

Innovation and quality of working life: perspectives and dimensions for analysis

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Abstract: The essay proposes a theoretical framework for reading the relationship between innovation and equality of working life. With the changes currently being felt the world of work, it is especially important to establish promising perspectives for defining quality of working life, and the dimensions by which we understand it. Having considered the multidimensional character of innovation, provided a brief overview of some of the principal attempts to formulate measures of job quality, and illustrated the relationship between innovation and quality of working life, we argue the need (also identified by other authors) to expand our framework for analysing quality of working life to incorporate not only questions of quality of work but also those of the quality of the work-life relationship. These changes help us to better understand changes in working conditions and the theoretical and methodological implications of the relationship between innovation and quality of working life. The perspectives and dimensions that form the basis of the model proposed are therefore founded on this theoretical and methodological assumption.

Keywords: innovation; work; quality of work; quality of working life; decent work; culture of work; meanings of work.

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Biographical notes: Giorgio Gosetti completed his research doctorate at the University of Bologna, and now teaches Sociology of Work and Services Organization at the University of Verona. The principal focus of his research is quality of work and quality of working life, which are considered with particular regard to changes in organisational models across different sectors of production of goods and services. Recently, he has broadened the scope of these enquiries to include artisan enterprises, public health services, agricultural farms, and emerging economies. He is Editorial Director of the *Journal Economia e Società Regionale* and member of the editorial board of the *Journal Sociologia del Lavoro*.

1 Introduction

In this article, we develop several lines of reasoning with which we seek to provide a framework for examining innovation specifically in terms of quality of working life. Essentially, it seeks to form a theoretical understanding of the issue and, specifically, to put forward a model that has been used to analyse quality of working life in a series of field studies that examined changes in working conditions specifically in relation to the evolution of organisational models (among the most recent of which: Gosetti, 2014, 2016, 2017).

Having first offered a brief illustration of the multidimensional and nonlinear nature of innovation, the essay illustrates some of the established models for understanding quality of work and quality of working life. It then attempts to outline the terms in which we might interpret the relationship between innovation and quality of working life, taking its lead, in the first place, from the ‘workplace innovation approach’. In the final part, it sets out a theoretical-methodological approach to analysing quality of working life that incorporates a model used since the nineteen eighties, supplementing it with new dimensions and indicators that, it is believed, allow us to better understand the changes we have witnessed in working conditions. The multidimensional model of the quality of working life presented in the following pages enables the identification of analytical elements that can be used in studying working conditions, but also in critical analysis and job design. Our account of the quality of working life will therefore focus on the factors in terms of which it is possible to intervene to encourage innovation in the way work is organised, and thereby facilitate the generation of better quality work. We will begin by defining what concept of innovation we are using, with reference, where appropriate, to the subsequent discussion of quality of working life.

The essay then re-elaborates and integrates a sociological understanding of quality of working life, highlighting how quality of working life serves both as a goal of innovation, but also as a means for generating and supporting concrete innovation practices in the workplace.

Ultimately then, what is proposed is a theoretical contribution. It does not report results, but rather seeks to formulate a perspective that recognises the connection between innovation at work and quality of working life.

2 Innovation: a multidimensional and nonlinear phenomenon

Innovation is dynamic, it concerns processes: innovation itself is a dynamic process, a nonlinear, multidimensional phenomenon that responds to a number of factors. We normally understand innovation as “the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations” [OECD-Eurostat, (2005), p.10]. Innovation is not simply a process of change. It is a complex construct that requires “specific knowledge resources, organisational skills, relationships with the market and funding” [Trigilia, (2009), p.248] to translate new ideas into practice (Ramella, 2013). As a multidimensional phenomenon, innovation concerns ‘products’ (goods or services) in terms of functionality, technical aspects, materials and so on, but it also concerns ‘processes of production and distribution’, and questions of

