

## DISCUSSION

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Being neither a statistician nor an expert on social indicators, I feel somewhat constrained in expressing many definitive judgments about the three papers which have been presented--other than commenting on their uniform excellence. What I believe I can do well, and perhaps what should have been done in a prefatory statement, is to provide something of a historical backdrop and a context for the papers which might enhance their meaning. Having accomplished this, I will then give some reactions to each.

Six years ago, in the annual Manpower Report of the President, the then Secretary of Labor expressed the following conviction: "What a man's or a woman's work is like and what employment means are crucial to the quality of American life. There is a danger of forgetting that the ultimate purpose of the economy--and of employment as part of it--is to satisfy the needs of individuals, instead of the other way around. We must begin to consider and examine the meaning of employment--in terms of human satisfaction--going beyond the earnings it provides. The full significance of work can be identified only through examination of all the varied gratifications--and deprivations--to which it leads. We are undertaking that examination."

In a subsequent section of the Report, prefaced by the heading "Quality of Employment," this statement can be found: "If meaningful and generally acceptable indexes of the quality of employment are to be developed...the current limited efforts to refine concepts and measures, and to expand research on the complex inter-relationships among the characteristics of the individual, his job, and his environment must be greatly intensified. Efforts to date have served the more limited objectives of employers and academic scholars better than the much broader and more stringent requirements of national planning."

Regretably, these requirements had not been met when, less than five years later, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare released its now well-known examination of Work In America in the form of a report which, at least, sought "to lay the groundwork for changes in policy" regarding work and employment. As you may well know, many of the report's judgments about the condition of American workers, constituting much of the *raison d'etre* for its policy recommendations, proved to be highly controversial. I think that it would be useful for us to re-examine a few of them.

According to Work In America, things have been changing, but "work has not changed fast enough to keep up with the rapid and widescale changes in worker attitudes, aspirations and values." As a consequence, "significant numbers of American workers are dissatisfied with the quality of their working lives...creating an increasingly intolerable situation with severe

repercussions...likely to be experienced in other parts of the social system." More specifically, we are told that "as work problems increase, there may be a consequent decline in physical and mental health, family stability, community participation and cohesiveness, and 'balanced' sociopolitical attitudes, while there is an increase in drug and alcohol addiction, aggression, and delinquency." Finally, as to implications for Government Policy, "we have sufficient information about the relationship between work and heart disease, longevity, mental illness, and other health problems to warrant governmental action. That jobs can be made more satisfying and that this will lead to healthier and more productive workers and citizens is no longer in doubt."

No one would dispute that these are pretty bold assertions, but many are likely to regard them as highly equivocal ones, perhaps more accurately characterized as hypotheses than as established principles. But let us continue to trace the path of recent history.

In 1973, the Office of Management and Budget completed its extensive collation of data culminating in the publication of Social Indicators 1973, an extension, in a sense, of the Federal Government effort that began with the publication in 1969 of Toward A Social Report. In addition to its fairly predictable treatment of Employment Opportunities, the OMB report also makes a very commendable effort to characterize the Quality of Employment Life. Chosen to represent this concept were a measure of job satisfaction (as defined and operationalized by the Michigan Survey Research Center) and a range of working conditions measures representing both contributory (benefit coverage) and outcome (work injuries) variables.

While Social Indicators 1973 certainly deserves high marks for its accomplishments in collating a range of data which hitherto had not been assembled in such fashion, I suspect that most readers, whose expectations were heightened by the volume's impressive title, could not help but be disappointed. I do not intend this so much as a criticism of what was done as an expression of my own disappointment of what was produced in relation to what was needed. In short, it was a reasonable beginning, but certainly more illustrative than definitive. "Quality of Employment," though still a useful referent term, was still in need of definition, conceptually and operationally.

This need was probably nowhere more acute than in the Department of Labor where a little known but intensive debate was taking place regarding the "true" condition of the American worker. When it was proposed, as a few had the temerity to do, that the Department do battle with the obscure, if not unseen, enemy called the quality of work or employment, the predictable, perhaps invariable, response was: "Show

me the data which establish the existence of a problem that justifies or requires Government attention." Regretably, the data necessary to build a case for action did not seem to exist. There was no compelling evidence, for example, that job satisfaction had declined either precipitously or gradually, or that absenteeism was raging, or that productivity was disastrously sagging, or that we had been experiencing wholesale defection from the labor force.

