

THE JOB SATISFACTION OF NEW ZEALAND MALE MANUAL WORKERS

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Three hundred and eighty-three male manual workers, comprising 133 freezing workers, 72 assemblers, 87 watersiders, and 91 carpenters, each group randomly selected from at least two sites in New Zealand, were interviewed concerning their job attitudes, and completed the Job Descriptive Index (J.D.I.), a standard checklist measure of satisfaction with five different job-facets. On comparison of J.D.I. scores with U.S. norms, N.Z. workers had lower satisfaction with work itself, supervision and co-workers, but equal or higher satisfaction with pay and promotions. Factory workers had especially low satisfaction with the work itself. Results were interpreted within a theoretical framework which stressed the importance of the workers' values in setting reference standards against which the job is judged, and the high emphasis on values of social interaction and autonomy at work caused by the nature of N.Z. society. Understanding of job satisfaction requires exploration in depth of the cultural, subcultural, organisational, occupational, technological, and group forces impinging on the worker and the effects of these on his work values.

A convergence in research and theories of job satisfaction in recent years has been the view that satisfaction is not a direct result of physical and psychological conditions of the job, but is rather the product of a comparison between those conditions and the values of the worker. Locke (1969, p. 316) stated that "job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are a function of the perceived relationship between what one wants from one's job and what one perceives as being offered". A close relationship gives rise to the positive emotional reaction we know as satisfaction, a discrepant relationship to dissatisfaction. Such a view is expressed in the work of the theorists Vroom (1964), Porter and Lawler (1968), and Graen (1973).

Studies in this tradition typically describe workers' values in terms of worker responses to rating-scales of various needs and conditions of the job. Such research seeks to account for the maximum variance in satisfaction over large samples but is unconcerned with the nature or configuration of values of particular workers or groups of workers. It thus tends to be limited in explanatory value, and is often criticised as "correlation without explanation" (Locke, 1969). Proper understanding of worker attitudes should be based on a fuller exploration of the nature of values and their sources than can be obtained from such scales.

A powerful influence in considerations of job satisfaction is that of "self-actualization" theorists (Maslow, 1954; Herzberg, 1959; and Snyderman, 1959) who assert that man's primary motivation should always be those of achievement, responsibility, and growth. The failure of workers to exhibit these

explained by environmental constraints such as autocratic supervision or mechanised technology, which prevent such intrinsic values being met on the job and force workers to lay stress on financial and social values as an alternative. From this type of analysis flow practical programmes of job-enrichment, in which the potential of the job for intrinsic satisfaction is deliberately increased (Paul and Robertson, 1970; Davis and Taylor, 1972). While there is undoubtedly some truth in these arguments and some potential for improvement of job satisfaction through such techniques, the present writer and others have noted that this tradition of job satisfaction research is often marked by psychological naivety, excessive faith in the fundamental harmony of managerial and worker goals, and a style of argument which owes more to evangelical fervour than to scientific detachment (Blacker and Brown, 1975; Inkson, 1977a). The scientific evidence for the type of need-hierarchy asserted by Maslow is slender, and the adaptability of workers in finding ways of tolerating deprived work should not be underestimated. A job which appears quite intolerable to an outside observer—particularly a middle-class observer with a white-collar frame of reference—may be quite acceptable to the worker who does it. He may, for example, see it as a source of only extrinsic rewards, with intrinsic rewards being derived from his family life and leisure activities. There is nothing necessarily unhealthy in this. Those who argue that an individual's work *must* be a central life-interest to him, that he *must* derive a sense of achievement and growth from the job, are judging work in terms of their own, quite arbitrary, frame of values.

This argument focuses attention on determinants of work-values which exist *outside* the workplace. Sociologists have pointed to the clear differences in work values between different social classes (Rosen, 1956; Centers and Bugental, 1966) and have argued that values are largely a product of socialisation outside the workplace. Hence, values at work are only properly understood in the context of the individual's total life-style and the meaning he ascribes to work in relation to his other activities (Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt, 1968, 1969; Benyon and Blackburn, 1972). Others have pointed to the existence of "occupational communities" in which membership of a particular occupation or profession is a key factor determining values (Salaman, 1974). On the other hand, there is evidence that values are also modified by the experience of the job itself; the worker gradually reduces dissonance by adapting his expectations to what is possible in the job (Biddle and Hutton, 1976). It appears, in short, that values at work are derived from a whole complex of cultural, social, occupational, organisational, group and individual forces, which are constantly modified by the worker's experience of the job itself. This paper attempts to explore the influence of some of these forces—namely, cultural and occupational forces and experience of the job—on the values and consequently the satisfaction of some New Zealand manual workers.

