation varies among these networks, individuals, and subgroups, especially between new hires and non-new employees.

It is important to note that not everybody experiences acculturation to the same degree (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988). Some researchers propose that disagreement with the desired mode of integration leads to acculturative stress (Chun et al., 2003; Knilans, 2009). As such, stress and tensions may lead to acculturative conflicts, also known as culture clash (Knilans, 2009). Culture clash is likely when people feel threatened by either the risk of losing their accustomed way of doing things or when they face unfamiliar situations, e.g., upon starting to work at a new firm. An important intervention to avoid culture clash is having structured and purposeful interactions between new hires and other organisational members to nurture intercultural tolerance or, in other words, it is important to facilitate assimilation of new hires to the culture of the firm that they have just joined (Schweiger and Walsh, 1990).

In the current study, new hires belong to one of four modes of acculturation to adjust to their workplace. In the case of an assimilation, new hires would fully adopt the culture of the organisation and hence, we would expect them to be job satisfied, i.e., their job satisfaction should be always high from the beginning to the end of the observation. In the case of separation, new hires would either have left the previous firm already because they were not satisfied with their jobs, or they got attracted by the new firm getting offered better opportunities. Such new hires would face a decrease in job satisfaction as time passed. Even if new hires did not have any job experience before starting at the company, we still considered them to have their job satisfaction declined as time passed. The rationale for doing so is that like other new hires with previous firm experiences (job switcher), new job seekers signed up at the company because they obviously thought they had received the best job offer (compared to alternative companies). Regarding marginalisation, job satisfaction should indicate a similar trend as in the case of separation. Finally, with integration, new hires should retain some of their old values

acquired at previous firms (cases of switching) but would still be able to accept the culture of the new firm and be job satisfied, or at least retain the level of their job satisfaction as time passed. At new employees there should be a downward trend visible (Keller and Semmer, 2013). Overall, we suggest that job satisfaction of new employees declines at the beginning but after a while it should increase again to higher levels. We state the following research hypothesis:

- H1 New hires job satisfaction starts initially higher than that of other employees, then declines and gradually bottoms out after some time.

3 Method

3.1 Sample

We use a sample of 815 new hires from 12 companies and compare their levels of job satisfaction with 1,925 (non-new) employees. The data collection of the first firm started on 10 May 2014 and the last collection ended on 18 March 2017. Hence the duration of the observation period was about 2 years and 11 months. However, as each participant started at a different time, there was an overlapping length of observations spanning a period of around 10 months. During the observation period, the daily job satisfaction level of new hires was reported around 39,111 times. The sample contained 187,137 data points in the final analysis. Based on this dataset, we traced the trajectory of new hires' job satisfaction. We further investigated critical time periods of new hires and their ups and downs compared to non-new employees.

The app to investigate job satisfaction was specifically designed to keep the identity of users anonymous. Therefore, to identify new employees, we applied an assumption. We knew that even if the app was deployed by each company at different times, all individual employees started to use the apps immediately after its introduction. Therefore, we categorised new hires as users that did not belong to the first wave (cut off day was 100 days after service introduction to each firm). After the app was implemented at the company, we noted that almost all users in the company used the app from the very beginning except non-users who absolutely declined to use it throughout the duration of the study. After the first week, we observed the daily rate of first-time users decreased exponentially, tailing off to a constant base level of first-time users. Hence, we could confidently state that the base line of first time 'late users' was, in fact, a stream of new hires that started to use the app shortly after their first day of employment at the company. Hence, of the 2,740 users, we marked 815 users as new hires because they started using the app for the first time 100 days after its introduction in their respective companies. Initial interviews with some of the new hires supported our assumption.

