



RESEARCH REPORT

Measuring Job Quality

Current Measures, Gaps, and New Approaches

Batia Katz

William J. Congdon

Jessica Shakesprere

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Measuring Job Quality

Emerging research is illuminating how multiple elements of job quality matter for overall worker well-being, including economic security and upward mobility (Congdon et al. 2020). However, progress in understanding broader concepts of job quality, and how they relate to worker outcomes, is hampered because current measurements of many aspects of work are incomplete and imperfect. Although basic elements of compensation, such as hours, earnings, and some benefits are well measured, other elements of work such as scheduling, working conditions, and job design typically are not captured in current data. With more complete and robust data, researchers could measure and monitor job quality levels, trends, and distributions across the workforce and conduct causal analysis to better understand which elements of job quality relate to worker outcomes in both the short and long term. Moreover, these data and this research could help inform new policies to improve job quality.

In this report, we review the current state of data on and measurement of job quality in the United States and what the literature suggests a more complete set of job quality measures might include, and we outline potential approaches to improving measurement. We discuss current, relevant large-scale data sources that capture elements of job quality, including household surveys, employer surveys, and administrative data sources, to explain what elements are present or missing. For elements not included in existing national sources, we also scan relevant literature for smaller surveys or other sources that have developed or used relevant metrics and concepts. We identify prospects for gathering more complete data on job quality, primarily exploring the possibility of developing household survey measures that capture a wider range of job quality elements. And we discuss how this would be helpful for researchers and policymakers trying to better understand, and ultimately improve, worker well-being, mobility, and equity.

Several types of data are needed to better understand job quality and its impacts. Many job quality elements suggested by research as potentially important for worker outcomes, such as scheduling, autonomy, and flexibility, are typically not available in current sources, and where they do exist, many measures are typically not available together in the same source. We compile a set of survey measures that illustrate what a more comprehensive measure of job quality might include. Where only limited prior examples of measures are available, we identify concepts and directions for further research and development. The resulting questions and concepts suggest directions for developing a comprehensive set of questions for job quality surveys—for testing and eventual fielding. We also identify opportunities to improve measurement by enhancing administrative data elements and creating additional links between available sources, such as household and establishment surveys.

Background and Motivation

The body of research around job quality—a set of job elements including wages, benefits, working conditions, and more—and how it relates to worker welfare and preferences is growing. And based in part on this evidence, efforts are also increasing to better measure and promote job quality, such as those of the California Future of Work Commission (2021) and the US Department of Labor.¹ Job quality can have varying definitions from different perspectives, but we define job quality as the conditions resulting from a bundle of job characteristics that relate to worker preferences and well-being, including their economic security, physical and mental health, subjective well-being, and prospects for upward mobility. Our previous research has explored how we define job quality (Congdon et al. 2020), what matters for workers with different characteristics (Scott and Katz 2021), racial disparities in access and opportunities to achieve job quality (Shakesprere, Katz, and Loprest 2021), and how job quality may affect economic mobility (Congdon, Katz, and Shakesprere 2021).

Job Quality and Worker Welfare

Good jobs have better outcomes for workers, their families, and their communities. Although many open questions remain about what job elements relate to which outcomes, at what magnitude, and by what mechanisms, empirical research has begun to characterize the shape and nature of these relationships, as summarized in earlier papers (Congdon et al. 2020). Better wages, benefits, hours, and schedules, for example, are often associated with better economic and subjective well-being, as well as health outcomes (e.g., Kahneman and Deaton 2010; Schneider and Harknett 2019; Sullivan and von Wachter 2009). Aspects of working conditions and job design have been found to relate to measures of worker satisfaction (e.g., Bryce 2018; Hedblom, Hickman, and List 2019). And features of jobs such as employer-provided training can raise workers' wages (Parent 1999).

Job Quality and Worker Preferences

Different workers may have varying wants for or needs from work, according to their circumstances and personal preferences. For example, studies show that workers are willing to accept lower wages in return for more predictable scheduling (Mas and Pallais 2017) or greater job security (Wiswall and Zafar 2018). In other research, workers have indicated a willingness to pay for various job quality elements (i.e., earn less in return for them)—including scheduling, paid leave, and day-to-day activity level—and this varies by worker demographic and personal characteristics (Maestas et al. 2017). In a recent Urban Institute brief, we find several clusters of job quality elements that workers tend to

prefer together: job security and stability, purpose and control over working conditions, and advancement opportunities (Scott and Katz 2021). We also find that women and people of color systematically ranked all job quality elements as more important than otherwise similar white men did, indicating major differences in worker preferences by race and gender.

Job Quality and Equity in Labor Markets

Evidence shows that job quality is distributed inequitably and structural barriers to good jobs persist, particularly for people of color (Brown 2020; Shakespreere, Katz, and Loprest 2021). Workers of color tend to have lower pay (Brown 2020), less access to benefits (Kristal, Cohen, and Navot 2018; Semyonov, Lewin-Epstein, and Bridges 2011), and worse working conditions (Loomis and Richardson 1998; Storer, Schneider, and Harknett 2020) than white workers. They also face more difficult workplace cultures (Emerson and Murphy 2014; Petrie and Roman 2004) and fewer advancement opportunities (Couch and Fairlie 2010; Pager, Bonikowski, and Western 2009; Wilson and Roscigno 2016). However, several job quality elements are not covered in the existing research, and even the equity literature lacks sufficient sample sizes, making it challenging to unpack disparities that go beyond Black versus white workers. Additionally, race and ethnicity are not captured in some data, which makes it impossible to explore equity for several job quality elements.

Job Quality and Economic Mobility

Finally, while limited empirical research exists around the connection between job quality and economic mobility, a few studies suggest potential links between job elements and longer-term indicators of worker mobility. One example is that workers may be able to gain opportunities for mobility by building skills on the job that depend on other job elements. These include not only direct training and tuition benefits provided to workers in their current jobs (Acemoglu and Pischke 1998, 1999; Becker 1962; Naidu and Sojourner 2020), but also job design features that allow for greater learning on the job or other job characteristics, such as predictable scheduling, that allow workers to invest in education and training (Dicksen, Golden, and Bruno 2018). Job elements that foster financial stability might support worker productivity and economic mobility (Kaur et al. 2019). Finally, job quality could impact future mobility in a positive way by encouraging greater labor force attachment. But while several theoretical explanations exist for how job quality might positively impact mobility, little direct empirical evidence exists on this point.

