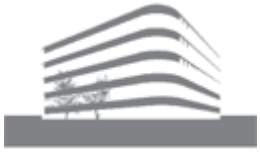

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Author(s): Gallie, Duncan
Date 2000
Type Working Paper
Series Estudios = Working papers / Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales 2000/154
City: Madrid
Publisher: Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales

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THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE: IS SCANDINAVIA DIFFERENT?

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Estudio/Working Paper 2000/154
October 2000

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ABSTRACT

There have been marked differences between countries in the importance that governments and the social partners of industry have attached to quality of working life issues. In particular, these themes have been much more salient in the public discourse of the Scandinavian societies than in other European societies. But did such policy commitments translate into effective differences in the experience of working life? Hitherto there has been insufficient comparative evidence for any serious attempt to assess this. However, a new survey providing data that is comparable for all of the European Union countries offers the opportunity for a tentative assessment of the implications of such policy differences. The paper compares employees' perceptions of the quality of working tasks, the degree of involvement in decision-making, career opportunities and job security to see whether Denmark, Sweden and Finland have a distinctive pattern from other European Union countries.

A concern to assess the broad trends in the quality of working life has been central to the sociological agenda for several decades. While in the past there have been major differences in perspectives and forecasts, within-country research has drawn an increasingly convergent picture of the types of factors that affect the nature and quality of jobs. For instance, a wealth of studies have pointed to the central importance of the skill level of work and the ways skills are changing. Similarly, there has been extensive investigation of the impact of types of technology and of the scale of work organisations. However, the nature of such studies has made it difficult to address the question of whether the quality of work might also be affected by cultural values and policies that are specific to particular societies. At least at the level of rhetoric, there have been marked differences in the importance that governments and the social partners of industry have attached to quality of working life issues. In particular, these themes have been much more salient in the public discourse of the Scandinavian societies than in other European societies. But did such policy commitments translate into effective differences in the experience of working life? Hitherto there has been insufficient comparative evidence for any serious attempt to assess this. However, new survey data that is comparable for all of the European Union countries provides the opportunity for a first tentative assessment of the implications of such policy differences.

The Scandinavian Experiment

The overt growth of policy interest in quality of working life issues in Scandinavia has been relatively recent, deriving from developments in Sweden in the 1970s. The 'classic' Swedish model of collective bargaining, rooted in the Saltsjobaden agreement of 1938, was primarily concerned with the development of highly centralised institutional mechanisms for determining pay and establishing labour market policies that would foster full employment (Korpi, 1978; Gourevitch et al. 1984; Kjellberg, 1998). The organisation of the workplace was left as primarily subject to unilateral employer control. Indeed, the statutes of the employers' organisation (SAF) specifically underlined the prerogatives of the employer with respect to both recruitment and dismissal decisions and the direction and allocation of work (Sandberg et al. 1992: ix).

It was thirty years later that the Swedish unions seriously began to take up the issue of control of the more immediate work environment. This largely reflected the combination of the growth of shopfloor militancy, culminating in the wildcat strikes of 1969-70, and the emergence of new employer-led initiatives for the reform of working conditions, most famously represented by the Volvo experiments (Gyllenhammar, 1987). The unions were faced simultaneously by growing dissatisfaction among their membership and by the threat of being by-passed by employer policies that would make a direct appeal to the workforce.

The first steps in enhancing workplace control came through the passage of more stringent health and safety legislation and in 1976 the Co-Determination Act opened the way for the unions to negotiate agreements about the organisation of work (Gourevitch et al. 1984). The election of a Conservative government slowed the implementation of the Act in the later 1970s and it was only in 1982 that an agreement on co-determination was finally reached with the main private sector employer's organisation (SAF). This set the stage for the local unions to begin to elaborate plans for the improvement of work tasks and work organisation. Following ideas initially developed by the Metal Workers union, the manual worker union confederation (LO) made the extension of 'developmental work' a central strategic objective in their 1990 Congress. This involved pursuing policies that would enhance the meaningfulness of work, improve occupational health and self-respect of employees and provide them with the opportunity to develop their personal resources. The growing public salience of quality of working life issues was reflected in the major research resources that were now devoted to them through institutions such as the Work Environment Fund and the Centre for Working Life (Gold, 1992) which both researched and disseminated through industry new work practice experiences.

A very similar development began to take place in Denmark in the early 1990s. The Danish Trade Unions Federation highlighted the issue of 'developmental work' in its 1991 Congress and the concept spread rapidly to become a cornerstone of trade union thinking (Hvid, 1999). The substance of these ideas was also soon to find a place in collective bargaining in Norway.

Yet despite the growing importance of quality of life issues in these countries, there were grounds for scepticism about how far they were likely to lead to real change in terms of the experience of work on the shopfloor. The design of tasks and work organisation were new territory for the unions and, given the technical specificity of individual workplaces, the pursuit of policies of job re-design placed major demands on the resources and knowledge of local unions. Employers still had a near monopoly of technical knowledge and could counter union demands with arguments about technical feasibility or cost that could be difficult to disprove. However, the Scandinavian countries were societies that had traditionally placed a strong emphasis on consensual industrial relations and where at least certain major employers had already seen possible benefits to work enrichment. It was possible then that processes of industrial partnership had led to a gradual shift in the climate of ideas in these countries whereby greater priority was given by all parties to quality of work life issues.

Dimensions of the Quality of Work

The classic concern in the literature on the quality of work has been with the nature of the work task itself. Both writers in the Marxist perspective, with their concern for the objectively alienating character of work, and writers focusing on subjective satisfaction in work, have started from the assumption that it is the direct productive activity of the employee which is most fundamental for well-being (Friedman 1946; Naville 1963; Blauner 1964).

Diverse task characteristics have been seen as important for job quality in specific studies. But there is a remarkably general consensus in the literature about the importance of three factors: the variety of the work, the level of personal initiative that can be exercised in carrying out the job and the extent to which the job permits personal self-development. These characteristics are usually seen as tending to bundle together, such that jobs can be ranked along a spectrum. At one extreme, there are types of work which are intrinsically interesting, give employees discretion in the way they carry out the work and provide opportunities for the development of skill. At the other, there are job tasks that are highly repetitive, offer little

scope for personal initiative and allow no possibility for further learning. A considerable wealth of research has been generally supportive of the view that these factors do have strong implications for both job satisfaction and job involvement (Gallie et al. 1998).