3.2 Data

Data were collected via an app which a consulting firm had installed in the mobile phones of employees. The aim of the participating companies was to monitor their employees' job satisfaction by obtaining feedback anonymously to improve the workplace environment so that employees would find it an attractive place to work. Daily responses were collected from employees at 12 companies in various sectors: e-payment

start-up, IT consulting services, retail, manufacturing, services, tourism, and education. About half of the companies were multinational (located near Barcelona) and the other half were Barcelona home-grown companies. Most of the users were Spanish nationals, with 91% from Barcelona.

Employee self-reported job satisfaction was obtained in the following way. Once the employee installed the app in their phone, the app would ask the employee on a daily basis: *how happy are you at work today?* The employees were not approached directly with the term ‘job satisfaction’ because the word ‘happiness’ reads more naturally, especially for young new hires. When using the app, employees were presented with a screen that had a four icon-face corresponding to a four-grade scale of 1 = sad, 2 = neutral, 3 = good, and 4 = great. By design, all new hires and non-new employees could only report their job satisfaction stated as ‘happiness level’ once a day. About 10% of the employees used the app every day and on average, employees completed the response to the question every alternate day.

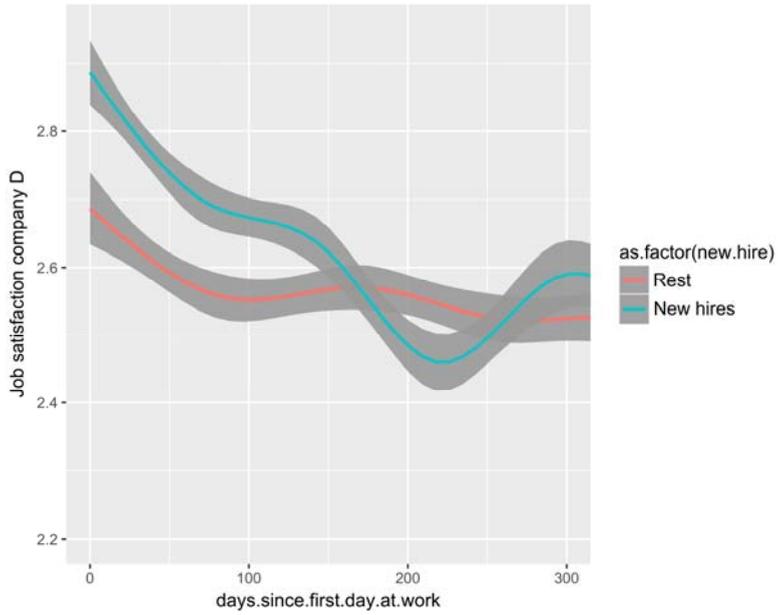
3.3 Data analysis

Our research deals about change and that can be measured in many ways. Chan (1998), e.g., uses an integrative approach incorporating longitudinal mean and covariance structures to analyse multiple indicator latent growth variables. In our case, we have daily readings of satisfaction in a 4-item categorical scale indicating how happy employees feel at their daily work. The user can choose one of four emojis (pictographs) to indicate his/her sentiment about the workplace. The four emojis represent the sentiments of ‘sad’, ‘neutral’, ‘good’ and ‘great’. Since two of these emojis are associated with a positive sentiment (‘good’ and ‘great’) and the other two with a not positive sentiment, we can compute the odds of positive to non-positive responses as $Y/(1 - Y)$. In this, Y is the count of a positive sentiment response and $(1 - Y)$ is the count of a non-positive response. In addition, there are two groups of users: new hires and non-new employees, all measured on a daily basis. We calculate the satisfaction odds as explained before. Once these odds are calculated, we computed the odds ratio between new hires and non-new hires by dividing the former through the latter term. A ratio larger than one at any given point means that new hires express a higher satisfaction, while a ratio lower than one indicates that new hires are less satisfied than non-new employees. To test for the significance of the differences between the odds, we applied the Fisher exact test for count data with the R statistical package.

