The Evolution of Job Quality

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Context

• Background:
  – affluence, but differentiation
  – age of the computer
  – increasing international competition
  – recession
  – the “Lisbon strategy” – “more and better jobs”
  – increased perceived importance of intrinsic aspects of job quality
Outline

• Concept and theory
• Indicators
• Stories about job quality:
  – increased skill requirements; polarisation,
  – work intensification,
  – autonomy
  – (in)security.
• Some implications of insecurity for worker well-being

Concepts of job quality

• Subjective “Utility” (Economics)
• Job that delivers complexity and autonomy (sociology)
• Needs-based: job that delivers, first, external need satisfaction; and second, internal need satisfaction – e.g.
  in marxian terms, self-validating labour.
• Competing models in practice:
  – “more and better jobs” (OECD and others) – usually meaning “better-paid”
  – EC: from “quality in work” to “quality of employment” and “flexicurity”
  – “decent labour” (ILO);
Core Indicators of job quality

- Wages
  - Including fairness of wages
- Job skills
- Effort and hours
- Autonomy/discretion
- Security
  - Employment security (financial and psychological)
  - Physical

Story 1: SBTC

Upskilling vs deskilling?
- A prima facie good-news story for job quality
- Evidence:
  - Increased skills use and deployment of educated labour is:
    - in similar industries across countries
    - associated with new technologies
  - Persistence or increase in education premia, in face of rising quantities of more-educated workers
  - Direct measures of rising skills use

Employment growth in the EU(23), 1998-2007, by Quintile
POLARISATION OF THE UK LABOUR FORCE

Explanations

- Technical change and polarisation: a nuanced version of SBTC
- Demographics and inequality
- Structural choice: the “low road”?
Story 2 Intensification

- Technology and organisation
  - EBTC
  - more effective monitoring technology
- Changing balance of power, linked to intensified global competition
- Insecurity??
- Consumerism: the work/spend treadmill?

- Evidence: typically based on comparison of required effort questions across time or in-depth case study

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Proportion in EU12 with high effort more than half the time

Source: EWCS
Sources: Skills Survey series

Related facts: over 2001-6: work intensification notable among school teachers; and in Hotels and Restaurants
Story 4 Autonomy

- Central to marxian conception of job quality;
- Also to psycho-social models of workplace well-being
- On contested terrain, and with contrasting predictions and perspectives:
  - Post-Taylorism/fordism: rising autonomy
  - Neo-Taylorism: renewed assault on autonomy
  - Employers’ vs employees’ perspectives
Figure 11 Employees – Are you able to choose or change …?

Task Discretion in Britain, 1992-2006

Source: UK Skills Surveys
Control over pace of work, 1989-2001, Sweden

% responding that they can decide their work pace themselves all the time. 1989-2001.

Source: ‘The Work Environment survey’

Task discretion in Finland, 1984-2003

Source: Quality of Life Surveys, Statistics Finland.
Decision latitude, 1996–2006, Norway

(% of workers citing high levels)

Source: SSB, Level of Living Surveys

Implications of Combined Story 3 and Story 4

Proportion of High-Strain Jobs

Source: Skills Survey series

'See Green (2008) Work Effort and Worker Well-Being in the Age of Affluence'
Men and women constantly thinking about work and having limited control over their work, 1989-2001, Sweden.

% of women and men who cannot stop thinking about work on their time off, combined with limited control over their work.

Source: 'The Work Environment survey'

Story 5  Insecurity

Aspects
- Employment insecurity
- Physical insecurity

Stories about employment insecurity:
- Reflects national trends and specificities
- Segmented, but complex variation with age
- Secular increase??
- Large impact on well-being
### The concept of employment security as “Welfare-reducing uncertainty surrounding employment”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituents. Uncertainty over:</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job continuity</td>
<td>Risk of job loss</td>
<td>Perceived risk of job loss Perception that &quot;job is secure&quot;??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job features</td>
<td>Promotion? Deterioration?</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospects if out of work</td>
<td>Out-of-work Benefits Expected duration of unemployment Quality of replacement job</td>
<td>Perceived difficulty of equal-job replacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income while unempl. Job replacement</td>
<td>Overall welfare loss</td>
<td>&quot;worry&quot;?? &quot;satisfaction with security&quot;??</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Job Insecurity

