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Worker well-being and the importance of work: Bridging the gap

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Abstract

The importance of worker well-being is widely-embraced both in theory and policy, but there are numerous perspectives on what it is, how to measure it, whether it needs improving and if so, how to improve it. We argue that a more complete approach to worker well-being needs to consider workers as full citizens who derive and experience both public and private benefits and costs from working. A broad framework on the meanings of work is used to expand the boundaries of worker well-being to reflect the broad importance of work in human life.

Keywords

well-being, job quality, meanings of work, quality of work

There is long-standing concern with the well-being of workers. Early observational analyses by Friedrich Engels (1845) and Henry Mayhew (1861), novels by Charles Dickens and Émile Zola, the photography of Lewis Hines (Sampsel-Willmann, 2009) and diverse secular and religious reform movements focused attention on poverty wages and dangerous working conditions as industrialization became widespread in Britain, the United States and elsewhere. The academic field of industrial relations was born in the early 20th century out of a deep unease with imbalances in the employment relationship with exploitative wages and working hours, arbitrary supervisory methods and frequent industrial accidents (Kaufman, 2004). Concerns with worker well-being similarly underlie the early theorizing of Karl Marx (1844), Georg Simmel (1907) and others regarding the alienation of workers from their work, Max Weber's (1922) work on the repressive nature of bureaucracies and Henri de Man's (1927) search for factors that enabled or prevented workers from fulfilling a variety of human needs such as activity, creation and self-worth.

Today, many scholars, policymakers, advocates and business leaders still embrace the importance of worker well-being (Guest, 2008). Modern exposés again illustrate the low pay, long working hours and hazardous working conditions endured by some workers (Ehrenreich, 2001; Harney 2008), but the most systematic attempts to measure worker well-being focus on crafting integrated measures of 'job quality,' especially in Europe (Guillén and Dahl, 2009; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). Following its Lisbon declaration of the goal of creating 'more and better jobs,' the European Council endorsed a comprehensive framework for monitoring and analyzing job quality (European Commission, 2001). Notable follow-up efforts include the job quality indices of the European Trade Union Institute (Leschke et al., 2008) and of Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011).

Importantly, many of these efforts take a multidisciplinary approach and include diverse dimensions in their overall measures of job quality. But this focus has effectively reduced work to a set of job-related tasks, and in turn has treated workers as mere performers of physical and mental activities. Yet work is much more than this. A fuller respect for work entails asking deeper questions about the meanings that workers and societies derive from it. Indeed the literature on job quality recognizes that work provides diverse material as well as psychological rewards, but work can also be

a source of identity and the means to care for others, achieve independence, serve society and build democratic communities (Budd, 2011). In other words (recall Marx's critique of the hidden abode of production), work needs to be embraced not as a private set of tasks done behind closed doors in a factory or an office, but as a very public activity with deep personal as well as societal meanings (Boyte and Kari, 1996). We therefore seek to bridge the gap between current thinking on worker well-being and the deeper importance of work for human life.

To be clear, the quality of a job is clearly a significant determinant of worker well-being, but job quality measures are largely job-centric while conceptualizations of worker well-being should be worker-centric.¹ We are asking not how 'good' or 'bad' a job is, but how well or badly off a worker is, in so far as he or she resides as a citizen in society. There are aspects of worker well-being that the literature on job quality has excluded as not related to the nature of specific jobs. For example, Gallie (2007a) largely excludes pay from his analysis of job quality because it is viewed as part of the terms of employment rather than inherent in the job itself; while Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011) exclude measures of social protection because these are features of a labour market or welfare state, not a particular job. A more complete approach to worker well-being needs to go beyond job quality to consider workers as fully-functioning citizens who derive and experience both public and private benefits and costs from working. This echoes the advocacy by Cooke et al. (2013: 507) of broadening job quality into a measure of work quality that reflects individuals' 'values on work and life' such that worker well-being is high when work helps individuals in 'achieving personal life goals'.² This approach is also consistent with Rothausen's (2013) construct of eudaimonic (purposeful) job-related well-being that goes beyond satisfaction with job tasks to include development and growth, role in society, impact on family and impact on life construction.