Job Elements Suggested by Evidence and Theory

Job elements that determine job quality, as suggested by both empirical and theoretical research, include features of compensation (e.g., wages and benefits), working conditions (e.g., safety and flexibility), job design (e.g., task composition), intrinsic value of the work (e.g., meaning or social value), and forward prospects (e.g., job security, training, and advancement opportunities). Below, we review which job elements research suggests might be included in a comprehensive measure of job quality, and we discuss considerations for measuring these elements, in either survey or administrative data. Table 1, below, provides an overview of the job elements, adapted from Congdon and colleagues (2020).

Wages and Earnings

Wages and earnings are a foundational and central element of job quality and a priority for accurate and comprehensive measurement and data. All other aspects of a job being equal, wages that better compensate workers for their time and effort leave workers better off. Theory and empirical research link both subjective well-being and various direct indicators of worker welfare, including physical health, mental health, life satisfaction, and happiness, to their level of pay or earnings (Kahneman and Deaton 2010; Reeves et al. 2017; Stevenson and Wolfers 2013; Sullivan and von Wachter 2009).

Measures of wages and earnings aim to capture complete and accurate information on both the *level* and *terms* of regular pay, such as hourly wages or annual salaries. In order to make comparisons across workers and jobs, measures also need to capture information to report or calculate pay over a standard unit of time, such as average hourly earnings or average weekly earnings. An hourly wage can be directly measured for hourly workers (as a wage rate) and calculated for other workers, but only if earnings are measured in conjunction with a measure of hours (more details on hours are provided below). Both earnings and hours can be captured well in both survey and administrative data.

Other aspects of wages and earnings include *relative earnings*, *variability in pay*, *pay for performance*, and *irregular pay*. Other job quality elements being equal, workers are happier in jobs where pay level conforms to notions of vertical and horizontal equity (Card et al. 2012; Fehr, Goette, and Zehnder 2008). A measure of *relative earnings* would require both individual pay and pay information for workers in the appropriate reference group, making this challenging to capture in many standard data sources (Dube, Giuliano, and Leonard 2019). In addition, volatile earnings negatively impact worker well-being. A measure of observed *variability in pay* necessitates tracking workers earnings over time (Smeeding 2018); alternatives could include survey measures that ask for recall of variability over

some reference period. *Pay for performance* compensation could also be considered for complete measurement. In addition to regular pay, where possible, capturing *overtime*, *tips*, *bonuses*, and other *irregular pay* offers a better picture of earnings. Survey sources can capture these forms of pay, though high-quality measurement can be challenging.

Hours and Scheduling

Hours and scheduling aspects of jobs are important elements to include in a comprehensive measure of job quality. For many workers, including hourly wage workers and part-time workers, hours and scheduling, in conjunction with wages, determine earnings. Whether people work part time by choice, or the number of hours workers receive match their preferences or needs, also relates closely to earnings and job quality. Variability in hours can explain large portions of earnings volatility (Farrell and Greig 2016). And research suggests the importance of how work hours are scheduled—whether schedules are set in advance, for predictable days and times, during regular hours, and so on—for worker preferences and outcomes (Mas and Pallais 2017).

Measuring the *number of hours* people work in any given reference period is both critical (Stewart and Frazis 2019) and in principle relatively straightforward—in both survey and administrative data—as are the closely related concepts of whether workers are considered *full time* or *part time*. Measuring the *variability* of hours is more challenging, as it requires at least some longitudinal aspect of hours measurement, which may be easier or more accurate to capture in administrative sources (Farrell and Greig 2016). Measuring the *predictability* of schedules and hours workers receive presents a number of challenges for measurement but is potentially important (Henly and Lambert 2014; Schneider and Harknett 2019). Household surveys are likely the most suitable data source for capturing this concept.

Other hours and scheduling concepts for consideration in job quality measurement include *hours adequacy* and *schedule regularity*. *Hours adequacy* (Alexander and Haley-Lock 2015; Golden 2015) captures whether part-time or hourly wage workers receive the number of hours from their employer that match their preferences. For measurement, the key challenge is capturing both the number of hours worked in a reference period, or usually worked, and some measure of desired hours over the same period. This is closely related to, but distinct from, concepts already measured in official sources that capture the reasons part-time workers report for working part time (Dunn 2018). Like reasons for part-time work, adequacy is likely best captured in worker surveys. *Schedule regularity* captures when work occurs; otherwise, similar jobs that are nine-to-five versus nights and weekends, for example, can be different for worker outcomes (Jamal 2004).

Benefits and Leave

Benefits, such as health insurance, and forms of leave, such as family leave or paid time off, represent valuable aspects of compensation and are critical in a measure of job quality on those terms alone. In addition, research links features of some benefits and leave to worker preferences and outcomes.

Measuring benefits can provide a better understanding of the overall compensation package of a worker. In the United States, employer-sponsored *health insurance* helps workers access health care that can be otherwise difficult to afford or obtain; research suggests that on the margin some workers stay employed just to maintain access to these benefits (Dague, DeLeire, and Leininger 2017; Garthwaite, Gross, and Notowidigdo 2014). *Retirement plans* offered through work similarly provide mechanisms to save or opportunities to join defined-benefit plans that are difficult or expensive to recreate outside employment; well-designed plans support worker retirement security (Benartzi and Thaler 2013). For measurement, both worker and firm surveys collect information on whether workers are offered these benefits through their job. More challenging, but potentially of interest, is accurately collecting richer information on the terms and quality of these benefits—for example, the cost and quality of health plans, the matching terms and quality and costs of investment options in retirement savings plans, or the vesting terms and replacement rates in defined-benefit plans. Additional important workplace benefits to consider include employer-provided *disability insurance*, *life insurance*, *education or tuition benefits*, or other valuable *fringe benefits*.

As with other benefits, forms of leave, whether paid or unpaid, are potentially important elements of job quality. *Medical or sick leave*, *family leave*, and *paid time off* are among the key forms of leave. These are valuable forms of compensation in themselves, particularly when paid, and they provide benefits and flexibility that potentially improve outcomes for workers. Research suggests that sick leave is valuable to workers and associated with better health outcomes (Kim 2017). Family leave has been found to benefit workers and their families (Rossin-Slater 2017). Paid vacation time is both a valuable benefit and has been associated with benefits, such as reduced stress (de Bloom, Geurts, and Kompier 2013). Availability of leave, either paid or unpaid, is measured in the most commonly used sources at the firm level (capturing whether forms of leave are offered to workers). In measuring job quality, capturing leave in, or linking to, person-level measures is important, and complete measures would include both availability and generosity of different forms of leave.

Working Conditions

Beyond the compensation workers receive, jobs also vary in important respects when it comes to the conditions under which workers provide their time, effort, and skills. Jobs and workplaces can be more or less flexible, democratic, safe, or free from discrimination. Other things being equal, better working conditions make for better jobs, and workers may demand greater compensation in exchange when working conditions are poor. Also, some of these aspects of work belong to workers by legal right, even if conditions vary because of imperfect compliance and enforcement.