On the other hand, the protagonists in this dispute could point to the notable strides taken since World War II to improve the well-being of workers, in terms of wage levels, income security, job protection, and the like. If there were in fact a case to be made, it obviously would have to be based on reliable data rather than catchwords, slogans, polemic and theory. It would require that we first establish just what it is that is important to measure and to improve.

So it was on to the Bureau of Social Science Research with this "simple" request for assistance: "There seems to be something of a campaign afoot to improve the quality of work (or employment, or working life). It sounds like a reasonable national goal, but what specifically is it that we are or should be striving to change and how can we gage the progress of our change efforts?"

The three conceptual papers which have been presented here today deal with a subset of the several issues which are being addressed as part of that exercise. Each of them, in my view, makes a notable contribution to the overall purpose of the project.

I must confess to having a particular affinity for the Quinn paper, not because of the fact that much of its substance grows out of research--very excellent research--supported by the Department of Labor, but because of what I have found to be an extraordinarily useful approach to conceptualizing and assessing the quality of employment. As Quinn points out, the quality-effectiveness strategy differs significantly from the OMB Social Indicators approach in that it deals with processes instead of outcomes alone.

It not only seeks to provide explanations of what causes what, but more important, it establishes a basis for selecting points of intervention in the social system which are likely to bring about desired changes in outcome measures.

The examination of the quality of employment simultaneously from three different perspectives has much to commend. This approach expands the more traditional conception of social indicators as criteria of individual well-being to include as well the many broader and equally legitimate organizational and societal interests in the character of employment. Realistically, policy decisions are not going to be based exclusively on the measurable impact of employment on workers alone, but will take into account as well the consequences for other concerned parties as well as society generally.

This three-way approach to assessment serves well both to highlight the value dimension of social indicators and to locate it more sensibly at the outcome or effectiveness end of the cause-effect equation than at the working conditions end as is commonly done. Too many contentious statements already have been made regarding the attributes which are supposed to characterize good and bad jobs. This kind of debate is better resolved empirically than theoretically or polemically, by establishing what the specific consequences are of any particular job attribute.

Of course the beauty of the tri-perspective approach to assessing the quality of employment is somewhat marred by an inevitable complication. Despite the optimistic assumption subscribed to by some that conditions of employment which best serve the needs of workers also further the interests of employers and others, there is no sound basis for concluding that all good things necessarily go together. Research now underway at the Survey Research Center, with Labor Department sponsorship, hopefully will shed badly needed light on what form is in fact taken by the "structure of effectiveness." It seems reasonable to anticipate, however, that there are likely to be conflicts--perhaps substantial ones--among the three basic perspectives with respect to at least some conditions of employment. The method for their resolution is by no means obvious. Notwithstanding Quinn's assertion that the selection of dominant perspectives in cases of conflict should be made by "those individuals, groups, and organizations whose positions confer on them the legitimacy (emphasis added) to make such decisions." If there are any universally accepted criteria of legitimacy, I am not aware what they may be or how they became established.

A somewhat related problem concerns the selection from among the broad set of working condition variables some subset that might best occupy our attention in monitoring the quality of work. I agree with Quinn that this choice should certainly include those conditions that impact significantly on effectiveness criteria that are important to all three perspectives. However, this is a necessary but not sufficient basis of choice. It stands to reason that there are conditions which significantly affect workers, for example, that have little impact on employer interests. I doubt the wisdom of assigning such conditions to a low(er) order of priority merely on the basis of their negligible implications for employer goal achievement.

Land, like Quinn, argues the importance of establishing cause-effect linkages between outcome indicators and antecedent conditions, although the relationships he examines are with broad social and economic conditions rather than specific features of employment. Using job satisfaction as an aggregate social indicator, Land describes two tentative models he has developed to illustrate how job satisfaction can be established as an indicator of social change.

