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The emergence of job satisfaction in organizational behavior: A historical overview of the dawn of job attitude research

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Abstract

Purpose – Based more on practical (and contextual), rather than theoretical grounds, over time, job satisfaction came to be the work attitude of choice for many early researchers interested in studying the relationship between employee attitudes and efficiency. Surprisingly, research examining the basis for why this belief is practically nonexistent. This paper addresses this apparent void in the organizational literature.

Design/methodology/approach – First, a historical overview of the development of job attitudes is introduced. Second, incorporating important early, but now mostly forgotten, research on employee boredom, fatigue and customer satisfaction, a "missing link" explanation is presented for job satisfaction eventually becoming the "job attitude of choice" in organizational research.

Findings – Integrating early research from two long-forgotten streams of organizational research, this paper provides a practical (and contextual) framework for why job satisfaction became the most widely used measure of happiness in the happy/productive worker thesis.

Practical implications – Future research endeavors on the happy/productive worker thesis might greatly benefit from an awareness of the important, but now mostly forgotten, stream of early research on worker well-being.

Originality/value – This historical paper provides the reader with a better understanding of the contextual framework for how the fascination with job satisfaction developed over time.

Keywords History, Attitudes, Job satisfaction

Paper type General review

> Perhaps the central objective of modern labor management and personnel work can be said to be the heightening of morale or improving of workers' attitudes (Kornhauser, 1930).

As was true for Kornhauser and his contemporaries fully 75 years ago, efforts to improve employee attitudes remain of paramount importance in the management sciences (Brief and Weiss, 2002; George, 1992). Nowhere is this importance more evident than in the proliferation of organizational research over the years examining job satisfaction. Although job satisfaction has been operationalized in many different ways (Judge *et al.*, 2001), it is usually considered to be an attitude (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). In an attempt to provide further conceptual clarity, Weiss and Cropanzano indicated the merit of distinguishing the belief, or cognitive, component of job satisfaction from its emotional, or affective, component. As noted by Wright and Cropanzano (2000, p. 85), "this suggests that job satisfaction is based partially on what one feels and partially on what one thinks." In any event, job satisfaction is, by far, the most frequently studied variable in organizational research, with more than 10,000

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studies published to date (Spector, 1997). One obvious reason for this continued interest in job satisfaction has been its long assumed role in the prediction of employee efficiency (Hersey, 1929, 1932a, b; Kornhauser, 1933; McMurry, 1932; Pennock, 1930; Snow, 1927).

Among these early researchers, McMurry (1932, p. 202) well expressed this belief in noting the importance in determining the relationship between "employee efficiency and work-satisfaction." Starting slowly in the mid-1930s (Hoppock and Spiegler, 1938), developing more fully during World War II (Brayfield and Crockett, 1955), and certainly well evidenced by the early-1950s, job satisfaction increasingly came to be the employee attitude of choice for researchers interested in better understanding what came to be called the "Holy Grail" of management research: the happy/productive worker thesis (Landy, 1985; Weiss, 2002; Wright, 2005)[1]. However, a careful consideration of the literature reveals a startling fact. Despite this increasingly widespread interest, research examining the "whys" surrounding this belief is conspicuous by its absence.

The purpose of this research is to help better understand the contextual framework for how this fascination with job satisfaction developed over time. To that end, and using important early, but now mostly forgotten, research on employee boredom, fatigue and customer satisfaction, this paper proposes a "missing link" explanation for why job satisfaction became the most widely used attitudinal measure in organizational research. But first, a brief historical overview of the development of job attitudes is introduced.