There is a need to develop approaches to worker well-being that capture the full importance and meanings of work in human life. As found in the multi-country Meaning of Working study in the 1980s, work is of 'significance to individuals because it occupies a great deal of their time, because it generates economic and sociopsychological benefits and costs, and because it is so interrelated with other important life areas such as family, leisure, religion, and community' (England and Whitely, 1990: 66). Our article therefore contributes to the literature by arguing for an approach that sees work in its broadest terms, rather than just linking it to a distinct set of tasks, and explicitly considers the wide-ranging private and public benefits and costs of work.

Conceptualizing worker well-being

There are several different ways to approach the issue of worker well-being. Below we set out two main approaches: a subjective and an objective approach. They offer very different and sometimes opposing views about how worker well-being is to be defined, measured and improved. This section offers a basis for subsequent discussion that draws out further the different meanings attached to work and their implications for the understanding of worker well-being. A later section will then consider how a broader approach to worker well-being might be constructed.

Subjective vs. objective approaches to worker well-being

Researchers have defined worker well-being in one of two ways. First, some have focused on workers' responses to questions regarding their satisfaction levels with different aspects of work. We can label such approaches 'subjective,' given that they focus on the subjective well-being of workers and propose job satisfaction as a measure. Approaches that fall under this heading include those in the psychology literature (Stride et al., 2007) and modern labour economics (Clark, 2011). Second, other researchers working within sociology (Gallie, 2007b) and elsewhere (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011) have proposed explicit criteria for assessing well-being, say through reference to a list of factors (skill, autonomy) that give workers the opportunity to achieve well-being. Such approaches can be labeled 'objective' since they prescribe what factors must be present for worker well-being to be realized. These two approaches have influenced national and international debates on job quality and remain

important reference points in the theoretical and empirical literatures on both worker well-being and job quality (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). We consider both approaches below.

Subjective approaches lay stress on workers' subjective reports of well-being. They assume that worker well-being can be defined and measured relatively simply. A particularly important and widely used indicator is self-reported job satisfaction in surveys that ask workers about their attitudes towards their jobs (Brown et al., 2012). A key argument is that workers accurately report their well-being through their reported job satisfaction. Although it is understood that worker well-being is a function of a set of work characteristics, the effect of the latter on worker well-being is assumed to be fully captured by reported job satisfaction. Following this approach, high reported job satisfaction is seen to equate to high worker well-being, and in turn, high job quality. Thus subjective approaches effectively stress the need to target improvements in workers' reported job satisfaction as the main route to higher worker well-being.

With objective approaches to worker well-being, the strategy for defining and measuring worker well-being is very different: a central argument is that this requires reference to a set of factors whose presence is seen to be important for the ability of workers to achieve well-being in work. High worker well-being is not then associated with work that leads workers to report high job satisfaction but rather with work that meets certain objective standards of quality. Work that offers some opportunity for creative activity and for some level of autonomy, for example, is seen as more conducive to worker well-being than work that entails drudgery and is tightly prescribed. The focus in objective approaches is on the characteristics of jobs and how those characteristics enable or thwart the ability of workers to achieve well-being.

Several implications follow, including the need to decide the factors that matter to worker well-being. Issues of autonomy, skill and pay can be seen as vital for workers to achieve well-being and thus can be seen as central to its definition and measurement; however, an objective definition of worker well-being might also include other factors such as work intensity and participation in decision-making. But how (and who) is to decide which factors to include and exclude? Is theory to be used to guide the selection of factors, and if so which theory? Another issue relates to the measurement of the different factors that are considered to impact on worker well-being: how, for instance, are factors such as the level of autonomy and skill to be quantified? A third issue concerns the weight to be attached to the different aspects of work deemed to affect worker well-being: for example, is autonomy over work to be given a lower weight than pay?

