Robert Hoppock: Early Job Satisfaction and Vocational Guidance Pioneer

Note. The authors would like to thank Ed Beck, Joan Bedell, Shannon Bedell, Shawn Comiskey, and Jeanne Scalise and for their valuable comments and suggestions on this paper.

Background

In this installment of the History Corner, we focus on an early pioneer of job satisfaction research and vocational guidance, Robert Hoppock (see Figure 1). Hoppock was born on December 24, 1901 in Lambertville, New Jersey (Ohles, Ohles, & Ramsay, 1997). After graduating from Lambertville High School, he spent 2 years at Lafayette College before transferring to Wesleyan University, where he earned an undergraduate degree in economics in 1923 (Ohles et al., 1997; Department of Economics, n.d.; Thomas, 1995). After graduating from college, Hoppock was unsure of which career path he should pursue. This was a recurring theme in his life. In his own words, Hoppock had a “painful” time finding his occupational calling (Hoppock, Conyne, & Cochran, 1976, p. 275). Having dabbled in a number of different jobs—accounting clerk, payroll clerk, express delivery person, camp counselor, passenger agent, kitchen helper, car service clerk, dish-washer—he eventually became a high school English teacher at his alma mater (Hoppock, 1967a; Hoppock, 1970a; Ohles et al., 1997). After 3 years as a teacher, he changed careers to become the first vocational counselor in the Rahway, New Jersey school district, eventually transitioning again to become the National Vocational Guidance Association’s first field secretary (Hoppock et al., 1976; Ohles et al., 1997; Pope, 2000). Later he became an assistant director at the National Occupational Conference within the Carnegie Corporation, where he studied employment trends (Ohles et al., 1997; Thomas,
He later entered graduate school at Columbia University, earning a master’s degree in educational psychology and a PhD in educational research (in 1932 and 1935, respectively; Ohles et al., 1997). After serving on the faculties of Fordham University, the State University of Iowa, and Columbia University, Hoppock became New York University’s (NYU’s) inaugural professor of counselor education (New York Times, 1939a; Thomas, 1995). He served as a professor at NYU from 1939 to 1972 (Ohles et al., 1997). In addition to teaching, Hoppock assumed a number of leadership and organizing roles. He was instrumental in creating NYU’s Guidance and Personnel Administration Department and served as its first chair (beginning in 1939; New York Times). He also organized the New Jersey Vocational Guidance Association and served as the president of both the National Vocational Guidance Association and the Academy of Teachers of Occupations (Ohles et al., 1997). He was also elected a fellow of the American Psychological Association.

Contributions to the Study of Job Satisfaction

Throughout his career, Hoppock gave considerable attention to worker “adjustment.” He suggested that adjustment was multidimensional—it was reflected in a worker’s “health, earnings, percentage of time unemployed, satisfaction in human relations, [and] job satisfaction” (Hoppock, 1957, p. 232). Hoppock was particularly interested in job satisfaction and his early work in this area culminated with the publication of the book Job Satisfaction (Hoppock, 1935/1977). That book, which was published in an era when job satisfaction had yet to be the subject of much scientific research, describes three studies that Hoppock conducted as part of his dissertation research (for historical background on these studies, see Hoppock, 1975).

The first of these studies, which began in the summer of 1932, used semistructured interviews to examine job satisfaction among 40 employed and 40 unemployed adults (the unemployed participants were asked to reflect on their most recent job). Among other things, these participants were asked to note the things they liked and the things they disliked about their work. In addition, participants completed self-report measures of overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with specific aspects of their job, such as supervision, coworkers, and pay. The results of that study identified several potential causes of job satisfaction, including amount of social status conferred by one’s work, job autonomy, and interpersonal relationships with one’s supervisors and coworkers.

In a follow-up study conducted during the 1932–1933 school year, Hoppock collected job satisfaction questionnaire data from 500 teachers employed in 51 communities throughout the Northeastern United States. He identified the 100 most satisfied and the 100 least satisfied teachers within his sample and compared the two groups on several potential predictors. His results suggested that the most satisfied teachers, in comparison to the least satisfied teachers, were older, displayed higher levels of general emotional adjustment, and reported having higher social status, lower work
monotony, and better interpersonal relationships with supervisors and coworkers.