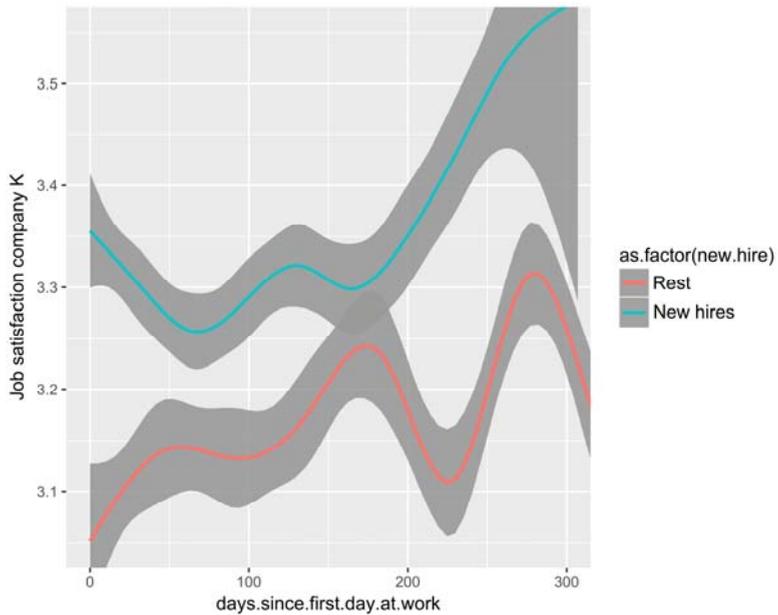
4 Results

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations of all participating employees for 12 companies (in monthly intervals). A four-grade scale was used to convert the scores into categorical values. The minimum score (for the company with its lowest value) was 2.48 and the maximum score (for the company with its highest value) was 3.47 (having an average of all responses from new hires and non-new employees as 2.91). That means, each company had their particular baseline (mean) with a relatively high variability [Table 1 and Figures 1(a) and 1(b)]. Also, employees in the same company showed a very diverse response pattern, with a variability of 0.93 standard deviation.

Figure 1 Examples of job satisfaction time trajectory at two companies, (a) company D (b) company K (see online version for colours)



(a)



(b)

Note: New hires at company D start with a high job satisfaction (compared to non-new employees) but it declines sharply; company K shows the opposite trend.

Table 1 Marginal means and SD of new hires and non-new employees in 12 firms

	<i>Max</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>
N of employees participating per firm	572	34	182	144
Number of responses				
All employees	50k	153	11k	4.6k
New hires	19k	21	3.2k	388
Non-new employees	30k	132	10.8k	5.8k
Job satisfaction				
All employees	3.47	2.48	2.91	2.88
New Hires	3.90	2.63	3.05	2.95
Non-new employees	3.36	2.59	2.89	2.84
SD of Job satisfaction				
All employees	1.15	0.54	0.93	0.934
New Hires	1.05	0.30	0.74	0.74
SD Non-new employees	1.15	0.72	0.95	0.94

Figure 2 Evolution of satisfaction of new hires and non-new employees (see online version for colours)

