

Job Reactions of New Zealand Manual Workers: A Theoretical Comment

Viviane M. J. Robinson
University of Auckland

Recent studies by Inkson (*New Zealand Psychologist*, 1977, 6, 2-13) and Barnes and Jamieson (*New Zealand Psychologist*, 1977, 6, 14-24) are criticised. It is argued that neither study obtained the data or performed the analyses that would enable an assessment of the relevance of the theories of employee reactions upon which their research is based to the New Zealand Industrial scene.

The aim of this critique is to demonstrate that there is a serious mismatch between the methods and analyses employed by Inkson (1977) and Barnes and Jamieson (1977), and the theories of employee reactions upon which their research is based. As a consequence, neither author has obtained the data, or performed the analyses that would enable them to assess the relevance of theories upon which their research is based to the New Zealand industrial scene.

My criticism of Inkson's paper will proceed as follows. Firstly, following a brief description of the theories of job satisfaction to which Inkson subscribes, I will outline the types of measures that such a conceptualization entails. Secondly, the measures that Inkson employs will be shown to be inconsistent with the conceptualization of job satisfaction outlined above. Thirdly it will be further argued that Inkson is incorrect to infer workers' job values from societal characteristics, since values are subjective and idiosyncratic and hence assessable only through various types of self-report.

Organizational psychologists, such as Locke (1976), Hackman and Lawler (1971) and Argyris (1973), see job satisfaction as the result of a complex interaction between what a worker wants from his job (his job values) and what he perceives his job as actually offering (perceived job characteristics).

Increasing discrepancies between what a worker wants and what he gets produce increasing levels of job dissatisfaction; decreasing discrepancies produce increasing levels of job satisfaction. Some theorists have argued (Mobley & Locke, 1970) that equal discrepancies may produce varying levels of job dissatisfaction or satisfaction depending on the relative importance of the particular values in question. For these researchers job satisfaction is explained in terms of three sets

of variables; the workers' job values, the relative importance of those values, and the perceived characteristics of the job. Such a conceptualization of job satisfaction produces the type of measure illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.

My job gives me a chance to learn new things

1. never
2. about once a year
3. about once every few months
4. about once a month
5. about once a week
6. about once a day
7. all the time

What is your job like?

What *should* it be like?

Researchers who weight the discrepancy by value importance may also ask subjects to rank separately the importance of their various job values (Mobley & Locke, 1970, p.466).

There are numerous problems involved in the measurement of subjective experience. Workers may not be aware of what job values they do hold, let alone of their relative importance.

Secondly, the presentation of workers with standardized lists of values is somewhat inconsistent with the discovery of both the *content* and intensity of a worker's job values. These aims may be more fruitfully pursued through the use of interview techniques rather than paper and pencil measures. While these considerations present formidable measurement problems to the organizational researcher, an explicit assessment of job values is essential to an understanding of the job satisfaction of New Zealand workers.

Inkson's statement of aims suggests that he sees his research as consistent with the above conceptualization of job satisfaction:

This paper attempts to explore the influence of some of these forces — principally cultural and occu-

pational forces and experience of the job — on the values and consequently the satisfaction of some New Zealand manual workers (p. 3.).

Neither of the instruments Inkson employed, however, provides data about the job values of New Zealand workers. The first measure, the Job Descriptive Index (J.D.I.) assesses a worker's satisfaction directly, rather than through a discrepancy score. The worker is asked to indicate by 'yes' 'no' or '?' whether most of the time, his job is described by certain adjectives. Take, for example, some of the items from the 'work' scale of the J.D.I.; routine, on your feet, challenging, simple, and satisfying, boring, frustrating, and good. The first group of items are descriptive and represent perceived characteristics of the job, the second group of items represent evaluative reactions to the job. While one can argue that workers who say their job is boring and frustrating are expressing dissatisfaction, comparable inferences about the workers' responses to the first group of descriptive items are impossible, unless one knows each subject's value standard. It does not follow that every worker who describes his job as "routine" is expressing dissatisfaction, as the scoring of this item implies. This perceived job characteristic would contribute to the job satisfaction of those workers who value routineness. Given the assumptions made in the scoring of these items, use of the J.D.I. begs the question of the nature of the job values of New Zealand workers.

Inkson's second measure of job satisfaction relies on direct verbal reports of feelings about the job. While such measures are appropriate to obtain data on the level of satisfaction of a particular group or groups, they offer no help to the researcher who seeks an explanation of the data he obtains.