The two approaches have informed both academic and policy debates. Some studies in Europe, on the one hand, have used job satisfaction as a proxy for worker well-being (Clark, 2011; Souza-Poza and Souza-Poza, 2000). ILO-inspired debates on 'Decent Work' (1999) on the other hand, have argued for more objective indicators of worker well-being. Below we consider further the theoretical and methodological aspects of these two approaches.

Theoretical and methodological issues

Subjective and objective approaches to worker well-being have competed for a number of years. Although recently in the ascendancy thanks to the turn to 'happiness' research in psychology and economics (Layard, 2005), subjective approaches to worker well-being remain vulnerable to the criticisms made by advocates of objective approaches. The following discussion will address some of these criticisms, though without necessarily jettisoning *in toto* a subjective approach.

As argued above, subjective approaches ask us to accept the validity of workers' responses to questions about their well-being at work. They draw insight and inspiration from the utilitarian tradition in philosophy and economics. The best way to tell how 'happy' someone is with her job, it is argued, is to ask them directly how satisfied they are with it. Yet there are several weaknesses with the subjective approach. First, workers are capable of adapting to the conditions and circumstances they face at work (Brown et al., 2012) and outside it (Cooke et al., 2013). As a result, their reported job satisfaction may mask or distort their actual well-being. Imagine a worker who reports high job satisfaction. She may do so not because she is ecstatic about doing her job but rather because she has adapted to it and has become resigned to doing it chiefly because she has no other realistic alternatives. The job that the worker does in this case may be low quality in several key aspects --- for

example, it may be low-paid and low-skilled --- but because she has adapted to her job these aspects will not be picked up by her reported job satisfaction; indeed they are likely to be masked by the latter. Moreover, empirical evidence shows that workers in different countries and in different occupations report similar levels of job satisfaction, even though they face huge differences in work and employment conditions (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). What this evidence suggests is the potential unreliability of job satisfaction data as a measure of worker well-being, giving credence to the argument that researchers should measure and define worker well-being in a way that does not rely on a purely subjective approach (Brown et al., 2012). The subjective approach can also be criticized for overlooking the deeper meanings and purposes of work, including its important connections with other aspects of life (Rothausen, 2013).

The objective approach has a long history. Marx (1844), for example, stressed the objective limits to fulfilling work under capitalism. In sociology, there has been a tradition of stressing the importance of issues of skill and autonomy in the determination of worker well-being (Gallie, 2007b). In economics, a more objective approach has been pioneered by Sen (1999), whose work has been applied to the understanding of the quality of work by Green (2006). Sen's approach, in essence, is that well-being depends on the 'capabilities' of people to achieve certain 'functionings' (doing and being things of value). Green (2006), following Sen, suggests that the quality of work can be defined in relation to several key factors, namely pay, skill, effort intensity, risk of personal harm and job loss and personal discretion. The degree to which these factors are present is seen to determine whether workers are capable of achieving well-being in work.

A problem with objective approaches, however, is that there is no universal agreement over which items to include in the definition of worker well-being or how to weight them in constructing a multi-dimensional measure. Even where there is agreement, there is the issue of finding appropriate measures of the key items; ironically, here data may be sought in subjective measures (such as discretion and skill use) drawn from surveys. Moreover, objective approaches could be seen as elitist expressions of perceived academic expertise. Workers' subjective appraisals of their well-being are overlooked, and the relative weights specified for each objective dimension might differ from workers' own preferences.

So we are left with the critical question of what dimensions of work to include in the definition of worker well-being. In answering this question, we agree with Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011) who emphasize the need to draw rigorously on the wider social-scientific literature for theoretical justification for the factors that matter to worker well-being. The debate between subjective and objective approaches underscores the need to be inclusive in the identification of dimensions of worker well-being, as now appears to be the case, for example, in the literature on career success in which objective and subjective measures are recognized as valid (Hall and Chandler, 2005; Ng et al., 2005). One of our major contributions is the use of a theoretical foundation that we believe is the most inclusive framework of work available, and this in turn leads to a broader approach to worker well-being than has previously been constructed. More specifically, we argue for an approach to worker well-being that transcends the level of individual jobs and brings into consideration the broader meanings of work in human life.

