



# citisales Jobs That Work study

## What is Job Quality for Hourly Workers?

Jennifer E. Swanberg, Ph.D., Jacquelyn B. James, Ph.D., Mamta U. Ojha, MSW

### INTRODUCTION

Given the continued growth of the retail market in the U.S., along with the changing nature of employment and working families, it has become important to find out what constitutes job quality in the new millennium for hourly, retail workers. Broadly defined, job quality refers to the characteristics of the job and the work environment that make a difference in the employees' satisfaction with the job. The Center on Law and Social Policy defines job quality as seven components: wages and earnings, benefits, job security, advancement opportunities, work schedule, health and safety, and fairness/work voice.<sup>1</sup> The *CitiSales Study* uses the term job quality to refer to numerous dimensions of the job experience, including supervisor effectiveness, the extent to which the job fits the skills and abilities of the worker, the level of teamwork among co-workers, and a host of other aspects of the job.

To adequately understand the dimensions of the work environment that promote optimal business and employee outcomes for hourly workers at CitiSales, it is critical to understand the workplace characteristics valued by this specific set of workers. This brief examines the workplace factors that constitute job quality at CitiSales for hourly workers. In Issue Briefs #6 and #7, we will show that job quality, as described here, is a significant driver of both employee engagement and customer satisfaction.

### WHAT IS JOB QUALITY FOR HOURLY WORKERS?

CitiSales employees were surveyed on a range of issues relating to their jobs and their lives outside of work. In the data analysis process, six primary dimensions emerged as contributors to job quality. Table 1 on the next page shows these six dimensions and the survey items that make up each one. The dimensions as well as the survey items that comprise each one are ranked according to their statistical importance in defining job quality.

### About this Issue Brief

This issue brief examines the workplace dimensions that constitute "job quality" for hourly workers in a large U.S. retail store, referred to as CitiSales.

One primary research question is examined in this brief:

- What is job quality for hourly workers?

**Table 1: Dimensions of Job Quality for CitiSales' Hourly Workers**

**1. Supervisor Effectiveness**

- I am recognized when I do good work.
- I feel valued as an employee at CitiSales.
- I am encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.
- My supervisor is supportive when I have a work problem.
- My supervisor really cares about the effects that work demands have on my personal and family life.
- I am allowed to make the decisions necessary to do my job well.
- I understand how my performance is evaluated.

**2. Schedule Satisfaction**

- How often are your preferences about the days and times of when you work taken into consideration by the person who writes the schedule?
- Overall, in the past month how satisfied have you been with the weekly schedule you have been assigned?

**3. Schedule Flexibility**

- I have the ability to change my schedule when I have a family or personal matter to take care of.
- When an unexpected personal or family matter arises, I have the ability to modify my schedule.

**4. Job Fit & Resources**

- I have the general tools and resources I need to do my job well.
- I have the clear understanding of what is expected of me.
- My job is interesting and challenging.
- My job makes full use of my skills and abilities.
- I am generally able to get my work done without facing too much red tape or bureaucracy.
- I have a clear understanding of the goals and priority of my store.
- I receive the necessary level of training to perform my job effectively.

**5. Opportunity for Career Development**

- I have sufficient access to career development opportunities.
- My chances of being promoted at CitiSales are good.
- I have a clear understanding of the career paths available to me at CitiSales.

**6. Teamwork**

- My store consistently provides excellent service to our customers.
- I think that cooperation and teamwork are strong within my store.

The first factor, *supervisor effectiveness* emerged as the most important dimension of job quality for hourly workers. As noted in Table 1, hourly workers perceive an effective supervisor at CitiSales as one who recognizes an employee when good work is done, values employees, encourages hourly workers to come up with new and better ways of doing things, and is supportive when work problems arise. *Schedule satisfaction* and *schedule flexibility* are ranked as the second and third most important dimensions of job quality. *Schedule satisfaction* among hourly workers focuses on how often preferences are taken into account when the store schedule is developed, and the level of satisfaction an employee has with his or her schedule.

*Job fit and resources* is the fourth contributing factor to job quality. Hourly workers identify their job as a good fit when they have tools and resources to do their job well, a clear understanding of what is expected of them and of the goals and priorities of their store, and a job that makes full use of their skills and abilities. *Opportunities for career development* and a spirit of *teamwork* are two other dimensions of job quality.

