

The Discussion of Subjective Quality of Working Life Indicators¹

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The Discussion of Subjective Quality of Working Life Indicators. This article discusses the main types of methodological approaches to the examination of subjective working life quality. In particular, it points out their common traits and differences and therefore shows their potentials as well as weaknesses in different survey purposes. Analysis of Czech worker survey data is based on the dual concept of the quality of working life, which is addressed in the first parts of the study. Two basic dimensions of the concept are described as a problem of a combination of objective characteristics and their subjective perception by workers. A system of three main levels which can produce relevant information for working life quality analysis (micro-, meso- and macro-) is introduced. Special attention is paid to a discussion of various types of survey questions (simple question, one-dimensional set of items, multi-dimensional set of items). The paper shows which kind of information they can deliver and how they work in different survey data analyses. At the same time, their different potentials in the case of meritory analysis are discussed. In connection with two fundamental objectives that may be pursued in the study of working life quality, i.e., the construction of an aggregate indicator and comprehensive analysis, the options and pitfalls involved in the merging of these different areas are commented on.
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1. Introduction

Work is an important part of human life, and contentedness in this area is largely reflected in the overall quality of life. Together with interest in the notion of working life quality, an interest in workers as such and the relationship between their work and other domains in life naturally arises. The current form and the future of work and employment in a globally integrated world is thus a topical and pressing theme, especially in connection with developments taking place in the last few years and marked by economic and financial changes. Research, analysis and policy interventions on working life quality thus naturally represent important themes in current European research and legislation. Working life quality is the subject of numerous national and international research projects, a topic widely discussed within scholarly projects, conferences and seminars, as well as the object of numerous pieces of legislation.

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Both as a theoretical category and as a subject of empirical research, working life quality is an extensive and internally diverse category. There are a number of theoretical concepts which define it in various contexts (quality of life, health and safety, labour market, social dialogue, EU legislation, etc.) and by means of various aspects (e.g., security, satisfaction, employment). Similarly, there are many approaches to its empirical measurement. In recent years, there have been very distinctive efforts to harmonize this research issue in Europe and to create a widely acceptable definition and a uniform approach to the measurement and interpretation of working life quality.

This article attempts to join the current debate concerning the options for empirical measurement of working life quality. The reader will find a basic overview of general empirical options for the examination of this area based on a dual concept of working life quality, understood by the author as a suitable framework for a theoretical and empirical definition for research purposes. The concept is presented after a general introduction, followed by an overview of empirical approaches which focus on the examination of both objective and subjective spheres of working life quality. Attention will mainly be paid to the three indicators used most often to measure the subjective dimension of the concept of the quality of working life. In particular, their advantages as compared to the others will be shown, as well as those points where they do not differ.

It should be noted that this article does not aspire to present a uniform definition of working life quality, nor does it strive to introduce a uniform approach to its measurements, or even a specific universal indicator. The article does not focus on a detailed and exhaustive description of each existing approach and tool, as other authors have done elsewhere (de Bustillo et al. 2009). Its purpose is to contribute to the field of the methodology of working life quality research by classifying various types of indicators and by presenting analysis outputs of survey instruments targeting its subjective dimension.

2. Working life quality surveys

The category of working life quality is a link in a hierarchical system of related areas. While it falls into the broader complex of overall quality of life, it contains job satisfaction, for instance, as one of its parts. Quality of life as a category has been of scientific interest from various points of view at least since the development of theories of needs, motivation, etc. (Maslow 1954; McClelland 1961; Rapey 2003), and it has also long played an important role in connection with the areas of health or work (e.g. Herzberg 1966; Flanagan 1978; Veenhoven 2000; Payne 2005). The topic of working life quality has enjoyed scientific attention at least since the mid-20th century (e.g., Herzberg et

al. 1957; Jencks – Perman – Rainwater 1988; Danna – Griffin 1999; Sirgy et al. 2001; Kistler – Mußmann 2009)³. In the first years of the 21st century, attention has increased in particular with respect to efforts to measure working life quality at local, and lately also international, levels.