‘organisation’ (the way work is managed, the structure of a company etc.) and ‘marketing’ (aesthetics, packaging, marketing techniques etc.). A number of models for interpreting innovation are mindful of the relationship between businesses and the context in which they operate. These are useful in understanding innovation in relation to the evolution of the value chain, which has adopted an increasingly spread-out, inter-organisational model based on cross-regional networks. Innovation can therefore be understood as “the application of new ideas with the aim of creating value” [Johannessen, (2013), p.1195]. Here, ‘institutional innovation’ is treated as distinct from ‘economic innovation’, though these two aspects are clearly linked. The dimension of ‘institutional innovation’ includes ‘political innovations’ (related to authority, laws, standards, ideologies, etc.), cultural innovations (values, habits, expectations, new ways of thinking, etc.) and social innovations (relationships, networks, alliances etc.). It covers all aspects of institutional activity that affect behaviours and the way we interact, be they formal (laws, contracts, agreements etc.) or informal (norms, rules, conventions). The dimensions of ‘economic innovation’, meanwhile, includes ‘organisational innovations’ (which concern new business models, advances in administrative processes, etc.), ‘material innovations’ (technologies, products, production processes, raw materials), ‘service innovations’ (tangible and intangible services, financial products, stylistic changes in marketing, etc.) and ‘market innovations’ (new forms of market presence, new strategies, etc.).

A key characteristic of innovation is its unpredictability. The driving forces behind it cannot all be explained in economic-utilitarian terms. Rather they “follow a logic of interaction in which trust and cooperation frequently appear among conventional market transactions” [Ramella, (2013), pp.9–10]. Increasingly, attempts to formulate an approach to interpreting innovation have challenged the idea of innovation as a purely linear process and recognised the need for a nonlinear, network-based, relational understanding.

In synthesis, innovation is a dynamic process, which is not only ‘nonlinear’, but also ‘uncertain’ (it can have negative outcomes), ‘collective’ (it involves multiple actors who are required to interact), ‘path-dependent’ (it is influenced by the history of the organisation), ‘difficult to emulate’ (it is often linked to a specific set of circumstances), and ‘accumulative’ (it requires continuity in the innovatory processes that lead to the creation of economic value) (Jacobs and Mazzucato, 2016). Innovation is also ‘relational’ in that it relates to a particular period in time, to a specific context. It requires input from numerous subjects in both the development and implementation phases. It is a complex process produced by the interaction of a number of varying characteristics of the enterprises involved and the networks they belong to, and of a specific set of circumstances. To understand it requires “an integrated analytical approach that takes into account both the ‘characteristics of the economic and socio-institutional context’, which determine the arrangement of available opportunities in a way that is more or less conducive to innovation, as well as ‘relational issues and the characteristics of individuals’, which condition the ability of economic actors to exploit the potentialities that arise” [Ramella, (2013), p.63].

3 Approaches to interpreting quality of work and working life

Quality of working life is widely understood to be “a multifaceted paradigm, built upon a number of interrelated factors that seek meticulous consideration to conceptualize and

measure” [Ahmad, (2013), p.74; Serey, 2006]. The International Labour Organization’s (ILO) definition of “decent work”, meanwhile, refers to “opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” (ILO, 2004, 1999). It outlines four principal areas through which quality of working life might be assessed:

- 1 standards, fundamental principles and rights at work
- 2 employment and opportunities to make money
- 3 social security and welfare provision
- 4 social dialogue and tripartism.

