

# CAREER SATISFACTION AS AN INCLUSIVE MEASURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE MANAGERS

## Introduction

The success of an organization and its multi-faceted development, depends to a great extent on the decisions made and activities undertaken by the its personnel. The human resources and competences accumulated in the organization are the crucial factor in the organization's success, particularly in the modern and unpredictable business environment. A priority challenge for organizations is not only to attracting talented individuals but also retaining them, including knowledge employees and leaders. Hence, monitoring activities within the scope of HR is a strategic element of a consciously managed organization. For this reason, the level of an employee's career satisfaction is a subject of interest for both individuals and organizations [Judge et al., 1999]. Career satisfaction, due to its association with the efficiency of the tasks performed by employees, can reflect an organization's current operations. It can also serve as a measure of the fulfilment of strategic goals in learning and development.

The dominant focus of the research in the field of career satisfaction is the analysis of its determinants. Researchers demonstrate that the key factors influencing satisfaction include an employee's proactive attitude, specific individual behaviors, career management skills [Spurk et al., 2019], and higher education [del Mar Salinas-Jaménez et al., 2011]. Organizational conditions, such as the culture, climate, management style, promotion opportunities, and available resources, are also important determinants [Wipulanusat et al., 2018]. In many cases, a pre-condition for feeling satisfied is holding professional positions aligned with one's aptitudes and skills. A. Koźmiński and W. Piotrowski [1998] notice that the satisfaction coexisting with

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professional development is a compilation of an employee's expectations and the enterprise's objectives. Therefore, it can be concluded that the homeostasis between personal and organizational goals is essential and leads to maximizing the benefits and satisfaction of both parties.

An important research trend presented in the literature includes the implications for organizations resulting from the employees' satisfaction. Examples of these implications are reductions in absenteeism and turnover rates [Salleh et al., 2020], increased commitment, and improved work results achieved by the organization [Tomažević et al., 2014; Trivellas et al., 2015]. For this reason, career satisfaction and changes in its status may serve an important source of information regarding the development of employees and, consequently, organizations.

Currently, the process of evaluating the development requires, more than ever, the adoption of a fully inclusive approach that considers individual professional career requirements. For this reason, it is necessary to use development measures that can be successfully applied to different professional groups without errors or distortions. This is particularly relevant for female managers, whose professional career patterns differ from the male managerial careers.

Considering the aforementioned, the aim of the article is to reveal that career satisfaction can be an adequate measure of the development of female managers. The objective of the conducted research is to demonstrate the relationship between the career satisfaction of female managers and the level of management.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1. Specifics of female managers' careers path

The conceptualization of the career construct and the direction of women's career paths are significantly influenced by the socio-cultural context and economic transformations [Abadi et al., 2020]. Over the past decades, the long-established paradigm and narrow canon of roles undertaken by women, both in personal and professional life, have undergone modification. Currently in Poland, women constitute 47% of all employed individuals and hold 42% of the managerial positions [The Central Statistical Office, 2023]. However, woman in top management positions remain underrepresented. In companies listed on the WIG140 index, women make up 17.2% of the authorities, and only 2% of these companies have a female CEO [Olszewska-Miszuris et al., 2023].

The significant predominance of men at the highest managerial levels results from gender divisions and stereotypes, which This is an important barrier for women in developing their managerial professional path [Tabassum, Nayak, 2021].

The consequences of this disparity include not only the homogeneous and exclusive groups that retain power [Einarsdottir et al., 2018], but also strongly rooted beliefs which identify leadership and management with men [Ely et al, 2011].

However, it should be emphasized that the growing awareness of these stereotypes, the competencies held by women, and intentional efforts by organizations to build gender-diverse managerial teams are gradually increasing women's participation in management. Female managers exhibit leadership aspirations and ambitions equal to those of male managers [Eagly, 2013]. J. Twenge [2001] revealed that the younger groups of female respondents demonstrate stronger self-reliance, self-agency, and development orientation. This fosters bold decision-making and the pursuit of careers in areas previously dominated by men, leading these women to be described as agents or managers of their own careers.