This central preoccupation with the job task however has been complemented by a growing awareness of the importance of the wider organisational context for an adequate conception of the quality of work. From an early period, it has been argued (and well demonstrated empirically) that the extensiveness of participation in wider organisational decisions is also of major importance for people's satisfaction with their work (Blumberg, 1968; Brannen 1983). This may be partly because it helps to meet people's expectations about citizenship (Marshall 1964). There is a tension between the norm of equal status in the wider polity and that of subject status in the workplace. But participation is also important because it is likely to be a precondition for ensuring that work tasks are designed in a way that corresponds to employees' needs. Self-determination in the work task is likely to be more effective if those tasks are initially constructed in a way that takes account of employees' views about what is feasible and desirable.

More recently attention has also focused on the extent to which organisations provide longer-term employment stability and career opportunities to their employees. This was a central theme of the literature on labour market segmentation, with its depiction of the nature of 'primary' or 'core' sector jobs (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Edwards, 1979). The provision of some measure of career opportunity within organisations could also be seen as an extension of the argument about the importance of learning opportunities in work. People may benefit through extending their competence with respect to specific job tasks, but a more comprehensive notion of opportunities for self-development would require the possibility of moving over time to more complex or more responsible types of work. Career progression in turn assumes that organisations will provide training opportunities that will equip people with the new skills they need to assume such positions. Arguably the career dimension of job quality is likely to be particularly (and perhaps increasingly) problematic for organisations since it conflicts with the objective of decentralising responsibilities for work. Decentralisation tends to lead to the elimination of the middle (particularly the supervisory) ranks that provide many of the positions to which people on the shopfloor might hope to

move. There may then be a degree of tension between the requirements of task discretion and an organisational design that provides extensive opportunities for upwards mobility. A compromise sometimes proposed is that organisations might continue to contribute to longer-term careers through the provision of training, even if individual promotion might have to depend on the external rather than the internal labour market.

Finally, a central aspect of job quality is job security. In the early post-war decades the prevalence of full-employment tended to reduce the visibility of the issue. The assumption was that, provided employees met minimal levels of competence, their market scarcity meant that they were likely to be able to stay with their employers for as long as they chose. Studies of turnover primarily regarded job instability as a problem for employers and one that had to be addressed by examining the factors that affected employee satisfaction. The growth of unemployment however from the mid-1970s made it evident that job security could not be taken for granted. It not only varied sharply across time, but it differed considerably depending upon the particular type of employee. Indeed, some commentators were of the view that employers were coming to adopt an active policy of creating a division between a core of highly protected workers, with long-term career perspectives in the organisation and a periphery of 'flexible' workers who could be hired and fired at will.

Apart from its intrinsic importance for well-being, the security dimension of employment was clearly integrally related to the other dimensions of the quality of employment. It is primarily in situations where there is a reasonable time perspective of employment that jobs are likely to be constructed in a way that give scope for personal initiative and learning. If employment is short-term, people are unlikely to develop the knowledge about the job and the organisation that would enable them to make a significant personal contribution or to gain the experience needed to extend their skills. Similarly, since employers are less likely to invest time or money in training employees who will soon leave, workers are less likely to experience any significant skill development. Stability of employment is also a precondition for effective participation. This is again partly an issue of having the necessary knowledge to contribute to the planning process. But effective participation also presupposes the type of longer-term commitment to the organisation that would ensure a concern for the collective well-being.

In assessing country differences with respect to these various aspects of working life, it is important to bear in mind that the 'quality of working life' programmes that developed in the Scandinavian societies gave a much stronger emphasis to certain dimensions than to others. The central thrust of these programmes was to improve the quality of work tasks by reducing the extent of highly repetitive work and increasing the degree of employee discretion in taking decisions about how to carry out the job (Sandberg et al. 1992; Berggren, 1992). An implication of this was that they also attached considerable importance to the issue of employee involvement in decision making about work re-organisation, so that jobs would be better structured to correspond to employee needs and preferences. However, policy makers and interest groups had not attached a similarly high level of importance to the issue of job security. Rather in Sweden, the emphasis had been on facilitating labour mobility through the development of active labour market policies, while Denmark had one of the least restrictive systems of regulation of employers' powers to hire and fire of all European countries (Bertola, 1990; Grubb and Wells, 1993). It is then particularly with respect to the dimensions of the work task and participation that a distinctive 'Scandinavian' pattern would be expected if the quality of working life programmes had had an effect.

Structural Change and the Quality of Working Life

Any attempt to assess 'country' differences needs to take account of the wide range of other factors that have been shown to affect the characteristics of jobs. In particular, three have been of central concern in the literature: skill, technology and the size of the workplace.

The evidence is very consistent that jobs of higher skill (greater task complexity) are linked to many of the dimensions that are involved in notions of job quality. They are associated with greater task variety, with greater task discretion (or decision latitude) and with greater opportunities to develop skills in the future (Kohn and Schooler 1983; Gallie et al.1998). The composition of the workforce in terms of the relative size of occupational classes is likely then to have strong implications for the general quality of work tasks. Even within classes, it has been shown that upskilling is typically associated with jobs of greater

intrinsic job interest. Hence those countries where skill change has been particularly rapid in recent years are likely to have better quality jobs.

Another factor highlighted in the literature, often as a significant influence on skill levels, is the nature of production technology. Initially, the emphasis was primarily on the negative effects for work experiences of the spread of mass production techniques (in particular assembly-line production). Not only were such technologies thought to undermine skill levels by fostering an ever-greater division of labour, but they increasingly tied the employee to the machine creating a highly repetitive and constraining work environment. The emergence of forms of automated production created much sharper controversy among researchers about the nature of trends in the quality of work. Some argued that it would improve work conditions by renewing the need for individual initiative and team work (Blauner, 1964; Kern and Schumann, 1987) while others suggested that it would accentuate 'alienation' by definitively separating the worker from the product (Naville 1963). The spread of micro-processor technology in the 1980s made the debate yet more complex because of the considerable diversity of the forms automation could take. However, empirical research has tended to indicate that new technologies are in general associated with higher skill levels, greater employee responsibility and better work conditions (Gallie et al 1998). This would suggest that societies which had more advanced technological infrastructures would also have generally better work conditions.