In stating its intent to promote employment through the creation not only of ‘more’ jobs, but also ‘better’ jobs (“Quality reflects the desire, not just to defend minimum standards, but to promote rising standards and ensure a more equitable sharing of progress”), The European Commission (European Commission, 2001a, 2001b) proposes a set of indicators to measure quality of work in relation to ten different aspects:

- 1 intrinsic job quality (work contract type, hours worked, level of qualification vs. job requirements, wages, etc.)
- 2 skills, life-long learning and career development (skills, training opportunities, etc.)
- 3 gender equality (gender pay gap, segregation, etc.)
- 4 health and safety (accidents at work, occupational illness etc.)
- 5 flexibility and security (social protection provisions, etc.)
- 6 inclusion and access to the labour market (unemployment, transition to active life, etc.)
- 7 work organisation and work-life balance (flexible working arrangements, maternity/paternity leave, etc.)
- 8 social dialogue and worker involvement (coverage of collective agreements, etc.)
- 9 diversity and non-discrimination (discrimination related to age, disability etc.)
- 10 overall work performance (hourly productivity, etc.).

In relation to a multi-faceted view, we should also mention the conceptual framework proposed by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), which is based on results from multiple editions of the *European Working Conditions Survey*. The framework identifies four dimensions of analysis:

- 1 career progression and job security (employment status, wages, social protection, workers’ rights)
- 2 health and well-being (health issues, hazards, workload management)
- 3 the possibility of balancing work and private life (work hours, work-life balance, social support)

- 4 opportunities to use and develop skills (qualifications, training, organisational learning, professional development) (Eurofound, 2012a, 2012b).

A further approach to keep in mind is that of the European Trade Union Institute for Research, Education and Health and Safety (ETUI-REHS), which in developing a composite indicator, the ‘European Job Quality Index’ (JQI), identifies six sub-indices:

- 1 wages (earning enough to ensure personal well-being)
- 2 non-standard forms of employment (improving employment opportunities for certain groups)
- 3 working time and work-life balance (adapting working times around family and social commitments)
- 4 working conditions and job security (work intensity, work autonomy, physical demands, likelihood of being made redundant)
- 5 skills and career development (opportunities to develop skills at work and enjoy progressive career development)
- 6 collective interest representation and voice (measured by level of union membership and study data) (Leschke and Watt, 2008; Zink, 2011).

Not all approaches to measuring work quality set out to identify a composite indicator. Instead, a theoretical and methodological approach that seeks to identify and measure the independence of aspects of quality of work is often preferred. In our view, this latter approach is more suited to representing the diversity of working conditions.

The model proposed by Gallie, meanwhile, adopts an expressly sociological outlook: “measures of job satisfaction are also open to the criticism that they are relatively weak indicators of positive attachment to work. A person can be ‘satisfied’ without having any strong sense of emotional involvement.” In light of these considerations, Gallie finds it more interesting to consider the characteristics of a job and “the extent to which jobs provide for the development of capabilities and offer protection against conditions that have been shown to be damaging for employee psychological health” [Gallie, (2007a), pp.8–9, 2007b). In this way, he proposes a model for examining job quality in relation to five different aspects:

- 1 skill levels
- 2 training opportunities
- 3 task discretion
- 4 work-family balance
- 5 job security.

More generally in the literature we find analytical models that approach the question of quality of work by examining the intrinsic characteristics of a job (purpose and content of the work involved, opportunities to use initiative and skills) separately from its extrinsic characteristics (promotion opportunities, wages, security etc.) (Rose, 2003). With this approach, the job itself, and its specific content, is viewed in a different manner to aspects of identity, security, social implications, and the relationship with the context in which the worker is “embedded”.

Another two perspectives of quality of work have frequently been identified in conceptual models: a 'subjective perspective', which is principally concerned with those elements of quality of work that are subject to perception, and which are therefore influenced by certain aspects of the individual; and an 'objective perspective', which is concerned, unsurprisingly, with the objective characteristics of the job, and the specific qualities of the workplace in relation to those of the worker. This dichotomy has been translated into a number of different theoretical-analytical traditions, which have turned their attention to the work's perceived (subjective) utility for the worker, rather than its (objective) capacity to satisfy his or her needs (Green, 2004, 2009). Gallie (2007a) identifies a number of potential weakness in both of these approaches: the former does not seem to consider that individuals – subjected to consumerist pressures and induced both to favour short-term over long-term benefits and adapt to such circumstances as they feel are within their reach – may be incapable of determining what is actually in their best interests; the latter does not appear to assign much weight to potential differences in the values of different individuals. Rather, it assumes that work is a key part of the individual's existence, without setting it in relation to other importance areas, such as family life. As will be clarified below, in response to the criticism set out by Gallie, the model outlined over the following pages succeeds in moving beyond this dichotomy and integrating both subjective and objective aspects as it sets out its terms of analysis.