Since Inkson acknowledges the role of job values, but has no data on this variable, he is forced to turn to other research for information about the job values of the New Zealand worker. His first move is to reject the theories of Maslow (1954) and Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959) on the grounds that they represent normative statements rather than descriptions of job values. While I agree that these theories are of little relevance to Inkson's research, I disagree with some of Inkson's reasoning. Firstly, Maslow (1954) is concerned with a theory of human needs, (both physical and psychological) not of human values. Needs constitute universal requirements for a person's well-being, values represent things or states that one wishes to attain or keep (Locke, 1976, p.1303-1304). While workers will all have the same needs, they will have job values which will be idiosyncratic and which may or may not serve their needs. Maslow's work can be criticised

on the grounds that (a) he offers no evidence for the existence of psychological needs (self-actualisation, self-esteem, and belongingness) and (b) that his need hierarchy is not in fact a hierarchy (Lawler & Suttle, 1972).

Secondly, Herzberg offers a descriptive analysis of those factors which workers themselves believe to be sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on the job. I agree that the work of these theorists does not provide us with ready-made information about the job values of New Zealand manual workers. Inkson does these theorists a disservice however, when he writes that they "assert that man's primary values at work should always be those of achievement, responsibility, self-fulfillment and growth" (p.2).

In his search for evidence about the job values of New Zealand workers Inkson then turns to those industrial sociologists who argue that the sources of job values can be found in community and kin groups. What follows however is not an examination of the values prevalent in the communities of New Zealand workers, but a discussion of selected characteristics of New Zealand society. By a series of complicated and unspecified inferences, Inkson moves from a statement of a *societal characteristic*, to an assumption about a *societal value*, to assumptions about the *psychology* (job values) of New Zealand workers. The specific moves involved are summarised below. Inkson acknowledges a paucity of evidence about the characteristics of New Zealand society, but argues that the following three characteristics may be an important source of job values:

- (a) New Zealand society has a well developed social welfare system and a low level of unemployment (societal characteristics). The high importance placed on security in the society as a whole (societal value) allows the New Zealand worker to place low importance on on-the-job security (individual job value). It is to be noted that Hines (1975) translates the same societal characteristics into a New Zealand value of concern for one another, which in turn translates into New Zealand workers who value the company and friendship of their workmates (p.10).
- (b) Opportunities for social mobility and minimal social stratification (societal characteristic) reflect egalitarian values in New Zealand society. The New Zealand worker is thus assumed to value egalitarian treatment at work, in the form of having an approachable boss, and the opportunity to socialize in the work place.
- (c) The majority of New Zealand workers are employed in small-scale enterprise and are not subject to the physical and psychological constraints of factory work. Inkson infers from this societal characteristic that New Zealand workers value having some autonomy in the design and placing of their work activities.

Given a certain societal characteristic, such as

the prevalence of small scale enterprise, it follows only that the society's members expect to find such a characteristic, not that they value it. It may be the case for example, that the society is currently questioning the value of such enterprise and through its political and economic processes, seeking to foster more large-scale industries. Furthermore, while it may be true that workers in small-scale enterprise value the autonomy that such employment can offer, the assumption that workers who are *not* part of such enterprises (e.g. freezing workers and assemblers) share those same job values, seems quite unwarranted.

I conclude this section on the derivation of job values with a final criticism. The postulated relationship between the societal values and the individual's job values varies in the three cases outlined above. In two cases (egalitarianism and autonomy) the society's values are paralleled in job values. In the third instance (security) job values and societal values are opposed. If there is not a clear cut relationship between societal and job-values, then one would have expected recognition and discussion of this variability.

The results presented in Inkson's Tables 1 and 2 are difficult to understand since there is no information included on the direction of the scales or on the maximum possible scores. In all cases, higher mean scores represent greater satisfaction, and the maximum possible score is 54.0 (Smith, Kendall & Hulin, 1969, p.81). Inkson stresses in the discussion section that these results must be understood in relation to the workers' job values, (which are sometimes incorrectly referred to as expectations), and his perceived job characteristics. He suggests for example, that New Zealand workers expressed greater dissatisfaction than the American sample because the former's values are more difficult to achieve in manual jobs. Such an "explanation" is acceptable however only if evidence is presented on the job values and perceived job characteristics of both New Zealand and American samples. A cross-cultural comparison of scores on the J.D.I. tells us nothing about the group's relative job values. American workers may be more satisfied than New Zealand workers because either (a) they have different values from New Zealand workers and such values are more easily achieved in manual jobs or (b) they have similar job values to New Zealand workers but their jobs are designed to enable them more readily to achieve these values. We cannot rule out either option on the basis of the data presented.

