

Report on the construction of the Social Quality Instrument in European workplaces

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Quality is an innovative, quantitative and qualitative research project that aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. The project will analyse international comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.

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Background

The Social Quality Instrument is a practical tool for European workplaces to measure various aspects of social quality of work. It is based on the preliminary analyses of research data collected in Quality project between years 2007-2008. The instrument combines elements from both qualitative and quantitative research work. In this report we describe how the instrument was built and we also present a short guide for national Quality teams and prospective users from all participating countries. The instrument is an outcome of the entire Quality team, although the Finnish team had the main responsibility of building the instrument.

The purpose of the instrument is basically two-fold. First, we aim to offer a research-based tool for European workplaces to evaluate the social quality of work. We hope that organisations could use the instrument to ponder whether they have organised work in a socially sustainable manner and how they could improve the prevailing working conditions. Second, we use the Social Quality Instrument to gather new data from European workplaces. As people from all over Europe use the instrument, their answers are saved in data files for further analysis. This new reserve of data will be used in the Quality project and after it to study the social quality of work in Europe.

The Social Quality Instrument is a developed version of the checklist of relevant indicators compiled in the earlier phase of the Quality project (see Deliverable 5.1). In the checklist we presented a selection of variables from the Quality survey and some additional statements derived from the interviews that could be included in the final version of the Social Quality Instrument. Unlike this paper-based checklist, the web-based Social Quality Instrument also compares respondents' answers to European average scores. Furthermore, the instrument provides users with a short written feedback on the various aspects of their work quality.

This report is organised into five more chapters. In first chapter we explain how various variables were chosen to the instrument by using statistical methods and previous research literature. After that we present the content of the Social Quality Instrument and the way it provides respondents with feedback. Next we describe the technical implementation and the piloting of the instrument. The report is concluded with a short user guide.

Selection of variables

The Social Quality Instrument is comprised of 15 key variables and a range of background questions. We fabricated the instrument so that it follows the basic idea of Karasek's Job Demands-Control model

(Karasek 1979; Karasek & Theorell 1990). This model was then extended with variables measuring the consequences of job demand-control balance as we already foreshadowed in the checklist of relevant items (Deliverable 5.1).

The majority of included variables were taken from the Quality questionnaire but we also benefitted from our qualitative research data when building the instrument. First, the qualitative research data supported the importance of the selected numeric variables. Second, the qualitative data revealed such important aspects of the social quality of work which were not asked in the questionnaire. For instance, on the basis of qualitative analysis the fairness of pay appeared as a crucial aspect of good work quality across Europe.

We began the selection of variables from the Karasek's job demands and autonomy scales. This was to find out the main characteristics of respondent's work; whether one's work is characterised as active work (high demand, high autonomy), passive work (low demands, high autonomy), high strain job (high demands, low autonomy), or low strain job (low demands, low autonomy). We selected two variables measuring the level of job demands and two inquiring about the level of job autonomy. The selection was based on factor analyses and critical reflection of the content of each statement. After this, we also added one question about job insecurity in order to measure work-related demands more comprehensively.

Karasek's model was then extended with the indicators of organisation culture. One aspect of organisation culture is social support (e.g. from colleagues and supervisors), which has been added to the original Karasek's model later. In this Job Demand-Control-Support model (Johnson & Hall 1988; Karasek & Theorell 1990) social support is considered as a modifying effect which makes difference between collective jobs (high support) and isolated jobs (low support). In the Social Quality Instrument we decided to measure social support from colleagues and supervisors by two variables. In addition to them, we also wanted to measure organisation culture with one question on career demands. By career demands we mean such cultural norms and values at workplaces that push people to work harder and longer days in order to succeed in their work. Furthermore, we also added two questions about the fairness of pay which emerged as a central aspect of social quality work in our interviews

The Social Quality Instrument also measures various aspects of wellbeing. These aspects can be seen as consequences of job demands, job autonomy, and organisation culture. By using factor analyses and comparing the suitability of various questions of the questionnaire, we ended up to choose one question about work stress, two about work engagement, and one on work-life balance. In addition to these quite narrow measures, we rounded off the instrument with a question about overall life satisfaction which was also taken from the Quality questionnaire.