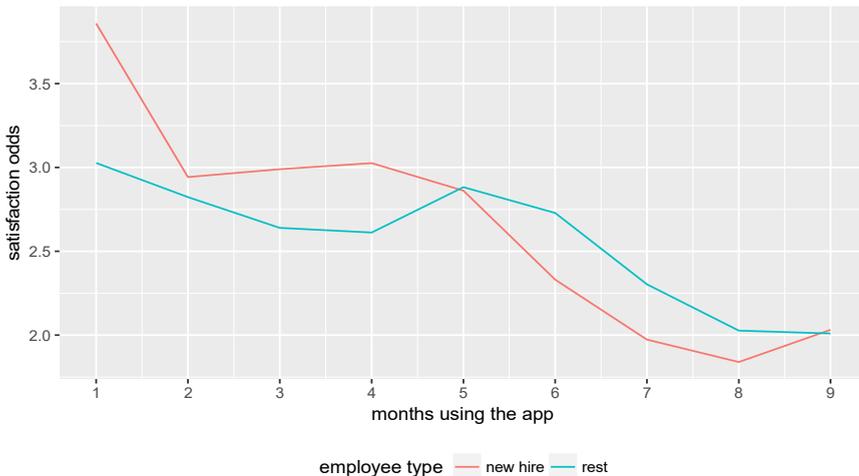


Table 2 shows monthly count answers for each group since the app was used. Note that for new hires, the time also corresponds to their employment seniority. The table further displays the satisfaction odds, the odds ratio between groups and the p-value of the Fisher exact test for each month, including the CI 95% interval of the estimated ratios. Measuring the odds ratio instead of absolute measures is more robust to factors that affect both groups equally such as macro-economic trends.

Table 2 Positive satisfaction (count data and odds ratio, monthly) new hires and non-new employees

Month	Count of collected answers								Analysis					
	Non-new employees				New hires				Odds of a positive satisfaction					
	Sad	Neutral	Good	Great	Sad	Neutral	Good	Great	New hires	Non-new employees	Ratio	Alternative	p-value	CI 95%
1	2,919	5,703	16,659	9,440	785	1,342	4,751	3,454	3.86	3.03	1.27	Greater	1.34E-19	(1.20, Inf)
2	2,452	3,116	9,623	6,096	776	955	2,803	2,292	2.94	2.82	1.04	Greater	9.79E-02	(0.98, Inf)
3	2,327	2,788	8,281	5,222	730	701	2,316	1,962	2.99	2.64	1.13	Greater	1.66E-04	(1.06, Inf)
4	2,297	2,378	7,684	4,526	689	514	1,816	1,824	3.03	2.61	1.16	Greater	4.12E-05	(1.08, Inf)
5	1,897	2,087	7,254	4,231	612	456	1,626	1,430	2.86	2.88	0.99	Less	4.33E-01	(0, 1.06)
6	1,728	1,817	6,154	3,519	622	402	1,293	1,094	2.33	2.73	0.85	Less	1.12E-04	(0, 0.91)
7	1,447	1,513	4,292	2,527	500	358	830	864	1.97	2.30	0.86	Less	6.38E-04	(0, 0.92)
8	1,606	1,509	3,991	2,323	365	340	602	695	1.84	2.03	0.91	Less	3.24E-02	(0, 0.98)
9*	1,439	1,390	3,605	2,082	325	175	457	559	2.03	2.01	1.01	Greater	4.41E-01	(0.91, Inf)

Note: *Not significant below this month due to sample size.

It was found that job satisfaction of new hires started 27% higher than that of non-new employees but dropped fast thereafter, supporting previous literature of having initially a downward trend of new hire's job satisfaction (Boswell et al., 2009). The downward trend of new-hires' job satisfaction was reversed on the eighth month. The ratio of new hires to non-new employees was lowest between the sixth and seventh months (exactly at day 195th) (Table 2). Therefore, our hypothesis is fully supported.

5 Discussion

New hires started with a relatively high job satisfaction compared to non-new employees but it soon declined. Our findings, therefore, support results of other researchers but having daily responses (e.g., Boswell et al., 2009). In contrast to other studies (e.g., Keller and Semmer, 2013; Boswell et al., 2009), we found on a more fine grained study design that already on the 64th day, the job satisfaction of new hires dropped to almost the same level as non-new employees. This finding is more precise than others (e.g., Boswell et al., 2009) and shows an earlier decline. We also found that the lowest level of new hires' job satisfaction was on the eighth month. Also the ratio of job satisfaction of new hires in contrast to non-new employees was lowest on the 195th day.

