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Job Quality

Job quality is a broad and multidimensional concept encompassing the intrinsic nature of work (such as skills, pace, discretion and autonomy), the employment or contractual arrangements within which work takes place (including pay, contractual status, benefits, work-life balance and opportunities for progression) and aspects of work relations (perceptions of fairness and trust, voice and due process/procedural justice).

The study of job quality – by sociologists, psychologists and economists - has a long history spanning the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations studies of the 1950s, the quality of working life movement and research on job enlargement in the 1970s. Following a two decade lull, interest in job quality by scholars, policy makers and practitioners has undergone a resurgence over the last decade and a new lexicon of job quality has emerged with the ILO's emphasis on decent work, the EU's discussion of better jobs and good work and country-specific debates on fair work (for example, in Scotland and Australia).

Job quality matters – to individuals, organisations and societies. For individuals, job quality can impact on health, wealth and well-being. For organisations, good jobs are associated with positive organisational outcomes, eliciting discretionary effort and commitment from employees that drives productivity and performance. At a societal level, job quality can impact on health and welfare spending (including in-work benefits), inclusion, competitiveness and growth.

There is no one accepted measure of job quality. Some researchers use objective and others subjective indicators; others use a mixture of both. Some studies utilise a single measure, such as pay. Others use multiple measures. A number of job quality indices exist comprising different job quality components and differing weightings attached to these components (see, for example, Muñoz de Bustillo 2011). Moreover, “job quality is a contextual phenomenon, differing among persons, occupations and labour market segments, societies and historical periods” (Findlay, Kalleberg and Warhurst 2013: 441). Taken together, the lack of an accepted conceptualisation of job quality and its inherently contextual nature creates a number of challenges. First, it is difficult to produce reliable job quality comparisons across occupations, industries, sectors and countries. Second, trajectories of change in job quality are difficult to measure. Third, competing conceptualisations hinder interventions to improve job quality and evaluating the effectiveness of any such interventions.

References and selected further readings

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Muñoz de Bustillo R., Fernández-Macías E., Antón JI. and Esteve F. 2011, *Measuring More than Money*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.

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Suggested cross references

Good jobs, decent work, bad jobs, upskilling, polarisation.