Two important working conditions for job quality measurement are *workplace safety* and *nondiscrimination*. Unsafe working conditions have been found to both impair worker health and economic outcomes directly and lead workers to require higher compensation to accept these poor conditions (Dworsky, Rennane, and Broten 2018; Guardado and Ziebarth 2019). Measuring the safety of work at the job or worker level poses some challenges, as safety can be a function of a workplace or industry and is inherently a matter of risk, which can be hard to assess at the person level. Doing so may require measures of worker perceptions of safety or experiences with unsafe conditions. Research also suggests that workplace discrimination, on the basis of race or color, sex, national origin, age, religion, pregnancy, and disability, while prohibited in law, remains prevalent (Ameri et al. 2018; Blau and Kahn 2017; Kline, Rose, and Walters 2021). Capturing whether an individual worker faces discrimination in a particular job is important but also poses measurement challenges, in particular because some aspects of discrimination operate at broader levels (e.g., the firm) or in expectation or may not be observed by workers. As with safety, employee-level measures can be developed to attempt to measure discrimination perceptions, experiences, or both.

Another working condition that research suggests may be important to capture in a measure of job quality—and with heightened salience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic—is the *flexibility* of work, both in work hours and location. Workers generally state a desire for flexible working hours, though this flexibility's importance for worker welfare is less clear (Mas and Pallais 2017). The ability to work from home has proven valuable for workers, especially in recent years (Barrero, Bloom, and Davis 2021). Workers' ability to work flexibly, in how and where they work, can be measured through worker surveys. A final consideration related to working conditions for potential measurement is the extent to which workers have a *voice* in their workplace (this concept is related to but distinct from union coverage or membership). Workers value voice in the workplace in itself, and having a voice can have instrumental value for contributing to other elements of quality (Hertel-Fernandez, Kimball, and Kochan 2020). Voice can also be measured through employee surveys, where worker perception might itself be the relevant concept for measurement.

TABLE 1

Organizing Framework for Elements of Job Quality and Potential Data Sources

| | Admin. data | Firm surveys | Worker surveys |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Wages and earnings | | | |
| Level of pay | x | x | x |
| Terms of pay (hourly, salary, etc.) | | x | x |
| Relative pay | x | | x |
| Variability of pay | x | | x |
| Irregular pay (overtime, tips, bonuses, etc.) | | | x |
| Hours and scheduling | | | |
| Number of hours (including part- versus full-time status) | x | x | x |
| Variability of hours | | | x |
| Predictability of hours | | | x |
| Hours adequacy | | | x |
| Regularity of hours | | | x |
| Benefits and leave | | | |
| Health insurance (including offer, affordability, and quality) | x | x | x |
| Retirement plans (including defined contribution versus benefit; terms) | x | x | x |
| Disability insurance | | x | x |
| Life insurance | | x | x |
| Education benefits (e.g., tuition reimbursement) | | x | x |
| Leave (paid or unpaid medical, family, or other leave; paid vacation time) | | x | x |
| Working conditions | | | |
| Safety | x | | x |
| Nondiscrimination | | | x |
| Flexibility (including hours and location) | | x | x |
| Voice | | | x |
| Job design | | | |
| Autonomy | | | x |
| Task composition | | | x |
| Working with others | | | x |
| Nonmonetary value | | | |
| Meaningfulness | | | x |
| Social value | | | x |
| Forward prospects | | | |
| Job security | | | x |
| Advancement opportunities (including internal labor markets, career paths) | | x | x |
| Training (general or firm specific) | x | x | x |

Source: The organizing framework for the elements of job quality is adapted from Congdon and colleagues (2020).

Notes: The indications of whether admin., firm, or worker surveys are potential data sources summarize the authors' assessment of the potential for the different types of data to capture these elements as discussed in the text.

Job Design

Similar to how working conditions can matter for worker preferences and outcomes, so can the design of individual jobs themselves. Whether jobs provide workers with autonomy or the opportunity to work in teams or include more or less enriching tasks can make jobs more or less pleasant or rewarding. Evidence also links job design to economic and well-being outcomes for workers.

For measuring job quality, the literature suggests that one potentially important aspect of job design is worker *autonomy*. Worker autonomy is the degree to which workers are allowed to exercise discretion in their tasks and control over their time at work, rather than being engaged in tightly prescribed or closely monitored work. Research suggests that greater autonomy is associated with higher subjective well-being among workers (Wheatley 2017). Another important element for measurement is the *task composition* of a job. Even conditional on occupation, particular jobs can be structured to include narrower or broader sets of tasks. Task variety can benefit workers by providing, for example, the opportunity to build skills on tasks that could contribute to productivity and earnings (Humphrey et al. 2007). A third concept to consider is whether jobs involve *working with others*, or in teams, which may also be associated with worker well-being (Karlsson, Loewenstein, and McCafferty 2004). These three concepts could all be suitable for collection through worker surveys but potentially difficult to measure by other means. Also, in some instances these concepts may not have standard survey items or constructs to draw on, either in standard surveys or from the literature, so they may require further research to advance measurement.

Nonmonetary Value

The standard economic model of labor supply emphasizes that workers only engage in work for compensation. But this view ignores that workers may find some intrinsic value in work itself and employment could be a source of nonmonetary value (Cassar and Meier 2018). Other fields of study and empirical research suggest that work can, for example, contribute to a sense of meaning or purpose, bringing important psychological and social rewards. But like other elements, the research emphasizes that the presence of these qualities varies across jobs.

The literature suggests that two potentially important concepts for measuring job quality are the degree to which the person finds their work on the job *meaningful* and whether they perceive it as advancing something of *social value*. Work that one perceives as meaningful may fulfill psychological needs (Loewenstein 1999). Closely related concepts that can contribute to measurement include where work offers the opportunity to exhibit or experience mastery, is found to provide dignity, or

contributes positively to a sense of identity. Evidence shows that people desire work that is perceived to have *social value* (Burbano 2016; Hedblom, Hickman, and List 2019). Because these concepts necessarily hinge on workers' subjective perceptions, they are well suited for measurement through items on worker surveys.

Forward Prospects

Finally, in addition to the static features of a job, such as its level of pay, benefits, or working conditions, jobs typically involve—implicitly or explicitly—a dynamic relationship between workers and firms with forward-looking terms. Otherwise similar jobs can be associated with, for example, different degrees of job security or different prospects for advancement within a firm. In addition, employer-provided training, where firms provide or subsidize investments among their workers, potentially pays off, for both the worker and firm, over time as workers accrue skills and become more productive.