However, the areas of both ‘working life quality’ and ‘job satisfaction’ are approached differently both on a theoretical level, and, correspondingly, on an empirical level. For instance, hierarchical theoretical concepts of working life quality put job satisfaction as a middle link on the scale of ‘life satisfaction – job satisfaction – satisfaction with individual aspects of work’ (Danna – Griffin 1999; de Bustillo et al. 2009), or as one of the manifestations of a more general quality of working life which – in addition to job satisfaction – this category assumes in other areas of the life of an individual (Sirgy et al. 2001; Dvořáková 2005). For research purposes, the categories of working life quality and job satisfaction are sometimes even deemed to be interchangeable, and working life quality can in such cases be defined pragmatically as ‘employee contentedness with the satisfaction of needs through resources, activities and results stemming from the job’. (Sirgy et al. 2001: 242)

In the corresponding empirical area, we can see more and more frequent efforts to create standardized procedures and tools for the measurement of working life quality, work quality, and job or employment quality. Locally-oriented versions of such tools can therefore be found, for instance, in Austria – Austrian work climate index (Der Osterreichische...), Germany – Gute Arbeit Index (Fuchs 2009), Belgium – Quality of Work in Flanders (Flanders Social and Economic Council 2009), Spain – Indicator of Quality of the Labour Market (Caprile – Potrony 2006), Canada – Job Quality Model (Lowe 2007), USA (Howell – Diallo 2007) or the Czech Republic – Subjective Quality of Working Life (Čadová – Paleček 2006; Vinopal 2011). However, in recent years, more frequent efforts to compare job quality at an international level can be observed. Such comparisons are conducted on a more long-term basis using national statistical labour market data and relevant data from the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS)⁴, European Labour Force Survey (ELFS), European Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) or International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). An intense interest in the supranational level of working life quality is also apparent from joint professional activities of researchers involved in this field, e.g., the activities of the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO), the international project ‘well-being@work’ (AK Österreich 2008/09), the organization of a workshop, *Working conditions and Health and Safety surveys in Europe: stocktaking, challenges and*

³ Loscoco and Roschelle (1991) provide an overview of the literature.

⁴ Recently, international comparisons have been attempted, for instance, by Tangian (2007) or Leschke, Watt and Finn (2008).

perspectives, in Brussels in 2009, or the establishment of a working group, *Quality of Work*, under the INSITO⁵ project.

In fact, the aforementioned theoretical and empirical efforts differ both in the definition of the object of research, the approaches chosen, and the objectives defined. Some have a very broad focus on ‘work quality’, others address the more narrowly defined ‘job quality’ or ‘working conditions’, some proclaim their objective as ‘satisfaction’ with work or a job, while others examine what constitutes a ‘good job’. Some approaches are oriented towards statistical data and data concerning the objective status of working conditions, others towards the subjective level of job satisfaction, and still others towards both at the same time. Finally, the objectives range from a detailed description of a broad area to efforts to produce a single general indicator of working life quality.⁶ The category of working life quality is thus defined in current empirical practice in varying degrees of scope and depth, and no consistent attempts at international comparison have yielded an unequivocal definition of the area under examination, yet alone generally accepted and applied indicators. As in other areas of cross-national comparative research, researchers are still faced with many challenges here.

3. Conceptualization of working life quality⁷

The concept of working life quality as presented here has a dual nature. The overall quality of working life comprises two complementary aspects: objective and subjective; where, for example, the subjective evaluation of one’s own job satisfaction is viewed as complementary to the actual working conditions. To capture working life quality adequately, one should examine both of these aspects; and – just as importantly - specify their mutual relationship clearly.