This study offers some theoretical contributions. On the tenets of the Acculturation theory, we showed that it was a challenge for new hires to acculturate to their firms. There was compelling evidence that most new hires started high on expectations but that they had trouble adjusting to their new workplaces. Instead of cultivating positive attitudes such as integration or assimilation, at least some of the new hires tended to have negative attitudes, indicating separation or marginalisation. Our finding that new hires' job satisfaction ratio declined gradually, but bottoming out between the sixth and seventh months can be explained by the fact that working in a company might be different from what at least some of the new hires initially expected. Difficulties in adjustment for new hires could be due to the work not being as interesting as previously thought, or not having anticipated the amount of pressure at the new workplace. In all, our theoretical contribution is that acculturation seems to be difficult for new hires at least at the beginning of their job assignments.

There was also evidence of high heterogeneity between new hires and non-new employees and also among the different companies (12 samples). Therefore, it might not be sufficient to focus research efforts solely on a single company (Boswell et al., 2009). Also, it is not advisable to mix new hires of different companies together to increase the sample size as companies differ in their characteristics. We, therefore, reflected on this issue in our data set to take averages from each of the 12 firms (instead of just taking all samples together).

We also offer some practical implications. Managers should not make overly attractive promises to their new hires that might be difficult to fulfil. We assume that the reason for the decrease in job satisfaction may be due to the inability of new hires to adequately acculturate to the new companies. Top management might have promised new hires too much at the job briefing or interview prior to joining the company. Also, job seekers might have been misled by the company website and expected too much from the

new company (Baker-Eveleth et al., 2016; Banerjee and Gupta, 2016). Management should be sensitised that job satisfaction of their new hires is critical until around 8 month after the start, especially in the first two month. That means counter measures against a decrease of job satisfaction should be taken early so that new hires do not quit the firm prematurely.

Our study is not without its own limitations. Based on the results of our research, we can only offer a time trajectory of new hires' job satisfaction in contrast to non-new employees. We do not know the actual reasons behind the changes in acculturation. Previous research found that future expectations of employees mediate their job satisfaction (Chen et al., 2011). Also, it is to mention that many new hires dropped out of their companies in the first few months. Furthermore, decisions of new hires depend on many factors that are beyond the scope of this research. For example, the importance of the job for a new hire, or the tightness of the job market may determine if a new hire makes an effort to integrate into a new firm. A new hire may also choose to separate from a company if he/she is lured by a more attractive offer from another company. In addition, global or company specific events can impact the job satisfaction of employees differently. For example, a company specific event, like a restructuring or a takeover might affect employees with varying seniority in non-uniform ways. Younger and new hires may fear a job loss much more than experienced employees because the firm would usually retrench younger employees first (Ismail and Bebenroth, 2016). Also, work attributes may influence the proactive personality of new hires (Li et al., 2014).

Finally, the data set in this study contained valuable information of employees from 12 companies spanning several industries. The participants were relatively young, blue and white collar employees, entrepreneurial and from Barcelona or its surroundings. Also, we could not control for age, gender or the season of the hiring as the companies did not share this information with us. The general behaviour of Spanish new hires as well as non-new employees may not be generalisable to employees in other countries. Also, Barcelona is a dynamic city and offers many opportunities especially to young people. New hires may be tempted to switch jobs in such an environment more easily than in other cities. With such a scenario in the job market in Barcelona, it was not surprising that the 12 companies in this study were keen to extend their cooperation to study job satisfaction of their new hires.

6 Conclusions

We have shown how the time trajectory of new hire's job satisfaction differs from that of non-new employees. On the tenets of acculturation theory, we found support that new hires started with a higher job satisfaction compared to non-new employees. This surplus of new hires' job satisfaction had the largest drop in the first two months. Job satisfaction of new hires reached a minimum 8 month after the start. The ratio of new hires' job satisfaction to non-new employees was lowest between the sixth and the seventh month (195th day). Mean reversion started after that, gradually leading to a somewhat increasing job satisfaction of new hires. In view of such a trajectory, management should take early counter measures to stabilise job satisfaction levels of new hires to keep them motivated, satisfied and productive.

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