Some studies suggest that the career development may proceed slightly different for women than for men [Gallos, 1989; Mavin, 2000]. These differences are particularly noticeable in managerial careers, which are traditionally associated with the linear development and hierarchical mobility within organizations. It should be emphasized that, due to household duties and maternity leaves, woman's professional paths are often characterized by non-linear and periodic withdrawals from the labor market [Mainiero, Sullivan, 2005; Burke, 2007]. The conflict between professional and personal roles tends to resonate most during mid-career, particularly affecting women in the middle management [Maddox-Daines, 2016].

T. Cox and C. Harquilla [1991] observed that women, compared to men, are slightly less likely share ideas with co-workers and experience fewer interactions with the supervisor regarding the feedback or support. For this reason, professional development strategies for female managers often rely heavily on inherent value of their potential [Beregovskaya et al., 2022]. Female managers aspiring to reach the highest management levels emphasize the importance of individual features, such as collaboration and communication skills [Wood, 2006]. Moreover, women who hold managerial positions indicate that their progress results from strategies involving consistently exceeding expected efficiency and undertaking demanding tasks [Ragins et al., 1998].

## 1.2. Career satisfaction

The concept of satisfaction is derived from the Latin words *satis* (sufficiently) and *facere* (to do). Thus, it can be understood as the sense of pleasure resulting from activities whose outcomes align with applicable norms or social acceptance. M. Dobrowolska [2010] perceives satisfaction as a permanent disposition, an employee's attitude towards the professional roles performed. In the field of human resource management, the notion of satisfaction is applied to the job and career. Job satisfaction

is a consequence of a positive assessment of one's current place of employment and the effects of the duties performed. On the other hand, the career satisfaction encompasses a comprehensive evaluation of one's professional path, subsequent positions, and overall profession [Zingesser, 2004]. For this reason, career satisfaction is significantly broader notion, which, apart from current employment, considers past experiences and the future trajectory of the expected career.

E. Locke [1969] indicates that one's career satisfaction is an emotional condition, resulting from a positive assessment of their work, including the achievements and professional goals realized. Therefore, it could be ascertained that one's career satisfaction reflects the degree to which the pursued career path is compatible with individual goals, values and preferences [Erdogan et al., 2004; Heslin, 2003]. T. Ng et al. [2005] highlights that the career satisfaction, as an idiosyncratic evaluation of the career, is an indicator of the subjective professional success. On the other hand, E. Diener et al. [1985] pointed out that it is also a subjective sense of occupational well-being.

When analyzing the concept of satisfaction, it is worthwhile to delve into the term contentment, which is considered by one group of researchers as synonymous with satisfaction [Chaudhuri, Naskar, 2014]. A. Sowińska [2014] describes satisfaction as the state of general contentment experienced by an individual. On the other hand, a contradictory perspective suggests that these are separate, semantically different constructs. K. Olechnicki and P. Załęcki [1998] observe that a differentiating element between the concepts of satisfaction and contentment is the temporal aspect of their occurrence. Satisfaction, compared to the transient and volatile nature of contentment, results from the accumulation of positive effects, thereby constituting an enduring representation of professional attitudes.

A. Zalewska [2003] indicates that the sense of contentment encompasses both emotional and cognitive aspects. The emotional aspect reflects feelings and the degree to which an individual likes their job, while the cognitive aspect arises from evaluating and judging professional operations. For this reason, it is essential to consider the dual nature of contentment, including affective reactions and cognitive evaluations. The author emphasizes that the cognitive aspect is strongly associated with the satisfaction, representing a conscious evaluation in the professional field [Zalewska, 2001].

This discourse is further enriched by the definition of satisfaction presented by M. Juchnowicz [2013]. The author pointed out that the sense of satisfaction includes not only the cognitive dimension but also the affective and the behavioral one. For this reason, accepting a broad definition of contentment makes it possible to identify it with the satisfaction. Such an approach is reflected in deliberations within the management and quality sciences [Fryczyńska, 2017; Dave, Raval, 2016].

### 1.3. Career satisfaction as an indicator of female professional development

The professional career, in contemporary conceptualization, is defined as a travel with the objective of achieving self-fulfillment [Gebbers, 2019]. The attributes of the current approach to career encompass freedom and development, with the predominant criterion for assessment being the subjective determination of psychological success rather than merely the value of salary or the number of promotions [Hall, 2004]. Due to this shift, the traditional model of expectations is being replaced with the agency and self-determination of the individual [Martin et al., 2001]. Thus, the evolution of careers toward individually managed career paths underscores the need for an idiosyncratic assessment of progress.