The second key attribute of any information on working life is the level to which it relates (micro-, meso- and macro-), with the distinction always being rather relative and based on the context of the analysis. While the micro-level usually corresponds to data on individual workers, the meso-level to aggregated sets of data, for instance at the level of a company, industry or location, and the macro-level contains data on entire countries or even broader territorial units displaying an even higher level of aggregation. Information required for the analysis of working life quality is in practice found at different levels and usually needs to be combined in some manner. For instance, information on satisfaction with pay can be obtained at the individual level, and

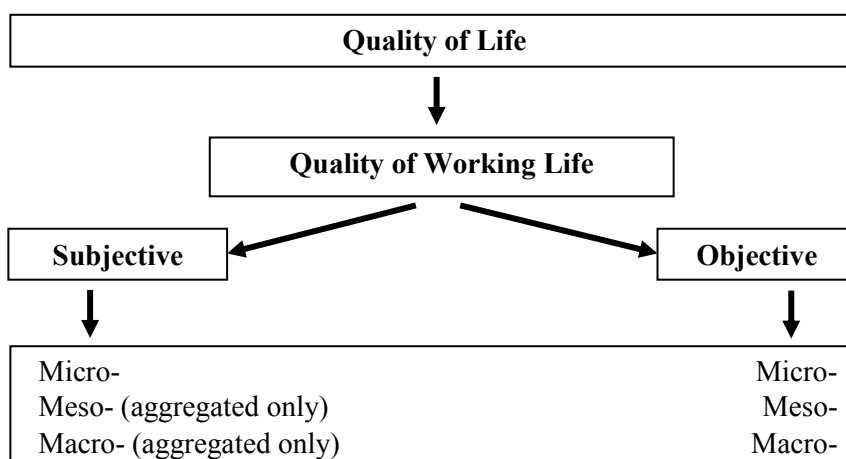
⁵ INSITO (Integration, Security, Innovation – European Answers to the Worldwide Financial and Economic Crisis) <http://www.insito.info/>.

⁶ A lengthy list of current approaches to empirical measurements of working life quality can be found in de Bustillo et al (2009).

⁷ This chapter is based on the conceptualization of the topic as already presented by the author in his previously published texts, especially Vinopal (2009; 2011).

taken to a higher level only through aggregation; on the other hand, information on unemployment rates is reported at the macro-level, or at best the meso-level (e.g., of a region), and if one wishes to use it in the analysis of individual data, it appears in the role of contextual variables.

Figure 1. **Dual concept of quality of working life.**



The objective level of quality of working life tends to be represented by aspects such as salary, the nature of employment and type of work contract, the level of legal protection of workers, working hours and their flexibility, working conditions and so on, but also by derivative indicators, such as gender or ethnic differences in individual areas. The objective aspects of working life can thus obviously be observed at all three levels.⁸ Unlike objective characteristics, the subjective level of working life quality cannot primarily be measured other than on the individual level. It is therefore most frequently explored through evaluations expressed by the workers themselves, whether on a general level of overall job evaluation (job evaluation, work evaluation, etc.), or in greater detail by evaluating individual aspects of the job and work (pay, interpersonal relations at the workplace, time requirements, etc.).

In additional to the above structure, the ultimate objective of an analysis of working life quality may in principle come in two different forms. On the one hand, the objective may be to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of the internal structure of workers' working life quality. On the other hand, the

⁸ On the other hand, if information on objective working life conditions is observed at the individual level – through questions to respondents in a survey – its 'objectivity' may be rather questionable, as such information is based on the subjective responses of workers rather than objectively substantiated hard data. And finally, even objective measurements from higher levels can be deemed subjective to some extent, here due to interpretation. Put simply, the level of unemployment or the degree of unionization represents objective hard data, while the nature and strength of their relationship to working life quality are determined by the researcher subjectively.

analysis may aim to produce a single consolidated piece of information – an index that represents the whole area by a single summary figure and allows easy comparisons, whether diachronous or synchronous. For both types of objectives, it is desirable to use information from different levels and which describes both the objective and subjective aspects of working life. When striving to make a detailed description, one must by definition cover the phenomenon under examination as broadly as possible, and the valid summary indicator should also encompass as many aspects as possible. Information of very different kinds is thus virtually always integrated in the process of exploring working life quality.