Attitudes and early management science research

Allport (1935) proposed that the study of attitudes began in the late nineteenth century, 1888 to be precise, with Lange's discovery that individuals instructed to concentrate on being ready to press a key at the onset of a stimulus responded more rapidly than those instructed to concentrate on the stimulus itself. This result was termed the subject's *aufgab* or task-attitude (Kiesler *et al.*, 1969). Consistent with Lange's laboratory research, in the work context, a number of early industrial engineers, including Fredrick Winslow Taylor and Frank Gilbreth, noted that the successful implementation of the principles of scientific management involved not only issues of physical strength and dexterity as they related to employee physical fatigue, but also a "mental revolution" on the part of both management and employee (Gilbreth, 1911; Gilbreth and Gilbreth, 1917; Taylor, 1919). For instance, while primarily focusing on the role of fatigue on employee output and achievement, Gilbreth (1911, p. 14) noted that employee "contentment" also had a significant impact on output. In a like manner, underlying Taylor's basic philosophy was the implicit assumption that workers who accepted the basic tenants of scientific management and, as a result, received the highest possible wages, with the least amount of physical and mental fatigue, would be the most "satisfied and productive."

Another leading contemporary of Taylor (1919), the Industrial Psychologist, Munsterberg (1913) focused not on physical fatigue, but on mental monotony or boredom. More specifically, while Gilbreth (1911, p. 24) defined fatigue as being "due to a secretion in the blood" of the worker, Munsterberg described monotony in terms of unpleasant feelings that repetitious tasks aroused in workers. For Munsterberg, monotony was quite different from fatigue, with monotony best categorized in terms of employee level of susceptibility and best described as a psychological "feeling" (Wright, 2005). Finally, the famous Hawthorne studies (and highly related work in Great Britain conducted contemporaneously by Wyatt and others in the 1920s) began as an investigation of the effects of such factors as rest pauses and incentives on worker fatigue and monotony.

But the emphasis soon shifted to the study of "attitudes" when the employees failed to respond in the "expected" manner to these changes (for additional discussions of the history of attitudinal research in organizational behavior, see Weiss and Brief, 2001; Wright, 2005). In short, the Hawthorne researchers in the USA and their British counterparts (Vernon *et al.*, 1924; Wyatt and Fraser, 1925; Wyatt *et al.*, 1938) "discovered" most definitely what Taylor, Munsterberg and other pioneers had intuitively observed decades before: that workers have the ability to reason, and that the appraisals they make of the work situation affect their reactions to it (Mayo, 1933). As with Taylor, the Gilbreths' Munsterberg, and Wyatt and his colleagues, the term attitude, in the contextual framework that the Hawthorne researchers used it, came to be associated with any number of employee "feelings" and "sentiments."

This definitional ambiguity as to what constitutes an attitude is partially due to the early seminal work of Thurstone (1927, 1928, 1929) and Thurstone and Thurstone (1930). In his seminal work entitled, "Attitudes can be measured," Thurstone (1928) proposed a broad definition of attitude, one incorporating the intensity of positive or negative affect for or against a psychological object. In particular, Thurstone (1928, p. 531) broadly and grandly defined attitude as "the sum total of a man's inclinations and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, ideas, threats, and convictions about any specified topic." On the basis of Thurstone's pioneering work, three early scales were developed to measure individual attitudes toward such topics as the church, prohibition and militarism – pacifism (Hinckley, 1932).

Thurstone's broad framework for defining attitude was highly influential on a number of early researchers interested in various work attitudes. For example, in an applied paper entitled, "The technique of measuring employee attitudes," Kornhauser (1933, p. 101) adopted Thurstone's general perspective and referred to the term attitude as being "conveniently vague" and having "no clear-cut psychological definition . . . " Other pioneering applied researchers were similarly vague in their definitions (Uhrbrock, 1934). Irrespective of these conceptual and definitional issues, by the 1930s, the study of work attitudes had evolved to the extent that Kornhauser (1933) was able to list five primary methods for investigating them.