As a consequence of the unpredictable and non-linear nature of female careers, women apply a broader range of criteria for assessing their careers and their progress [Ruderman, Ohlott, 2002]. For female managers, the predominant goal and thus professional orientation is self-fulfillment and the pursuit of knowledge at an expert level [Struges, 1999]. Female managers often associate their success with the efficiency and cohesion of the team they manage. Their sense of fulfillment is, to some extent, dependent on the satisfaction of subordinate employees [Einarsdottir et al., 2018], the quality of interpersonal relationships, the support obtained from co-workers, and the atmosphere within the team.

Men, in contrast to women, are much more likely to evaluate a career through the prism of the status achieved. Thus, a positive attitude of men toward their careers is a result of a high remuneration, the sense of being better, or approval from top management [Eddleston et al., 2006]. Therefore, when evaluating an employee and their progress, both the male and the female professional development patterns, and the differences in their preferences related to the career investments should be considered. In this case, career satisfaction could serve as a more neutral evaluation than the objective success measures, identified exclusively as the male career success pattern.

T. Kupczyk [2009] points out that the success among managers primarily implies the realization of the plans, followed by the achievement of professionalism and the development of qualifications. The assessment of professional success and interpretation of the developmental stage, being a subjective perception of oneself, therefore occur in relation to established professional goals. For managers, understanding the opportunities and constraints that genuinely impact career acceleration processes enables them to set not only realistic but also highly ambitious career goals and related plans for achieving them. The achievement of intentionally planned goals and the realization of a pre-selected career trajectory lead to satisfaction and, in turn, further motivation.

It is important to emphasize that goals related to professional development are based on an individual value system and change depending on the context, personal situation, and market conditions. Therefore, the subjective interpretation and evaluation of the achievement of professional goals may be a justified exemplification of an individual's development [Heslin, 2003]. The inclusive nature of career satisfaction as a measure of one's professional progress results from the possibility of applying it in various environments, industries, and employee groups. Moreover, subjective assessment is suitable for both modern career models, and traditional professional career patterns [Dries, Verbruggen, 2012].

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research group

The qualitative study, conducted via an internet survey questionnaire, involved 400 female managers. The research sample was purposive, with the population limited to respondents meeting the criteria of gender (women) and position (managerial positions). The request to complete the questionnaire was directly addressed to managers and organizations in Poland, asking them to provide the questionnaire to employed female managers. The survey was conducted in 2022.

47 female respondents (12%) hold basic management level position, 146 (36%) are at the middle management level, and 207 (52%) work in high managerial positions. A seniority of up to five years characterizes 5% of the managers, 13% have a professional experience from 5 to 10 years, 47% have between 10 to 20 years, and the seniority of 35% of the managers exceeds 20 years.

### 2.2. Measurements

Career satisfaction was evaluated using the Career Satisfaction Scale, developed by J. Greenhaus, S. Parasurman, and M. Wormley [1990]. This scale has been widely used by many researchers, in various socio-cultural contexts [Wise et al., 2022]. The verification of satisfaction level referred to evaluating the sense of one's success, satisfaction with the general course of their career, and the achievement of specific objectives, including those related to income, position within the organizational structure, and skill development. Using Likert's seven-grade scale, respondents specified the extent to which they agreed with particular statements. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability indicator for five items in the career satisfaction questionnaire was 0.844. The general career satisfaction level, as a symmetrical variable, was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the questionnaire's five items.

### 3. Research Analyses and results

Firstly, the level of career satisfaction of female managers was investigated (Table 1). It can be observed that female respondents are largely satisfied with their realized career (mean=5.73). To the greatest extent, they are satisfied with the level of achievement of goals related to the development of new skills (mean=5.88). Female managers are least satisfied, but still positive, about the progress achieved in terms of salary value (mean=5.40).

Table 1. Career satisfaction of female managers

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Modal
Satisfaction with achieved goals for developing new skills	5.88	0.99	6.00
Satisfaction with overall career goals achieved	5.87	1.00	6.00
Satisfaction with career success achieved	5.84	1.01	6.00
Satisfaction with advancement goals achieved	5.67	1.08	6.00
Satisfaction with income goals achieved	5.40	1.30	6.00
Career satisfaction	5.73	0.85	6.00

Source: own study.