This brief review of some approaches to the quality of work and working life shows that, although there is still need for further conceptualisation and operational translation, there are some shared qualities: the multidimensional and multilevel character (micro, meso and macro), the need for a multidisciplinary reading that accommodates different forms of work, and the subjective and objective nature of the concept and instruments of measurement (Findlay et al., 2013; Hagqvist et al., 2018). Many analyses, for example, show that the assessment of subjective job satisfaction cannot be used as an indicator of the quality of work and working life, since "job satisfaction has no apparent relevant relation to other objective indicators of job quality" [Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente and Fernández Macías, (2005), p.672]. Indeed, "job satisfaction does not only depend on the quality of the employment, but also on the worker's expectations with respect to the job. The key to job satisfaction is, in fact, in the fit between the objective conditions of the job and the worker's expectations" [Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente and Fernández Macías, (2005), p.663]. In fact, certain mechanisms act as "filters" in the assessment of job satisfaction: "first, the person looks for a job in accordance with his/her expectations, which in itself eliminates many possible cases of lack of fit. Second, if a person has to accept a job that does not fit his/her expectations, he/she will tend to adjust the expectations to the job. Third, if the person passes the previous two filters [...], he/she will simply tend to leave it [Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente and Fernández Macías, (2005), p.671].

To summarise: in the literature, we often find approaches that study the quality of employment (at the macro level) rather than the quality of work and working life. Considering working practices and the relationship between worker and organisation/work content it is possible to identify the factors that require innovation in working conditions, and to use the quality of working life as a means to produce innovation. Furthermore, the approaches that extend the analysis from quality of work to quality of working life help us to understand the asymmetric polarisation in the labour market between a few high quality jobs and many low quality jobs. From this point of

view, the contribution of Grote and Guest helps us to identify the reasons “in favour of revitalizing QWL (quality of working life) research”: “the marginalisation of growing numbers of workers through unemployment or precarious employment and increasing evidence of stress-related mental health problems that employment insecurity causes”; “the changing nature of work and debates about the quality of jobs”; “low quality jobs” associated with “precarious forms of employment” and “intensification of work”, and in which “demands at work increased” and “individual control declined” [Grote and Guest, (2017), pp.152–153].

4 Workplace innovation and quality of working life

The aim of this essay is to identify a possible framework for understanding the relationship between innovation and quality of working life. One ‘approach’ that allows us to understand certain fundamental aspects of this relationship is that of the ‘workplace innovation’. Pot et al. (2016) borrow a definition from the “European Workplace Innovation Network” (EUWIN), which states that “Workplace innovations designate new and combined interventions in work organisation, human resource management, labour relations and supportive technologies. It is important to recognise both process and outcomes. The term workplace innovation describes the participatory and inclusive nature of innovations that embed workplace practices grounded in continuing reflection, learning and improvements in the way in which organisations manage their employees, organise work and deploy technologies. It champions workplace cultures and processes in which productive reflection is a part of everyday working life. It builds bridges between the strategic knowledge of the leadership, the professional and tacit knowledge of frontline employees and the organisational design knowledge of experts. It seeks to engage all stakeholders in dialogue in which the force of the better argument prevails. It works towards ‘win-win’ outcomes in which a creative convergence (rather than a trade-off) is forged between enhanced organisational performance and enhanced quality of working life” [Pot et al., (2016), pp.14–15]. Workplace innovation is therefore a “unifying concept which brought together work organisation, human resource management and other antecedents. It seeks to broaden job roles and employee discretion at individual and team levels, transcend vertical and horizontal demarcations, enable employee-led improvement, and engage the tacit knowledge of frontline workers as a resource for all levels of decision making. [...] Increasing the complexity of jobs enhances opportunities for workplace learning and development” [Totterdill, (2017), pp.131–132].