Finally, a number of writers have pointed to the importance of the sheer scale of work organisations in effecting employee experiences. However, the implications of greater organisational size are ambivalent in terms of the different dimensions of work quality. In certain respects the effects are likely to be negative. Larger organisations tend, it has been argued, to be more anonymous, and, given their greater problems of internal co-ordination, working life is likely to be more closely regulated by impersonal rules. Individual participation in decision-making is likely to be more difficult to achieve and to be replaced with indirect forms of representation that may become oligarchic and distant from grass roots opinion (an argument classically developed by Michels [1962]). However, larger-scale organisations may also have positive implications for work quality in the way they affect careers and security. Because they tend to be more finely stratified and contain a higher

proportion of supervisory staff, they are likely to offer greater opportunities for career advancement. Since they tend to have more secure market positions, they may also offer more secure employment.

Given the accumulated evidence for the importance of these factors, it is important to explore how far any apparent country differences in work quality can be accounted for in terms of compositional differences with respect to skill, technological development and typical organisational size. The interrelationship between such effects is likely to be complex. Policies designed to improve work quality may operate through decisions about skill composition and the adoption of new technologies. But the most convincing case for a distinctive country effect would be if the expected pattern of country differences emerges even when such factors have been taken into account.

Data

A strong test of the view that the Scandinavian societies offer distinctively better work conditions would clearly need a very wide-ranging research programme, combining representative data over time with a range of matched in-depth studies. Given the constraints on cross-national research (not least deriving from cost), there is little systematic data available other than of a survey type. This clearly has limitations in terms of the number of measures available for any given aspect of the work situation and for the ability to compare different types of measure of the issues of interest. The objectives of the present study are then essentially exploratory and any conclusions must necessarily be regarded as very tentative. It seeks to detect whether there is any evidence that is consistent with a Scandinavian policy effect in the self-reported assessments of work characteristics of representative samples of employees in various countries of the EU.

The data on which we draw come from a survey carried out in 1996 to compare the experience of employment and unemployment across the European Union, which we refer to

as 'The Employment in Europe Survey'[1]. This provided a much fuller range of questions about people's work situation than had been available in any earlier representative survey. Given the restriction of the survey to the EU, it provides evidence for only three of the Scandinavian societies: Denmark, Sweden and Finland. However, it is Denmark and Sweden that are the countries that have been the most central to discussions of the emergence of a new quality of work life policies and provide the sharpest test of any effect of policy orientation.

For thirteen of the fifteen countries, the survey involved a random sample of approximately 1,000 people aged 16 and over (supplemented by a booster sample of the unemployed). In these countries, the sample size for those in work ranged from 443 (in Finland) to 609 (in Great Britain). There were three countries in which initial sample sizes were rather different. Separate samples were taken for East and West Germany, giving a substantially larger overall sample of those with jobs for united Germany (964). In contrast a considerably smaller overall sample was taken in Luxembourg and in Northern Ireland giving only 305 and 118 people in work respectively. It must be borne in mind that differences of sample size can affect significance levels and this requires care in interpretation.

In all cases personal interviews were carried out with individuals randomly chosen from the sample households. The survey is cross-sectional and hence statements of 'effects' must be read as statements of statistical association. The analysis is concerned to explore whether the patterns to be found in the data are or are not consistent with given theoretical expectations; they cannot provide direct evidence of causal relations.

The Quality of the Work Task

The evidence presented here is based on employees' own perceptions of their work task. The potential problem of such data is that people may be reluctant to give too bleak a

[1] The survey was commissioned by DGV and was carried out as a special survey within the Eurobarometer series (Eurobarometer, 44.3). For fuller details, see Gallie, 1999.

view of their work, since it could be seen as reflecting upon their personal worth. However, there are a number of reasons why a 'self-report' approach is likely to give us a more satisfactory picture of the quality of work than other supposedly more objective methods (for instance, that based on the judgement of an external observer). In the increasingly differentiated and dispersed structure of employment that characterises modern economies, the development of a reliable representative picture by means of external observation faces formidable practical difficulties. It would require observers to study a very wide range of jobs in different societies and to study them over extended periods of time. Moreover, with the expansion of the service industries, the very nature of work may make the person's own judgement more reliable than that of an outsider. Where work is increasingly of an inter-personal kind, the types of 'objective' measures developed for the study of industrial jobs become much more difficult to apply. The demands of the work become less transparent. It is the person who is involved in the activity on an everyday basis who is likely to have the clearest view of what it entails.

The measure of intrinsic job quality was based on four question items. Respondents were given a list of statements and asked to report, using a four point scale, how true or untrue each was about their own particular job. The questions were designed to be applicable to the widest possible range of jobs and to direct attention to the factual nature of the jobs. Items were chosen to relate to the three key conceptual dimensions of intrinsic job quality discussed above - the variety of the work, the opportunities for skill development and the scope for personal initiative. The wording of the items was :

'There is a lot of variety in my work'
'My job requires that I keep learning new things'
'I have a lot of say over what happens in my job'
'My job allows me to take part in decisions that affect my work'

Table 1. *Work Tasks Characteristics*

How true characteristic is of the person's current job:	Very true	Quite true	A little true	Not at all true	N
There is a lot of variety in the work					
All	35.5	30.2	21.1	13.2	7798
Self-employed	49.0	25.7	16.0	9.2	1174
Employed	33.1	31.0	22.1	13.9	6624
Job requires learning new things					
All	33.7	28.7	23.7	14.0	7764
Self-employed	47.9	25.2	19.5	7.4	1154
Employed	31.2	29.3	24.4	15.1	6609
Say over what happens in the job					
All	29.9	28.0	25.3	16.7	7785
Self-employed	66.8	13.7	13.1	6.4	1172
Employees	23.4	30.6	27.5	18.5	6613
Takes part in decisions that affect the work					
All	34.1	27.4	21.0	17.4	7765
Self-employed	80.6	11.1	6.0	2.4	1152
Employed	26.0	30.2	23.7	20.1	6613

Table 1 shows the distribution for the overall sample of responses to the four items. While there is no evidence of widespread alienation from the work task, there is at the same time a disturbingly low proportion of people who give the type of response that is indicative of a job of high quality. On the individual measures only about a third of the workforce are in jobs offering a high level of job interest, opportunities for self-development or significant initiative in decision-making on the job. The proportions with high quality job characteristics are particularly low among employees, with only a quarter considering that it was 'very true' that they could have a say over what happened in the job or that their job enabled them to take part in decisions that affected their work. Those who were self-employed were

substantially more likely to make a positive assessment of their work task on all items. The difference, however, is particularly striking with respect to the potential for exercising initiative in work.

