



Increasing Job Quality through Greater Employer Transparency

Models to Inform Future Action at Scale

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The Great Resignation during the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed attention to job quality issues. Throughout the pandemic, many workers lost their jobs at least temporarily and some still have heightened concerns about their health safety and difficult working conditions, especially in traditionally low-paying industries such as retail and leisure and hospitality. Nonetheless, we know little about job quality at US companies.

Job quality is a complex concept, with multiple dimensions including adequate wages, benefits, stable schedules, worker safety and protections, positive work environments, potential for advancement, and other features (Congdon et al. 2020). We generally get our information on job quality from aggregate statistics for whole industries or occupations, but that tells us little about what is actually happening at a firm level.

Yet we know employers within the same industry may take divergent approaches to job design and talent strategy. Not understanding this firm-level landscape across the multiple dimensions of job quality makes it incredibly difficult to both clearly define what a “good job” looks like and actually implement policies and practices that incentivize businesses to reflect on job quality and make improvements that could help them retain and attract talent and improve workers’ lives in meaningful ways.

Many businesses may have a limited understanding of their own job quality challenges. Even businesses with very sophisticated analytic capacity in operations often do not deploy these skills to understand the people side of their business (Scott and Spievack 2019). Moreover, this lack of understanding can make it difficult for businesses to attract and retain frontline workers, particularly in the complicated COVID-19 labor market.

Having transparent data on firms' job quality could also be useful to numerous other stakeholders who want to encourage businesses to do better. For example, data on health insurance coverage, wages, and scheduling practices for frontline workers at all publicly held companies could help investors assess risk and align their values with their investments. Similarly, governments, nonprofits, and large institutions such as hospitals and universities could include job quality as a factor in procurement decisions. Consumers could use more complete data on firms to inform where they spend their dollars. And consumers, advocates, and workers themselves could use job quality data to better focus their actions and campaigns. In these ways, greater transparency about firms' job quality could be an important and necessary first step to improving American jobs.

Efforts to shine a light on job quality at individual firms are in early stages but increasing. To better understand them, we interviewed six experts, conducted online research, and profiled nine organizations' efforts. This brief describes each approach to job quality transparency identified, summarizes the approaches' trade-offs, and discusses how they could inform models for job quality expansion in the future.

Job Quality Transparency Models

We identified three basic models of job quality transparency efforts: voluntary self-assessment tools, mandated public reporting or disclosures, and public rankings or ratings.

This section describes these basic models and provides some examples. Most examples are efforts currently underway, but others have been paused or discontinued or are still in development. Table 1 describes these specific examples' main uses, sources of funding, and approaches to confidentiality. Then, the following section describes the data and methods in more detail.

Model 1: Voluntary Self-Assessment Tools

Self-assessment tools allow individual employers to input their own data on job quality into a template. Businesses engage in this process for different reasons—either to work with a consultant to improve their job quality as a way of advancing their own internal business strategy or to compete for contracts, grants, or preferred provider status. The data gathered in these self-assessments tend to be shared only with the parties that are using or have solicited the data, although some exceptions exist. Philanthropy has played a key role in developing and often sustaining these efforts. Examples of this model include the following:

- **Good Jobs Institute (GJI) Good Jobs Scorecard:** this tool was developed and launched in 2017 by GJI, a nonprofit organization based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The self-assessment includes a pyramid of basic needs (table 2) that are readily quantifiable, and it has evolved over time to include DEI metrics. The Good Jobs Institute uses the tool in its fee-for-service consulting practice to help businesses identify opportunities to improve company performance by addressing job quality. In addition, some impact investors—those seeking to generate financial returns while also creating a positive social or environmental impact—use the scorecard's results as performance indicators when working with company leadership to make investment decisions. Data are usually shared only with the Good Jobs Institute consultant and internal company stakeholders, although 10 companies have signed on to share their job quality data publicly.