In a third study—which was conducted without the prior approval of his dissertation committee (see Hoppock, 1975)—Hoppock collected job satisfaction questionnaire data from residents of New Hope, Pennsylvania. He noted that such a sample would include participants from a variety of occupations and employers, thus increasing the generalizability of his findings. Hoppock selected New Hope as the site for his research because it “is about as typical of American small towns as one might expect to find” (Hoppock, 1935/1977, p. 238). So during the summer of 1933, Wallace P. Thornton—a retired insurance agent and Hoppock’s father-in-law—canvassed New Hope in search of research participants.

Hoppock’s objective was to recruit every employed New Hope resident age 18 and over; he excluded people who were not paid for their work (e.g., “housewives”) and people whose longest term of consecutive employment was less than 6 months. Of the 351 eligible New Hope residents, 309 provided data—a response rate of 88%!

The New Hope study found that only 15% of participants were dissatisfied with their jobs; however, there were substantial differences in job satisfaction levels across occupations. “Professional men,” artists, and railroad workers, for example, were more satisfied than were teachers, laborers, and farmers. As a testament to its impact, Job Satisfaction was reviewed in the New York Times (1935) and is listed among the great books of I-O psychology (Highhouse, 2009).

After the publication of his 1935 book, Hoppock continued to pursue his interest in job satisfaction by conducting research, writing literature reviews, and speaking on the topic (see Figure 2). From 1938 to 1952, he published a series of 10 review articles in the journal Occupations (see Hand, Hoppock, & Zlatchin, 1948; Hoppock, & Hand, 1945; Hoppock, & Odom, 1940; Hoppock, & Robinson, 1949, 1950, 1951; Hoppock, Robinson, & Zlatchin, 1948; Hoppock, & Shaffer, 1943; Hoppock, & Spiegler, 1938; Robinson, & Hoppock, 1952). The last of those review articles (Robinson & Hoppock, 1952), which summarizes job satisfaction research published during 1951, is representative of the others. Robinson and Hoppock summarized several studies conducted by other researchers, including studies that examined job satisfaction’s relationships with turnover and productivity, as well as studies that examined environmental factors and personal characteristics as predictors of job satisfaction. They further concluded that approximately 18% of workers are dissatisfied. Estimating the prevalence of job dissatisfaction was a recurring objective of Hoppock’s research (see Hoppock, 1935/1977).

Other articles published by Hoppock examined the relationship between age and job satisfaction—he reported a correlation of .21 (Hoppock, 1936)—within-person changes in job satisfaction over one’s career (Hoppock, 1960), and the job satisfaction levels of psychologists (Hoppock, 1937). Regarding the latter, he found that psychologists scored in the 64th percentile on job satisfaction, which led him to conclude that “the vocational and industrial
Figure 2. Robert Hoppock’s handwritten notes for a speech on job satisfaction that he gave to the Psychology Club in New York in 1952. Image courtesy of the Archives of the History of American Psychology, The Drs. Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, The University of Akron (Collection: Hoppock Papers).
The psychologists appear neither better nor worse than the average man of comparable position in other fields of work” (p. 300).

**Contributions to Vocational Guidance**

Hoppock was also one of the founders of vocational/career counseling/guidance. Realizing that there are many occupations that career seekers are unaware of and that have little readily available information, Hoppock decided to specialize in organizing and disseminating occupational information (Hoppock et al., 1976). He frequently provided practical advice on career guidance to both counselors and job seekers, including an early textbook for guidance counselors (Group Guidance; Hoppock, 1949) that was packed with “practical illustrations and materials” (Shaffer, 1950, p. 75). Hoppock’s (1957) textbook for vocational counseling, Occupational Information, received the “highest commendation” in a review (Baer, 1959, p. 75). This book provided guidance on obtaining occupational information, counseling individuals on their occupational choices, and teaching occupations to students. He also published checklists of questions to assist job seekers, students, and counselors (Hoppock, 1948). To this day, Joyce Laine Kennedy, a newspaper reporter, frequently mentions his seven principles (paraphrased in Table 1) for selecting a career (Kennedy, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). Hoppock often mentioned that when choosing a career it is critical to consider the employment outlook and labor market for different jobs rather than focusing solely on one’s interests (Barnard, 1933; Hoppock, 1937a; Hoppock, 1970b). Some of his ideas seem ahead of the times—in 1937 he argued that “marriage no longer means permanent removal from the employment market” and that “there is no sound psychological reason why women should cook meals, wash dishes, launder clothes and clean houses” (Associated Press, 1937, p. 1).