The five primary methods for work attitude measurement

The first approach was termed by Kornhauser as the "impressionistic" method. Building on the work of Williams (1925), this approach was highly subjective and informal in nature. Researcher impressions were formed on the basis of many incidental observations of what employees said, how they said it, how they worked, and how they played. The later influential writings of Homans (1950) and Whyte (1943) well epitomize this impressionistic perspective. In a fascinating example of how this approach worked, consider Williams' (1925) research on the railroad industry. As a historical, contextual backdrop, because they had skills that were hard to replace, railroad workers were among the first to not only form local unions, but also to build a national federation of their locals (Chandler, 1965). As a result, their brotherhoods became the strongest unions during the late nineteenth century, pioneering modern collective bargaining and grievance procedures (Chandler, 1965). However, with the advent of World War I, serious industrial relations problems arose in a number of occupations, including the railroad industry. In an informative write-up, Williams (1925) attributed the root cause of the railroad strife to a major disruption of the nation's wartime system of wages. Through conversations with the head of a railroad brotherhood, Williams determined that governmental officials had arbitrarily changed a number of job specific wage rates, without considering their possible interrelationship with other job classification wage rates. The result was a severe disruption to the long established system of wage parity across various job classifications within the industry.

The second approach involved the unguided interview. Best demonstrated by Mayo (1933, p. 84), the interviewer was trained to ask no specific questions, but to encourage employees to talk about subjects important to them, especially "including employee attitudes and feelings..." The importance and magnitude of this approach is well demonstrated by its development at the Hawthorne plant. Commencing with interviews of 1,600 employees in 1928, by the end of 1930, an incredible 21,126 employees had been personally interviewed out of a total work population of roughly 40,000. During the initial year (1928) of operation, Mayo (1933) reported that the average interview lasted about 30 minutes. With increased confidence in the procedure, coupled with the training of 43 new interviewers in 1929 alone, by 1930, the average interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and Mayo (1933, p. 84) was able to enthusiastically report that the "employees enjoyed the opportunity of expressing their thoughts." Even considered within the context of today's more generally "enlightened" environment of human resource practices, the consideration shown employees through this extensive interview process remains quite impressive today, over 75 years later.

The unguided Hawthorne interview approach evolved into the third approach: the guided interview format. According to Kornhauser (1933), early research efforts varied as to the actual level of guidance. Typically, the interviewer had a specific set of topics or questions, but did not subscribe to a particular set order of questioning. This format left room for the employee, if the need arose, to branch off into others topics of interest or concern. Prime examples of the use of this approach involved Kornhauser's own research at the Badger-Globe Mill of the Kimberly-Clark Corporation (Kornhauser and Sharp, 1932) and prominent consulting psychologist, Houser's (1927) investigations in the manufacturing and public utilities industries. In the Kimberly-Clark study, Kornhauser (1933, p. 102) conducted his interviews from a list of approximately 50 questions, with full written notes being kept, "including what the interviewer says and what the employee contributes even where this is not related to any questions on the list."

The fourth method involved the use of attitudinal question blanks. Once again, Houser (1927, 1938)and his consulting associates were important in the development of this approach. In this approach, Houser asked employees a number of simple questions which could be answered by a simple "yes" or "no" format. This format was highly instrumental to the development of later, more intricate methodologies (Kolstad, 1938), as it allowed researchers to compile simple quantitative data regarding, for instance, how satisfied/unsatisfied employees were on any number of workplace conditions.

The fifth, and final, approach in use by the 1930s involved the actual creation of sophisticated scales, specifically designed to measure particular attitudes. Building on the seminal work of Thurstone (1928, 1929) and Uhrbrock (1934) provided the results of a large ($N = 4{,}430$) study of employee attitudes in a manufacturing firm using a scale composed of 50 items. Sample items included, "If I had to do it over again I'd still work for this company" and "I think this company treats its employees better than any other company does." In findings that signaled later research interests on such topics as job satisfaction, job and organizational commitment, and job involvement, Uhrbrock found that supervisors were more favorably disposed to their company than general laborers, while women were more favorably disposed than were men. Reviewing the body of work on work attitudes to date, Uhrbrock (1934, p. 373) concluded that the use of employee attitudinal research would be greatly helpful in determining how "to create a loyal, cooperative attitude" in one's employees. Likewise, and foreshadowing the widespread subsequent interest in the possible role of job satisfaction in the prediction of employee efficiency and performance, Kornhauser (1933, p. 99) noted that, "Management's interest in employee attitudes arises from the belief that attitudes are important determinants of efficiency."