TABLE 1

Examples of Job Quality Transparency Efforts by Model Type

Model	Name	State of implementation	Uses			Funding sources			Data confidentiality	
			Internal business strategy	Public awareness	Contracting and procurement	Investment strategy	Fee-for-service	Government	Philanthropy	Public
VSAT	GJI Good Jobs Scorecard	Current	X			X	X			X
	Working Metrics	Current	X		X	X		X		X
	JVS Job Quality Index	Current	X		X			X		X
	Diner's Guide	On pause	X	X				X	X	
MPD	California A.B. 1192	Future (pending)		X		X		X		X
	SEC Human Capital Disclosures	Current		X		X		X		X
RR	Drucker Institute Corporate Rankings	Current	X	X	X	X		X	X	
	Good Jobs Score	Defunct	X			X		X	X	
	JUST Capital Ranking	Current	X			X		X	X	

Source: Interviews with staff.

Notes: VSAT = voluntary self-assessment tools, MPD = mandated public disclosure, RR = rating/ranking, JVS = Jewish Vocational Services, SEC = US Securities and Exchanges Commission.

- **Working Metrics:** this tool processes commonly available human resources data (table 2) to assess job quality against national benchmarks and was developed by Working Metrics, a for-profit workforce analytics company. Businesses can upload data for their own internal purposes, but the tool was primarily designed to gather job quality data as part of procurement processes by anchor institutions (e.g., universities, hospitals, etc.), workforce development programs, and community development agencies. Data are not released publicly. Seed money for the development of Working Metrics came from philanthropic foundations, and the organization is also experimenting with a fee-for-service model.
- **Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) Job Quality Benchmarking Index:** the index was developed by JVS (Boston), a nonprofit workforce development organization connecting job seekers to training, education, and careers. Participating employers input and share information about job quality with JVS. It then uses these data to drive decisions about employer engagement strategy, and the JVS career coaches use them to match clients to opportunities consistent with the organization’s job quality pillars (wage, benefits, schedule, career ladder, and supportive environment). JVS also provides employers with a summary report that demonstrates how their jobs stack up against similar roles at other companies and coaching services on how they might increase their competitiveness in the talent marketplace. The tool is mostly financed by philanthropy, but JVS also has licensed the tool for use by different organizations, which generates some additional income to sustain and continuously improve the tool.
- **Diner’s Guide:** the guide initially started at Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) United in 2005 to raise the profile of high-road restaurants—“high road” meaning an employer that invests in job quality for their workers. Businesses volunteered to share their job quality data (table 2), and ROC created an app that restaurant patrons could use to access this information to inform their choices and continue advocating for good jobs with the restaurants they patronize. The guide has evolved because of significant changes in the restaurant industry during COVID-19 to more closely link the data reporting to supports for these businesses to craft and sustain high-road talent strategies. The data are now found on a website maintained by One Fair Wage, a new nonprofit that has spun off from ROC United focused on supporting job quality in the service sector. The website includes restaurants that participate in RAISE, One Fair Wage’s high road restaurant association, and those that have participated in “High Road Kitchens,” a pandemic-created program focused on helping restaurants improve job quality.

Model 2: Mandated Public Disclosure Policies

Mandatory Public Disclosure Policies would mandate businesses to disclose certain data about their jobs. Two examples of policies are currently under development. The data are intended to be widely accessible to the public and could be used by shareholders, businesses, and workers for different purposes, such as searching for a new job, investing in a company, or documenting a company’s pay and benefits. The costs of these policies are primarily borne by the companies that provide the data, although public entities have the responsibility of aggregating and distributing the data and ensuring reporting compliance. Because of the mandatory nature of these disclosures, their burden on

businesses, and the perceived risks of publicly disclosing potentially sensitive data, fully implementing these efforts may be politically challenging. Examples of this model include the following:

- **California A.B. 1192:**¹ the legislation grew out of the Future of Work Commission in California. It is sponsored by State Controller Betty Yee, who has worked in partnership with the Drucker Institute. If passed, the bill would mandate all companies with 1,000 or more employees in the state to report a set of defined human capital—or job quality—metrics (table 2) under penalty of perjury.² The state would make firm-level data publicly available, use them to establish job quality benchmarks, and move toward a “high-road employer” certification program under which companies that provide a sufficiently high level of job quality would be eligible for certain incentives, such as procurement contracts, tax benefits, and workforce development funding.
- **US Securities and Exchanges Commission (SEC) Human Capital Disclosures:** as of November 2020, all SEC registrants (which includes all public companies operating in the United States) are now required to provide a description of their human capital strategies relevant to business operation and management.³ The SEC added this requirement in response to pressure from investor groups that recognized the importance of human capital information to understanding risks to companies’ value over time.⁴ Information from these disclosures appear in SEC filings, which can be searched using the Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis, and Retrieval (EDGAR) system.⁵ With the tool, anyone can search disclosures by company and type of form, although the information cannot be aggregated across companies because searches can only occur for one company at a time and no standardized set of human capital metrics currently exists.