Several concepts from the literature related to these forward-looking features of a job are worth considering in measuring job quality. One is *job security*. Research finds that workers are willing to accept lower pay for greater security (Wiswall and Zafar 2018). Measuring job security presents challenges, however; in many work arrangements, the degree of security is informal and uncertain. Alternative approaches to capturing job security in worker surveys can include questions that ask workers about expectations for or perceptions of security (similar to questions used to determine employment contingency), which are potentially relevant concepts for welfare, even if biased or imprecise. Or, measures may include questions that address objective employment terms (e.g., whether workers are at-will or contract employees) that relate to security.

Another important concept to measure is whether jobs include *employer-provided training*. Economic theory and empirical research suggest the importance of training provided at work for workers' later earnings growth (Becker 1962; Parent 1999). Measures of training should ideally capture aspects of both its intensity and scope, including the distinction of whether the training is general or firm specific (Acemoglu and Pischke 1999). Whether training is provided through a job, and its terms, can potentially be measured in employee or firm surveys. A final concept for consideration is whether a job provides direct *opportunities for advancement*, including access to internal labor markets, and whether jobs sit within formal or informal career ladders. On the one hand, workers sometimes express a stated preference for these elements. On the other hand, at least for workers paid low wages, evidence suggests that movement between jobs plays a more important role in climbing career ladders over time (Haltiwanger, Hyatt, and McEntarfer 2018; Topel and Ward 1992).

Available Measures and Current Sources

To best understand the current availability of data and metrics on job quality, we reviewed 11 major data sources, including household surveys, establishment surveys, and administrative data sources. These data sources provide metrics on elements discussed above. They represent various types of data from sources with different intended purposes and audiences. The sources varied significantly in their collection frequency, geography, and types of respondents surveyed (individual, household, or firm), as well as the level of demographic and industry information available for each respondent. These factors all influence the usefulness of any given source or combination of sources in measuring job quality.

We reviewed the sources described below because they represent the largest, best-tested, and most robust information on job quality available, but many other sources can potentially provide information on job quality or be a resource for developing new measures. These include smaller surveys that do include some elements, such as the Gallup Great Jobs Demonstration Survey, the Urban Institute Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Survey of Consumer Expectations. Larger, ongoing surveys also have some useful job quality information but focus on other factors (e.g., the General Social Survey), observe a specific sample of jobs (e.g., the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey), or are outside the sample we are interested in (e.g., the European Working Conditions Survey). Finally, additional administrative data sources cover important elements of job quality well—in particular, earnings, such as Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration data—but have restricted use and are difficult to practically build on for better measuring job quality.

Though national surveys do not focus on broad measures of job quality, we reviewed five standard surveys that had multiple elements of job quality in addition to other demographic and person-level information:

- **American Community Survey (ACS):** the ACS is an annual national survey operated by the Census Bureau that collects metrics at the person level on various topics, from jobs to education to homeownership.
- **Current Population Survey (CPS):** the CPS is a monthly national survey operated by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which collects data at the person level on the American labor force. It includes information on the labor force as well as other indicators of social and economic well-being.

- **National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 (NLSY):** the NLSY is a longitudinal survey that collects information at the person level with a nationally representative sample of young people and follows them into adulthood. It includes information on education, employment, health, and social well-being.
- **National Compensation Survey (NCS):** the NCS is a quarterly national survey operated by the BLS that collects data at the establishment level on compensation, benefits, and employer costs.
- **Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP):** the SIPP is a national household-level survey operated by the Census Bureau that collects information on income from jobs as well as different types of government programs.

To better understand what might be available beyond these large national sources, we reviewed three surveys or supplements to the standard national surveys:

- **Current Population Survey—Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS-ASEC):** beyond what is provided in the standard CPS, the CPS runs an annual social and economic supplement with more questions on employment, income, and a host of other job characteristics.
- **American Time Use Survey (ATUS):** the ATUS is a nationally representative survey operated by the BLS on how Americans spend their time, and it collects information on jobs as well as nonmarket activities such as child care and volunteering. ATUS data can easily be linked with CPS data for more robust information.
- **Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)—1984 Wave:** the PSID is a longitudinal household survey that began in 1968 and collects information on households in regular follow-up waves. Although the survey does not collect detailed job quality information in most years, a one-off version collected a rich set of information on job characteristics of employed household heads in the 1984 wave.

We also reviewed two programs that provide national or state government administrative data on job quality elements:

- **Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII):** the SOII is a program operated by the BLS in cooperation with state governments to provide administrative data on nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses. The dataset covers approximately 200,000 employers yearly.

- **Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program:** the LEHD program is operated by the Census Bureau, combining federal, state, and local data on employers and employees. It includes information from unemployment insurance data, quarterly wage and employment data, and survey information on job characteristics.

Finally, we also reviewed one especially robust recent, relevant academic and privately operated survey:

- **American Working Conditions Survey (AWCS):** in 2015, the AWCS was designed for a research study to fill some gaps in information about job characteristics (Maestas et al. 2017). It was a one-time survey fielded to a representative sample of workers as part of the 2015 RAND American Life Panel. It includes information about working conditions, pay, benefits, and workplace culture.

Below, we summarize the results of this scan (table 2).

TABLE 2

Job Quality Measures by Source

| | 1. ACS | 2. CPS | 3. ASEC | 4. NLSY97 | 5. ATUS | 6. NCS | 7. SOII | 8. LEHD | 9. SIPP | 10. PSID ^a | 11. AWCS |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------|---------|-----------|----------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------|----------|
| Wages and earnings | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Level of pay | x | x ^b | x | x | | x ^c | | x | x | x | x |
| Variability | | | | x | | | | x | x | x | |
| Hours and scheduling | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Number of hours | x | x | x | x | x | | | | | | |
| Full- or part-time | x | x | x | | | | | | | | |
| Predictable | | | | x | | | | | | | x |
| Benefits and leave | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Health | x | | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x |
| Retirement | x | | x | x | | x | | | | x | x |
| Educational Other: leave, disability, etc. | | | | x | x | x | | | x | x | x |
| Working conditions | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Safety | | | | | | | x | | | | x |
| Nondiscrimination | | | | | | | | | | | x |
| Flexibility | x | | | | x ^d | | | | | | x |
| Job design | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Autonomy | | | | | | | | | | | x |
| Task info | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Work in teams | | | | | | | | | | | x |
| Nonmonetary value | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Meaningfulness | | | | | | | | | | | x |
| Social value | | | | | | | | | | | x |
| Forward prospects | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Job security | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Career paths | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Training | | | | x | | | | | x | | x |

| | 1. ACS | 2. CPS | 3. ASEC | 4. NLSY97 | 5. ATUS | 6. NCS | 7. SOII | 8. LEHD | 9. SIPP | 10. PSID ^a | 11. AWCS | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Respondent information | Demographic | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Gender | x | x | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x | |
| | Race/ethnicity | x | x | x | x | | | x | x | x | x | |
| | Age | x | x | x | x | | | x | x | x | x | |
| | Education level | x | x | x | x | | | x | x | x | x | |
| | Disability | | x | x | | | | | x | | | |
| Respondent information | Occupation and industry | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Occupation | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| | Industry | x | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Survey characteristics | Respondents | household: person | household: person | household: person | person | household | est. | est. | person | household: person | family: person | person |
| | Frequency | annual | monthly | annual | annual/biannual | annual | | annual | quarterly | annual | annual | 2015 with 5 follow-ups |
| | Geography | nation to block-group | nation to county | nation to county | nation to Census region | | | nation to state | nation to state | nation | nation | state |

Source: Authors' review of data documentation and survey instruments.