The broad meanings of work

Our premise is that measures of worker well-being should incorporate the full spectrum of private and public benefits and costs of work that reflect its different meanings. If work is solely about money, then worker well-being can be limited to the consideration of pay and benefits. If it is simply the performance of physical and mental tasks, then consideration of those tasks will be sufficient to measure worker well-being. But if, as we contend below, work is about much more than money and the performance of specific tasks, then worker well-being needs to be conceived equally broadly.

We follow Budd's (2011) comprehensive examination of the diverse meanings of work from across the humanities and the social and behavioral sciences. This provides a valuable and provocative framework for re-thinking the nature of worker well-being, because it integrates a much greater diversity of thinking on work than is typically the case. In this way, specific meanings of work are uncovered that cause us to broaden the understanding of worker well-being. In particular, the

framework implies six key meanings of work for workers and their communities: physical health and consumption, mental health and personal fulfilment, identity, freedom, caring for others and service. We consider each of these in this section, then discuss what these meanings imply for broadening the conceptualization and measurement of worker-well-being.

First, physical health and consumption reflect the key importance of work as a means to income and consumption. Work provides the basis for society to live, while workers individually gain the income they need to live. There is private gain or suffering depending on the level of wages that workers receive. But at what price is this ability to live achieved? The physical health aspect of work additionally brings into consideration the health risks of work and more directly the state of working conditions. As with the level of pay, there are also private gains and losses depending on the health risks of work. Broadening the meaning of work entails recognizing not only these private aspects, but that this aspect of work has public meaning in that these private gains and losses spill outwards. Low-paid work, for example, creates a workforce that is dependent on welfare. It also creates poverty and the lack of opportunity. Dangerous work is costly to a community through health care costs, the loss of productive resources and income maintenance and other support programmes.

But work is much more than just a way to achieve consumption and a source of physical health. This is directly obvious in the case of voluntary work, but it also extends to the wider meanings of work that transcend its effects on consumption and physical health. Second, then, mental health and personal fulfilment capture the traditionally-recognized non-pecuniary aspects of work. On the one hand, there is the stress and anxiety of working under high pressure or oppressive conditions, and also the hardship and degradation of performing monotonous and mind-numbing work. Yet on the other hand, there is the personal fulfilment that comes from doing work that matches one's skills and that offers opportunities for challenge and initiative. There are personal costs and benefits here for workers but there are also social costs and benefits. A worker who is stressed by work may be more prone to absence and more likely to be in the care of the health service. A worker who is deskilled by her work may be less able to function as a fully rounded human being outside of work; mindless work leads to mindless leisure. A worker who is animated and uplifted by her work, by contrast, is more likely to be engaged and participative in society. This suggests why a measure of job satisfaction may not be adequate for the purposes of capturing worker well-being, for work's meaning extends beyond its effect on workers' feelings about work. Also, to the extent that workers adapt to the work they do, their reported job satisfaction may conceal the true quality of their lives at work.

Beyond these commonly-recognized intrinsic aspects, there is increasing attention to the deeper importance of work for self-understanding. The third dimension of a framework of broadened meanings of work is therefore identity. Work can have meaning for individuals' identity construction on various levels, including the development of a sense of individual purpose, group identification with one's occupation or employer and the social status attached to these associations, and a sense of humanness. Work can facilitate a positive self-understanding along these dimensions, or work roles can conflict with one's true sense of self, leading to an inauthenticity that Marx labeled alienation.

A fourth meaning of work focuses on the importance of freedom. Western liberal thought embraces the idea that workers should be free to dispose of their labour services as they please and endorses the virtues of a flexible labour market with limited regulation; in this view, workers benefit from being able to choose forms of work that meet their preferences. The argument is that workers can opt for work they like doing, trading off higher quality jobs for lower wages; this argument forms the basis of the theory of compensating differentials found in labour economics. The problem, of course, is that in the real world workers are not to 'free to choose' in the way envisaged by liberal political and economic theory; rather they have to accept work on terms set by employers and therefore often find themselves in forms of work that fail to meet their preferences. Marxian political thought also places emphasis on freedom, but in this case the freedom to self-determination in work. It argues that truly free labour is the source of worker well-being. The Marxian theory of alienation argues that capitalism prevents workers from achieving self-realization by imposing un-free labour on them. The lack of freedom in work reflects the unequal class basis of capitalist society and leads to conflict.