Model 3: Ratings and Rankings

Ratings and rankings systems are aimed at raising public awareness of job quality, either alone or as a component of business performance. Several organizations currently publish ratings or rankings of large companies. The businesses themselves are also a key audience, as are investors, although the strategies to connect with the latter are not always well defined. Philanthropic foundations play a large role in financing these efforts. Examples of this model include the following:

- **Drucker Institute Corporate Rankings:** the Drucker Institute is a nonprofit based at Claremont Graduate University. It is trying to contribute to “stakeholder capitalism,”—a philosophy in which businesses serve the interests of all stakeholders (including customers, employees, and society overall), instead of only shareholders. They pursue this goal in part by ranking major companies on “five dimensions of corporate performance—Customer Satisfaction, Employee Engagement and Development, Innovation, Social Responsibility and Financial Strength—to create a holistic perspective” of corporate effectiveness. Job quality (see table 2 for data elements) is covered in the “Employee Engagement and Development” category. Like all the Drucker Institute’s programs, the company rankings are financed through philanthropy as well as income-generating social enterprise initiatives, including consulting with employers seeking to improve their business practices. The institute also offers a financial product, where people can invest in

companies that are performing well in the Drucker rankings. The companies that score highest in the rankings are recognized each year in the *Wall Street Journal's* “Management Top 250” list.

- **Good Jobs Score:** the nonprofit Good Jobs Institute developed a score using Glassdoor data to rank companies on job quality metrics. The initial focus was on publicly traded grocery stores, and the data were intended for internal use by companies and external use by investors. Though the tool is now defunct because of limited organizational capacity to constantly update the data, it was initially financed through philanthropic foundations.
- **JUST Capital Rankings:** JUST Capital is a nonprofit focused on bridging trust between the public and employers and moving the market toward inclusive capitalism, with a primary focus on workers. JUST releases an annual ranking and other rankings throughout the year on issues such as which companies are best for workers. To identify metrics, the team annually surveys the public on what is most important for companies to prioritize in terms of job quality. Businesses are the primary audience for the rankings. JUST shares the data at advisory board meetings with participating CEOs to show performance relative to industry peers. These corporate leaders may use the data to redefine corporate priorities, increase their competitiveness, or spur company participation in racial equity and financial well-being initiatives to signal leadership on good jobs. Secondary audiences include investors who use the data to create exchange-traded funds and other financial products on topics such as racial equity funds to steer capital toward companies outperforming on justness. The JUST team has a media partnership with CNBC to release and share rankings and other research insights to the public. The rankings—like JUST in general—are funded by philanthropy.

Job Quality Data in Employer Models

In this section, we explore the scale and scope of different job quality employer transparency efforts and note interesting differences by model type. In table 2, we explore the data sources and methods used in each job quality transparency effort, as well as the data elements included. Below, we discuss the implications of these differences in the scope and scale of current efforts and also note whether the models created standardized scores or provided any benchmarks based on their analysis of job quality.

Model 1: Voluntary Self-Assessment Tools

Voluntary self-assessment tools vary in the number of measures covered, but all four tools we reviewed include specific metrics of job quality. All four tools include information on pay and benefits, three include information on job culture and design, and two cover working conditions and training. The self-assessment tools also include some operational metrics, such as retention and job growth, and the majority include some measure of equity. Other than for the Diner’s Guide, the metrics do not include employee perspectives. The tools tend to operate at smaller scale (fewer than 50 employers) than other models because they rely on employers opting in to self-report their data. Again, one exception is the

Diner’s Guide, which has a larger scale, in part, because of broad outreach, press coverage, and the incentive for businesses to promote their practices to a potentially large customer base.