To examine whether subjective measure in the form of career satisfaction differs based on the managerial level occupied by female managers, an univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. It was preceded by a Levene's test to verify the homogeneity of variance of the variable among managers at the basic, middle, and high levels of management. Due to the unmet assumptions of variance equality ( $F(2; 397) = 3.534; p = 0.03$ ), Welch's correction was applied in further analysis (Table 2). The groups of female managers separated by management level were shown to be statistically significantly different in terms of career satisfaction ( $F_{\text{Welch}}(2; 118.213) = 19.786; p < 0.001$ ).

Table 2. Career satisfaction of female managers by management level

Management level	Mean	Standard deviation	F	df1	df2	p-value
Basic	5.14	0.97	19.786	2	118.213	<0.001
Middle	5.60	0.86				
High	5.96	0.72				

Source: own study.

Games Howell's post hoc tests revealed that all groups are statistically significantly different from each other (Table 3). The level of satisfaction among high-level female managers is 6% higher compared to middle-level managers and 16% higher than the satisfaction level of basic-level female managers. Therefore, the positioning of the managerial role in the management structure significantly statistically differentiates the sense of career satisfaction among female managers.

Table 3. Differences in average career satisfaction by management level

Management level		Difference in averages	Standard error	p-value
Basic	Middle	-0.46	0.16	0.014
	High	-0.82	0.15	<0.001
Middle	Basic	0.46	0.16	0.014
	High	-0.36	0.09	<0.001
High	Basic	0.82	0.15	<0.001
	Middle	0.36	0.09	<0.001

Source: own study.

In order to verify the relation between the management level and the satisfaction with one's career, Spearman's correlations was performed. The correlation coefficient reached the value of 0.293, and is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a positive, moderate relationship between the managerial level occupied by the manager and career satisfaction. The higher the position in the management structure, and consequently the greater success in hierarchical mobility, the higher the career satisfaction of female managers.

## Conclusion

The change in career models, from traditional, linear and hierarchical professional career paths towards a subjective and highly individual approach underscore the validity of using subjective evaluation measures. The trajectory and dynamics of the contemporary careers rely on the individual standards, the foundations of which are the employee's personal values and preferences [Dries et al., 2008]. Therefore, the assessment of professional development through the prism of organizational measures of success increasingly diverges from the investments made by the employee in their career capital.

A relevant exemplification of the progress made by an employee can be career satisfaction. It has been shown to be positively related to an individual's commitment to work and tasks being performed [Kardas, 2009]. The level of motivation and willingness to act often plays an overriding role in the process of achieving satisfactory



and positive career results. J. Kardas [2009] highlights that in the case of a manager, the sense of success and fulfillment is significantly determined by the individual's level of motivation. Due to the high degree of proactivity among managers [Cressley et al., 2013], evaluating progress through satisfaction with the achievement of professional goals appears highly justified and substantiated.

Career satisfaction and professional performance are also associated with adaptability [Zacher, 2016], i.e. readiness to work in changing environments. This skill consists of four dimensions: preparation for future tasks, acceptance of responsibility for development, analysis of opportunities, and confidence in one's own abilities and resulting future success [Savickas, Porfeli, 2012]. Thus, the level of career satisfaction can be a determinant of attitudes, behaviours and decisions made related to a manager's career development, especially in today's turbulent business environment.

In a study conducted using the Career Satisfaction Scale [Greenhaus et al., 1990], it was found that female managers are largely satisfied with the course of their careers. To the greatest extent, they are satisfied with their goals for developing new skills, which corresponds with the dominant professional orientation of women, which is to strive for mastery and an expert level of knowledge [Struges, 1990].

An in-depth analysis by Hofmans et al. [2008] for differences in the interpretation of satisfaction along the career dimension, as measured via the Career Satisfaction Scale, demonstrated some gender invariance. It was revealed that one of the five diagnostic variables related to feelings of career success showed significant factor invariance. Consequently, when evaluating careers through the Career Satisfaction Scale, it is important to keep in mind that specific aspects of careers may be defined and evaluated differently by women and men. For this reason, it would be valuable to conduct further research that includes career satisfaction evaluations of men in managerial positions.