Notes: est. = establishment.

^a 1984 wave with detailed job characteristics module.

^b The CPS collects detailed earnings information but only for respondents in the outgoing rotation groups.

^c The NCS provides estimates of average wages for certain occupations in specific geographical areas based on employer costs.

^d In 2017–18 the ATUS included a module on leave and job flexibility.

Wages and Earnings

Wages and earnings are well covered in both general survey and administrative data sources, though the level of detail varies significantly (Czajka, Patnaik, and Negoita 2018). Seven of the eleven sources explicitly measured wages or earnings, while two measured it indirectly (for a total of nine sources that involve wages). The major national surveys all included a measure of earnings for each respondent's primary job. Two surveys were specifically centered on income—the SIPP and the PSID—and include broad measures of income (including income from assets, second jobs, and government programs such as disability or veterans' benefits). To better understand job quality, we are interested primarily in measurement of income from the respondent's primary job in these sources.

Though the CPS does not have data on salary or wages for each respondent in each month, it does collect detailed information on wages and earnings from outgoing rotation group members, which represent roughly one-quarter of the sample. In addition, the CPS-ASEC collects detailed earnings information. The NCS does not cover wages directly but provides estimates of average wages for certain occupations in specific geographical areas based on employer costs.

Data sources that more explicitly focus on a specific (nonwage) element of job quality, such as safety or scheduling, were less likely to have data on wages and earnings. For example, the ATUS and the SOII both did not have a measure of pay. And even among the sources that include measures of wages and earnings, they did not include information on other aspects of pay, such as pay equity and predictability of wages.

Hours and Scheduling

Hours and scheduling are also somewhat well covered by the existing data. Six of the eleven sources had some information on hours and scheduling, with the most commonly covered element by far being the absolute number of hours worked (weekly or monthly). Two sources covered whether hours were stable and predictable (either by directly asking whether hours were stable or by asking how often and when scheduling changes occur), two sources covered whether respondents had control over their hours or location, and one source included whether a respondent had full- or part-time employee status. For the most part, very little information existed on scheduling beyond absolute hours. No information was available in these surveys about the hours adequacy.

Benefits and Leave

Nonwage benefits are also well documented across different data sources. Eight of eleven sources had at least some information on benefits available. Of all the sources, the PSID had information on the most benefits, with information on insurance, retirement, educational benefits, and leave. This robust information on benefits is older and only available in the 1984 wave of the sample.

Overall, among the sources, access to employer-provided health insurance was the most well documented, with six sources including it. Access to retirement benefits was also relatively well covered, as it was included in five sources. Six sources mentioned other types of benefits, with the most common being paid leave, such as parental leave and vacation, but only the PSID collected information on educational benefits.

Working Conditions

Working conditions beyond hours and scheduling were not well represented across data sources, possibly because many of these elements, as discussed above, pose challenges for measurement. Only four of eleven sources had information on the elements related to working conditions, and most only covered a single element. The AWCS had the greatest number of elements overall, including working conditions, safety, and schedule flexibility. The low incidence of workplace safety was somewhat surprising, considering how essential it has been during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional one-off surveys have been conducted in the past two years that tried to capture more information on safety, but these have been largely pandemic focused.

Job Design

Aspects of job design were the least-covered category of job quality elements in the literature, with only two of eleven sources having any related measures. Only the AWCS, a privately operated survey, tracked more than one element of job design. The AWCS had the largest number of elements included overall, and in particular includes direct measures of workplace autonomy and working in teams with coworkers. In general, though, beyond the AWCS, a significant gap in data exists on workplace culture and job structure.

Nonmonetary Value

Concepts covering the intrinsic value workers may find in their work, such as how meaningful or prestigious a job feels, are typically not covered in these standard sources, and only two of eleven sources included anything related to these concepts. However, one source each did include occupational standing or prestige, having a sense of purpose and dignity, and meaningfulness. Generally, as discussed above, these elements are difficult to measure and may require the development, testing, and validation of new survey items to measure them usefully.

Forward Prospects

Job elements related to forward prospects are also limited in standard sources. Training was covered in three sources (the SIPP, the NLSY, and the AWCS). No source included any information on career paths, and no source included more than one element of skills development. This gap in the data aligns with the lack of information on educational and tuition benefits. None of the eleven sources documented any measure of job security.

Options for Achieving Better Measurement

As indicated in the literature scan summarized above, at a high level, clear gaps exist in the data available on job quality. Among major sources, wages and earnings are generally well covered, as is basic information on hours and some benefits. However, more detailed metrics on scheduling, other nonwage benefits, workplace culture, job design, forward prospects, and other nonmonetary job elements are typically missing. Importantly, while these sources collectively cover many elements of job quality, this is not true of any single source or easily linked set of sources. As a result, to better understand the landscape of job quality in the United States, learn more about the relationships between job elements and worker well-being, and, ultimately, improve job quality effectively through policy or other levers, more robust, reliable, and comprehensive measures of the many job quality elements are needed.

Below, we discuss several options for achieving more comprehensive measures of job quality. We first focus on the possibility of supplementing standard household survey measures with measures that extend to include a wider range of job elements together in a single survey measure. We then discuss briefly other complementary paths to improving job quality measurement involving

administrative data sources and establishment survey data, including enhancing administrative data sources and enriching links between different sources of survey and administrative data.

Developing More Comprehensive Household Survey Measures of Job Quality

Our work suggests that a gap exists in data on job quality in the standard, national, household survey sources. Much information on job quality is scattered across various sources in a way that is difficult or impossible to combine to form a holistic sense of job quality. In addition, looking across a variety of sources, important elements of job quality are still missing. Below, we consider the exercise of how a single, comprehensive national survey on job quality could be developed, pulling together items and sequences from standard sources where available and, where not, identifying starting points for developing new items and sequences.