![Job Insecurity Chart](chart.png)

- % who disagree or strongly disagree with "I feel my job is secure in this workplace"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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</table>
Job insecurity

- Least in Scandinavia: Denmark (12.2% in 1997); most in Bulgaria (37.3% in 1997)
- In 2005, above average in: OIEs, Developing and East Asian economies
- Overall, significant fall, 1997-2005: wholly explained by changes in unemployment rates

Perceived insecurity by unemployment rate across nations

Classification: L: Liberal mkt econ; T: transitional; N: Nordic; C: Corporatist; O: Other industrialised; D: developing

Source: ISSP, pooled 1997 and 2005
Gender

• A significant gender job insecurity gap in 5 out of 7 country groups; most in East Asia

• But gender makes little difference to worry.
  – Exceptions:
    • Transitional economies
    • Nordic economies

Age

• Institutional and economic environment important:
  – Age is associated with job insecurity: positively in LMEs, Transitional, East Asia; negatively in Other European and Dev. Econs.
  – Age increases the difficulty of job replacement everywhere.
Problem: imprecise indicators used in ISSP. Better to ask directly about job loss risk.

Perceived Risk of Job Loss

% reporting at least an evens chance of job loss and unemployment

Source: UK Skills Surveys

Job insecurity item in Australia:

- ‘I would like you to think about your employment prospects over the next 12 months. What do you think is the per cent chance that you will lose your job during the next 12 months? By loss of job, I mean getting fired, being laid off or retrenched, being made redundant, or having your contract not renewed.’
Difficulty of job replacement

• ‘If you were to lose your job during the next 12 months, what is the per cent chance that the job you eventually find and accept would be at least as good as your current job, in terms of wages and benefits?’

Better?

• Explicit about the concept referred to
• Comparable objective definition and response scale
• But: do respondents perceive in terms of subjective probabilities? Can they make cardinal judgements?
• Our findings:  
  – Substantive biases  
  – But strong predictive power
Perceived and actual probability of job loss – Germany

Perceived and actual probability of job loss – Germany and Australia
Perceived and actual probability of regaining as good a job – Germany

Perceived and actual probability of regaining as good a job – Australia
Why it matters

- Job insecurity lowers well-being --- a lot (Burchell; Nolan et al; Wichert; etc)
- Unemployment itself lowers well-being --- a lot (Warr; Oswald and Clark; Cooper et al. etc)
- Also at macro level; impact additional to effect on unemployed (Ditella et al); additional to impact on income

Luiz Felipe Scolari has shrugged off the pressure mounting on him at Chelsea and declared that another managerial position would always be around the corner for him. "If I lose my job, I have another job …… Maybe tomorrow, maybe after one year or two years. I have worked for 25 years." (Guardian, 14 January, 2009).

As manager of Bunyodkor, August 2009
Males:
Loss of life satisfaction relative to highly employable man in highly secure job

Notes:
• the standard deviation of life satisfaction is 1.4
• Interaction between employability and job insecurity

Females:
Loss of life satisfaction relative to highly employable woman in highly secure job

Notes:
• the standard deviation of life satisfaction is 1.4
• Interaction between employability and job insecurity
Females:
Loss of mental health relative to highly employable woman in highly secure job

Note: the standard deviation of the mental health score is 16

Conclusions

4 mixed tales about the evolution of job quality:
• Upskilling but polarisation
• Persistence of low-autonomy jobs in some countries
• Persistence of high-effort jobs very widely
• Increasing high-strain jobs: worse for women?
• The movement of perceived insecurity is cyclical, and widely varying, but not secular
• Impact on WB of insecurity is large; the impact of the current recession is probably greater than increments from recent improvements in working conditions; right now, we need “more” before “better” jobs