CULTURAL AND OCCUPATIONAL FACTORS

While most New Zealanders and visitors to New Zealand speculate and often pontificate on the specific values of the culture and the special nature of New Zealand society, there is little authoritative scientific evidence to indicate how these differ from developed overseas countries. However, there are a number of observable features of the society which may well lead to characteristic motivations and values in the work force; some of these have already been suggested by Hines (1974).

Firstly, New Zealand has, by international standards, a very low level of unemployment, and a well-developed system of social welfare. These may tend to reduce both the potency of security as an important value at work, and the extent of employee loyalty to a particular job or employer. The usual levels of labour turnover in New Zealand—over 40 percent for men and over 60 percent for women—are much higher than in developed overseas countries.

Secondly, New Zealand is popularly believed to be a more egalitarian, less socially stratified society, than many others. Vellekoop (1969) and Collette (1972) suggest that while social stratification undoubtedly exists in the country, it is not extreme. A study by Robb and Cloud (1970) of intergenerational class mobility in Rotorua indicated high mobility. The ethos of egalitarianism may be valued and expected at work as elsewhere in society.

Thirdly, the basis of the New Zealand economy is in agriculture and small-scale enterprise. As employment in the agricultural sector has declined due to mechanisation, expansion has been in professional, administrative, sales, and service work. In 1971, only 38 percent of the national workforce was classified as manual production workers, including many, such as production supervisors, construction workers, and skilled tradesmen, whose work would not be constrained by the discipline of factory work (New Zealand Yearbook, 1974). It is suggested that this background causes workers to identify autonomy, outdoors, and personal-enterprise work as an expected norm.

It is hypothesized that these cultural constraints, de-emphasizing security but emphasizing egalitarianism and on-the-job autonomy, lead to two key values in the workforce. First of all, New Zealand workers should set a high value on social interaction. As Hines (1974) states: "Interpersonal relations on the job and supervision are often cited in job satisfaction . . . New Zealanders prefer to work with friends . . . there is a widespread exchange of Christmas cards . . . emphasizing the personal, informal nature of work relationships." Secondly, New Zealand workers may have expectations of physical and psychological autonomy which are difficult to meet in an employing conventional mechanised batch- and mass-production techniques. The nature of these expectations are not such as to be met, however, by increased worker participation—as is the case in many other countries.

achievement motivation and desire for responsibility are not high in New Zealand—but rather by autonomy *on the job*, whether this be achieved by working independently of machines, out of doors, or in self-employment.

It was therefore hypothesized that because of their higher expectations, New Zealand workers would have relatively low social satisfaction at work compared to their counterparts in developed countries overseas; and that they would respond very negatively to routine non-autonomous work. With regard to inter-occupational differences in job satisfaction, no explicit hypotheses were made beyond the general one that dissatisfaction in an occupational group was determined by the discrepancy of the nature of the job from the worker's values rather than by the nature of the job alone.

SAMPLE

The data were derived from a study of orientations to work in four occupational groups of male manual workers. The four groups were: Freezing workers from two works in the Otago/Southland area ($n=133$); assembly workers from two central New Zealand factories manufacturing consumer durables ($n=72$); watersiders from two South Island ports ($n=87$); and trade carpenters employed on twenty different building sites in the Dunedin area ($n=91$). In each location, a random sample of workers was chosen for interview from lists of personnel broken up by department; where prospective interviewees were absent or did not wish to participate, substitutes were randomly chosen from the same department. The proportions of prospective subjects "lost" through absenteeism or unwillingness to participate were: freezing workers 24 percent; assemblers 9 percent; watersiders 11 percent; carpenters 12 percent.

The main characteristics of the four occupations were as follows:
Freezing workers Routine, repetitive, paced, assembly-line type jobs; short job cycles—typically only a few seconds; seasonal work—seven months a year only; physically unattractive surroundings; large supervisory spans of control.

Assemblers Routine, repetitive, partly-paced, assembly-line work; job cycles typically between 20 minutes and an hour; mixed-sex, mixed-age social environment; moderate supervisory spans of control.

Watersiders Range of work from simple carrying to operation of complex equipment, forklifts, etc.; workers on strict rotation to different tasks; much heavy work; work depends on shipping movements—many days off or only partly worked (guaranteed minimum wage even if no work done); some work outdoors; constantly shifting work-groups and changing supervision due to rota basis of allocation.