Fifth, a comprehensive consideration of the meanings of work for individuals and societies needs to recognize that it provides the physical, cognitive and emotional effort required to attend to and maintain others. In other words, work is the source of a society's caring activities. These take

place not only in the home through (typically unpaid) household, child-rearing and elder care work, but also outside the home, especially through paid jobs in the health care and education sectors. Consistent with longstanding feminist scholarship, we need to value fully the broad private and public contributions of unpaid and paid reproductive work. Caring might frequently involve elements of love, but it is also real work that requires physical and emotional effort and that generates economic and social value, even when unpaid. It is also time to reject the production/reproduction duality that disconnects paid productive work from unpaid reproductive work. Not only does this dichotomy marginalize and devalue certain forms of work --- typically 'women's work' --- while privileging other forms, it also fails to recognize the interconnected nature of a society's full breadth of work activities. The idealized male breadwinner, for example, cannot devote himself exclusively to paid employment without someone to prepare his meals and otherwise care for him; equally, the idealized housewife cannot remove herself from the public sphere of paid employment without a male breadwinner.

Sixth, we also need to broaden the standard domain of the meanings of work beyond individual-centric meanings that currently dominate thinking. Indeed, work serves an individual's and his or her immediate family's needs for income, mental health, identity and freedom as well as fulfilling the family's caring needs. But work also has important meanings for individuals and society as serving others. This can include service to God, humanity, or one's country, community or family. For example, some might see the deepest meaning of work being achieved when work is viewed as a calling, not only drawing on one's special gifts or talents, but using these to serve others. Indeed, the idea of work as a calling has religious roots, with the idea that one's special gifts are created by God and should be used to serve God's kingdom. Volunteer work and civic service, by contrast, are also valued for secular reasons in terms of helping others and helping build a community or a nation. Working in the military service is frequently seen as patriotic service for one's country while work can also be seen as serving economic nationalism, as was true in English mercantilist thought (Spencer, 2009).

So the true importance of work for individuals and societies goes beyond the typical extrinsic and intrinsic rewards commonly recognized in research on work. That is, it has broad meanings beyond income in support of consumption and job satisfaction in support of psychological health. Robust measures of worker well-being, or what Cooke et al. (2013) label 'work quality,' therefore need to go beyond the construct of job quality to reflect a fuller range of private and public benefits that can be derived from work as well as a full range of costs that should be avoided.

Connecting worker well-being to the breadth of meanings of work

The conceptualizations outlined in the previous section provide a needed foundation for crafting a novel approach to worker well-being that sees work as more than a source of immediate material and psychological benefits that largely flow from the nature of the job tasks. This approach is summarized in Table 1. The first domain is derived from the importance of work as a critical means for supporting consumption: workers cannot live by leisure alone, and wages must be earned to survive in capitalist society. The living standards of a worker and his or her family are tied to income earned at work. When work fails to support decent living standards, it is not only the worker and his or her family that suffers; there can also be negative consequences for society, including health care costs, negative educational outcomes, crime and withdrawal from political and civic society. Pay must therefore be given central prominence in the understanding of worker well-being. This approach discards the fiction of wages as being a 'just' and 'fair' return for the contribution made by workers in production which is a feature of mainstream economics. Instead, workers should be seen as entitled to a level of remuneration that allows them and their families to live at a socially acceptable level. Adequate pay and benefits from work overall can also be seen as vital to the securing of positive identity in our consumption-driven society, and the pursuit of higher pay and improved work-related benefits can be justified on the basis of the identity conceptualization of work (see below).

