Job Quality in the EU: Salient Issues and Key Challenges

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Job Quality in EU Research: Building Up the Knowledge Base
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European Employment Strategy 2001

• Shift in EU policy objectives in the area of employment and social integration under the slogan: ‘Not just more jobs but also better jobs’
• Policy objectives formulated in terms of common indicators and measurable targets
• → “What makes a good job?”
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The EU definition of job quality:

- Multi-dimensional approach, including
  - objective characteristics of the job
  - subjective evaluations by workers
  - workers’ characteristics
  - the match between the worker and the job
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- Multi-dimensional approach, including
  - objective characteristics of the job
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  - workers’ characteristics
  - the match between the worker and the job
    - Among the 10 indicators for monitoring employment quality:
      - work organization and work–life balance;
Selected key issues and challenges

• Some trends in job characteristics over time
• Critical issues in Work-Life Balance
• The link between job quality and life satisfaction
Trends in Job Quality I

• All in all, several indicators of job quality indicate improved working conditions: e.g. a declining trend in long hours and unsocial hours (except in Eastern European cluster); using skills at work (but not UK, Ireland)

• But new elements are emerging that make jobs „demanding“: e.g. intensification of work and boundary blurring

• Persistent gender differences an new gender inequalities: e.g. fixed-term contracts more common for women than men.
Trends in Job Quality II

- Important country differences: A general shift in perception of problems from ....dangerous and unhealthy working conditions to .... intensification of work with tight deadlines , balancing work and private life.
What is Work-Life Balance (WLB)?

• Shorthand for „work“ and „the rest of life“
• Life domains in which people perform different roles
• **Theory of role strain** (Goode 1960)
• Role conflict due to conflict in time, place, resources → total role obligations are overdemanding
• **Enhancement arguments** (Marks 1977; Sieber 1974) suggest that engagement in multiple life roles can generate social and economic resources
• Research on the work-family interface has been heavily dominated by a conflict perspective
Work – Life (Family, Home, Nonwork) Interface

- Type and direction of interaction:
  - **Negative** aspects of Work–Life Interface: work–family conflict, interference
  - **Positive** aspects of Work–Life Interface: work-family facilitation, enhancement...
  - **Bi-directional** concept: work can interfere with or facilitate the family/home domain AND family can interfere with or facilitate the work domain
Challenge for Work-Life Balance

- Job demands, such as long working hours and job strain, increase work-life conflict (*expected!*)
- Job resources, i.e. good career prospects, decrease work-home interference (*expected!*)
- Autonomy and control over work – which were conceptualized as a job resource – are not a solution for work-life balance but are instead associated with increased conflict between work and home (*not expected!*).
Job Characteristics and Life satisfaction

Well-paid job
Autonomy at work
Dull/boring job
Job insecurity

Life satisfaction
Findings

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Autonomy at work
Dull/boring job
Job insecurity

Job satisfaction → Life satisfaction

Job satisfaction +

Well-paid job +

Autonomy at work +

Dull/boring job —
Findings

- Well-paid job
- Autonomy at work
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Job satisfaction

Life satisfaction

+ + +

- - -
Findings

Security is the key element in employment that in a most straightforward manner affects people’s quality of life.