To simplify the analysis, a scale of intrinsic job quality was constructed from the four items. The different job characteristics were clearly very closely related. A reliability analysis gave a satisfactory Cronbach alpha of .78. A principal components analysis confirmed that the items related to a single underlying dimension[2]. Each item was scored from 4 for 'very true' to 1 for 'not at all true', and the scale score represents the average score across the four items.

One check on the validity of the measure is to examine the pattern by class, given the wealth of literature that points to major differences in job quality at least between employees in professional and managerial work on the one hand and those in working class jobs on the other. The class classification used is an approximation of the Goldthorpe/Erikson class schema[3]. Table 2 shows that the results of the measure are consistent with previous evidence. There is a strong gradient by occupational class, with scores ranging from 3.25 among those in higher professional/managerial class positions to 2.31 among those in semi and non-skilled class positions.

Table 2. *Quality of the Work Task by Class (Employees)*

Higher Professional/Managerial	3.25
Lower Professional/Managerial	3.08
Lower non-manual	2.70
Tech/supervisors	3.01
Retail and Sales	2.66
Skilled manual	2.46
Semi/non-skilled	2.31
N=6667	

[2] The eigenvalue was 2.40 and the factor accounted for 60% of the variance.

[3] The algorithm for allocating occupational groups to these classes was prepared by Mark Tomlinson, currently at UMIST, Manchester.

To what extent did countries differ in terms of the average quality of job tasks? Is there any evidence that the Scandinavian countries were characterised by particularly good quality jobs? The analysis focuses on employees, as these have been central to theoretical discussions. Table 3 shows two countries stand out as having particularly high scores: Sweden (3.15) and Denmark (3.14). Here the average for all occupations was very similar to that of the European average for professional/managerial work. Finland came in third position with a score of 2.84. The country with the worst score was Portugal (2.38).

In general, men had somewhat better quality jobs than women. But the high ranking of both Sweden and Denmark was evident for both men and women; indeed, Denmark was the only country in which the quality of women's work was higher than that of men. Although there was little difference in the scores of Finnish men and women, the particularly high overall ranking of Finland also largely reflected the relatively high quality of women's work. The countries in which women's jobs were most noticeably worse than men's were Greece, Germany and Spain.

At first glance then the three Scandinavian countries do appear to be distinctive. But how far could this be accounted for by compositional differences, for instance with respect to occupational class, the use of new technology or size of establishment? To examine this we carried out a series of regressions allowing us to compare the initial country coefficients (expressing the gross differences) with the net country coefficients once a range of structural factors had been taken into account. The latter might be regarded as conservative estimates of possible country effects. It could be the case for instance that preferences with respect to the quality of work affect both the skill composition of the workforce and decisions about workplace size. However, if clear country differences emerge despite such controls the evidence in favour of such effects would seem particularly persuasive.

Table 3. *Quality of Work Task by Country (Employees)*

	Men	Women	All
Austria	2.76	2.68	2.72
Belgium	2.73	2.59	2.67
Denmark	3.08	3.22	3.14
Finland	2.80	2.88	2.84
France	2.87	2.78	2.83
Germany	2.70	2.52	2.62
Great Britain	2.78	2.74	2.76
Greece	2.79	2.79	2.79
Ireland	2.56	2.67	2.61
Ireland N	2.50	2.40	2.45
Italy	2.56	2.62	2.59
Luxembourg	2.53	2.63	2.57
Netherlands	2.79	2.66	2.74
Portugal	2.34	2.43	2.38
Spain	2.60	2.46	2.55
Sweden	3.15	3.15	3.15
All	2.75	2.74	2.75
N= 6616			

In Table 4, the initial country coefficients (without controls) are presented in Model 1. Belgium has been taken as the reference country and the coefficients indicate whether or not work tasks in a particular country are of a higher or lower quality than in Belgium. The pattern that emerges is very similar to that of Table 3, although it is now possible to see whether the differences are statistically significant. Denmark and Sweden stand out very clearly as having exceptionally good quality jobs. However, Finland, France and Greece also have significant positive coefficients. Portugal and Spain have significantly worse jobs than in other countries.

Table 4. *Country Effects on Task Quality for Employees*

	Model 1 (without controls)		Model 2 (with controls)	
	Coef	**Sig.**	**Coeff**	**Sig**
Austria	0.06		-0.05	
Denmark	0.48	***	0.45	***
Finland	0.17	**	0.03	
France	0.16	**	0.11	*
Germany	-0.05		-0.08	
Great Britain	0.10		0.08	
Greece	0.13	*	0.04	
Ireland	-0.06		-0.09	
Ireland N	-0.22		-0.47	
Italy	-0.08		-0.12	*
Luxembourg	-0.10		0.07	
Netherlands	0.07		0.05	
Portugal	-0.29	***	-0.25	***
Spain	-0.12	*	-0.15	**
Sweden	0.48	***	0.40	***
Constant	2.67	***	1.74	***
Adj R2	0.06		0.22	
N =	6599		5767	

Note : Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. The reference country is Belgium. Control variables in Model 2 are age, sex, class, size of organisation, time with current employer, whether the job involves the use of automated or computerised equipment and whether the job has been upskilled in the last five years.