<Table 1 about here>

Since a major role of work is to support physical life through enabling consumption, the quality of work itself should not imperil physical well-being. Dangerous work creates both private and public costs. A robust approach to worker well-being therefore needs to include standards for physical well-being and for health and safety at work. This should include measures such as protection against workplace hazards and risks, positive indicators of physical health and protection against unwanted intimacy and sexual harassment.

Moving beyond work's direct importance for consumption and physical health, the traditional non-pecuniary aspects of work indicate that psychological and mental health should also be a dimension of worker well-being. Much of the psychological literature emphasizes subjective self-appraisals of job satisfaction, self-esteem and self-identity. These are important aspects of a comprehensive approach, in the sense that they can signal, albeit noisily, workers' well-being in jobs. But they are incomplete and need to be assessed alongside other objective indicators of well-being. To see work as a source of personal fulfilment also highlights the possible stressful nature of forms of work which impose excessive demands. Research on the detrimental mental health effects of low control, high stress, high effort and long hour jobs reinforces the importance of avoiding low levels of psychological and mental health (Siegrist, 1996). In practical terms, it can be seen as important that workers are protected from stressful work, say by promoting forms of flexible working and greater levels of autonomy at work. Curbs on intensive effort and long work hours are also important to the promotion of worker well-being. The point is that the workers' mental well-being needs to be considered in addition to their physical well-being especially as many jobs are now carried out in the service sector where physical injury is low. This highlights again the benefits of integrating across perspectives and moving to an inclusive approach to worker well-being that encompasses both the mental and physical demands of work.

The deeper meaning that work can provide in terms of shaping one's identity indicates that another dimension of well-being is the extent to which work supports a positive identity. As noted by Rothausen (2013: 12), 'in healthy individuals, job-related identities and roles do not exist in isolation but as part of, and instrumental to, a coherent, positive sense of a whole self'. One concern here is whether work roles create a sense of inauthenticity by conflicting with one's true sense of self. For example, emotional labour that requires frequent suppression of one's true emotions results in feelings of inauthenticity (Erickson and Ritter, 2001), and such instances need to be included in a measure of worker well-being. Other work-related threats to personal identity include being forced to present one's self in certain ways, such as wearing ugly uniforms, following corporate scripts in interacting with customers and being required to suppress one's national identity or class (Leidner, 1993; Poster, 2007). The external recognition and social standing attached to one's work are also important elements of its deeper significance with respect to identity, and should also be considered as part of worker well-being.

A fourth meaning of work relates to freedom. This has a number of implications for worker well-being. At one level, work should provide socio-political-economic independence. Worker well-being should therefore include the ability to leave a job and seek whatever employment or occupational opportunities are desired. Employment discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity and other qualities violates this standard and should be seen as contrary to well-being. Socio-political-economic independence also requires absence of coercion in the employment relationship; workers should have the economic and political independence from their employers that is consistent with being fully-functioning worker-citizens. This should include legal protections against discrimination, harassment, abusive treatment and unfair dismissal. That is, high levels of well-being require that workers have stable employment and are not vulnerable to dismissal and lacking in employment rights. Opportunities to establish independent trade unions, exercise free speech in the workplace and pursue other forms of workplace voice are additional elements of well-being in this regard. In other words, workers should be treated with dignity and respect and not as commodities or factors of production, consistent with a more rounded picture of worker well-being that recognizes workers as free human beings with inalienable rights (Budd, 2004; Kaufman, 2005).

Work as a source of freedom for workers and societies also links to the idea of work as an arena for human creativity. The opportunity to acquire, develop, hone and utilize skills in work can thus be viewed as an important ingredient of a comprehensive approach to worker well-being. Conversely, well-being will be impaired by exposure to mundane and non-creative forms of work,

which are liable not only to undermine the mental capacities of workers but also to deny them opportunities for recognition and self-esteem. Elevating well-being in this case entails moves to curtail work that lacks a strong creative content.