In considering how to build a comprehensive, national survey module on job quality, we consider the elements for which a breadth of data already exists, as well as the elements for which it does not. Where available, we prefer items from large, federal government surveys, such as the CPS. These surveys have typically been extensively tested and validated. Other things being equal, we also prefer questions from recent surveys. Given the premium placed on space and burden in federal surveys, we prefer concise items and sequences. For concepts not included in recent national surveys, we consider examples of questions from nonstandard or research sources; these would typically require further development and testing to consider for inclusion in a survey at scale. Finally, where no such examples or sources are available for concepts suggested by the literature, we note this and, where possible, provide example questions that could form the basis for item development and testing.

WAGES AND EARNINGS

The level of pay is generally one of the best-covered elements of job quality in standard surveys. As a starting point for a comprehensive survey measure of job quality, the CPS question sequence on wages and earnings included in the Outgoing Rotation Group survey, which we do not reproduce here for length, is generally considered the standard for relatively complete survey measures of earnings. The CPS sequence captures information on level, form, and sources of pay and attempts to capture irregular pay, such as pay from overtime work or tips.

HOURS AND SCHEDULING

As discussed above, the basics of hours are also well covered in the CPS and include measures of part- and full-time status, as well as questions about the absolute number of hours worked. Based on our

review above, a broader job quality survey should also consider for inclusion questions to capture several other key aspects of hours and scheduling, including predictability and adequacy.

Scheduling predictability

Scheduling predictability and stability are potentially important concepts to include in a job quality survey, and they are not covered in the standard federal sources, such as the CPS. However, recent high-quality surveys have included items on predictability that could form the basis for measuring this concept.

For example, recent waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 included questions about the predictability of scheduling, including advance notice that workers received, control they had over scheduling decisions, and variability in hours over longer periods of time (Schneider and Harknett 2019). This question about how far in advance workers receive notice about their schedules is from recent waves of the NLSY97:

How far in advance do you usually know what days and hours you will need to work?

1. 3 days or less
2. 4 to 7 days
3. Between 1 and 2 weeks
4. 3 weeks or more
5. ALWAYS WORKS SAME SCHEDULE

Hours adequacy

A related but distinct element of job quality involving hours and scheduling is hours adequacy. Many workers are unable to receive the number of hours each week that they need to earn enough to support their needs or preferences, and some involuntarily work part time. This concept was not in any of the major surveys that we profiled, but it is captured in the Urban Institute's Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey.² This question from the 2020 wave of that survey could serve as an example for a question on hours adequacy in a job quality survey:

Think about the number of hours you work for pay. Which of the following statements is most correct?

1. I would prefer to work more hours
2. I would prefer to work fewer hours
3. I work for as many hours as I prefer

BENEFITS AND LEAVE

It is also important to measure nonwage benefits as an element of job quality. While standard surveys capture key elements in this category, significant gaps also exist, and no one source has much cohesion. The major national surveys, in particular, typically lack metrics on benefits beyond health insurance and retirement, and most include little or no measurement of forms of leave.

Benefits

One potentially important consideration for measuring job quality is to extend survey measures to include other important nonwage benefits, including life insurance, disability insurance, and educational or tuition benefits. Detailed questions on these benefits are not available in the major national surveys, but examples of questions we would find useful could build from the sequence on fringe benefits in the 1984 PSID, which included, for example, the following question on employer-sponsored life insurance benefits:

Does your employer pay for life insurance that would cover you if your death were not job related?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

We could consider including similar questions that ask about whether an employer provides disability insurance or other forms of insurance benefits.

Of particular interest for measuring job quality among nonwage elements of compensation are employer-provided benefits related to education and training, such as tuition reimbursement programs (on-the-job training is covered separately, below). Most national surveys did not include measures that captured these benefits, and developing measures on this concept could be considered in future research.

Leave

Similarly, most of the major federal employee surveys do not include any measure of leave, paid or unpaid. Because this is a key aspect of job quality, it would be helpful to use a standard sequence on leave to ask individuals about their quality of leave. Such measures could be drawn or adapted from those used in the recent ATUS 2018 leave survey:

Can you take paid leave for:

Your own illness or medical care?

1. Yes

2. No

Don't know/Refusal

The illness or medical care of another family member?

Childcare, other than for illness?

Eldercare?

Vacation?

Errands or personal reasons?

The birth or adoption of a child?

In addition, many employees are offered unpaid rather than paid leave, where workers can still return to work after leave but will not be paid during their time away from work. The same source, above, includes a parallel sequence that captures whether jobs allow for unpaid leave, and it includes a parallel set of questions about forms of leave with the same response options:

Would your employer approve of you taking UNPAID leave for the following reasons...?

WORKING CONDITIONS

Working conditions beyond hours and scheduling were not well covered in any major sources we reviewed. The AWCS included the most elements related to this category, so it can be a good source of examples.

Safety

Safety, as discussed above, is an important concept of job quality but challenging to measure at the level of the job. The concept is well covered in the SOII. However, these questions were asked at the establishment level and then aggregated, so they are less useful for understanding job quality.

For measuring the degree of safety that workers are exposed to in individual jobs, new survey items may need to be developed. One potential model for how these types of questions could be asked is a set of questions included in the AWCS about physical exposure—for example,

Are you exposed at work to...*

1. Vibrations – hand tools/machinery
2. Loud noise
3. High temperatures

4. Low temperatures
5. Breathe smoke/fumes/powder/dust
6. Breathe vapors
7. Handling chemical products
8. Breathe tobacco smoke
9. Handling infectious materials

*where the respondent is asked to rate the frequency of exposure to each of the above on a scale from 1 (all of the time) to 7 (never)

Such questions would likely need to be refined and extended to cover the range of safety issues or conditions workers face on the job. This is an important area for further research.

Nondiscrimination

As with safety, discrimination is a potentially challenging concept to include in a household survey. Here, too, is an example from the AWCS that could serve as a blueprint for a question or sequence on nondiscrimination in a larger survey:

Over the past 12 months, have you been treated less favorably at work on the grounds of your...?

1. Age
2. Race/ethnicity/color
3. Nationality
4. Sex
5. Religion
6. Disability
7. Sexual orientation

Another important consideration for building a complete job quality survey will be developing a consistent set of recall or reference periods, as well as a consistent set of response categories, across a diverse set of questions; for example, whether these questions ask respondents if or how often some job quality element is ever present at their current or main job, compared with measures that impose a reference period (e.g., in the past 12 months), versus measures that alternatively ask about point-in-time qualities of a job. Similarly, a consolidated survey should have consistent response formats and categories.