In Model 2, the control variables were introduced into the analysis: age, sex, occupational class, size of workplace, time with current employer, whether or not the work involved new technology and whether or not the skills of the job had increased over the previous five years. Many of these were indeed strongly related to the quality of work tasks. As was seen earlier there was a strong effect of occupational class, with lower non-manual, skilled manual and particularly non-skilled workers having jobs of much poorer quality. The importance of skill effects was further underlined by the fact that there was a strong

association between the experience of upskilling and the quality of work tasks. Sex differences were not significant once other factors had been taken into account, but people in the prime years (35-54) tended to be in better jobs. Finally, the quality of work tasks was higher in smaller establishments (fewer than 50 employees) and among those working with new technology.

But the notable point is that, even when the full range of these controls had been introduced, Denmark and Sweden still stand out as very distinctive. The quality of jobs in France also appears to be significantly better than in most other countries. The distinctive position of Finland survived most controls (notably for class, workplace size and new technology), but disappeared when account was taken of change in skills in the previous five years. Greece was no longer significantly better than other countries once age and class had been controlled for. At the other end of the spectrum, Portugal and Spain continued to emerge as having particularly poor jobs even when all the control variables were introduced. In this extended model, Italy joined the ranks of the countries with particularly low quality job tasks.

Participation and Consultation

Involvement in organisational decision-making has been shown consistently to be a major influence on people's satisfaction with their work and their commitment to their employer. Such involvement however can vary both in terms of the types of decisions at issue, the degree of influence exercised and the institutional forms that participation takes. Previous research has generally distinguished between forms of 'direct participation' which relate to decisions about work organisation that directly affect the individual and mechanisms of employee consultation concerned with wider organisational issues (Geary and Sisson 1994; Frohlich and Pekruhl 1996). Certainly, at the institutional level, it is clear that countries differ substantially in terms of the prevalence and nature of formal participative mechanisms, and earlier research suggested that this may have important implications for perceptions of influence (IDE 1981, 1993).

Two measures were available of the opportunities for employees to make their voice heard in the organisation, which broadly correspond with this distinction. The first, focusing more specifically on issues of work organisation, asked: 'Suppose there was to be some decision made at your place of work that changed the way you do your job. Do you think that you personally would have any say in the decision about the change or not?' The choice lay between four options: no influence, just a little influence, quite a lot of influence and a great deal of influence. The second, concerned with consultation about more strategic organisational decision-making, asked: 'Thinking now about how you get news about important developments in the organisation you work for, does management hold meetings in which you can express your views about what is happening in the organisation or not?'

A first point to note is that overall only a minority of employees felt that they could exercise any substantial degree of influence over decisions affecting work organisation. Fourteen per cent thought they had a great deal of influence and a further 27 per cent that they had quite a lot, giving overall only 40 per cent with any effective degree of participation. However there were very substantial variations between countries (Table 5). There were three countries where a clear majority felt that they could exercise substantial influence: Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands. About half of all employees felt they could participate in Portugal and Greece. But less than a quarter of the workforce thought they could exercise significant influence in Germany, Ireland and Luxembourg.

A higher proportion of employees overall (56 per cent) reported consultation meetings where they could express their views about wider organisational decisions (Table 5). The proportion was once more highest in Sweden (71 per cent), followed by Denmark (68 per cent). In contrast to its position with respect to 'direct participation' Finland also joined the other Scandinavian countries in having a high prevalence of consultative meetings (66 per cent). The Netherlands came in fourth position. It was not the case that countries that had low levels of 'direct' participation also stood out in terms of lack of consultative mechanisms at a higher organisational level. Among the countries that had exceptionally low levels of direct participation, only Luxembourg had a very low level of higher level consultation. The position of Germany notably improves with respect to wider organisational consultation.

Table 5. *Participation in Decision Making (Employees)*

	% with great deal/ quite a lot of influence over work organisation	% with consultative meetings about important organisational developments
Austria	36.6	54.7
Belgium	31.8	49.2
Denmark	59.4	68.2
Finland	42.2	66.8
France	39.2	59.9
Germany	22.9	52.5
Great Britain	31.1	54.4
Greece	47.5	55.2
Ireland	24.2	56.3
Ireland N.	21.4	53.3
Italy	37.5	47.1
Luxembourg	22.6	46.6
Netherlands	57.3	63.9
Portugal	50.6	42.9
Spain	43.2	47.1
Sweden	63.3	71.3
All	40.1	56.4
N=	6554	6616

Previous research has shown that opportunities for participation vary considerably depending on people's class position. It is also likely that direct participation is easier to achieve in smaller organisations. In large-scale organisations, with their higher levels of role differentiation and hierarchy, it is likely to require the establishment of specific institutional mechanisms such as quality circles. How far can the apparent country specific effects be accounted for in terms of such factors? In order to test this, a scale score was produced for direct participation, with scores ranging from 4 for those reporting a great deal of influence to 1 for those with no influence. The measure of consultation was dichotomised between those who were or were not in workplaces that held such meetings. Regression analyses were carried out using an ordered logit procedure for 'direct participation' and a logistic regression for 'consultative meetings' (Table 6).

Table 6. *Country Effects on Participation for Employees*

	Decisions re work organisation		Consultative meetings re important organisational developments	
	Model 1a (without controls)	**Model 2a (with controls)**	**Model 1b (without controls)**	**Model 2b (with controls)**
	Coef Sig.	**Coef Sig.**	**Coef Sig.**	**Coeff Sig**
Austria	0.18	0.09	0.22	0.23
Denmark	1.04 ***	1.18 ***	0.79 ***	0.85 ***
Finland	0.45 ***	0.48 ***	0.73 ***	0.80 ***
France	0.33 **	0.29 *	0.44 ***	0.53 ***
Germany	-0.10	-0.10	0.13	0.25
Great Britain	-0.18	-0.15	0.21	0.24
Greece	0.57 ***	0.46 **	0.24	0.37 *
Ireland	-0.16	-0.28	0.29 *	0.13
Ireland N	-0.77	-1.51	0.12	-0.31
Italy	0.51 ***	0.42 **	-0.08	0.03
Luxembourg	-0.30 *	-0.27	-0.10	0.24
Netherlands	0.72 ***	0.90 ***	0.60 ***	0.68 ***
Portugal	0.58 ***	0.67 ***	-0.26	-0.12
Spain	0.29 *	0.18	-0.08	0.00
Sweden	1.21 ***	1.22 ***	0.94 ***	0.92 ***
Chi2	523.01	752.68	180.98	392.92
DF	15.00	34.00	15	34
Sig	***	***	***	***
N =	6486	5542	6436	5570

Note : An ordered logit procedure was used for Models 1a and 2a; a logistic regression procedure for Models 1b and 2b. The reference country for all models is Belgium. Control variables in Model 2a and 2b are age, sex, class, size of organisation, time with current employer, whether the job involves the use of automated or computerised equipment and whether the job has been upskilled in the last five years.