In the discussion section, Inkson alludes to interview material which enables him to interpret the job satisfaction scores of the carpenters, in relation to their expressed job values. I hope that these data will be presented in a future publication

so that organizational researchers can begin to move beyond the stage of inferring the values of New Zealand workers from societal characteristics, societal values, or from ratings of job satisfaction.

Barnes and Jamieson's (1977) study is more difficult to evaluate because it represents "part of a larger study designed to test the Hackman and Lawler (1971) framework in a New Zealand setting ..." (p.17) A second aim of the (larger) study is to examine differences among Maori, Samoan and pakeha employees. It is quite possible therefore that most of my comments will anticipate issues that the authors will discuss in future publications.

On the other hand, one can justifiably make these comments at this point, because the authors have failed to state precisely what *this paper* (in contrast to the larger study) is designed to achieve. Both the introductory review of the Hackman-Lawler model and some of the discussion section may give the erroneous impression that this research report provides a test of the Hackman-Lawler theory of job reactions.

In the following discussion therefore, I am mainly concerned with describing what would count as a test of the theory. The theory itself is summarised by Barnes and Jamieson (p. 14-15). A test of the theory would require: (a) identifying a group of workers who expressed a strong desire for satisfying higher-order needs. (I have argued previously that such workers could be more accurately described as giving higher importance to certain values); (b) calculating for this sample of workers, the relationship between certain perceived characteristics of their jobs and their job reactions (the theory predicts that the higher a job's ratings on the core dimensions, the more favourable these employee's reactions); (c) demonstrating that the correlations calculated in (b) are significantly higher than the equivalent correlations calculated for a sub-sample of workers who gave low importance to the relevant job values.

Barnes and Jamieson's results section bears no relationship to the analyses described above. Having identified employees with high and low desire for higher order needs, they tested differences in frequency across ethnic groups and present no analyses relevant to (b) and (c) above. Table 2 also presents average ratings made by employees and supervisors on 23 variables, across ethnic groups. Is the reader supposed to relate this table to the three major groups of variables (employee values, job characteristics and job reactions) that comprise the Hackman-Lawler model? Presumably not, because several variables are listed under the wrong heading. Variable 5 (psychological need level) is not a perceived core

dimension in the job, but an assessment of an employee characteristic. Similarly variable 6 (level of intrinsic motivation) represents an employee's reaction to his job not a perceived job characteristic.

Perhaps Barnes and Jamieson intend to present the correlations described in (b) and (c) above in a subsequent paper and thus reveal whether or not New Zealand manual workers, like their American counterparts react more favourably to jobs which offer variety, discretion, task identity and feedback (Hackman & Lawler, 1971, Table 6). Given that such analyses are not presented in this paper, it is misleading to write "We are not yet convinced of the general validity of the Hackman & Lawler framework, particularly when applied to cultural groups increasingly removed from a Western European and American occupational value system" (p.22). What sort of claim is this? Is it based on the analyses presented in this paper or on analyses performed but not yet revealed? Given the data so far presented, I am struck more by the parallels between the two studies than by the differences. The New Zealand employees expressed a desire for higher order needs comparable to that of the American subjects (Hackman & Lawler, 1971, p.271). Given the New Zealander's high expressed desire for an "opportunity in [their] job, for participation in the determination of methods, procedures and goals" and "opportunity for personal growth and development on [their] job", one might begin to question Hines' (1975) conclusion that the New Zealand manual worker does not want responsibility on the job. The non-significant difference between cultural groups suggests that this part of the theory may be applicable across cultural groups.

There also seem to be parallels in perceived job characteristics. In Barnes and Jamieson's own words, "Subjects reported similar levels of autonomy, feedback, task identity and variety in their jobs to those reported in North American studies" (p.14).

The greater satisfaction with their jobs reported by Samoan workers does not imply that they would become dissatisfied with enriched jobs (jobs that are higher on the four core dimensions). Rather, the Samoans' score of 5.79 (on a 7 point scale of desire for higher-order need satisfaction) suggests that they would react favourably to such changes. This possibility is of course compatible with the Hackman-Lawler model.

The model will be proven to be limited in its application to New Zealand where (a) certain New Zealand groups do not show a desire for higher order needs and (b) workers who do express such a desire do not react more favourably to enriched jobs than workers who do not share these values. The recognition of the importance of job values in the work of Lacke (1970) and Hackman and Lawler (1971) seems to make their conceptual frameworks (though not necessarily their instruments) ideally suited to the study of the job reactions of workers from various ethnic and cultural groups.

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