The advent of job satisfaction research

As a careful reading of both Kornhauser (1933) and Uhrbrock (1934), two early leading lights of research on employee attitudes demonstrates, by the early-1930s, job satisfaction had still not yet become the attitude of choice for the vast majority of researchers in applied psychology and management. Certainly, one reason for this failure involved the previously discussed definitional ambiguity surrounding what constitutes an attitude (Thurstone, 1928). In fact, Organ and Near (1985) noted that a number of prominent, early researchers appeared to not only confuse, but also confound the terms "employee morale" and "job satisfaction"[2]. As a result, in his seminal work, aptly titled, *Job Satisfaction*, Hoppock (1935, p. 47) was moved to note that, "As an independent variable *job* (italics original) satisfaction may not even exist."

Similarly, and apparently much to their surprise, Organ and Near (1985) noted that the term "job satisfaction" was completely absent from the subject index of Roethlisberger and Dickson's (1939) ground breaking work, *Management and the Worker*! Indeed, instead of job satisfaction, Roethlisberger and Dickson preferred to use such terms as "sentiments" and "tone." These are important conceptual distinctions because, as appropriately noted by Organ and Near (1985, p. 242), terms like sentiments (and tone) indicated much more than just satisfaction with one's job, but "referred to emotions, to feelings, to affect, to hedonic states." As one case in point, an early study by Thorndike (1917) focused, not on job satisfaction, but on a more global measure of general satisfaction, which Thorndike termed "satisfyingness." In sum, a cursory examination of the classic literature in the field clearly demonstrates how surprisingly infrequently, at least up to the late-1940s, the term "job satisfaction" actually appeared in the literature (Organ and Near, 1985).

Consider research published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* (*JAP*). *JAP* started publication in 1917, during World War I. Over the first 30 years of publication, from 1917 to 1946 to be exact, only 2 articles were published in *JAP* with the words "job/work satisfaction" in the title. While topics such as Thorndike's (1917) paper on satisfyingness were published in *JAP* early on, the first article focusing on job satisfaction was not published until 1937, 20 years after *JAP*'s inception, by the pioneering job satisfaction researcher, Robert Hoppock. In this landmark study, Hoppock (1937) reported job satisfaction levels for a sample of APA vocational and industrial psychologists, finding that psychologists were no more satisfied than workers from other occupations.

The second article, by Super (1939), examined the relationship between employee occupational level and job satisfaction. Super made a number of observations that served as a basis of investigation for future job satisfaction researchers. Among these observations, Super found differences in average satisfaction level among professional, managerial and commercial workers, with professional workers reporting being the most satisfied with their work. Interestingly, it was almost another 10 years, or not until 1948, that job satisfaction focused articles once again appeared in *JAP*. For example, Kerr (1948) reported on the validity and reliability of the job satisfaction tear ballot and Nahm (1948) conducted a study on nursing satisfaction. By the early-1950s, research on job satisfaction was definitely on the rise, and a number of researchers were publishing their job satisfaction research in *JAP*, including Kates (1950), Brayfield and Rothe (1951), and Carey *et al.* (1951).

Of course, over the next 50 years, literally thousands of articles investigating aspects of job satisfaction have been published (Locke, 1976; Judge *et al.*, 2001; Spector, 1997). In fact, ask any organizational researcher today what is the most commonly investigated job attitude, and they will undoubtedly reply: why, job satisfaction, of course! To help address this mystery of why, this paper proposes that a "missing link" explanation can be found by jointly considering two independent streams of early, applied work designed to investigate the correlates of employee efficiency. The first involves employee susceptibility to various aspects of industrial fatigue and monotony (Bedale, 1924; Thompson, 1930; Wyatt, 1929). The second examines a long forgotten body of research on customer sales and advertising (Kitson, 1921; Poffenberger, 1925, 1929; Snow, 1926; Strong, 1925a).