In attempting to relate trends in aggregate job satisfaction to the basic economic indicator

of the unemployment rate, Land is immediately confronted with a formidable methodological problem: the doubtful reliability and interpretability of available statistics on job satisfaction. It is no easy matter to plot trends in job satisfaction, notwithstanding the deceptively facile judgments that some observers have made in the last few years. In addition to suffering from the limitation of excessively high standard errors, existing data on job satisfaction reflect rather substantial variance in question wording. There is a reasonable basis for doubting the comparability, for example, of answers to questions about satisfaction with "your job" and satisfaction with "the work you do." This measurement problem is rather nicely illustrated in the appendix of a monograph written by Quinn for the Department of Labor (Job Satisfaction: Is There a Trend?, Manpower Administration Monograph No. 30). I urge you to read it.

In examining the linkage between satisfaction and unemployment rate, Land finds a significant inverse relationship between the two indexes, with the former increasing as the latter decreases. The hypothesis he offers up to account for this correlation seem plausible enough, although I suspect that other equally plausible ones could be generated. I do find particular favor, however, with the notion that the relationship may in part be a function of general changes in life satisfaction. I have long been puzzled by the neglect of the obverse of the popular "spillover" hypothesis; i.e., general life circumstances influencing work experience.

It is notable too that Land's findings and interpretations run counter to what I sense is the prevailing wisdom around the Labor Department. Although the popular view is that job satisfaction and unemployment are likely to be correlated, the relationship is assumed to be direct rather than inverse, with increases in unemployment accompanied by increases in job satisfaction. Presumably, during periods of rising unemployment, workers are so damned thankful to have any job at all that they overlook or play down those features of employment which might otherwise distress them. I think the lesson to be learned here is the importance of defining issues and developing policy on the basis of empirical data rather than gut feelings and highly personalized views of the world. A system of social indicators of the quality of employment obviously has much to offer in this respect.

Land's second model, establishing linkages between satisfaction and both occupational status and age, is also provocative. Although I find the logic of his analysis and the predictive power of the model fairly impressive, I think it best that we reserve final judgment until there is some opportunity to test the accuracy of his projections to the decade of the 1970's. It is well that we accept his acknowledgement that both these models are quite tentative and that they are merely illustrative of how job satisfaction can be given interpretive value as a social indicator.

Of course, even if we assume that both models are essentially valid, we are faced with no small challenge in deriving policy implications regarding the enhancement of job satisfaction. With his tongue in perhaps both cheeks, Land suggests three possibilities--eliminate unemployment, bar those under 29 from employment, and abolish blue-collar jobs. I trust that we can be equally imaginative in discovering some more viable options. It may be that the much maligned Work In America treatise deserves more careful consideration in this regard.

Finally, a few thoughts about Thurow and his treatment of equity in the world of work. Having been subjected these past few years to the tyranny of neo-classical economists, it is exhilarating to find that there are other economic perspectives that are alive and well, and to hear it conceded that there are disciplines other than economics which may have something to contribute to the definition and solution of social problems. I might add that I was forewarned that the Thurow brand of economics is both mushy soft and dangerous, and that I should be wary of giving any implicit endorsement to his efforts to subvert or mongrelize the discipline by conceding that sociologists and psychologists have something of value to contribute in attempting to understand and shape the world of work. For the while at least I will take my chances and do penance if necessary after I rejoin the proponents of the true faith in Washington.

The concept of interdependent preferences and the issue of equity are of obvious concern in the development of a social indicators scheme. Indeed, I would be inclined to go beyond their pertinence to the matter of wage structure and apply a criterion of equity to other, non-economic (or at least less economic) conditions of employment. Equity is a basis for differentiating among occupational groups with respect to job security, comfort and safety, and other amenities of employment as well as in terms of wage benefits.

Although I disagree with many of his interpretations, I do concur with the basic tenor of Robert Schrank's treatment of what he calls "schmoozing" in the May 1974 issue of Industrial Relations. This quite unique term is used to describe a range of opportunities available to some work groups that are not available to other groups--the freedom to make adjustments in standard working hours, the opportunity to use a telephone while at work, and the chance to engage in casual socializing in the work place. Government white-collar workers and assembly line workers present picture of striking contrasts in this regard. Schrank argues that the many amenities available to white-collar workers generally which are denied to blue-collar workers produce considerable resentment. I suspect that he is correct, although I know of no basis for gaging either its prevalence or its intensity.