

New Zealand Workers' Attitudes: Reply To Robinson

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This paper presents a reply to a critical review by Robinson of a paper by the writer on the job satisfaction of New Zealand male manual workers (Inkson, *New Zealand Psychologist*, 1977, 6, 2-13).

The title of my paper was *not* "The Work Values of New Zealand Male Manual Workers", but "The Job Satisfaction of New Zealand Male Manual Workers", hence my use of instruments measuring satisfaction rather than values (Inkson, 1977a). While I did formulate some suggestions and hypotheses as to the nature of work values in New Zealand, at no point did I state that these were "assumptions", treat them as assumptions, or claim that they were in any sense proved by my data. Rather, I suggested that the observable differences in job satisfaction between the U.S. and New Zealand workers reported in my study could plausibly be explained by the special nature of New Zealand society, the effects of that society on the values of its members, and the extent to which these values were met at work. Moreover, I cited a number of studies which supported my argument, and which Robinson (1968) appears to ignore. Robinson gives only one possible alternative explanation for my results — that U.S. and New Zealand jobs are differently designed — but offers neither a theoretical rationale nor supporting evidence for such a position.

Robinson appears to take the view that consideration of any phenomenon (e.g. work values) is impossible unless one measures it. This is shown by her statement that my conceptualisation of job satisfaction "entails" (i.e. necessarily involves) certain types of measures. Measurement is of course desirable where it is possible, but speculation, logical deduction, and the gathering of relevant evidence from elsewhere also have their place in the scientific process, provided conclusions are not drawn from inadequate data.

Robinson states that my hypotheses about New Zealand workers' values are arrived at by "a series of complicated and unspecified inferences". That is a matter of opinion. I do not see the inferences as complicated, and I think I specified them quite clearly, as indeed did Robinson herself. What I did not do was treat them as "assumptions" as Robinson implies. An assumption is "the taking for granted or supposing that

a thing is true", whereas a hypothesis is "a proposition tentatively assumed in order to draw out its logical or empirical consequences" (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1966). I do not believe that anyone could read the relevant section of my paper ("Cultural and Occupational Factors", pp. 4-5), in which the word "may" is used three times, "hypothesized" twice, and "suggested" once, and come to the conclusion that I had made *assumptions* about either societal values or the psychology of New Zealand workers. Rather, on the basis of existing knowledge and previous research I formulated *hypotheses* concerning worker values. I then drew out the logical consequences of these hypotheses for job satisfaction, conducted a test to determine whether the predicted consequences were true, and showed that provided the legitimacy of the test was accepted, the results were at least consistent with the hypotheses.

I concede the desirability of measuring work values directly in such a study, and I would have done so had I been able to find suitable measures. To determine special characteristics of New Zealand worker values requires comparisons with equivalent overseas workers; without such comparisons, New Zealand data would be as valueless as test scores without norms. I could find no measure of work values for which suitable normative data were available. The most frequently used test of values and satisfaction, and the type of test which Robinson advocates, is the Porter need-satisfaction questionnaire (Porter, 1961). However, apart from having no systematic norms, this instrument, originally developed for use in managerial groups, has been shown, in contrast to the J.D.I. (the measure used in my study), to be of questionable validity when used to assess the values of manual workers (Herman & Hulin, 1973). In relation to determining the *content* of work values, there are other objections to this type of measure which I have detailed elsewhere (Inkson, 1977b, pp. 242-243). I believe Robinson is right to say that study of the content of values

"may be more fruitfully pursued through the use of interview techniques". It was for that reason that my major research method in the overall study was the replication of interview procedures used by Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt (1968) in their study of 229 "affluent" workers in Luton, England. The interview comparisons provided some confirmation that the New Zealand workers, in contrast to the Luton sample, expressed in attitudes and behaviour at least some of the values suggested in the paper on job satisfaction. For example, New Zealand workers expressed significantly less concern for security, and reported significantly more interaction with workmates, than did the Luton workers (Inkson, 1978).

Robinson's criticisms of the J.D.I. seem naive. The objection that "it does not follow that every worker who describes his job as 'routine' is expressing dissatisfaction" appears to set a test standard in which every response by every subject represents an expression of the quality in question — an impossible standard which could not be met by the measures proposed by Robinson. The J.D.I. is not a perfect instrument and its validity in cross-cultural studies has not been proved. Nevertheless, Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) report an extensive body of validating research for the instrument and show its high correlation with other measures of job satisfaction. As to the criticism that the J.D.I. "begs the question of the nature of job values", it is reiterated that the J.D.I. was used to measure satisfaction, not values.