Carpenters Skilled trade requiring five-year apprenticeship for entry; work ranges from outdoor shuttering and foundation work to fine finishing and polishing; shifting work-groups; some insecurity due to trade

fluctuations; constant physical movement; work-group and supervisory span vary according to nature and size of site (e.g., multi-storey office-block vs. single house).

METHOD

Each subject was interviewed in an office at his place of employment by the writer or a trained student assistant. A set schedule of questions was used covering personal background and work-history, attitudes to previous and present jobs, workmates, supervision, company, union, and various social issues; and aspirations for the future. Many of the questions were taken from Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt's (1968) study of the work-attitudes of "affluent" workers in Luton, England. At the conclusion of the interview, which lasted between 45 minutes and an hour in most cases, each subject completed a short questionnaire which included the Job Descriptive Index (J.D.I.) (Smith, Kendall, and Hulin, 1969). The J.D.I. is a standardised job satisfaction questionnaire; it is based on checklists of adjectives covering responses to five different facets of the job—the work, pay, promotions, supervision, and co-workers. It is probably the most commonly used measure of satisfaction currently in use in the world, and Smith, Kendall, and Hulin have published extensive norms based on samples of over 2500 subjects in 21 U.S. organisations.

RESULTS

Table 1 gives means and standard deviations for each occupational sample on each dimension of the J.D.I. The slightly reduced sample *n*'s were due to a small number of subjects incorrectly completing the form. The raw scores for different facets cannot meaningfully be compared with each other.

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations on J.D.I. Scales

Satisfaction Area	Freezing Workers n=129		Assemblers n=69		Watersiders n=84		Carpenters n=83	
	<i>M</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>s.d.</i>
Work	19.90	10.83	23.19	12.31	35.09	8.61	37.39	8.16
Pay	36.12	12.81	27.25	12.67	36.99	10.93	34.16	10.87
Promotions	18.90	13.07	21.97	14.95	20.99	13.43	29.08	13.43
Supervision	35.28	12.12	37.54	10.80	35.29	10.95	42.06	9.31
Co-workers	37.96	10.31	36.73	11.05	41.69	8.93	39.73	10.31

*Five carpenters who supervised their work-groups in addition to their own regular work were omitted from the calculation of this mean. *n*=83.

Table 2 relates the J.D.I. scores to U.S. norms established by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969, p. 80), for a sample of over 1,900 male workers in 21 factories. In Table 2, each N.Z. sample mean is expressed as a discrepancy score, in terms of its number of standard deviations from normative sample means.

TABLE 2
Discrepancy in Standard-deviation Units of N.Z. Sample
Means from Normative Sample Means

Satisfaction Area	Normative Sample		N.Z. Occupational Samples			
	Raw Scores		Discrepancy Scores			
	n=1928 +		Freezing Workers	Assemblers	Water-siders	Carpenters
	M	s.d.				
Work	36.57	10.54	-1.58*	-1.26*	-.14	+.08
Pay	29.90	14.53	+.43*	-.18	+.49*	+.16
Promotions	22.06	15.77	-.20	-.01	-.06	+.44*
Supervision	41.10	10.58	-.55*	-.34*	-.55*	+.10
Co-workers	43.49	10.02	-.55*	-.67*	-.17	-.37*

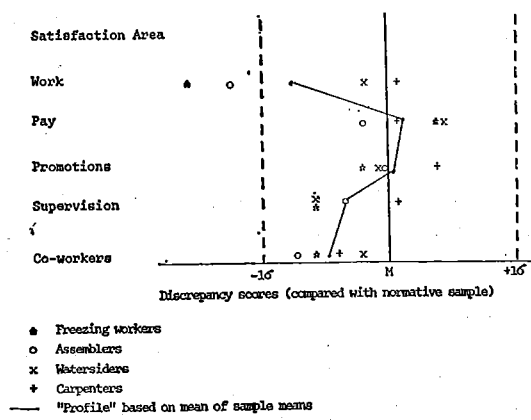
*Significantly different from normative sample mean, $p < .01$ (Z test).

The overall tendency in these results was for the New Zealand samples to have *lower* job satisfaction than the normative sample. Out of twenty comparisons, fourteen were in this direction, and eight of these were significant at the .01 level; of six comparisons in the direction of greater satisfaction by New Zealanders, three were significant at the .01 level. However, interpretation of the comparisons was hindered by the fact that only 70 percent of the normative sample were manual workers, the remainder being white-collar and supervisory staff in the same organisations. Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969) do not present separate norms for manual and non-manual workers, but other studies suggest that job satisfaction is characteristically higher in non-manual jobs (Vroom, 1964, pp. 129-132). Other limitations of the comparisons concern the representativeness of the New Zealand samples. Apart from the over-representation of South Island workers, two mass-production industries were included in the sample, and all 20 operating units in the study, apart from the building sites, employed at least 100 staff and were therefore large by New Zealand standards. Thus, the New Zealand sample may be biased towards routine factory work, though the 21 organisations represented in the normative sample were also mainly factories.