Employee fatigue, monotony and satisfaction

Interest in worker fatigue and monotony can be traced back to the time of scientific management (Gilbreth and Gilbreth, 1917; Taylor, 1919; Wright, 2005). However, the topic became even more prominent as a result of the famous Hawthorne experiments at the Western Electric Company (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939) and contemporaneous work in Great Britain by the British Industrial Fatigue and Health Research Boards (Wyatt, 1924, 1929). For instance, in work that equaled in scientific rigor the more widely heralded work at the Hawthorne plant, Wyatt (1929) and Wyatt *et al.* (1928, 1929) found that when workers experienced monotony or boredom, their efficiency decreased.

Given these findings, it did not take long for researchers to consider whether employees differed in their susceptibility to experience monotony or fatigue, especially given earlier research conducted on army recruits during World War I. Specifically, the Army Alpha Intelligence Examination administered to military recruits was highly instrumental in stimulating research on worker propensities to differentially experience monotony or boredom on the job. Of related interest to applied researchers, these tests established that scores on intelligence tests varied according to the previous civilian occupations of the recruits (Blum and Naylor, 1968; Wright, 2005). Interestingly, the tests also found that the percentage of illiteracy in the general population was surprisingly large, with a significant additional number only able to read with great difficulty. In particular, fully 25 percent of the military recruits were unable to read and understand simple printed instructions (Poffenberger, 1929).

Since, the armed forces were being asked to select, process, train, develop, place and promote literally millions of additional personnel, often in a matter of a few short weeks, these distressing illiteracy results presented military staff with the potential for a human resources nightmare. As one consequence of the α-tests, a widespread interest in studying the scope and extent of feeblemindness in society at large and the workplace in particular developed, as witnessed in Mateer's (1917) provocatively titled article in *JAP*, "The moron as a war problem."

Further building on these Army Alpha findings, research on worker fatigue and monotony focused on the role of employee intelligence in performance prediction (Wright, 2005). It did not take long for some to recognize the complex nature of a possible relation between intelligence and performance in the workplace. Miner (1921) was among the first to recognize that always hiring the most intelligent job candidate might not be the best strategy, with Otis (1920) noting that an intelligent worker is more likely to revolt if required to work for a prolonged period of time on repetitious tasks. Relatedly, and highly pertinent to our discussion on satisfaction, Snow (1923) noted the possibility that an employee's intelligence was a prime factor in establishing his level of general satisfaction. To that end, Snow incorporated Thorndike's (1917, 1922) aforementioned global measure of (life) satisfaction. Interestingly, for Thorndike and his students, satisfyingness came to be considered as a primary, fundamental aspect of human nature. In this context, while duller individuals demonstrated considerable general dissatisfaction when the work was fairly complex in nature, they showed the least general dissatisfaction when the work was highly repetitive (Snow, 1923). The lesson learned was that employees widely differed in the extent that they experienced employee monotony and boredom, which, in turn, affected their performance.

The implications of these early studies were highly influential on the next generation of job satisfaction researchers (Rothe, 1946a, b; Smith, 1953). For instance, one of the leading lights of early applied research on job satisfaction, Patricia Cain Smith, reported that her early research interest in general satisfactions resulted from findings of the British Industrial Fatigue and Health Research Boards (Smith, 1992; Wyatt, 1924, 1929; Wyatt *et al.*, 1929). In an informative look into how applied research was conducted in the early days, Smith (1992, p. 9) noted that:

> First I tried to "validate" workers' reports of boredom by correlating the reports with slumps in output. I watched and made complete records of the behavior of each of a number of machine operators throughout every working day for an entire week.

As a result of her efforts, Smith found that production did, indeed, change and that the changes were related to the satisfaction of the employee's self-set goals for the day (Cain, 1942; Smith, 1953; Wright, 2005). If the employee was behind her self-set goal, she was likely to be unsatisfied, and would tend to speed up work activity to reduce her dissatisfaction. Conversely, if the employee was ahead of schedule, she was inclined to be satisfied and would tend to reduce her work speed or stop work altogether (Smith, 1953). I suggest that it was observations such as these that greatly helped lead to the proposed importance of job satisfaction in the prediction of worker performance. Next, an examination of the second link in this "missing link" explanation is provided, the all but forgotten role of customer sales and advertising.