Besides these key variables the Social Quality Instrument gathers background information from all respondents. The instrument includes questions about gender, age, country, and the highest level of education completed. This kind of background information allows us to make some, albeit not very profound, comparisons between men and women, countries, age and educational groups regarding the social quality of work in Europe. As we use the same background variables as in the Quality questionnaire, we can also try to make comparisons between the Quality survey data and the new data gathered through the instrument.

Content of the Social Quality Instrument

The Social Quality Instrument starts with the selection of working language (<http://socialquality.jyu.fi>). The instrument can be used in all eight languages represented in the Quality project. The selection of language is followed by an introduction page, the collection of background information and four main steps. During the main steps, users are asked questions about different aspects of quality of work as described above in this report. After completing them, the instrument provides the user with a results page where the given answers are compared with the European mean scores. The content of the Social Quality Instrument is as follows:

1. Language selection
2. Introduction
3. Background information
 - Sex
 - Year of birth
 - Country
 - What is the highest education that you have completed?
4. First step
 - Job demands
 - Does your job require you to work fast?
 - Does your job require you to work very hard?
 - Job autonomy
 - Are you free to decide how your job is to be done?
 - Are you free to decide what your job involves?
 - Job insecurity
 - I am afraid I will lose my job
5. Second step
 - Career demands
 - In order to be taken seriously in this organization, employees should work long days and be available all the time.
 - Social support
 - I am comfortable in discussing my private life with my direct superior
 - I am comfortable in discussing aspects of my private life with my colleagues

	Fairness of pay
	- How fair your company has been rewarding you in view of your experience/effort responsibilities/stresses/strains/work quality?
	- How fair are the payment procedures in your company?
6.	Third step
	Stress
	- In the last month, how often have you felt stressed?
	Work engagement
	- I am enthusiastic about my job
	- My job inspires me
	Work-life balance
	- Your ability to meet the needs of your job with those of your personal or family life
7.	Fourth step
	Overall life satisfaction
	- I am satisfied with my life
8.	Results and feedback

The Social Quality Instrument produces two types of information for respondents. On the one hand, the results are illustrated with graphs where the users' answers are compared to European mean values. These mean values are derived from the Quality survey data. First, job demands and autonomy are presented in a fourfold which shows the main characteristics of respondents' job (i.e. high strain, low strain, active or passive work). Second, all other aspects of social quality of work (e.g. social support, career demands, stress) are illustrated with horizontal bars graphs.

On the other hand, the same results are also presented in a written form to facilitate the interpretation of graphs. Written results are organised so that those aspects of work where respondents' score better than European average are presented first. Next, the instrument lists those aspects of work where respondents score below European mean values. This is to make visible the aspects of work which are most critical in terms of respondents' social quality of work. Finally, after presenting the results, respondents are also asked to give feedback on how to improve the instrument.

Technical implementation

The implementation of the instrument was started by mapping existing online instruments and checklists similar to the Social Quality Instrument. We explored such online instruments as Family-Responsible Employer Index (<http://www3.iese.edu/Ifrei/index.asp>) and Equal Pay (<http://www.equalpay.nu/>) with the purpose to discover alternative ways of designing and implementing the instrument. In fact, we gained a lot from these existing online tools when designing the content of the Social Quality instrument and implementing it in the online context. Existing online tools showed us many examples of how to organise questions and how to illustrate the results for respondents.

It turned out that technological platforms to build the instrument were many in number, although majority of them did not meet all our needs. We tested various commercial applications, such as Webropol (<http://www.webropol.com>), Zef (<http://zefolutions.com/en/>), and Mr. Interview (www.spss.com/mrinterview). However, these ready-to-use solutions were either unable to produce instant feedback for respondents or unable to operate with all eight languages of the Quality project. It would have been both costly and time-consuming to modify one of them to meet all our needs. For these reasons, we ended up to search for a technological solution that allows us to tailor-made the instrument from the very beginning.