To appreciate work as freedom also forces one to consider the level of autonomy enjoyed by workers over the work they do and the schedule by which they do it. This overlaps with other meanings of work: it is likely to be more personally fulfilling and identity affirming where it is carried out by workers with a high degree of autonomy and discretion. In other words, work can be seen as meaningful and purposeful if it enables workers to exercise autonomy and to develop and realize their creative competences. On this view, the degree of autonomy offered to workers over their work acts as a key determinant of well-being (Schwartz, 1982). An ambitious variant of this would include more democratic systems of governance, including mechanisms to involve workers in the management of the firms in which they work (Russell, 1985); a more radical step would entail the transfer of ownership of productive assets to workers and the formation of worker-owned firms.

Lastly, connecting worker well-being to the robust meanings and roles of work means that its caring and service aspects cannot be overlooked, and that workers --- whether paid or unpaid --- who engage in reproductive and other frequently marginalized work roles are fully included in measures of well-being. Specifically, worker well-being should include a concern with the extent to which work allows for caring and service activities. For some workers, caring and serving others is a direct part of their work; for others, well-being may be promoted by reducing aspects of work that prevent carrying out necessary and valued caring and/or service duties (Hansen, 1997). In this way, the contemporary emphasis on work-family balance is important, and should be broadened to work-community balance to reflect better the importance of service in addition to caring. Measuring these aspects of worker well-being can include subjective approaches (for example, self-appraisals of the extent to which workers believe they are serving others) and objective (such as analysis of the extent to which policies promote activities that serve the community or others).

Including caring and service aspects of work is not a standard approach to job quality, but should be included in broader measures of worker well-being. It is important to appreciate that that individuals work for a variety of purposes: not only for income but also ‘to have an important role in society’ or ‘to help loved ones’ (Rothausen, 2013: 8). Consequently, well-being needs to include ‘the “fit” between available [employment and other income support] alternatives and personal life goals at the stage of life of an individual’ even as the nature of a specific job is held constant (Cooke et al., 2013: 507). Indeed, in interviews with 88 workers, Cooke et al. (2013: 512-8) found that some ‘viewed work as being good quality when it could be integrated seamlessly into more important life activities’, others ‘valued any type of employment as a way to contribute to the local community’ and a third category of individuals focused on what the community meant for them and how meaningful it was to be back in a caring and friendly community’. Such evidence confirms the need to define and measure worker well-being in ways that extend beyond job-related characteristics and encompass the position of workers in society.

Conclusion

Many scholars, business leaders, policy-makers and advocates claim that worker well-being is important. But much of the recent attention has focused on job quality. While these efforts often take a multidisciplinary approach and include diverse dimensions of job quality, this focus largely reduces work to a set of job-related tasks. In contrast, recognition of the broader scope of the meanings and roles of work means that a full accounting of worker well-being needs to go beyond job quality. Indeed, in interviewing workers about their perceived well-being, Cooke et al. (2013: 520) found that many ‘de-emphasized specific job characteristics while accentuating the extent to which work enabled them to live in their chosen community and with their preferred lifestyle.’ Therefore there is a need to bridge this gap by developing measures of worker well-being that reflect the full range of meanings that work can have for individuals and societies.

In short, we believe that this article uses the broadest set of theoretically-rich conceptualizations of work available and therefore importantly moves the literature toward the most comprehensive approach to worker well-being developed to date. The value of such an approach can

be illustrated by reference to the often bifurcated nature of discussion of worker well-being in much academic research, representing well-being as either a subjective or an objective construct. Our broader framework means that worker well-being has both a subjective and an objective dimension. Workers' responses to questions about job satisfaction convey some important information about their own subjective evaluations of the quality of their working selves. But data on job satisfaction should not be the end of the story as far as worker well-being is concerned (Brown et al., 2012). This is in part because self-reported job satisfaction is affected by workers' expectations and norms about work: workers with different expectations and norms may offer different responses about their job satisfaction even if their jobs are identical in objective terms. So, from our perspective, consideration must also be given to the objective conditions and circumstances of the work that workers actually perform as shaped by broader life and societal goals.

