

Skills, Job Control and the Quality of Work: The Evidence from Britain (Geary Lecture 2012)

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Abstract

In the last decade and a half there has been a marked increase in the interest of European policymakers in the quality of work. In part this reflects the concern to give greater content to the notion of a social Europe, and in part it stems from a growing awareness that the cherished employment objectives of the European Union (in particular with respect to women and older workers) will be difficult to achieve unless jobs offer a degree of intrinsic interest and levels of work pressure that are compatible with psychological health. However, it is notable how little policy discussion draws on the growing evidence from empirical research. This paper aims to trace some of the principal developments in the research agenda and in substantive knowledge, drawing on a major programme of British empirical research over the last two decades. It focuses on two core aspects of work quality – skill on the one hand and job control on the other. These have been central to the debate about job quality since its earliest days. The next section outlines the evolving debate among researchers about underlying trends in the skill and control and the following section examines the emerging picture from the empirical evidence.

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Job control may include control over work tasks, control over the work pace and physical movement, control over the social and technical environment, and freedom from supervision. Workplace autonomy has been seen as a specialized form of the more general concept of control.[1] Workplace autonomy is the freedom of a person to determine what he or she does at work, and how. Association with other factors[edit]. For Georges Friedmann, the quality of work depends on the employees' skills and on their capacity to control decision-making at work.[2]. ^ Gallie, Duncan (2012). "Skills, Job Control and the Quality of Work: The Evidence from Britain, Geary Lecture 2012" (PDF). *The Economic and Social Review*. 43 (3, Autumn): 325–341.

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