Country effects are again assessed with Belgium as the reference country. Sweden and Denmark stand out very clearly as the countries with the highest coefficients on both measures of participation. The Netherlands, Finland and France also emerge consistently

from the data as having particularly good mechanisms for employee involvement. Greece and Portugal have relatively high levels of direct participation, but are not distinctive with respect to higher level consultation. Again the evidence is consistent with the view that the Scandinavian countries are effective in fostering good conditions of employment, although they are closely followed with respect to participation by France and particularly the Netherlands.

Training and Career Opportunities

Is there any evidence that work organisations in the Scandinavian societies differed not only in the immediate quality of the work tasks, but in their concern for the longer-term career prospects of the workforce? An important measure of such longer-term concern is the provision of training. Training provision is likely not only to enhance people's longer-term employability, but also to increase the opportunities for career progression either within the current organisation or elsewhere. However, given the importance attached to internal labour markets in the literature, it is also necessary to look more specifically at whether there are significant opportunities for career progression within the organisation itself.

As a measure of the training provided by employers, people were asked : 'Did you receive any education or training in the last five years paid for by your employer or former employer?' The response choice lay between nine categories representing different durations of training, ranging from 'none' to 'more than a year'.

An initial examination of the proportions of employees who had received either no training or a significant amount of training (more than a month) already shows interesting differences between countries. The Scandinavian countries had the lowest proportions that had not received any training: 36 per cent in Denmark, 31 per cent in Sweden and 29 per cent in Finland. In contrast, employees in the Southern European countries were particularly unlikely to have received training from their employer. This was the case for over 70 per cent in Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal. Turning to the figures for those who had received at

least a month's training, the picture is similar, although not simply a mirror image. While Denmark, Finland and Sweden were well above the European average, the Netherlands also had an unusually high proportion of employees with significant periods of training. Greece is characterised by a polarised pattern: it had a high proportion with no training at all, but at the same time a slightly higher than average proportion with more than a month's training.

Table 7. *Country Differences in Employer Training*

	% receiving employer training	
	None	**1 mth+**
Austria	55.1	14.5
Belgium	68.8	10.1
Denmark	36.0	29.4
Finland	28.5	21.0
France	62.4	11.5
Germany	54.9	9.5
Great Britain	53.0	14.9
Greece	77.3	16.1
Ireland	59.4	12.3
Ireland N	71.4	14.3
Italy	79.1	6.5
Luxembourg	66.7	7.5
Netherlands	49.6	23.9
Portugal	71.1	9.0
Spain	70.0	10.8
Sweden	31.4	19.3
EU15	55.9	14.6
N =	6599	

It could be expected that training opportunities would be affected by the size of organisation a person worked in, the technology of the work and the person's skill level. Did the relatively high training provision of the Scandinavian societies largely reflect such factors? Since the categories for the different durations of training covered periods of unequal

length, this was tested using an ordered logit procedure. The results indeed confirm that there was a very strong link between the size of establishment and the likelihood of training. Training provision fell sharply as the size of workplace declined. In contrast, those working with new technology and those who had experienced an increase in the skill requirements of their job in the previous five years were markedly more likely to have received training. There were also clear class effects. Lower non-manual workers were significantly more likely to have received training even than professional and managerial employees. But, skilled manual and non-skilled workers were much less likely to have had the opportunity.

Yet even when account had been taken of all of these factors, the distinctiveness of the Scandinavian countries is confirmed. Denmark, Finland and Sweden have the largest (and indeed quite similar) coefficients (Model 2, Table 8), followed by the Netherlands. Great Britain, Austria and Germany are in an intermediate position. All of the Southern European countries have negative coefficients, although it is only in Italy that the effect is statistically significant.

Did the concern for training in the Scandinavian countries reflect a greater commitment to providing long-term careers for employees within the organisation? There are two measures available in the survey. The first was concerned with people's past experience. People were asked whether or not they had been promoted while they had been with their current employer. The second sought to assess their perception of future opportunities, asking how high they thought their chances were of being given a significant promotion in their present organisation. For purposes of analysis responses have been dichotomised into those who thought that they had a 50/50 or better chance and those who thought their chances were less than evens.

Table 8. *Country Effects on Employer Training*

	Model 1 (without controls)		**Model 2 (with controls)**	
	Coef	**Sig.**	**Coeff**	**Sig**
Austria	0.53	***	0.43	**
Denmark	1.37	***	1.17	***
Finland	1.31	***	1.11	***
France	0.25		0.13	
Germany	0.43	***	0.37	**
Great Britain	0.66	***	0.48	***
Greece	-0.34		-0.21	
Ireland	0.41	**	-0.05	
Ireland N	0.27	**	0.08	
Italy	-0.50		-0.46	**
Luxembourg	0.07		0.38	
Netherlands	0.91	***	0.60	***
Portugal	-0.12		-0.06	
Spain	0.03		0.00	
Sweden	1.30	***	1.12	***
Chi2	509.53		1231.58	
DF	15		34	
Sig	***		***	
N=	6415		5558	

Note : Ordered logits. The reference country is Belgium. Control variables in Model 2 are age, sex, class, size of organisation, time with current employer, whether the job involves the use of automated or computerised equipment and whether the job has been upskilled in the last five years.