The evolution of customer to job satisfaction

By the 1920s, research on sales and advertising by such prominent writers as Scott (1908), Sheldon (1911), Hollingworth (1913), Nystrom (1914), Eastman (1916) and Whitehead (1917) was considered by many scholars to be little more than "a jumbled collection of opinions on a great variety of topics" (Strong, 1925b, p. 77). In fact, while obviously quite relevant to more modern marketing researchers, the importance of customer satisfaction was surprisingly absent from the earliest "how to" musings on appropriate sales techniques (Strong, 1925a, b). The early marketing objective was primarily focused on securing the particular sale in question (Wright, 2005). Poffenberger (1929, p. 411) appropriately referred to this approach "as a kind of combat in which all plans must be laid so as to guarantee that the distributor shall win and consumer shall succumb." As time evolved, this single objective of making a particular sale became one of not only securing the initial sale, but one of retaining the customer for future sales (Charters, 1922; Sloan and Mooney, 1920). As a result, this increased focus and direction regarding just what constitutes a proper sale resulted in the development of theoretical models devoted to how to influence others to buy (Kitson, 1921; Poffenberger, 1929; Snow, 1926).

One of these early theoretical approaches is especially noteworthy in acknowledging the importance of customer satisfaction. This approach focused primarily on the "creation" of customer wants, leading to the increased prominence of applied psychology-based techniques in sales and advertising (Poffenberger, 1929; Wright, 2005). Strong (1925b, p. 77) succinctly expressed this approach in terms of the action sequence "wants-solution-action-*satisfaction*"(emphasis added). According to Strong (1925b, p. 85), "we have a picture of selling where the prospect is very active because he (the customer) has a want to be satisfied and the salesman's job is to aid the prospect in his endeavors to solve his problem." The emphasis became one of what customer need(s) will the product satisfy. In other words, by the mid-1920s, advertising had finally evolved to a focus on the wants and desires of the customer. The question of paramount importance became one of what must be done to enhance customer happiness and satisfaction with the current product to increase the possibility of purchasing another product (Wright, 2005).

Simple stuff in the twenty-first century, but quite a revolutionary concept for the American buying public of the pre-World War I era. After all, the median income for the 40,000,000 Americans receiving income in 1918 was a very modest $1,140. Furthermore, 75 percent of the income-earning population received only $1,574 or less, with the vast majority of that income going to the necessities of food, clothing and housing (Poffenberger, 1929). Once again, it is important to consider the social contextual milieu in which this research was being conducted. The role of a heightened commercialism was rapidly gaining momentum after the World War I (fueled in part by the post-war rise in income) and sales and advertising philosophy changed dramatically by the "roaring" 1920s (Wright, 2005). Customer satisfaction had become extremely important because of the realization that "…unless the goods measure up to expectations there will be no repeat orders" (Scott, 1908, p. 86). This strong influence of early sales and advertising research on the role of satisfaction, first for the customer, and later for the employee, has not been adequately addressed by organizational scholars (Wright, 2005). It is very apparent, however, that the emphasis on customer satisfaction for increasing repeat sales (or increasing performance and productivity) was not lost on a number of early advertising researchers.