Founded theoretically on some basic elements, such as “work organisation” (balance between control requirements and control capacity), “structure and system”, “learning, reflection and innovation” (dynamic capabilities and innovation capabilities), “workplace partnership” (power relations and different interests), “integrated approach and alchemy” (technological and social innovation) [Pot et al., (2016), pp.23–26], workplace innovation “reflects an organizational capability, which consist of four resources: strategic orientation, product-market improvement, flexible work, and smart organizing. These innovations have business-conduct purposes and profit-making functions, but their function is not limited to the internal side of performance, they also involve organizational and social functions such as improving the quality of work and the deployment and development of human talents” [Oeij et al., (2011), pp.36–37].

Workplace innovation (which operates at the organisational and individual level) serves as a link between social innovation (which operates at an organisational and societal level) and social quality.

Therefore, if “recent research on national level indicates that through workplace innovation positive effects regarding organisational performance can be expected” and that “simultaneous improvement in quality of working life and productivity is possible, in particular in projects with strong employee participation” [Pot et al., (2012), p.266], we can say that workplace innovation practices constitute “a developed and implemented practice or combination of practices that structurally (division of labour) and/or culturally (empowerment) enable employees to participate in organisational change and renewal to improve quality of working life and organizational performance. [...] The workplace innovation’s ‘structure orientation’ contains practices that structure work organisation and job design. [...] These practices concern the division of labour, the division of controlling (‘managing’) and executing tasks, and provide employees with structural decision latitude or control capacity. [...] The workplace innovation’s ‘culture orientation’ contains practices that provide opportunities for employees to participate in various ways, for example, in organizational decision-making. It not only concerns employees, but it could include employee representatives as well, as in the case of social dialogue and collective bargaining. Culture-oriented practices can stimulate commitment and provide employees (and employee representatives) with voice” [Oeij et al., (2016), pp.198–199].

Many studies emphasise that productivity and quality of working life are interlinked and that “improvements in QWL are typically related to better job satisfaction, well-being, social relations, and greater opportunities for learning and exerting influence at work for employees”. This connection affects areas such as “productivity factor”, “decentralised decision-making”, “competence development”, “supervisor support”, “internal and external cooperation”. In particular, “decentralized decision making, employee competence, and internal and external cooperation were positively associated with simultaneous improvements. [...] Decentralized decision making increases the autonomy and power of employees to make decisions that are important to the performance and to the quality of their working lives. [...] Numerous studies have found that teams with greater autonomy have better performance and employee well-being” [Ramstad, (2014), pp.29–39].

The approach taken by the QuInnE project (quality of jobs and innovation generated employment outcomes) is largely consistent with this line of interpretation. The project was financed by the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 Programme “EURO-2-2014 – The European growth agenda” with the aim of investigating how job quality and innovation mutually impact each other, and the effects this has on job creation, including the quality of the jobs in question. A series of project working papers reveals the complexity of the relationship between innovation and job quality.

First of all, we can note that – relative to two approaches within innovation policies, the more traditional “narrow approach”, which “can be characterised by the STI-mode (science, technology, innovation) of knowledge management system that focuses on codifying explicit, abstract knowledge”, and the “broad approach”, a continuous process, that “involves tacit and ‘often highly localised’ knowledge where doing, using and interacting, the DUI-mode of knowledge management, is important” [Makó et al., (2016), p.5] – “over the last twenty years, EU innovation policy has evolved theoretically, with a

remarkable shift from the narrow to the broad approach. For a number of reasons, this shift is, however, partial and incomplete” (p 26). The object of workplace development has expanded to encompass entire organisations, production systems, company networks, and regional innovation systems, while “measurement involves not only more indicators of non-technological innovation but also more focus on ‘workplace innovation’, on the design of ‘good work’ and ‘better jobs’ ” [Makó et al., (2016), p.31].