Table 9. *Promotion Opportunities within Current Organization*

	Has been Promoted	50/50+ chance of promotion
Austria	33.9	41.6
Belgium	34.4	30.2
Denmark	24.3	30.8
Finland	23.1	28.7
France	36.6	33.4
Germany	28.3	26.8
Great Britain	39.4	36.4
Greece	22.7	27.9
Ireland	36.5	39.5
Ireland N.	35.7	35.7
Italy	26.6	17.2
Luxembourg	43.1	39.5
Netherlands	37.5	25.1
Portugal	27.8	27.2
Spain	37.2	30.9
Sweden	27.7	33.8
All	31.7	31.1
N	6616	6546

Taking the percentage distributions of people who had been promoted or had a good chance of promotion (Table 9), there is no evidence that the Scandinavian societies were more likely to operate internal labour markets than other countries. Indeed, Denmark, Finland and Sweden were below average in terms of past promotion and close to the average with respect to future opportunities.

Regression analyses showed that career opportunities were strongly affected both by individual and organisational characteristics. People who had been in the organisation longer were more likely to have been promoted (although not more likely to feel that they had good future prospects). Men were more likely than women both to have been promoted in the past and to think that they had reasonable promotion opportunities in the future. Non-skilled

workers appeared strongly excluded from both past and future opportunities for career advancement, while lower non-manual employees were optimistic for the future. People working with new technologies had a significantly higher probability of having been promoted in the past and they were also more likely to think that they had a reasonable chance of moving up further in the organisation. Finally, there were strong effects of organisational size. Those working in large organisations (500+) were much more likely than those in other organizations to have been promoted. Future opportunities appeared to be particularly poor in organisations of 50 to 99 employees, as well as in those with fewer than 10 employees.

Once such factors were taken into account, all of the three Scandinavian countries had strongly negative coefficients for past promotion, while they were not distinctive from the majority of other countries with respect to perceived future opportunities (Table 10, Models 2a and 2b). Overall, it appears that despite the much stronger emphasis on training at work in the Scandinavian countries, there is no evidence of more developed internal labour markets.

Job Security

The final dimension of the quality of work to be examined is that of job security. Sources of job insecurity can be diverse. It may arise because relatively weak employment regulation allows employers to dismiss people more easily on individual grounds or it may be due to a general weakness in the labour market in a period of recession. The latter is likely to be heavily contingent on the particular position of a country in the business cycle, whereas the former may reflect longer-term institutional differences – whether in terms of employment legislation or de facto trade union power. It is the general level of protection of employees against dismissal that is likely to affect the atmosphere of work in an enduring way and can be regarded as a relatively stable aspect of the quality of working life.

Table 10. *Country Effects on Promotion Opportunities*

	Has been Promoted		50/50+ chance of future promotion	
	Model 1a (without controls)	**Model 2a (with controls)**	**Model 1b (without controls)**	**Model 2b (with controls)**
	Coef Sig.	**Coef Sig.**	**Coef Sig.**	**Coeff Sig**
Austria	-0.03	-0.10	0.50 ***	0.50 ***
Denmark	-0.50 ***	-0.56 **	0.02	-0.07
Finland	-0.56 ***	-0.69 ***	-0.07	-0.30
France	0.09	0.11	0.15	0.16
Germany	-0.28 *	-0.29 *	-0.17	-0.15
Great Britain	0.21	0.24	0.28	0.22
Greece	-0.58 ***	-0.35	-0.11	-0.05
Ireland	0.09	0.10	0.41 **	0.28
Ireland N	0.10	-0.62	0.26	0.36
Italy	-0.37 *	-0.36 *	-0.73 ***	-0.74 ***
Luxembourg	0.38 *	-0.36	0.40 *	0.38
Netherlands	0.13	0.03	-0.25	-0.47 **
Portugal	-0.31	-0.28	-0.15	0.04
Spain	0.12	0.44 *	0.03	-0.01
Sweden	-0.31 *	-0.55 ***	0.17	0.13
Constant	-0.64 ***	-1.76 ***	-0.84 ***	-1.37 ***
Chi2	107.201	1091.3	110.955	484.702
DF	15	33	15	34
Sig	***	***	***	***
N =	6425	5568	6390	5546

Note : Logistic regressions. The reference country in all models is Belgium. Control variables in Models 2a and 2b are age, sex, class, size of organisation, time with current employer, whether the job involves the use of automated or computerised equipment and whether the job has been upskilled in the last five years.

Table 11. *Security from Dismissal by Country (%)*

	Time before dismissal for :				Security Index Score
	Lateness		Lack of Work Effort		
	Within a month	More than a year	Within a month	More than a year	
Austria	50.6	14.7	41.7	20.0	3.92
Belgium	41.6	24.9	33.5	34.9	4.58
Denmark	35.8	26.7	27.7	32.4	4.80
Finland	30.1	31.9	17.4	43.4	5.29
France	47.9	26.9	46.9	22.3	4.11
Germany	60.4	10.4	41.4	18.7	3.72
Great Britain	46.3	15.5	41.0	20.5	3.99
Greece	60.3	20.2	48.0	20.3	3.94
Ireland	51.3	19.5	37.4	24.4	4.04
Ireland N	33.3	16.7	27.3	18.2	4.46
Italy	29.4	45.7	29.1	40.1	5.35
Luxembourg	41.0	30.0	43.6	31.3	4.42
Netherlands	29.9	31.3	19.3	42.8	5.26
Portugal	50.4	29.4	41.3	31.8	4.45
Spain	68.6	15.3	65.5	9.5	3.21
Sweden	13.4	42.4	9.2	57.3	6.02
All	44.2	24.3	35.7	29.4	4.44
N	5228		5228		

The measure of security against dismissal in the survey focused on the speed of dismissal in the event of an employee's performance being judged unsatisfactory. It asked : 'How long do you think it would be before a person doing your sort of job would be dismissed in your organisation if they persistently…. 1) arrived late, 2) did not work hard'. There were six possible response categories: within a week, within a month, within six months, within a year, within more than a year, and never. An overall index of security has been created by scoring responses to each item (with higher scores representing longer periods before dismissal) and then summing the two scores.