Hoppock was particularly known for his outreach efforts. He was referenced in 38 New York Times articles, edited a magazine (Occupational Index) covering occupational opportunities, and wrote a newspaper article (Hoppock, 1937b). Hoppock was known as “an excellent speaker” for outreach events such as parent–teacher association meetings (Scarsdale Inquirer, 1940, p. 3), and he made several radio appearances (New York Times, 1929, 1931, 1937, 1939b). A short segment of Hoppock

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Suggestion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learn about all of the activities in a job you are considering and the time spent conducting each activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Consider not only the pay and prestige of a job, but also whether you will like the work itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Choose a job that is in demand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Match your competencies to those of the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Remember that interest ≠ ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Admiring someone who chose a job does not mean that you should choose that job as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nearly every job will include some activities that you dislike performing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Kennedy (2012a).
(1967b) speaking has been uploaded to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2U-Vfh9ULEc&feature=youtu.be.  

Hoppock also created traveling classes at NYU in which students (e.g., high school students and parents, guidance counselors, and counseling graduate students) would visit different academic institutions or guidance centers (New York Times, 1942, 1949). Similarly, he often took guidance counseling students on field trips to worksites (e.g., offices and factories) to give them a better idea of different jobs (Thomas, 1995).

Summary

Robert Hoppock made important contributions to our current understanding of job satisfaction and vocational guidance. In a time when job satisfaction research was in its infancy, Hoppock created an early job satisfaction survey and he authored an influential book on the topic, Job Satisfaction. Hoppock also wrote the book Occupational Information, which he regarded as the most important contribution of his career (Hoppock et al., 1976). His legacy lives on today with citations in I-O psychology textbooks (e.g., Landy & Conte, 2010) and a memorial scholarship at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (2015).

Notes

1 This organization was created during the Great Depression to gather and distribute information about occupations to job applicants; it ceased activities in 1939, after the depression had ended (New York Times, 1939c). The work that Hoppock performed here is similar to the type of work now conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Thomas, 1995).
2 Now known as the University of Iowa.
3 Currently titled the Journal of Counseling & Development.
4 When Hoppock first became involved in the field of school counseling, the field was more centered on assisting students’ career choices; over the years it became more focused on psychotherapy (Hoppock et al., 1976). In its early history, vocational guidance was associated with I-O psychology as many early I-O psychologists conducted work in this area (see Koppes, 1997 for examples).
5 In fact, Hoppock further suggested that husbands should perform these duties.

References

Associated Press. (1937, July 20). Woman’s place in home theory termed gag to help further men’s interests. Reading Eagle: Complete wire report of the Associated Press, the United Press and the International New Service. (pp. 1, 8).


Hoppock, R. (1967b). The use and misues of occupational information (K-12). Talk given to the Vocational Guidance Institute, National Bridge, VA.


Scarsdale Inquirer. (1940, October 18). High school P.T.A. plan open meeting: Vocational education in the Scarsdale schools will be discussed by authority. *Scarsdale Inquirer*. P. 3.


The SHRM-SIOP Science of HR Series is searching for I-O practitioners to serve as authors and reviewers for our collaborative white papers series.

These white papers have a wide reach in the business community and have risen to the Top 25 most downloaded research items in the entirety of the SHRM website.

If you have at least 15 years of consulting experience (internal or external) and are interested in being an author or reviewer, visit our website (http://www.siop.org/siop-shrm/default.aspx), email David@psycharts.com, or scan one of the codes below.

Check out our white papers!

Interested in being an author? Scan here!

Interested in being a reviewer? Scan here!