Model 2: Mandated Public Disclosures

The mandatory public disclosures have the potential to include a wide variety of job quality dimensions but vary in how well this is implemented. The current guidelines for SEC human capital reporting do not require any specific metrics. As a result, considerable variation exists in how the reporting is implemented across companies—in terms of what and how much data are collected as well as how that information is presented. Many companies disclose very little information about job quality, and it is difficult to compare employers because the information varies so much between them.

On the other hand, the California public disclosures, if passed, would require standardized data items. The California model is also one of only two models we reviewed that included all five categories of job quality. It also covers equity, though it does not include any other operational metrics, which makes it a more useful tool for public awareness than business decisionmaking. Specific metrics include baseline numbers of full-time, part-time, and contract workers, disaggregated by race, gender, and ethnicity and separately by occupation and pay band; job quality indicators such as pay, benefits, and workplace safety; measures of worker voice and empowerment, such as union density; and measures of expenditures on training and recruitment.

Moreover, the mandatory public disclosures also offer the best model in terms of their potential to bring job quality data to scale. California A.B. 1192 would require all companies with 1,000 or more employees in the state to report, and all public companies operating in the United States are required by the SEC to do some type of human capital reporting.

TABLE 2
Data Sources and Metrics Included in Job Quality Transparency Efforts

Model	Name	Data Sources	Job Quality Domains Covered					Operational Metrics Covered
			P	B	W	C	T	
Assessment tool	GJI Good Jobs Scorecard	Employer self-report	X	X	X		X	Turnover, absenteeism, customer satisfaction, financial strength, equity
	Working Metrics	Employer self-report	X	X		X		Retention, employee satisfaction, equity
	JVS Job Quality Index	Employer self-report	X	X	X	X	X	Equity
	Diner’s Guide	Employer self-report, worker surveys, word of mouth	X	X		X		Internal promotion, equity
Public disclosure	California A.B. 1192	Employer self-report	X	X	X	X	X	Equity

Model	Name	Data Sources	Job Quality Domains Covered					Operational Metrics Covered
			P	B	W	C	T	
	SEC Human Capital Disclosure	Employer self-report						
Rating/ ranking	Drucker Institute Corporate Rankings	Glassdoor, Payscale, CSR Hub	X	X		X		Retention, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, social responsibility, financial strength, equity
	Good Jobs Score	Glassdoor, Indeed	X				X	Turnover, internal promotion, customer satisfaction, financial strength
	JUST Capital Ranking	Crowdsourced data, employer self-report, government and nonprofit data	X	X	X		X	Customer satisfaction, social responsibility, financial strength, equity

Sources: Interviews with staff; “SEC Adopts Rule Amendments to Modernize Disclosures of Business, Legal Proceedings, and Risk Factors Under Regulation S-K” (press release), US Securities and Exchanges Commission (SEC), August 26, 2020, <https://www.sec.gov/news/press-release/2020-192>; “EDGAR—Search and Access,” SEC, last updated September 27, 2021, <https://www.sec.gov/edgar/search-and-access>; Andrew R. Brownstein, John L. Robinson, and Elina Tetelbaum, “The New SEC Regulation S-K Rules,” Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, October 14, 2020, <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2020/10/14/the-new-sec-regulation-s-k-rules/>; Marc Siegel, “How to Approach the SEC’s New Human Capital Disclosures,” Financial Executives International, October 30, 2020, <https://www.financialexecutives.org/FEI-Daily/October-2020/How-to-Approach-the-SEC%E2%80%99s-New-Human-Capital-Disclo.aspx>.

Notes: P = pay, B = benefits, W = working conditions, C = culture and job design, T = training.

Ratings and Ranking Tools

Finally, we reviewed three ratings and rankings systems of employer job quality data. In terms of scale, they lie somewhere between self-assessments and the kind of scale that could be achieved through mandated reporting. The organizations assembling the information use data they can compile from crowd-sourced platforms such as Glassdoor or Indeed or large companies’ selective voluntary public disclosures. One advantage to these models is that they reflect employee voices. In terms of metrics, the ranking models generally have more operational metrics than other models, including employee and customer satisfaction and social responsibility.