The first four columns in Table 11 provide the proportions of employees giving a relatively short period before dismissal (less than a month) and also the proportions giving a relatively long period (more than a year). The final column of the table presents the country averages for the security index scores. It can be seen that security from rapid dismissal was slightly greater overall with respect to problems relating to work effort than to lateness. This was true for all countries other than Luxembourg. But the difference was particularly marked in Germany, Ireland, Finland and Greece. The two measures, however, provide a broadly consistent picture of whether the employees in a given country had above or below average employment security.

Were the Scandinavian countries distinctive in the degree of protection that employees enjoyed? Taking the overall index score, Sweden is certainly the country where such protection was greatest and Finland was also one of the highest ranked societies. The contrast between these countries and the country with the lowest level of security (Spain) was striking. For instance, whereas in Sweden only 13 per cent reported that they would be dismissed within a month for lateness and 9 per cent for inadequate work effort, the proportions in Spain were as high as 69 per cent and 66 per cent respectively. But it is clear that the Scandinavian countries were not homogenous or clearly distinctive in this respect. The score for Denmark was considerably lower than for Sweden and Finland, indeed lower than that for either Italy or the Netherlands.

Regression analysis showed that security from dismissal was related to a wide range of factors. Men were more likely to be vulnerable to dismissal than women. Security was particularly low among skilled manual and non-skilled workers. Employees working with new technologies were relatively well protected. The most striking effects related to organisational size. Employees in firms with fewer than 100 employees were very much more at risk than those in larger firms (100+) and the effect grew stronger as establishment size declined with coefficients of -.45 in establishments of 25 to 49 employees and -.73 in those with fewer than 10 employees.

However, as can be seen in Model 2 of Table 12, taking account of these factors did not substantially alter the overall respect to country rankings. Sweden and Finland had

relatively high levels of job security, but Denmark was not significantly different from the reference country (Belgium). While none of the Scandinavian countries was among the countries where security was particularly low, they could not be regarded as offering distinctively high levels of job security.

Table 12. *Country Effects on Security from Dismissal*

	Model 1 (without controls)		**Model 2 (with controls)**	
	Coef	**Sig.**	**Coeff**	**Sig**
Austria	-0.66	***	-0.62	***
Denmark	0.23		0.14	
Finland	0.72	***	0.57	**
France	-0.46	**	-0.52	***
Germany	-0.86	***	-0.83	***
Great Britain	-0.58	***	-0.54	***
Greece	-0.64	***	-0.36	(*)
Ireland	-0.53	**	-0.04	
Ireland N	-0.12		0.54	
Italy	0.77	***	1.02	***
Luxembourg	-0.15		0.52	
Netherlands	0.68	***	0.58	***
Portugal	-0.13		-0.07	
Spain	-1.37	***	-1.11	***
Sweden	1.45	***	1.35	***
Constant	4.58	***	4.66	***
Adjusted R2	0.10		0.21	
N=	4952		4351	

Note : Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. The reference country is Belgium. Control variables in Model 2 are age, sex, class, size of organisation, time with current employer, whether the job involves the use of automated or computerised equipment and whether the job has been upskilled in the last five years.

Conclusions

The Scandinavian countries took an early lead in developing policies designed to improve the quality of working life. But there can be many pitfalls in the journey from policy formation to effective change in working conditions. Is there any evidence that these countries had produced a better quality of work environment than other European Union societies? The data provided in this paper must be seen as a very tentative step in trying to address this problem. Surveys help to provide a more representative picture of the patterns prevailing in particular countries, but necessarily rely on relatively simple indicators of complex phenomena. The data are cross-sectional and therefore cannot provide causal evidence on the impact of policy change. But they do enable us to examine whether the differences between countries are consistent with the view that such policy developments may have had real effects in terms of employee experiences. The analysis has focused on four aspects of the quality of the work environment – the work task, opportunities for participation, the availability of training and career progression and finally job security. Since the surveys were confined to countries that were members of the European Union, the 'Scandinavian' countries for which data were available were Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

The indicators for the quality of work tasks focussed on the variety of work, opportunities for self-development and decision-making autonomy on the job. Denmark, Sweden and Finland were indeed the countries that had the highest scores in terms of the quality of work tasks. The relatively high position of Denmark and Sweden was confirmed even when account was taken of the impact on the nature of work tasks of differences in class composition, organisational size, the use of new technology and recent skill trends. At the other end of the spectrum, Portugal and Spain were the countries with poorest quality work tasks and again this remained the case even when other factors had been controlled.

It was also notable that Sweden and Denmark stood out very clearly as the countries where wider organisational participation was highest – whether one took the ability to influence decisions about changes in work organisation or the prevalence of meetings in which employees could express their views about developments in the organisation. Finland was less distinctive with respect to the former, but was also particularly well-placed with

respect to consultation. The Scandinavian countries also came out as having exceptionally high levels of employer-provided training, although the Netherlands also did very well on this measure.

With respect to the other dimensions of the quality of work life, there was much less that was distinctive about the Scandinavian countries. There was no evidence of more developed internal labour markets. Employees in these countries were neither more likely to have been promoted in the past, nor to perceive particularly good promotion chances for the future. Indeed, the evidence for past promotion suggests that opportunities for upward mobility within the organisation were relatively low. Finally, there was a substantial divergence between the Scandinavian societies in terms of job security in the sense of protection from rapid dismissal. Employees in Sweden and Finland were exceptionally highly protected, but this was much less the case in Denmark.

The evidence then does not suggest that employees in the Scandinavian countries had secured better employment conditions across the board. But they were clearly in a position of relative advantage with respect to the quality of work tasks and involvement in decision-making in the organisation. These were precisely the dimensions of working life on which the governments and social partners in these countries had focused most closely in their attempts to improve the quality of working life. There had not been an equivalent emphasis on the issue of job security. The fact that the distinctiveness of these societies is with respect to the nature of the work task and participation is then consistent with the view that their stronger policy emphasis on the quality of working life may have had an impact upon employees' everyday experiences of work. It would be unwise, however, to assume that such a programme could be easily generalised across other societies. Its potential to influence practice in the Scandinavian societies was doubtless to a considerable degree rooted in the prevailing structures of power in these societies, in particular the relatively long periods in government of social democratic parties, the high membership strength of the trade unions, and the unusually strong degree of representation of the social partners in industry in wider social decision-making.

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