Of greater interest than the overall low satisfaction of New Zealand workers compared to the normative sample, were the *patterns* of satis-

faction of the various samples. It was noticeable that all three significant *positive* deviations of New Zealand workers related to extrinsic job-rewards—pay and promotions. On the other hand, all eight significant negative deviations related to the intrinsic nature of the job (the work itself), or to the social environment (supervision and co-workers). Particularly striking was the very low satisfaction of the two factory groups with their work, and the low satisfaction of all groups with their co-workers. While the results suggested that there were clear differences in levels of satisfaction between the different occupations—freezing workers and assemblers having relatively low satisfaction, and carpenters and watersiders relatively high satisfaction—there were sufficient parallels between them to suggest the possibility of a characteristic New Zealand job satisfaction “profile” (Figure 1).

Figure 1: “Profile” of satisfaction in four occupations



Finally, a general interview question on job satisfaction yielded interesting results. The question was, “Overall, how do you feel about your job? Would you say you were very satisfied, fairly satisfied, rather dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?” The results (Table 3) were strikingly discrepant from the J.D.I. findings. Despite the relatively low level of satisfaction indicated by the J.D.I., over 75 percent of every sample assessed themselves as satisfied rather than dissatisfied. The most strikingly satisfied workers on this criterion were the watersiders, while the carpenters, the most satisfied group according to the J.D.I., ranked their satisfaction as being no higher than that of the two factory groups.

TABLE 3
Self-assessments of Job Satisfaction (percentages)

	Freezing Workers n=133	Assemblers n=72	Watersiders n=87	Carpenters n=91
Very satisfied	15	21	59	23
Fairly satisfied	62	67	38	53
Rather dissatisfied	18	10	3	20
Very dissatisfied	5	3	—	4

DISCUSSION

The suggestion that New Zealand workers have overall lower job satisfaction than U.S. workers is speculative, for reasons already mentioned. Nevertheless, it calls to mind the findings of researchers such as Katzell, Barrett, and Parker (1961), Turner and Lawrence (1965), and Hulin (1966) who have noted that where job and conditions are held constant, job satisfaction tends to be *negatively* correlated with indices of community prosperity and pleasantness: the higher the prosperity, the lower the preponderance of slums, etc., the lower the job satisfaction. This finding may be explained in terms of a "reference-group" theory of job satisfaction (Korman, 1972, pp. 143-146); the job is judged in relation to its total environmental context, and causes satisfaction or dissatisfaction in relation to the expectations of satisfaction created by other facets of the worker's environment and reference-groups. An ordinary factory job may seem low-grade to workers from a pleasant, affluent middle-class suburb; the same job may be quite attractive to those from a deprived urban environment. It is suggested that the ethos of security, autonomy, and non-manual occupations described earlier creates expectations which make satisfaction more difficult to obtain through manual jobs in New Zealand. The low social satisfaction of the New Zealand samples suggests that supervisors and workers find it difficult to accommodate their needs for informality and rewarding social interaction within the constraints of efficiency, co-ordination, and discipline dictated by any modern work-organisation.

The low levels of satisfaction associated with factory work were in agreement with an unpublished N.Z. study by Simpson, Burnell, Fay, and Tippett (1975). They administered the J.D.I. to 31 male and 28 female manual employees in a South Island tannery. The results showed that compared to the normative samples, males had significantly lower satisfaction with work and co-workers, while females had significantly lower satisfaction with work and supervision (but significantly *higher* satisfaction with pay). Satisfaction with work was 0.73 standard deviations below the normative mean for males, and 1.19 standard

deviations below for females. In all the factory samples studied (the writer's and Simpson, Burnell, Fay, and Tippett's) workers scored significantly below the norms for satisfaction with the work for the lowest-income groups listed in stratified J.D.I. norms by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969, p. 107). This appears to provide strong evidence for the view that New Zealand workers have an unusually strong rejection of factory work.