How apparent was this recognition? Well, as noted earlier, only 2 articles with the words "job/work satisfaction" in the title were published from 1917 to 1946 in *JAP*. There was a similar apparent lack of interest in job satisfaction research by such other leading journals as the *Personnel Journal*. In contrast, over the same time period, an astonishing 92 articles were published in *JAP* which had either the root words "sales" or advertise' in the article titles, making the knowledge of advertising and sales methods to the consumer, if not the most studied, certainly the most published *JAP* topics in the 1920s and 1930s. Gradually, this interest in all manner of topics relating to customer satisfaction with a product evolved, so that by the early-1930s, applied psychologists were interested in not only whether customer attitudes could distinguish between successful and unsuccessful products and sales techniques, but also distinguish between successful and unsuccessful merchants themselves (Waters, 1931). The Great Depression and the subsequent hard economic times of the 1930s, coupled with the advent of World War II, slowed the inevitable progress. However, it was only a matter of time before this interest in various aspects of customer and merchant satisfaction evolved to the study of the satisfaction of actual employees with aspects of their job, moving Brayfield and Rothe (1951, p. 307) to note that, "Increasingly, business and industrial concerns are studying the job satisfaction and morale of the employees."

Interestingly, a scant four years later, Brayfield and Crockett (1955, p. 42), was forced to admit that "satisfaction … need not imply strong motivation to outstanding performance." This skeptical conclusion was further buttressed by Vroom's (1964) influential book. In his review, Vroom determined that the median correlation between job satisfaction and performance was a rather modest $r = 0.14$. Roughly 20 years later, a meta-analysis by Iaffaldano and Muchinsky (1985) placed the relation at a similarly modest $r = 0.17$. While this seemed to settle the matter, other findings were more supportive. For instance, at about the same time as Iaffaldano and Muchinsky's work, a meta-analysis by Petty *et al.* (1984) determined that the corrected relation between satisfaction and performance was actually a rather healthy $r = 0.31$, over twice the figure reported by Vroom. Finally, the most comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis of the relation to date was conducted by Judge *et al.* (2001).

Judge *et al.*'s meta-analysis was composed of 312 samples with a combined N of 54,417 subjects. Their qualitative review was organized around seven models proposed as best characterizing past investigations of the job satisfaction – job performance relation. These models can be briefly summarized as: job satisfaction causes job performance (model 1); job satisfaction is caused by job performance (model 2); job satisfaction and job performance are reciprocally related (model 3); job satisfaction is spuriously related to job performance (model 4); the job satisfaction – job performance relation is moderated by other variables (model 5); job satisfaction is not related to job performance (model 6); and finally, that there are alternative conceptualizations of job satisfaction and/or job performance (model 7). Results of their meta-analysis estimated the mean true correlation between overall job satisfaction and job performance to be

0.30, though they observed that the more traditionally-based models 1-4 have typically provided results that are disappointing to proponents of a job satisfaction – job performance relation. As a result, recent research has increasingly come to recognize the importance of models 5 and 7, leading to a renewed optimism about the prospects of finding practically meaningful relations between job satisfaction and performance ratings (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001; Judge *et al.*, 1995). Ironically, my review of classic, but unfortunately, long forgotten, primary research sources uncovered information particularly germane to both models 5 and 7.

A number of applied psychology and management scholars were quite interested early on in the possible relationships among worker well-being, productivity and employee retention (Elkind, 1931; Fisher and Hanna, 1931; Hersey, 1929, 1930, 1932a, b). Unlike job satisfaction, which by definition, is limited in scope to aspects of one's work, these early researchers did not limit the domain of employee well-being to only the job, but clearly acknowledged the more global elements of well-being, noting that it refers to one's life as a whole (Hersey, 1932b). By focusing on positive well-being (and consistent with Judge *et al.*'s models 5 and 7), Hersey (1932b, 1929, p. 289) was sufficiently moved to note that "it would seem impossible to escape the conclusion that in the long run at least, men are more productive in a positive emotional state than in a negative [one]."

In like fashion, a number of Hersey's contemporaries concentrated on the possible benefits of examining the negative or unpleasantness dimension of well-being (Elkind, 1931; McMurry, 1932). For example, using data obtained from employees at R.H. Macy and Company, Anderson (1929) concluded that in excess of 20 percent of the working population suffered from mild mental disorders. In addition, early investigations of this potential problem were not limited to workers from the USA. According to Culpin and Smith (1927, 1930), between 20 and 30 percent of gainfully employed British postal workers suffered from some form of neurosis. In fact, early researchers appeared to recognize the possibility of both a moderating (Fisher and Hanna, 1931; Hoppock, 1935; Weitz, 1952) and main effect (Kornhauser and Sharp, 1932; McMurry, 1932) influence of various measures of employee well-being and emotion on the job satisfaction – job performance relation.