Drawing together different conceptualizations of work, a high-quality job is truly one that meets certain objective standards as well as providing high job satisfaction. The comprehensive approach to worker well-being developed here provides not only a way to integrate subjective and objective approaches, but also the basis for considering broadly the subjective and objective dimensions that should be embraced in its evaluation. Some of these dimensions have already been identified by other researchers, but our broadened framework also uniquely adds new dimensions, such as occupational choice and the ability to serve and care for others. Future research should use this framework to develop concrete measures of worker well-being which can then be used by policy-makers and others to understand better patterns of workers well-being and needed areas of improvement.

Our analyses are also important for the closely-related literature on job quality. Objective approaches to job quality are implicitly or explicitly based on beliefs about worker well-being. If an author's model of worker well-being is too narrow, then the resulting measures of job quality will be too narrow. We believe that our integrated model provides the strongest foundation for job quality researchers to use in constructing measures of job quality. This, then, can help researchers and policy-makers identify the strengths and weaknesses of the European Council's framework for monitoring and analyzing job quality (European Commission, 2001), the ETUI job quality index (Leschke et al., 2008) and that of Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011), and other efforts to define and measure European job quality in pursuit of the Lisbon Strategy goal of creating 'more and better jobs'. For example, our framework indicates that while these efforts have appropriately highlighted the importance of skills and autonomy, they overlook the importance of non-discrimination and opportunities for caring. Moreover, our broader assessment of worker well-being indicates that a focus on job quality is not sufficient for policy intervention because social safety nets, other labour market interventions and personal life goals can be important for worker well-being but are typically seen as outside the scope of a specific job.

Finally, a broad approach to the meanings of work provides greater legitimacy to forms of work that are often invisible. A true picture of the well-being of a nation's working population should include not only the well-being of paid employees in stable jobs, but also workers frequently considered 'marginal' or invisible, whether paid or unpaid, who frequently have caring duties. Feminist perspectives on work reject deep-seated dualities such as production/reproduction, work/family and labour/leisure (Glucksman, 1995). Consistent with these perspectives, we have tried to advance a holistic approach to worker well-being that recognizes the interconnected nature of a society's full breadth of work activities and does not divorce worker well-being from other (non-work) aspects of well-being.

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Notes

1. Some approaches begin to bridge job quality and worker well-being: for instance Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011) include work-life balance. But this bridging is limited. For example, work-life balance is assessed through measures related to working time. This is consistent with our argument that worker well-being is dependent on avoiding conflicts with other obligations, but stops short of recognizing that work itself can be a source of caring and service. In other words, our thesis is that we need to continue to extend this movement toward bridging the gap between job quality and worker-well-being.
2. Developing a stronger connection between job quality and broader contextual factors linked to the community and society is also consistent with Acker's (2002) call to expand industrial relations research beyond the bounds of the formal rules and practices of the workplace.

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Table 1. Domains of worker well-being: A comprehensive approach

Pay and benefits

- An adequate income including a 'living wage' and basic benefits coverage
- Economic security via social safety nets

Safety, health, and body work

- Protection against workplace hazards and risks
- Positive indicators of a worker's physical health
- Protection against unwanted intimacy and sexual harassment

Psychological and mental health

- Avoidance of undue stress associated with work
- Avoidance of excessive effort and hours of work
- Positive levels of job satisfaction and self-esteem

Identity

- Positive levels of self-identity and consistency with life goals
- Pay, benefits, and other markers of social standing that contribute to positive identity
- Avoidance of excessive levels of emotional labour and other sources of inauthenticity

Freedom and voice

- Freedom to quit and occupational choice
- Protections against discrimination, harassment, abusive treatment and unfair dismissal
- Ability to form independent trade unions
- Workplace free speech protections

Skill and creativity

- Opportunities for skill development and use
- Avoidance of low complex and mundane work

Autonomy over work

- Opportunities to control how and what work is done
- Opportunities to influence design and planning of work

Governance and ownership

- Opportunities to participate in how work is managed
- Opportunities to own productive assets

Caring

- Opportunities for caring for others
- Avoidance of conflicts that prevent the fulfilment of caring responsibilities

Serving others

- Opportunities for serving others
- Avoidance of conflicts that interfere with ability to serve others