Location flexibility

Particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic made many employers turn to temporary or permanent remote work, employees may value flexibility or control over the location from which they work. Most of the standard sources did not capture concepts related to flexibility. Such measures could be drawn or adapted from those used in the recent ATUS 2018 flexibility survey:

As part of your (main) job, can you work at home?

Do you ever work at home?

Are you paid for the hours that you work at home, or do you just take work home from the job?

What is the main reason why you work at home?

1. Finish or catch up on work
2. Job requires working at home
3. Coordinate work schedule with personal or family needs
4. Reduce commuting time or expense
5. Personal preference
6. Other—specify

Don't know, Refusal

How often do you work only at home?

1. 5 or more days a week
2. 3 to 4 days a week
3. 1 to 2 days a week
4. At least once a week
5. Once every 2 weeks
6. Once a month
7. Less than once a month

Don't know, Refusal

Schedule flexibility

The standard surveys also do not include a measure of how flexible schedules are or how much control respondents have over their schedules, which is potentially important for job quality. For including or developing measures related to scheduling control and flexibility, we could again draw from a recent wave of the NLSY97, which includes the following question:

Which of the following statements best describes how your working hours are decided? By working hours we mean the time you start and finish work, and not the total hours you work per week or month.

1. Starting and finishing times are decided by my employer and I cannot change them on my own.
2. Starting and finishing times are decided by my employer but with my input.
3. I can decide the time I start and finish work, within certain limits.
4. I am entirely free to decide when I start and finish work.
5. When I start and finish work depends on things outside of my control and outside of my employer's control.

Worker voice

Finally, it is potentially desirable for a job quality survey to include a measure of whether workers believe they have a voice in the workplace at their current job. Some sources, including a regular supplement to the CPS and the SIPP, ask whether the respondent is a union member. However, it would also be helpful to include items addressing a worker's subjective perception of whether they believe they have voice at their current workplace. Survey item development may need to draw from the research literature on worker voice.

JOB DESIGN

In general, standard sources do not capture job elements related to job design, which research suggests can be important for job quality and worker outcomes. Three concepts related to job design worth considering for inclusion in a comprehensive survey measure of job quality include autonomy, connectedness, and task composition.

Autonomy

Measures of autonomy could focus on "operational" autonomy, including control over hours, the sequence of job tasks, closeness of supervision, restrictiveness of tasks, and level of task routinization (Handel 2008). Additional measures could consider "strategic" autonomy, which includes the authority to make decisions, including supervision, and allocate resources (Brown 1969; Handel 2008). While major federal surveys do not cover autonomy, the AWCS again provides examples of questions that could be the basis of a sequence to capture this concept:

Generally, does your main paid job involve...

Meeting precise quality standards

Assessing for yourself the quality of own work

Solving unforeseen problems on your own

Monotonous tasks

Complex tasks

Learning new things

Are you able to choose or change...

Order of tasks

Methods of work

Speed/rates of work

For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work

Consulted before work objectives set

Involved in improving work organization/processes

Have say in choice of working partners

Can take breaks when wanted

Influence decisions important for your own work

Able to apply your own ideas

These questions have a five-point Likert scale of response options:

1. Always
2. Most of the time
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never
6. Don't know

Working with others

Another potentially important concept for measurement in a job quality survey is whether the job provides the opportunity to work in teams with other workers. We have found few survey items that capture this concept. Future research could develop, test, and validate measures of this concept.

Task composition

Somewhat limited empirical analysis exists on a job's task composition (such as writing, data entry, customer service, or physical labor). However, with growing attention to consequences of technological change for job tasks and interest in how task variety influences job satisfaction, it would be worthwhile to measure task composition. Currently, tasks associated with occupations may be identified in databases such as the Occupational Information Network, but because these databases only capture occupational information, they do not provide empirical information about job quality. These sources may inform item development for survey questions on task composition, although the extremely rich data these provide on the many different tasks associated with an occupation cannot practically be included in a survey. Survey items might have to be developed to capture higher-order information about task composition, such as the diversity versus narrowness of a job's task composition.

NONMONETARY VALUE

In general, traditional data collection sources do not include direct measures of concepts related to nonmonetary aspects of work. These are concepts where further research and survey development, testing, and validation are needed to develop valid, reliable, and low-burden items that would also be consistent with more standard measures.

Meaningfulness and social value

A point of departure for further research and survey item development is the question covering related concepts in Maestas and colleagues' (2017) AWCS:

In general how often does your work provide you with the following?

- opportunities to fully use talents
- make positive impact on community/society
- sense of personal accomplishment
- goals to aspire to
- satisfaction of work well done
- feeling of doing useful work

This question has a five-point Likert scale of response options:

1. Always
2. Most of the time

3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never
6. Don't know

The General Social Survey, mentioned above as a survey we did not use, does include a measure of occupational prestige, which is based on the US Census occupation classification and could also potentially serve as a model to measure that aspect of nonmonetary value.

FORWARD PROSPECTS

As discussed above, at least two elements related to forward prospects on the job are worth considering for inclusion in a job quality survey: whether a job provides training opportunities and its degree of forward-looking job security. Neither concept is well covered in standard sources, and new question sequences would need to be developed, though in each case sources exist that could serve as a basis for developing items on these concepts.

Training

As described above, a well-rounded job quality measure should include understanding whether workers receive training on the job, along with some aspects of the scope and intensity of any training. Measures of employer-provided training are typically not included in employee surveys, and employer survey measures have not been conducted recently.

One basis for developing a question sequence to cover training at work might be the set included in the 2008 SIPP, in the Wave 2 Topical Module sequence covering education, which includes questions that determine if workers have received training from their employer in the past year and some aspects of scope. This sequence is intended to include employer-provided training but doesn't focus on employer-provided training alone, which would require changes. The sequence does include questions that address the extent and specificity of training. The NLSY also includes questions on training, which could be compared with and considered in developing this sequence of questions.

Have/has [respondent] received any [training to improve one's skills in a job] in the past year?
(1) Yes (2) No

Not counting anything that lasted less than an hour, how many training activities of this type did [he/she] participate in during the past year?

How long did the training last?

1. Less than 1 full day (less than 8 hours)

2. 1 day to 1 week (8-40 hours)
3. More than 1 week (more than 40 hours)
4. Currently in training

ASK IF NECESSARY: How many weeks?

How long is this training expected to take?

1. Less than 1 full day (less than 8 hours)
2. 1 day to 1 week (8-40 hours)
3. More than 1 week (more than 40 hours)

Who pays/paid for [respondent] to attend this training?

1. Federal, state, or local government program (NOT employer)
2. Self or family
3. Current or previous employer
4. Other

Where does/did [respondent] receive this training - on the job or away from the job?