Table 1. **Working life quality levels**

	<i>Unit of analysis</i>	Objective characteristics	Subjective characteristics
Micro-level	<i>Individual</i>	Salary/wage Job characteristics	Satisfaction with salary Evaluation of relations at the workplace, etc.
Meso-level	<i>Company, location, etc.</i>	Average salary Jobs on offer	X
Macro-level	<i>State, EU</i>	Unemployment rate Level of legal protection of workers	X

However, combining the subjective and objective aspects of working life quality into a single indicator is not easy. In addition to all the methodological problems mentioned above, one of the key theoretical problems here is the traditional concept of relative deprivation (Merton 1968: 185-215; Walker – Pettigrew 1984). A greater degree of satisfaction with working conditions does not necessarily mean that they really are of a higher quality, and poor working conditions do not always lead to expressions of dissatisfaction. A change in an index combining objective and subjective aspects thus may indicate an improvement in objective working conditions, but also ‘merely’ their more favourable assessment on the part of the workers. One can also easily imagine a situation when objective conditions are apparently improving but workers’ satisfaction continues to drop (because surrounding countries exhibit faster objective growth, for instance). An effort to integrate both aspects into a single summary index thus, in my opinion, disguises and obfuscates the key feature of the working life quality concept – the duality of the relationship between the objective nature of conditions and their subjective perception.

If summary indicators are to be objective, undoubtedly a way can be found to construct them separately in both the objective and subjective spheres. It is undoubtedly possible and justified to define working life quality only from the perspective of objective conditions, for instance: to integrate data from the

micro-, meso- and macro- levels using adequate technical and statistical procedures, to construct a relevant summary indicator for the area, and to conduct synchronous or diachronous comparisons. Similarly, the quality of working life can be defined in terms of the subjective feelings of workers, and using one of the types of survey instruments shown later on. However, rather than trying to interconnect both pieces of information artificially at the final stage, I consider it more useful to address the issue of their correspondence, building on the dual nature of the quality of working life concept, through comparison and explanation of their mutual relations. In this regard, an elaboration of the methodological possibilities of instruments for measuring only one of the two parts of working life quality could be useful and practical, and not only because they are frequently used in various types of surveys.

4. Instruments for measuring the subjective quality of working life

Two dominant theoretical approaches frequently employed in the study of working life quality in general can be applied to the subjective area: the concept of needs satisfaction, and the theory of side effects (Sirgy et al. 2001). Approaches based on the theory of needs satisfaction usually focus more narrowly on the issue of work life, and view its quality as the extent to which work and a job satisfy needs that people wish to satisfy through them. (e.g. Porter 1961) The theory of side effects, on the other hand, looks at the issue of working life quality in relation to other life domains, e.g. family (e.g., Leiter – Durup 1996; Bromet – Dew – Parkinson 1990; Křížková et al. 2005).

Irrespective of their differences, both approaches require information about individuals. Research instruments for the measurement of subjective perception of work and jobs thus inevitably fall into the area of research methods working with individual workers, using, in particular, the survey technique.⁹ An instrument used to explore the subjective evaluation of working life quality therefore usually has the form of a standardized questionnaire, although the specific form and number of questions may differ significantly. In principle, three basic forms of instruments can be observed:

1. a simple question
2. a single set of items – the one-dimensional approach
3. two or more sets of items – the multidimensional approach.

A simple question most often reads ‘How satisfied are you with your work life?’, ‘How satisfied are you with working conditions in your job?’, ‘How would you rate your job?’ etc., where the answers are presented to the respondents in the form of scales between positive and negative assessments of varying scope and orientation.

⁹ Let us leave aside for the time being a whole host of qualitative approaches and techniques, because these offer limited options for generalization, which is one of the main objectives of the type of exploration addressed in this paper.

The one-dimensional approach with a single set of items is taken to mean questions which establish similar assessments on the part of respondents in multiple areas of their working life at the same time such as, for instance, satisfaction with pay, superiors, technical facilities, etc. The unidimensionality lies in the fact that to assess different aspects of working life, a single criterion is used; most frequently, 'satisfaction', although workers may also be asked about 'quality', 'fulfilment of expectations/needs', 'changes over the last year', etc.