The conducted analysis of variance and correlation indicated a positive relationship between career satisfaction of female managers and the position held in the organizational structure. These findings are confirmed by a number of studies. The researchers report that career satisfaction as a subjective measure of success is significantly and positively correlated with performance on the objective dimension [Judge, Bretz, 1994; Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019]. In turn, T. Judge et al. [1995] showed that the predictors of career satisfaction of top executives are salary, promotion and company size as measured by the number of employees. In addition, career satisfaction is also related to the level of professional competence [Kong et al., 2016; Aytekin et al., 2016], and job commitment [Lee, Eissenstat, 2018]. Moreover, the higher the level of career satisfaction, the stronger an individual's aspirations to continue pursuing a high-level career path [Dickey et. al., 2009].

Measuring professional development with objective measures involves the risk of distortions, due to the high sensitivity to the conditions of the professional

environment. The pace of salary growth and the number of promotions are determined not only by the scope of employee competencies but also by the organizational structure and the specifics of the industry [Dette et al., 2004]. However, it should be noted that a subjective measure such as career satisfaction is also not free of professional context. Individual aspects and career goals may be understood and evaluated differently depending on the occupational group to which the individual belongs [Spurk et al., 2015].

Considering the above arguments, it is first worth emphasizing that the peculiarities of female managerial careers justifies paying special attention to subjective measures of career path evaluation. Career satisfaction, due to its significant positive correlation with the objective measures of success and the inclusion of the subjective theory of career, is an adequate exemplification of the development of female managers. However, the use of the career satisfaction for the interpretation and comparison of professional development between male and female managers raises certain concerns. This encourages to further, both quantitative and qualitative, studies intended to analyze possible differences in the way of defining success and evaluating professional achievements by gender.

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## CAREER SATISFACTION AS AN INCLUSIVE MEASURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE MANAGERS

### Abstract

The subjective nature of contemporary careers, characterized by their dynamics shaped by new competencies, constitutes a strong rationale for updating the approach to the evaluation of professional development. The inclusivity of development metrics, considering diverse patterns of career paths and personal goals and values, is particularly crucial from the perspective of female managers. The aim of the article is to reveal that career satisfaction can be an adequate measure of the development of female managers. The objective of the conducted research is to demonstrate the relationship between the career satisfaction of female managers and the level of management. In the conducted survey participated 400 female managers, occupying positions at the basic, intermediate, or high level of management. It was revealed that female managers are highly satisfied with their careers, especially in terms of the skills they have acquired. Furthermore, it was found that the higher the management level, the higher the career satisfaction of female managers. This article expands the body of knowledge on career satisfaction of female managers, simultaneously highlighting the validity of its use as a measure of professional development.

**KEYWORDS:** CAREER SATISFACTION, DEVELOPMENT, FEMALE MANAGERS, INCLUSIVENESS, PROGRESS

**JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES:** J28, J53, M12

## SATYSFAKCJA Z KARIERY JAKO INKLUZYWNA MIARA ROZWOJU KOBIET MENEDŻEREK

### Streszczenie

Podmiotowy charakter realizowanych współcześnie karier, o dynamice których decydują nowe kompetencje, stanowi silną przesłankę do zaktualizowania sposobu oceny rozwoju zawodowego. Inkluzyność miar rozwoju, uwzględniająca zróżnicowane wzorce ścieżek zawodowych oraz osobiste cele i wartości, jest szczególnie istotna z perspektywy kobiet menedżerek. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie, że satysfakcja z kariery może być adekwatną miarą rozwoju zawodowego kobiet menedżerek, a ponadto wykazanie związku pomiędzy satysfakcją z kariery kobiet menedżerek a zajmowanym szczeblem zarządzania. W przeprowadzonym badaniu ankietowym wzięło udział 400 menedżerek zajmujących stanowisko

na podstawowym, średnim lub wysokim szczeblu zarządzania. Wykazano, iż menedżerki w dużym stopniu usatysfakcjonowane są realizowaną karierą, szczególnie pod kątem zdobytych umiejętności. Ponadto dowiedziono, że im wyższy szczebel zarządzania, tym większa satysfakcja z kariery kobiet menedżerek. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi uzupełnienie wiedzy na temat satysfakcji z kariery kobiet menedżerek, wskazując równocześnie zasadność jej wykorzystania jako miary rozwoju zawodowego.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: SATYSFAKCJA Z KARIERY, ROZWÓJ, KOBIETY MENEDŻERKI, INKLUZYWNOŚĆ, POSTĘP**

**KODY KLASYFIKACJI JEL: J28, J53, M12**