According to Muñoz de Bustillo et al. there are two different mechanisms that constitute a positive relationship between job quality and innovation: “the first builds on the role played by job quality in incentivising productivity through an increase in employee identification with the firm. The second, a completely different perspective, argues that good working conditions translate into higher unit labour cost (i.e., not all the increase in labour cost is compensated by increase in productivity), putting pressure on firms to increase productivity through innovation”. The authors’ analysis reveals “the existence of a significant and strong correlation between the quality of employment and technological innovation” [Muñoz-de-Bustillo et al., (2016), pp.2–4], although the correlation with the Job Quality Index for organisational innovation is less apparent when we control for industry or occupation.

Other studies, again related to the QuInnE project, have shown that different forms of innovation can have quite different implications in terms of job quality: those that generate a “greater (and positive) impact on job quality are process and product innovation (in this order) and marketing innovation, while organisational, after controlling for other variables affecting job quality, does not seem to have any statistically significant impact on job quality” [Muñoz-de-Bustillo et al., (2017), p.21]. Labour relations and collective bargaining also have a large, positive impact: “in the firms with employee representation, process and organisational innovation has a significant positive effect on job quality. In contrast, in firms without employee representation, organisational innovation does not have this significant effect (the relationship is similar with respect to process innovation). These results confirm the importance of having a union representative in the workplace and collective voice to boosts job quality for employees” [Muñoz-de-Bustillo et al., (2017), p.17].

In his contributions to the QuInnE project, Duncan Gallie offers an interesting perspective. He claims that, having for many years considered the relationship between the objectives of effective business performance and the quality of employees’ jobs in conflicting terms, “new theoretical perspectives emerged from the 1980s that argued that they were not only compatible but mutually advantageous” [Gallie, (2018), p.6]. Observing that “the literature points to a number of aspects of job quality that may be beneficial for innovative capacity”, he proposes “an index comprising three of these [aspects] that have received particularly strong empirical support with respect to their links to innovative work behaviour:

- 1 knowledge development through training and informal learning
- 2 the scope for personal task discretion and use of initiative
- 3 job security” [Gallie, (2018), p.11].

Indicators of these characteristics were used to construct “a measure of innovation-conducive job quality’ (ICJQ)”, that “was shown to correlate not only with measures of motivation but also with reports of innovative work behaviour and of innovation in work organizations” [Gallie, (2018), p.28]. The evidence reveals that, in Europe in recent

years, “there has been an increase in the prevalence of jobs with innovation-conducive job quality (ICJQ). This increase has had quite distinct implications for different types of workforce inequality. It has been associated with a reduction in regional inequalities, relative stability in inequalities related to personal characteristics such as sex or age, a cyclical effect with respect to inequalities of class and a sustained deterioration in the position of temporary workers” [Gallie, (2018), p.30].

More specifically, Gallie's reasoning leads him to three main conclusions:

- 1 “The first is that, on the basis of the evidence for the period 2005 to 2015, initiatives to improve working conditions in a way that is likely to enhance the innovative capacity of employees have proved to be heavily constrained by pre-existing structures of social inequality. Despite a significant overall increase in the prevalence of innovation-conducive jobs, the social distribution of such jobs has remained in general unchanged”.
- 2 “Second, although policy discussion has focused heavily in recent decades on ways of increasing competitiveness through increasing flexibility in the use of the workforce, it should be recognised that the pursuit of certain forms of flexibility, in particular the use of short-term contracts, may reduce longer-term productivity by undermining the types of work conditions that help stimulate innovation. Policy initiatives, then, will need then to focus on the enhancement of job quality”.
- 3 “Third, there are grounds to think that policies to enhance job quality can make a difference.