Elsewhere, the writer has outlined some of the special pressures placed on freezing workers by the routine nature of their jobs (Inkson and Simpson, 1975; Inkson, 1976, 1977b). Freezing workers typically have a highly instrumental orientation to work; that is, they maintain an orientation of low psychological involvement in their work and high emphasis on their financial rewards. While the assemblers in the present study were much lower-paid than the freezing workers and consequently could not develop a highly instrumental orientation, their ego-involvement in their work was also low. Both groups stressed their leisure activities, sports and hobbies, as having greater importance to them than their work. These adaptations make unsatisfying work easier to tolerate.

However, interview evidence suggested a high degree of alienation among some of the assemblers, particularly young single men working in an urban factory. These men typically found the job unrelievedly boring; moreover, unlike the married, settled, workers, they had no family interests (some had migrated to town from the country and most lived in flats). They tended to take days off work when they felt like it, and were also prone to quit for a minor reason and seek employment elsewhere. Their leisure activities tended to be confined to drinking and hanging about the streets. It is employees of this type, alienated because they see no alternatives for fulfillment, an irritant to management through their low involvement but too disorganised to be a real, change-generating threat, who are perhaps the major casualties of New Zealand's industrialisation.

The finding that despite the relatively low levels of satisfaction indicated by the J.D.I. results, over 75 percent of each sample assessed themselves as being satisfied rather than dissatisfied repeats a point found by numerous research studies of job satisfaction since Herzberg's (1935) classic study. It is likely that to admit that one is dissatisfied arouses strong cognitive dissonance, so that the pressures to answer positively to this kind of question are very great. It is likely that the dominant response, "fairly satisfied" represents no very high level of fulfilment of values through work, but rather an adjustment to a loosening of values to a level where job-characteristics become approximate to them. "Acquiescent" rather than "satisfied" might be a better description of workers in this category.

The sharp discrepancies in satisfaction of watersiders and carpenters according to whether the J.D.I. or a self-assessment method of measurement was used, shows the importance of seeing job satisfaction

in the context of job-conditions and worker expectations. The J.D.I. is essentially descriptive, whereas the interview question was essentially evaluative. As Smith, Kendall, and Hulin state (1969, pp. 16-17) evaluative assessments are affected more than descriptive by the individual's frame of reference, whereas descriptive are affected more by the actual nature of the job.

From detailed interview material it was possible to establish that the carpenters were in fact much less satisfied in relation to their values than was apparent from their J.D.I. scores. Their dissatisfaction related partly to the discomfort of outdoors work in bad weather; another important feature was their perception that their employers were not particularly competent. (Neither "work conditions" nor "company" is a job-facet in the J.D.I.). More important perhaps was the carpenters' feeling that the status of being a skilled tradesman was being steadily eroded: many felt that they were employed on work which could be done by labourers, that their skills were unrecognised and under-utilised, that their wage-differentials for skill had disappeared, that their trade was being diluted by unqualified men. Thus, while they described the job fairly as having more satisfying characteristics than did, say, the freezing workers, nevertheless, their satisfaction was not high because of their high expectations of rewards from their trade. In contrast, the watersiders had moved to their jobs—which were highly prized in their communities—not in the expectation of gaining status or skill, but in the expectation of increasing their earnings, reducing their hours of work, and becoming part of a cohesive occupational community. These expectations were met in their eyes, therefore they were a highly satisfied group. Over 40 percent were men who had previously acquired a trade qualification, such as carpentry, but who now found that waterside work afforded compensations for the loss of skill and status involved. The freezing workers and assemblers had had low expectations of satisfaction from their work. While it was clear to most of them that high satisfaction was impossible given the nature of their jobs, nevertheless there was sufficient correspondence between their expectations and reality for them to feel "fairly satisfied".

What emerged above all from this study was the inadequacy of any single indicator or set of indicators of job satisfaction for characterising attitudes to work; and the inadequacy of any set of worker ratings of lists of "needs" or "expectations" to describe his work values. The job satisfaction findings were intelligible only within the context of knowledge of the nature of the various jobs, and the orientations to work of the various groups—orientations of much greater complexity and heterogeneity than may be apparent from this paper. Here it has been possible to look only superficially at these orientations. Nevertheless, the writer has to conclude with Hilgert (1971) that "the dynamics of a work situation can be viewed only within the context of that situation if we are to fully understand why workers think, feel, and act as they do".

Moreover, in this sense, "work situation" must include not only characteristics of job and conditions, but also characteristics of the values of the worker and the meaning he attaches to his work. Conventional theories of job satisfaction are over-simplified; conventional measures of job satisfaction are seductively convenient. Real understanding of worker attitudes requires a much wider perspective.

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