The multidimensional approach employs multiple sets of items. This makes it possible to expand the field of vision through which working life quality is viewed, and to observe its internal dynamics. Porter's approach (1961) or the *DGB – Index Gute Arbeit* (Fuchs – Kistler – Trischler 2009) approach can be mentioned as examples of this kind. Our approach, which will be explained in detail below, is another example.

Different types of questions obviously have different potential in terms of the quality and comprehensiveness of the measurement of working life quality. Before we compare them, we will briefly dwell on the concept of the survey instrument proper used to explore the 'subjective quality of working life'. It needs to be briefly presented here because the different types of questions and the differences between them will henceforth be described with reference to the same instrument.

Subjective quality of working life instrument (SQWL)¹⁰

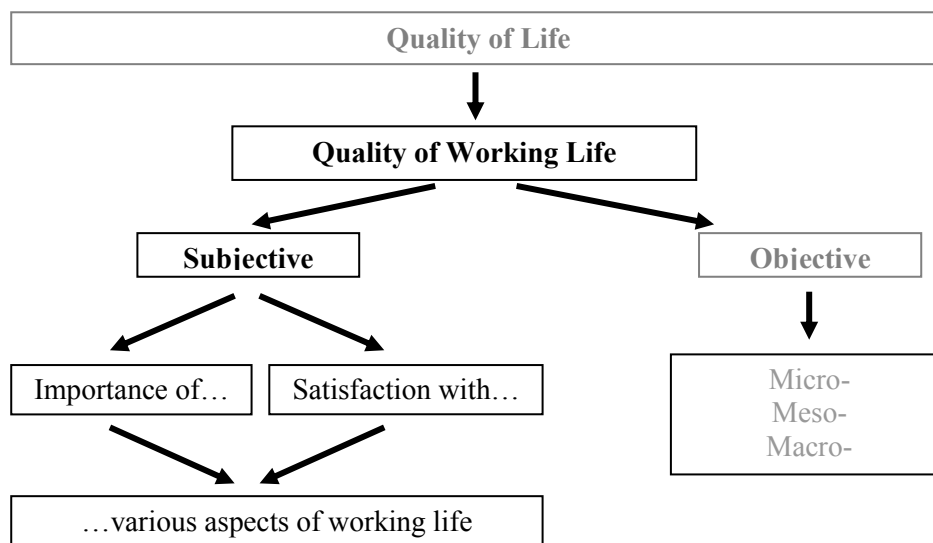
From the perspective of the conceptual duality of the category of working life quality, as explained above, the survey instrument covers its subjective part by exploring the micro-level. Adequate coverage of the structure of domains and aspects of working life was accomplished through multi-degree development of different variants of the instrument and through the testing of various sets of items.

Our approach is in principle based on the theory of needs satisfaction when the dimension of *importance* of individual aspects for the workers themselves is added to the dimension of job *satisfaction*. This approach is based on the following assumption: if we want to measure the subjective perception of working life, information about satisfaction with individual aspects (salary, interpersonal relations in the workplace, security, independence, prospects, etc.) may not be sufficient. Each aspect may presumably carry different weight for each worker and as such, play a different role in each worker's overall job satisfaction, depending on the *importance* attributed by workers themselves to individual aspects. Unlike the assessment of resources provided, for instance, such importance does not represent an estimate of general objective conditions

¹⁰ For detailed description of the instrument and its development process, see Vinopal (2009; 2011).

(which may be of a more universal nature in the eyes of the workers). On the contrary, it continues to operate on a purely subjective, individual level: different aspects may be important to different workers to a different extent, and the measure of their satisfaction may also differ. The combination of such dimensions thus may be highly specific for each person, and it is desirable to capture this at the individual level.

Figure 2. **Conceptualization of subjective quality of working life**



Note: For a detailed figure showing the measurement model and the original format of the instrument see (Vinopal 2011).