Challenges and Opportunities for Bringing Job Quality Transparency Efforts to Scale

Despite their differences, all three models—voluntary self-assessment, mandatory public disclosures, and ratings and rankings—share some common challenges.

Many people we spoke with highlighted the challenge leveraging these data to make real change at individual firms. Some smaller-scale self-assessment models have clear benefits for participating businesses, but only a small number of businesses opt in. Ratings and rankings do not rely on business participation to exist, so they often do not have direct buy-in from businesses to engage them in actively using the data to improve job quality. And mandated public disclosures, if not tied to particular incentives, are unlikely to motivate businesses to act on their own.

This challenge of getting stakeholders to actually use these data extends to other stakeholders such as investors, governments, and others as well. The self-assessment tools often have narrowly defined audiences. In contrast, ratings and rankings could be useful for consumers, workers, and others, but often these models do not have organizational capacity to engage many potential stakeholders in actively using the data. And the current SEC disclosure approach is both unstandardized (to allow businesses discretion) and onerous to look up or aggregate across businesses, even for technologically savvy potential users.

At the heart of these difficulties lies a lack of funding and capacity to build scaled job quality data and inspire action. Most organizations driving these efforts are relatively small themselves and work within their limited means to publicize their efforts and engage a wide range of stakeholders. Even the entities behind public disclosures will need a well-formulated and well-funded communications and engagement plan to accomplish these larger objectives.

All three models—to some extent—also have challenges with data quality. The best data are likely to surface when businesses voluntarily report metrics only for their own purposes and self-interest. When businesses perceive a particular benefit for good behavior—such as preferred status or successful procurement—or a penalty for bad behavior vis-à-vis mandated reporting, they have an incentive to report more positive metrics. And government agencies or other institutions that support these efforts are unlikely to have adequate resources to monitor data quality. In some ways, ratings and rankings that use crowdsourced and other publicly available data could be used to reality check these data, but these models have their own challenges in terms of data quality. The organizations that put together ratings and rankings routinely ask companies to validate the data, but most decline to do so.

Benchmarking surfaces as a common challenge for two of the models. It is hard to define what a “good job” looks like without having data on what the larger labor market looks like. The small scale and selective nature of the self-assessment tools make it infeasible to use these data to establish reliable benchmarks, although Working Metrics uses national data sources to try to do this. Mandatory disclosures—if fully implemented and standardized—would facilitate large-scale benchmarking, allowing employers themselves to see how they compare with other businesses and policymakers to develop substantive job quality criteria for use in crafting public policies and priorities. Ratings and rankings almost by definition have benchmarked measures; however, if the underlying data are unreliable (see paragraph above), it is hard to know if this is meaningful.

Even with these challenges, each model has important lessons and opportunities that could help increase job quality transparency. Understanding how these models and their current states work

offers some important insight into thinking through what pathways to scaling job quality transparency look like (table 3). Scale would enable rigorous benchmarking and could spur significant shifts in how businesses think about their business models. In this section, we describe different aspects of each model’s potential:

- potential for scale—the degree to which this model could be expanded to cover a critical mass of US businesses
- customizability—how much flexibility exists to tailor the specific elements of job quality that might be captured
- actionability—how easily the job quality data gathered could be linked to concrete actions by key stakeholders, including businesses themselves, governments, investors, and others
- sustainability at scale—how feasible it would be to invest the necessary resources to implement at scale
- political feasibility—how likely it is that deploying this model at scale would have enough support from stakeholders to actually be implemented

The voluntary self-assessment tools profiled in this brief are used on a very modest scale, but the lessons learned from current efforts could help leaders adopt similar practices in federal or state government procurement processes and philanthropic grantmaking. This would lead to substantial scale and could include a full range of employers—small and large, non-profit and for-profit, publicly traded and privately held. The voluntary models described in this brief have substantial customizability and can be closely linked to employer action and incentives; at scale, they could also encourage more employers to voluntarily engage with organizations like One Fair Wage and the Good Jobs Institute for help to make improvements in job quality that would also improve their bottom line. The cost of adding job quality metrics would be marginal and sustainable in terms of cost over time. Putting this kind of process in place also tends to be more politically feasible than mandatory disclosures, because it may not require actual legislation to implement.