1. On the job - taught by someone from the organization
2. On the job - taught by someone outside the organization
3. Away from the job
4. Other

What is/was this training designed to accomplish?

1. ...teach basic job skills? (such as office software, work habits, or management practices)
2. ...to teach new specific work skills? (such as how to use equipment, machinery, or technical procedures)
3. ...to upgrade skills or knowledge?
4. ...to introduce company policies? (or guidelines or requirements)
5. ...to prepare [respondent] for another job (or assignment) WITHIN the organization?
6. ...or to prepare [respondent] for another job (or assignment) OUTSIDE the organization?
7. ...or [something] else?

Security

No sources we reviewed included measures of job security suggested by the literature. Developing, testing, and validating items to capture job security in employee surveys thus remains an important direction for further research. As discussed above, two potential approaches may potentially serve as a basis for such items.

The first includes items asking about perceptions or subjective assessments of job security. One example comes from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York’s Survey of Consumer Expectations, which includes the following question, asking respondents about their subjective perception of the likelihood of losing their job within a set reference period:

What do you think is the percent chance that you will lose your [“main” or “current”] job during the next 12 months?

Another example includes questions from the BLS 2017 Contingent Worker Supplement to the CPS, such as the one below, intended to capture the contingency of work; contingency is not a perfect complement to security but, again, forms a potential basis for developing more tailored items:

Provided the economy does not change and (your/NAME’s) job performance is adequate, can (you/he/she) continue to work for (your/his/her) current employer as long as (you/he/she) (wish/wishes)?

The other class of questions that can address an element of job security are those that capture objective employment terms that are closely related to job security. This could include questions on employment relationships, such as additional questions from the Contingent Worker Supplement that identify whether work is temporary. It could potentially also include questions about the terms of employment (e.g., whether workers are employed at will or have a contract).

Enhancing Measurement with Administrative Data and Establishment Surveys

Other directions for achieving a more comprehensive measurement of job quality include considering both administrative data and establishment survey sources and creating better links between different data sources. Improving data collection with different sources allows for leveraging various strengths of different measurements—for example, administrative data for earnings can be linked with survey data on concepts that can best be captured directly from workers.

NEW OR ENHANCED ADMINISTRATIVE DATA ELEMENTS

While administrative data sources are uniquely valuable for the aspects of job quality that those records can characterize, such as earnings, many opportunities to broaden information collection on job quality elements are not well suited for administrative data. However, there is at least one important exception: the wage records from the Unemployment Insurance system that form the basis for the earnings data in sources such as the LEHD include job-level quarterly earnings, but do not typically include measures of hours. Capturing a measure of hours in these records is possible, however, as is done in some states, such as Washington. One way to enrich job quality measurement with administrative data would be to standardize the collection and reporting of hours information in addition to earnings alone in these records (Groshen 2021).

LINKS BETWEEN ADMINISTRATIVE AND SURVEY DATA

One way of linking between sources already being used, if limited in access, is linking survey sources, such as the CPS, and administrative sources, such as wage records. The LEHD already includes these links and offers researchers opportunities to extend these links. In principle, this suggests at least one alternative path for supplementing existing sources, which is to focus on extending survey measures to include a wider range of nonwage elements and rely on administrative sources for core information on earnings.

LINKS BETWEEN EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE SURVEY DATA

An alternative set of links for potential exploration and further research is between employer and employee surveys. Although some potentially important job elements, such as key benefits offered, can be accurately and efficiently captured through establishment surveys, linking establishment data to person-level records, where possible, could be another direction for increasing job-level data available on job quality elements. However, one important limitation of establishment survey data is missing coverage of workers outside traditional employment relationships—a group of workers who are especially important to include for understanding job quality across the workforce.

Conclusion

Research indicating how broader concepts of job quality matter for worker welfare suggests that a more consistent and comprehensive measurement of a wider range of job elements would be valuable. But standard survey and administrative measures characterizing jobs currently focus on measures of wages, hours, and certain benefits, with only occasional supplements to capture other job

elements and some elements rarely being measured at all. Better measurement of job quality is essential for not only better understanding the landscape of jobs in modern labor markets, but also for making efficient and effective efforts, through policy or other levers, to improve it.

Better measures of job quality would allow for more accurate description and monitoring of labor markets and the economy. These measures would help researchers and policymakers not only understand the state of workers and their jobs overall, but also provide better information on which groups of workers have better jobs, by which measures, and which aspects of job quality are inequitably distributed, along demographic, geographic, or other dimensions. And consistent, improved job quality data collection over time would allow for observation of trends. In general, better understanding what job quality looks like for which workers is the first step to better understanding where workers, labor markets, and the economy could potentially benefit from policy or other interventions to improve job quality, worker well-being, and corresponding labor market and economic outcomes.

Richer job quality measures can, in addition, allow for continued and much-needed research on causal relationships—between job elements and worker welfare outcomes, on the one hand, and between factors shaping the levels, trends, and distribution of job quality, on the other. By connecting better measures of job quality with data on worker outcomes, we can better understand the consequences of job quality, or its absence, for workers, their families, and the economy. The combination of better measures of job quality with research on broader economic, policy, and institutional factors can improve our understanding of the determinants of job quality. And with better knowledge of the causes and consequences of job quality, we can more effectively design and target policy and other solutions to improve job quality in ways that matter most for social welfare.

Notes

- ¹ US Department of Labor, “US Secretary of Labor Announces Biden–Harris Administration’s Coordinated Effort to Improve Job Quality Nationwide,” news release, January 21, 2022, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/osec/osec20220121>.
- ² “Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey: December 2020 Questionnaire,” Urban Institute, February 3, 2021, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2021/02/16/wbns_2020_questionnaire.pdf.

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About the Authors

Batia Katz is a research analyst in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population at the Urban Institute, where she researches workforce development. Katz's previous research experience includes studying the science labor market, the impact of personality traits on employment outcomes, and gender and family in the workforce. Katz graduated with high honors from Haverford College, where she earned a BA in economics.

William J. Congdon, a senior fellow in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population and the research director for WorkRise, is a labor economist conducting and applying research to inform economic and social policy. His work focuses on labor market policy, social insurance, and the safety net. Congdon was previously a senior economist at the Council of Economic Advisers and was a fellow and founding member of the Obama administration's White House Social and Behavioral Sciences Team. He holds a PhD in economics from Princeton University.

Jessica Shakesprere is a research associate in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population. Shakesprere conducts quantitative and qualitative research and provides technical assistance, focusing on housing as a platform for service delivery, community development, and worker protections.

Shakesprere has a BS in biology and BA in political science from the Ohio State University and graduated with honors and research distinction.

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