The current form of the questionnaire asks respondents to assess both *importance* and *satisfaction* with the individual aspects of their work and allows for different types of analysis. Data may in principle be analyzed on three different levels: the level of (1) individual aspects, (2) domains/factors, and (3) overall summary indicators. It is also possible to analyze each dimension separately and to observe satisfaction or importance on each of the levels, or to integrate the dimensions in various ways in order to obtain information of a higher order. Of the many ways to integrate dimensions, *discrepancy* (i.e., to what extent satisfaction corresponds to or lacks importance in the observed aspect or domain), and *subjectively perceived quality of working life* (satisfaction weighted by means of importance in order to ensure adequate weights for individual aspects in the summary indicator) appear to be most useful. The combinations of levels and variants of the analysis available

are summarized in Tab. 2. Obviously, individual types are more or less useful for different purposes; those in brackets are used in the analysis below.

Table 2. **Options for data analysis types**

		<i>Level of analysis</i>		
		Items	Domains	Overall indicator
<i>Dimensions separately</i>	Satisfaction	x	x	[x]
	Importance	x	x	x
<i>Dimensions combined</i>	Discrepancy	x	x	x
	SQWL	x	x	[x]

A discussion of instruments for measuring the subjective quality of working life

After a short excursion into one multidimensional approach, it is now possible to compare the three types of instruments mentioned above. It is evident that different types of questions provide different possibilities for gathering specific types of information, different pros and cons in terms of measurement quality, and different usability for further analysis. The order implemented above, starting from a simple question and finishing with complex structures of sets of items, could represent some kind of a hierarchy in terms of the increasing quality and potential of each approach. Nevertheless, such a hierarchy is not indisputable and has its own limits in the particular format of each question. In addition to the fact that complex sets can be misleading if items have been selected inappropriately or a serious context effect occurs during interviewing, a simple question may be the best solution in the case of a limited budget or where it plays some special role in the survey. In this section, we will address this issue in more detail, particularly as regards the quality of working life instruments. On the other hand, a more general discussion of the measurement characteristics of different types of questions and indicators can be found, for example, in Saris – Gallhofer (2007), whereas Krejčí (2010), for example, presents a comprehensive general framework of the concept of quality of survey research.

Data presented in this study come from the Survey ‘*Stress in the workplace*’, conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic for the Occupational Safety Research Institute, between June 22 and July 6, 2009. Sample specifications are: employees in the Czech Republic, 18-65 years, N = 836, quota sampling, PAPI.

Simple question vs. set of satisfaction items

A simple question such as ‘How satisfied are you with your job?’ (Very satisfied – rather satisfied – rather dissatisfied – very dissatisfied) taps into the respondent’s immediate state of mind. In the respondent’s actual situation, it usually means that whatever is the currently most burning issue dominates their overall feeling, and their response will predominantly be a reflection of this. Such a question is strongly contextually dependent, and the ‘context’ can be very broad, ranging from the economic situation of the country, through the situation in the organization and burning questions related to the current job, to the design of the questionnaire and the question itself. Therefore, such a question is prone to measure different things on different occasions, and tends to be extremely unreliable and invalid when used in longitudinal surveys. On the other hand, we could suppose that it describes the respondent’s actual strongest feelings about his or her job or work activity, and such information could naturally be the main goal of this approach, or it could be sought as a suitable indicator for use in further analysis of, for example, well-being or life satisfaction.

Sets of items such as ‘How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job?’ (followed by various aspects of the job or work activities and accompanied by a similar answer scale as that mentioned above) overcome many shortcomings of simple questions and – if prepared and used correctly – improve both the validity and reliability of measurement. The thoughts and evaluations of the different respondents about their current job are integrated with reference to several clearly defined aspects of employment. Therefore, the final image doesn’t reflect only the immediate state of mind of individual respondents, but describes broader structures of feeling identical for them all. A fixed set therefore ensures much more standardized measurement on different occasions. On the other hand, a composite index derived from answers to the whole set of items may not necessarily represent the respondent’s actual feelings. This is because the set also includes those aspects that are less relevant to the worker’s actual situation, while the seriousness of some other burning issues that have a determining influence on the worker’s actual feelings can be artificially decreased by being put together with the first ones. Other potential problems with this kind of instrument may emerge if particular items in the set are not selected appropriately and, for example, omit important aspects of working life, or if one domain dominates while others are critically suppressed. (For the purposes of this article we will overlook other non-trivial methodological risks related to question wording or scale design.)