Robinson states that I "reject" the theories of Maslow, Herzberg, and other behavioural scientists of the "self-actualisation" school. This is hard to reconcile with my statement that "there is undoubtedly some truth in these arguments" (p.3). What I rejected was the assumption, correctly attributed to these theorists by Fox (1971), "that all men, everywhere, can and should achieve self-actualisation within an organisational context structured to promote psychological growth" (p.6). Robinson states that such an attribution "does these theorists a disservice". However, the universalism and prescriptive emphasis in these theories is clearly demonstrated, for example by Herzberg's (1968) repeated references to those who receive no intrinsic rewards in their work as "stunted" and "psychologically crippled" and by Miller and Rice's assertion that, in good organisations, the job conditions "required for task performance are always identical with those required to satisfy the social and psychological needs" (1967, p.xii). My criticisms of the "self-actualisation" school have been elaborated elsewhere (Inkson, 1977c).

Robinson states that I initiate a discussion of

"the sources of job values in community and kin groups" but then examine instead "selected characteristics of New Zealand society". In fact, there was *no* reference in my paper to kin groups, and only a passing reference to "occupational communities". I was at pains to point out that "values at work are derived from a whole complex of cultural, subcultural, occupational, organisational, group and individual forces" (p.3) and to say that I would focus on *cultural* variables. The evidence of sociologists that the determinants of work attitudes and behaviour frequently lie *outside* the workplace (Shimmin, 1962; Goldthorpe et al., 1968) has been ignored by psychologists, who have tended to seek total explanation in terms of the interaction between the individual and his job or organisation. Need-deficiency theorists have gone a stage further, attempting to "predict" job satisfaction by reference only to the internal psychological processes of the individual (e.g. the comparison of her perceptions of her job with her perceptions of an ideal job) without reference to any external factors, not even to the nature of the work (e.g. Wanous & Lawler, 1973). It appears to be this type of study which Robinson is advocating in the early part of her paper.

Robinson makes one valid point when she suggests that there is a possible confusion, at various points in my paper, between "expectations" and "values". Some researchers have in fact argued that job satisfaction is a function of the discrepancy between what the individual expects, and what exists in his job (e.g. McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). However, as Locke (1969) and Lawler (1973) point out, not getting what one expects causes surprise but not necessarily dissatisfaction. On the other hand, "empirically, values and expectations often coincide, because most people only value that which they have a reasonable chance of attaining" (Locke, 1969, p. 320). Moreover, this criticism assumes that "expect" carries only its narrow meaning of "anticipate" i.e. denotes a non-evaluative prediction of future outcomes; my own meaning of "expect", as I think was clear from its usage in my paper, was that of "consider reasonable, just, proper, due, or necessary" (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1966). Essentially, I was arguing that people's values are determined by their experience and sense of fairness. A worker whose previous experience or observation of others has led him to the *expectation* of a wage of \$250 a week will be dissatisfied with \$200, whereas a worker who expects only \$200 will be satisfied. Robinson inadvertently makes the same point when she describes the wording of an appropriate questionnaire for determining values: does the worker's answer to the question, "What *should* your job be like?" describe his values or his expectations? It could be

argued convincingly that it describes that which he considers reasonable, just, proper, etc., i.e. his expectations.

Robinson states that "while it may be true that workers in small-scale enterprises value the autonomy.... the assumption that workers who are *not* part of such enterprises share those same job values, seems quite unwarranted". Apart from the fact that once again my hypothesis has been referred to as an assumption, this statement seems to ignore not only the high labour mobility prevalent in New Zealand (for example 97% of the workers in the largest organisations in my sample, i.e. freezing workers, had previously worked in smaller organisations), but also the normal processes of value-dissemination within any society. Robinson's statement is rather like saying that in a Christian society there is no reason to expect anyone except current Church members to have Christian values.

Robinson concludes her critique of my paper with the hope that my interview material "will be presented in future publication so that organisational researchers can begin to move" to a more satisfactory determination of the values of New Zealand workers. I share her hope, although I fail to see how non-publication of my data is such a stumbling-block to other researchers, including Robinson, who may study values in any way she sees fit. Indeed, her paper might have been more valuable had she presented some theory, or some evidence of her own, or even given a specific indication of what she would have considered an adequate test of my own hypotheses. I find the negative quality of her contribution depressing and hope she will soon be able to turn an obviously penetrating intellect and an admirable concern for the empirical verification of theory into more productive activities.

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