Eventually the Social Quality Instrument was implemented in Plone environment. Plone (<http://www.plone.org>) is an open-source content management system that allows the building of websites, questionnaires, feedback forms and many other things on the Internet. Plone proved to be a feasible platform as we were able to receive technical assistance from the University of Jyväskylä, the home institution of the Finnish quality team, where Plone is used extensively in the provision of online services. The Social Quality Instrument was designed and implemented by the Finnish quality team in close cooperation with the staff of the Information Management Centre, University of Jyväskylä.

Translating and piloting the instrument

The first version of the Social Quality Instrument was compiled in English. The English version of the instrument was first checked by the British team and then translated into local languages by other partners. In the next phase the Finnish team transferred the translated pieces of text into the internet. In the meantime, partners were asked to find a small group of people from their home countries to test the instrument.

The aim of piloting was to test both the usability of the instrument and its technical implementation. We also wanted to test how the saving of data works, and how the new data can be analyzed. During the piloting, people were also able to send their comments and questions by using a feedback form at the bottom of a result page.

The piloting yielded information about the strengths and the weaknesses of the Social Quality Instrument. First of all, the pilot users provided us with suggestions of improving the layout of the instrument. They also suggested some extra questions, for instance about training at work, that could be included in the instrument, and new technical features, such as receiving results in a PDF format. Regarding the reliability of the instrument, the most constructive comments dealt with the accuracy of the results. It was noticed that some of the results were presented wrongly, and that there were inconsistency between the graphic

and written results. The obvious flaws in the illustration of results were corrected immediately. We also made some improvements on the layout of the instrument when this was regarded necessary.

User guide

Getting started. The Social Quality Instrument and its eight language versions can be accessed at: <http://socialquality.jyu.fi/social-quality-instrument>. Each language version can also be accessed directly by adding an international language code to the end of the web address (/en, /fi, /bg, /de, /hu, /nl, /pt, /sv).

Purpose of the instrument. The instrument can be used both to collective or individual purposes. By collective purposes, we refer to those endeavours at workplaces that aim to develop the social quality of work. The Social Quality Instrument can offer a basis for discussion on the social quality of work and how it can be improved at a workplace. The instrument can also be used individually to evaluate the social quality of one's own work.

Filling in the instrument. It takes only about 5 minutes to fill in the Social Quality Instrument. Each question, including those with no reference data available (e.g. fairness of pay), must be answered.

Limitations. The instrument produces only indicative results on the social quality of work. The results are most accurate for the respondents who work in service sector occupations. This is because of the reference data that is collected from a limited number of hospital, telecom, bank/insurance, and retail trade organisation. In addition, the presented reference scores (i.e. European averages) are calculated from Quality survey that covers only eight European countries.

Research work. The members of Quality project can also use the Social Quality Instrument in their research work and teaching activities. The instrument provides Quality team members with a possibility to analyse the given answers as they are automatically saved for further analysis. There are two issues that require further attention when analysing the data. First, the reliability of data is not particularly high because of the uncontrolled use of the instrument. Second, the fact that users will most likely represent a wide range of economic sectors must be taken into account while analyzing the data. To increase the reliability of data, there will be a possibility to conduct targeted surveys by using the Social Quality Instrument in future.

Data. All answers are saved in comma-separated values (CSV) files. These files are compatible, for example, with Microsoft Excel and SPSS programme. A CSV file contains data structured in a table form. Each line in file corresponds to a row in the table, and within lines, single answers are separated by commas. The first line of CSV file specifies variable names.

Answers to each language version of the Social Quality Instrument are saved into a separate CSV file. In addition, numeric data and written feedback are saved into separate files. In other words, there are altogether 16 data files available for Quality team members.

Administrative rights. The administrative rights of the Social Quality Instrument are limited to the Finnish Quality team due to the licence terms of Plone platform.