Regardless of clear differences, both types of question seem equally usable when considered as variables to be put into further analysis. Basic results of analysis of construct validity (convergent and divergent), checked by

association analysis with hypothetically related topics, show similar or almost identical patterns (see Table 3, 1st and 2nd column), and patterns of differences between subgroups of workers are also very similar when based either on analysis of a simple question or on an index computed from a set of satisfaction items (See Graph 1).

Table 3. Association of types of measurement with work related issues (Spearman's rho)

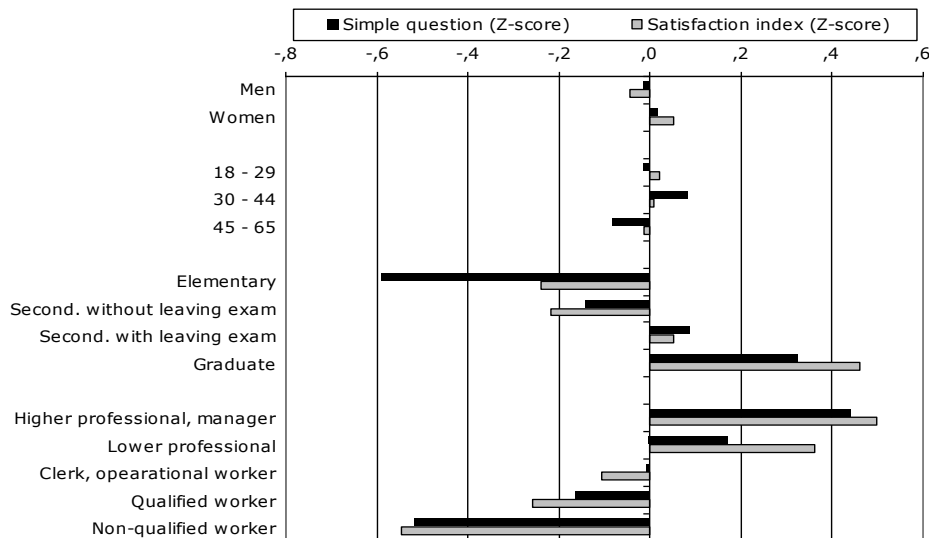
	<i>Simple question</i>	<i>Satisfaction index</i>	<i>SQWL Index</i>
<i>Simple question (satisfaction with current job)</i>	1.00	.53**	.54**
<i>Satisfaction Index (satisfaction with aspects)</i>	.53**	1.00	.99**
<i>SQWL Index (satis. with and import. of aspects)</i>	.54**	.99**	1.00
Probability of job change in next 12 months	.41**	.33**	.32**
Level of working stress in current job	.16**	.25**	.24**
Overall evaluation of relationships in the workplace	.46**	.56**	.56**
Health	.30**	.30**	.30**
Type of employer	.01	.01	.01
Household living conditions	.40**	.43**	.42**
Education	.23**	.23**	.23**
Personal income	.29**	.26**	.26**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Source: Survey 'Stress in the workplace', June/July 2009, employees 18-65, N = 836.

On the other hand, analytical possibilities unquestionably differ when it comes to a detailed analysis of working conditions. Here simple questions clearly cannot offer any material for investigation about which aspects workers are more satisfied with and which they are less satisfied with, how different groups of workers differ in respect to satisfaction with different aspects, or how satisfaction with various aspects changes over time. Therefore, a partial conclusion could be that both forms of question may provide meaningful output if we know what the limitations are and for what purpose we want to use them. If we are interested in a deeper and longer investigation of job satisfaction and its correlates, sets of items are unambiguously better. If we are interested in the currently dominant feelings of workers about their job or if we are merely looking for a practical indicator to use in broader analysis, then a simple question seems to be more appropriate or at least sufficient.