The prevalence of innovation-conducive jobs varies substantially between different European regions” [Gallie, (2018), p.30].

Finally, other authors studying innovation systems and production and employment regimes have identified clusters of countries in which innovation and job quality are linked in a different way: “a well-identified Nordic group is characterized by high innovation and high job quality; Continental countries, the UK and Ireland stand in an average position with regard to both innovation and job quality (with the exception of Germany that belongs to the innovation leaders cluster, but is characterized by an intermediate job quality level); Southern and Eastern countries exhibit lower levels of innovation and lower job quality. According to that literature, innovation and job quality appear interrelated, which must be linked not only to individual firms’ practices, but more widely to the existence of institutions influencing both types of outcomes” [Erhel and Guergoat-Larivière, (2017), p.9]. Furthermore, “the results by levels of education are quite interesting: it seems that countries that combine high levels of innovation and job quality have higher employment rates of low educated people while those that combine low levels of innovation and job quality have lower employment rates of low educated people. [...] This would mean that countries that combine high levels of job quality and innovation (Nordic countries in particular) also have the more inclusive labour markets” [Erhel and Guergoat-Larivière, (2017), p.23].

This is not the occasion to consider the elements of ‘workplace innovation’ and the diffusion of ‘workplace innovation’ policies more fully. For the purposes of this paper, in conclusion, we are only interested in pointing out that many studies show:

- 1 The need to adopt a broad concept of organisational and work innovation, which concerns not only technological and technical-scientific factors, but also social and cultural factors.
- 2 The influence, on innovation, of both those factors that are endogenous to the firm, and those that are exogenous to it and therefore also determined by the institutional context within which it operates.
- 3 A link between results for the organisation (performance) and quality of working life (possibility of learning and discretion in work, job satisfaction, etc.), starting from the growth of employee involvement, top-management commitment and leadership (Eurofound, 2015; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2012).
- 4 That, although the reasons for ‘workplace innovation’ practices are mainly related to economic and business goals, many organisations combine different practices to promote simultaneous organisational performance, efficiency, quality of performance and quality of working life by adopting both a structural and a cultural approach to ‘workplace innovation’.
- 5 That, if improved quality of working life can be an effect of innovative practices, quality of working life can itself be a prerequisite for innovation.

In order to generate innovation it is necessary to develop worker skills and opportunities for learning at work, cultivate their capacity and opportunity for independent action, involve them in decisions, make it possible for them to monitor their own work, and ensure their work is safe: all basic aspects of the multidimensional make-up of quality of working life.

5 Quality of working life: a relational approach

Keeping in mind the various considerations we have elaborated so far, we present a framework for analysing quality of working life, taking care, as we do so, not to neglect its generative character in terms of innovation. If, as we have seen, innovation has a multidimensional and nonlinear nature, and is therefore a property that emerges from the dynamic relationship between different factors, we believe that in order to generate innovation it is necessary to appreciate what the generative elements actually are. Sociologists of work can do this by considering work processes “from the point of view” of the different types of workers involved in the production of goods and services, although care must be taken to highlight any changes in organisational patterns.

The genesis of this model falls largely within the wider theoretical-methodological framework developed in Italy from the 1980s onwards, wherein the relationship between the needs of the worker and the organisational context was treated as the principal barometer of quality of work (Gallino, 1983; La Rosa, 1983). This approach supplanted the previous analytical set-up, which had tended to examine working conditions primarily in relation to economic and ergonomic aspects. Relative to the later framework (i.e., from the 1980s), we believe it is necessary to make two additions in order to complete the analytical model and bring it up to date (Gallie et al., 2012).