The first step to determine the workplace characteristics that excite hourly workers about their job, is to better understand the aspects of the job they value or consider to be most important. At CitiSales, six distinct workplace factors appear to be most valued by hourly workers. In particular, supervisor effectiveness, schedule satisfaction and flexibility ranked most prominently. Interviews with managers revealed that some managers see the effort involved in creating schedules with individual requests and needs for time off as managing "one big jigsaw puzzle." Our findings suggest that such efforts are well worth the trouble, as the availability of flexibility is an important component of job quality for hourly workers.

## ACTION STEPS:



**Determine the most important dimensions of job quality for your employees in your organization.** As we have mentioned, job quality differs in different contexts and different workplace environments. Conduct internal research to ascertain the elements of the on-the-job experience most important to your employees.



**Create multidimensional supervisor training.** Supervisors matter to employees. Provide supervisors with training that educates them about work functions, schedule flexibility, employee relations and how to empower employees to take responsibility.



**Establish store processes that allow employees to have some say in their work schedule.** Schedule satisfaction is the second most important ingredient of job quality for hourly workers, followed by schedule flexibility. Consider developing processes that allow employees to influence their schedule and that allow for schedule flexibility when last minute matters arise. See Issue Brief #4 for strategies that promote workplace flexibility for hourly workers.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Lower-Basch, E. (2007).** *Opportunity at Work: Improving Job Quality. Opportunity at Work Series, Paper No. 1.* Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

## About the CitiSales Study

The data presented in this brief are part of a larger, multi-method study which examines the individual and organizational effects of quality workplace practices for employees in hourly, front-line retail jobs and for older workers in professional and hourly jobs in the same organization. The study was conducted in collaboration with a *Fortune 100* retail firm referred to as “CitiSales.” The company operates over 6,000 stores throughout the United States. Survey data were collected in 2006 from 6,085 employees within 388 stores in three geographical regions of the U.S.; 72% of employees surveyed responded. The hourly worker sample is 3,903. See Issue Brief #1: *Introduction to the CitiSales Study* for a detailed description of the hourly worker sample. Qualitative data were collected from 38 district managers and three regional vice presidents overseeing the operations in these stores.

*Sample and Methods:* For the analyses presented in this brief, the sample was restricted to hourly workers 25 and older, working full-time and who reported working for CitiSales for one year or more (n=1344). We restricted the file to workers for whom employment at CitiSales is their primary jobs because we wanted to determine if job quality factors that are good for employers are also good for employees.

*Analyses:* Factor analyses were conducted to answer the research questions in this study. For more detail about the study, please contact Dr. Swanberg (jswanberg@uky.edu) or Dr. James (jamesjc@bc.edu)

This study was supported by grants from the Ford Foundation and the Sloan Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility at Boston College and by generous support from the *Fortune 100* retail firm referred to in the study as CitiSales.

## About the Research Team



**Jennifer E. Swanberg, Ph.D.**, is co-principal investigator of the CitiSales Study and is the executive director and founder of the Institute for Workplace Innovation (iWin) at the University of Kentucky, and an associate professor in the UK College of Social Work with joint appointments in the Colleges of Medicine and Public Health. Her research has focused on quality

workplaces as a business and work-life effectiveness strategy, access to workplace flexibility among under-represented working populations, and the use of human capital and quality employment as a form of economic development. Dr. Swanberg’s research has been published in top-tier research journals, and she has appeared as a national and international work-family expert on television and radio including MSNBC, CNN, CBS, NPR, and BBC. She has been recognized by Alliance of Work-Life Progress as one of the profession’s Rising Stars, and her research has been recognized as among the top research articles by the Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award for Excellence in Work-Family Research.



**Jacquelyn B. James, Ph.D.** is co-principal investigator of the CitiSales Study and is the director of research at Boston College’s Center for Work & Family. She received her Ph.D. in personality and developmental psychology at Boston University. Prior to coming to Boston College she was associate director of the Murray Research Center: A Center for the Study

of Lives at Harvard University. Her research has focused on the meaning and experience of work in women’s lives, gender roles, and adult development. She and her colleagues have published numerous articles, opinion pieces, and four edited books. The most recent volume (with co-author Dr. Paul Wink, professor of psychology at Wellesley College), *The Crown of Life: Dynamics of the Early Postretirement Period*, is about the opportunities and challenges inherent in the early retirement years for new generations of retirees. Dr. James is past-president of the Society for the Study of Human Development and serves on the editorial board of the society’s flagship journal, *Research in Human Development*.

**Mamta U. Ojha, MSW**, is pursuing her doctorate at the University of Kentucky College of Social Work. She works at the University of Kentucky Institute for Workplace Innovation as a research fellow. She has a BA in psychology from Lucknow University, India and an MSW from the University of Kentucky.