As with job performance and efficiency, the role of employee well-being in the prediction of employee attendance and retention has long been of interest to organizational scholars. Fisher and Hanna's (1931) seminal work on the "dissatisfied worker" is representative of this early recognition that employee well-being is predictive of employee participation decisions. More specifically, they noted that employee well-being was "responsible to a much greater extent for labor turnover than is commonly realized"(Fisher and Hanna, 1931, p. 233) and actually accounted for upwards of 90 percent of employee turnover and 50 percent of absenteeism. Their interest in the role of employee psychological or emotional well-being in employee withdrawal decisions was similarly shared by a number of other early researchers, including Eberle (1919) and Snow (1923). In particular, Eberle (1919) wrote about the relevance of "general" employee satisfactions, while Snow (1923) focused on the role of "mental alertness" in employee decisions to withdraw.

These findings clearly demonstrate that a number of early organizational researchers recognized the possible benefits of employee well-being in better understanding the happy/productive worker thesis (Wright, 2005). Unfortunately, this burgeoning interest in the topic of well-being practically ceased with the advent of the great depression (Uhrbrock, 1934), and did not return in the social sciences for roughly 60 years (Diener, 1984, 1994). More recently, an increasing number of scholars are proposing employee well-being as providing the basis for better understanding and explaining the happy/productive worker thesis (Wright, 2005; Wright and Cropanzano, 2004).

Concluding thoughts

The systematic analysis of employee attitudes began at a rudimentary level, in the early-1920s (Kornhauser, 1944). Based more on practical, rather than theoretical grounds, over time, job satisfaction came to be the work attitude of choice for many researchers interested in studying organizational behaviors (Wright, 2005). Incorporating important early, but now mostly forgotten, applied research on employee boredom, fatigue and customer satisfaction, a "missing link" explanation was presented for why job satisfaction became the most widely used measure of happiness in the happy/productive worker thesis. Regarding the first link, much early interest in job satisfaction evolved from work on the purported relationship between employee monotony, boredom and fatigue with job performance (Smith, 1953). That is, and consistent with the practical basis for the Hawthorne experiments (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939), if employee satisfaction is related to employee boredom, and employee boredom is related to performance, perhaps employee job satisfaction is related to job performance.

The second link evolved from the similar fascination of a number of early, applied psychologists with maximizing the relationship between customer satisfaction and future sales performance. According to this argument, if customer satisfaction is predictive of product sales and subsequent merchant success, then employee satisfaction with their job should also be predictive of their performance. The simultaneous consideration of these missing link explanations provides a practical based explanation for why job satisfaction became the primary operationalization of happiness. However, given the fact that after literally thousands of studies, a definitive linkage between job satisfaction and performance remains to be made, future research endeavors on the happy/productive worker thesis would greatly benefit from a careful reconsideration of the mostly forgotten stream of early research on worker well-being.

Notes

1. As evidence of this gradual, but slow progression, let us consider the chronology of reference sources, by decade, listed in Brayfield and Crockett's (1955) widely cited review of the employee attitude to employee performance relation. Of the 62 references cited by Brayfield and Crockett, only four were from the 1920s to 1930s combined! Over half, or 35, were from the 1950s, with the remaining 23 published in the 1940s.
2. In a review of the term morale, Child (1941, p. 393) noted three different conceptualizations of the construct. One conceptualization is of particular relevance to the present discussion, as it refers "to a condition of physical and *emotional well-being* [italics added] in the individual that makes it possible for him to work and live hopefully and effectively . . . " However, as noted by Organ and Near (1985), as time evolved, the term morale fell more and more into disfavor, with job satisfaction becoming the job attitude of choice in organizational research.

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