Graph 1. Patterns of differences in job satisfaction among subgroups of workers.¹¹



Source: Survey 'Stress in the workplace', June/July 2009, employees 18-65, N = 836.

Simple satisfaction sets vs. a more complex structure

Lengthy attempts have been made to come up with a more complex solution for the subjectively perceived quality of working life and to produce a composite index more sophisticated than a simple satisfaction index. The example of instrument presented above or more the detailed one in Vinopal (2011) show the rich analytical possibilities offered by such an approach, which cannot be delivered by one-dimensional survey instruments.

On the other hand, analysis based on this more complicated survey instrument suggests that the contribution it may make is also limited. If the same analysis is conducted once based on both dimensions (SQWL Index) and again based on a set relating merely to the satisfaction dimension (Satisfaction Index), the results are generally the same and the more complicated approach appears to provide no additional insights. This can be demonstrated again through the analysis of associations of those two indices with hypothetically related variables, where no factual difference in output can be seen (see Table 3, 2nd and 3rd column), or through the analysis of relationships to working stress, which also shows almost the same results for both approaches (see

¹¹ Shows means of variables standardized into Z-scores in subgroups.

Table 4). This holds true not only for partial indices representing domains, but also for primary variables representing single aspects (not shown here).¹²

Table 4. **Regression analysis. Dependent variable: level of working stress**

<i>Partial Satisfaction Index</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Partial SQWL_Index</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Remuneration	-.046	Remuneration	-.063
Relationships	-.286**	Relationships	-.285**
Time	-.331**	Time	-.315**
Self-realization	.117*	Self-realization	.127**
Security	.020	Security	.036
Conditions	.155**	Conditions	.147**

** Coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level

Source: Survey 'Stress in the workplace', June/July 2009, employees 18-65, N = 836.

What remains clear is that subjectively perceived quality of working life can readily be appreciated from various perspectives in a theoretical context, but measuring separate dimensions in people's minds may be much more problematic. On the other hand, both (and certainly also other relevant dimensions) have their own factual meaning and could be useful for other types of analysis. For example, with regard to importance and satisfaction, their mutual correspondence is still one such area that may be particularly promising (in fact, these dimensions are not associated in the data in the reported survey). Similarly, the combination of the dimensions of 'what is a good job' and 'quality of current job' used in the Gute Arbeit approach (Fuchs – Kistler – Trischler 2009) offer many other analytical possibilities for mutual comparison.

5. Conclusions

The outputs of demonstrated summaries, classifications and analysis leads to the conclusion, that although a comprehensive exploration is required to attain a true understanding of the issue of working life quality, the construction of summary indicators is also a justifiable aim. They play an important role both in comparative social research and in practical issues of legislative processes at national and international levels; and despite all their generally known shortcomings, they can be put to a wide range of uses.

However, in the construction of summary indicators, the intrinsic nature of the phenomenon being explored always needs to be respected. It has been demonstrated that working life quality can be viewed from two different perspectives: as an issue of objective conditions, and as a question of the subjective feelings of workers. These two spheres may but need not

¹² On the other hand, dimensions of satisfaction and importance are not associated. My explanation of the results described above thus refers mainly to the cognitive complexity of the topic in people's minds and to questionnaire design effect.

correspond, and an effort to integrate them at any cost does not necessarily yield the best result.

Neither part of working life quality is without difficulties; both in the context of the measurement of objective characteristics and of their subjective perception, researchers face complications. In this study we addressed some of them, especially those playing a role in the sphere of subjective working life quality survey instruments. It was shown that a simple question as well as one-dimensional and multidimensional sets of items could have their places in different types of surveys and that in some regards, they are equally utilizable. On the other hand, substantial differences in the field of meritory analysis were pointed out. The choice of the proper survey instrument therefore must be well reasoned and should stem from a clear awareness of the goals of the survey and ways utilizing the indicator in data analysis.

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