TABLE 3
Potential for Bringing Different Transparency Models to Scale

Type of model	Potential for Scale	Customizability	Sustainability at Scale (cost)	Political feasibility	Actionability
Voluntary self-assessment tools	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Mandated public disclosures	High	Moderate	High	Low	Moderate
Ratings and rankings	Low	Low	Low	High	Low

Two leaders interviewed stressed how the implementation of some sort of mandated reporting on job quality could have transformational effects in raising awareness and understanding about the importance of job quality. However, the scale and scope of these efforts are in direct tension with their

political feasibility. The wider and more precise the scope of the data collection and share of employers included, the more likely it is that employers will oppose mandated job quality reporting. To avoid these problems, those who craft mandated disclosures make trade-offs. For example, the California legislation only covers very large companies, and the SEC regulations on human capital disclosures are completely open-ended.⁶ This makes the disclosures more politically palatable but not as representative of businesses in the larger US economy.

One way to possibly make mandated public disclosures more politically feasible is to consider restricting access to data, much like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission does with its mandated reporting on racial and gender equity within companies. Companies feel less vulnerable when the data use is more limited. However, reporting the data develops capacity within businesses, and the mere fact that the data exist actually opens the door for stakeholders to ask companies to voluntarily make it public. For example, in the wake of racial equity conversations in summer 2021, companies felt shareholder pressure to share their EEOC data with the public to be more transparent about these issues, and at least 100 companies have agreed to.⁷

Although they have the advantage of not depending on political support for their implementation, ratings and rankings are incredibly difficult to expand much beyond their current scale and scope because of the data sources used and time-intensive nature of compiling and processing the data. Getting to much greater scale would require an unsustainable amount of resources over time.

Conclusion

The pandemic has opened a window of opportunity to address job quality in new and more innovative ways. Using employer data on job quality to increase transparency around these issues is one important prerequisite for action. Pioneering efforts in this space can help inform how our leaders could leverage employer data and information to make meaningful improvements in job quality for millions of Americans, and help us emerge from this period with higher-quality jobs and an economy prepared to meet new challenges.

Notes

- ¹ California A.B. 1192, Employment Information: Worker Metrics (2021–22), https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB1192.
- ² Human capital is defined as “the skills, knowledge, and qualifications of a person, group, or workforce considered as economic assets” (Thornton and Willingham 2021).
- ³ Andrew R. Brownstein, John L. Robinson, and Elina Tetelbaum, “The New SEC Regulation S-K Rules,” Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, October 14, 2020, <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2020/10/14/the-new-sec-regulation-s-k-rules/>; Security and Exchanges Commission (SEC) 17 CFR 229, 239, and 240 (2020), <https://www.sec.gov/rules/final/2020/33-10825.pdf>.

- ⁴ Marc Siegel, “How to Approach the SEC’s New Human Capital Disclosures,” Financial Executives International, October 30, 2020, <https://www.financialexecutives.org/FEI-Daily/October-2020/How-to-Approach-the-SEC%E2%80%99s-New-Human-Capital-Disclo.aspx>.
- ⁵ “EDGAR—Search and Access,” SEC, last updated September 27, 2021, <https://www.sec.gov/edgar/search-and-access>.
- ⁶ Note that senators introduced the Workforce Investment Disclosure Act (S. 1815, 117th Cong., 2021–22, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1815/text>) in the Senate in the spring of 2021, which would mandate the disclosure of several specific metrics for SEC reporting including number of full-time, part-time, or contingent workers, demographic information, turnover and retention rate, hiring and promotion rates, training, health and safety, compensation, and productivity. Senate hearings were held in September 2021 but no other actions as of the publication of this brief. The California legislation is similarly stalled for now.
- ⁷ Lydia Beyoud and Andrew Ramonas, “Shareholders Up Demands for Workplace Diversity Data Seen by Few,” *Bloomberg Law*, June 7, 2021, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/esg/shareholders-up-demands-for-workplace-diversity-data-seen-by-few>.

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