Firstly, the examination of workers’ needs can be expanded to encompass the question of ‘aspirations’ (Appadurai, 2013) and ‘capabilities’ (Sen, 1993, 1999;

Nussbaum, 2011) – by which is meant the extent to which the organisational set-up manages

- a both to satisfy existing aspirations and to stimulate further aspirations in the worker (rather than passive adaptation to a given working situation)
- b to enable the development of the worker's capabilities (new skills, opportunities for professional development etc.) in such a manner that he or she can actually perform a useful function.

These two concepts – which we were persuaded to incorporate into the framework in part on the basis of our own research and analysis of the sociological literature on the quality of work and working life – aid us in formulating a critical response to an individualised, context-free notion of worker activation.

Secondly, we believe that in approaching the question of quality of work, the focus should be expanded from aspects that are inherent to the work involved – in the strictest sense – to include some consideration of the quality of the work-life relationship. After all, recent years have seen a number of substantial changes in the world of work, such as: the modularisation, fragmentation, and wider distribution of processes of production of goods and services; the broadening and lengthening of the value chain and the development of network-based organisational models; the dematerialisation of work; the blurring of the spatial-temporal boundaries around work; and the growing demand on workers to adapt to new production processes and become more active by putting certain life resources at the service of employers (skills, time, etc.). These and other contemporary processes are redefining the relationship between work and other areas of life. As such, our framework for analysing quality of work can be expanded to include additional aspects that are specifically concerned with the quality of the work-life relationship (a choice that other approaches have also made, as we saw in paragraph 3).

To summarise, it seems necessary, if we are to comprehend working conditions as they actually stand, to reformulate these two angles of analysis – namely the examination of 'quality of work', and the investigation of the 'quality of the work-life relationship' – within a wider framework for analysing 'quality of working life'. As such, 'quality of working life' is determined by the 'product of the relationship' – 'measured in both subjective and objective terms' – 'between workers' needs, aspirations and capabilities, and how the work is organised, both in the strictest sense' (i.e., management and distribution of workload and working and production processes), and 'more generally in terms of any wider aspect of employment regulation' (social protection, industrial relations, job market, the value chain etc.) 'that has a direct influence on working conditions'.

In summary, the model presented in the following pages consists of three distinct but integrated conceptual elements:

- 1 the idea that to study the quality of working life we must consider two perspectives, one subjective, the other objective (Table 1)
- 2 that to understand the subjective assessment of the different aspects of the quality of working life we must analyse the influence of the work culture (the meanings that the person attributes to the work and the different aspects of work) on assessment (Table 2)

- 3 that the subjective and objective elements used to measure quality of working life can be subdivided into a series of dimensions, independent, but which can also be studied in terms of their relationships (Table 3).

Each conceptual element must be translated operationally into measurement indicators (an aspect that will be only briefly mentioned here). We shall now move on to consider the analysis of these three constituent elements of our integrated model.

We have seen that analysing quality of work requires consideration of both subjective and objective aspects, to the point that this has led to the development of distinct analytical traditions. Bearing this in mind, the analytical framework presented here adopts two, expanded, ‘perspectives’ of enquiry (Table 1):

- 1 consideration of ‘subjective aspects’, including
 - 1a level of ‘satisfaction’ in relation to different aspects of the job (wages, working times, flexibility etc.)
 - 1b the ‘worker’s own assessment’ of how his or her work is organised (work intensity, level of autonomy, possibility to reconcile work with other demands, etc.)
- 2 consideration of ‘objective aspects’, which include
 - 2a actual ‘working behaviours’ (hours worked, travel time to and from work, hours of training, etc.)
 - 2b the ‘organisational set-up’ affecting the work and the work-life relationship (scheduling of shifts, schemes for allocating holidays and days off, services that facilitate a better work-life relationship, etc.).

Clearly, it is possible to identify indicators that measure the same aspect from different angles. If we consider, for instance, factors such as wages, working hours, work intensity, etc. it is easy to see how these may be analysed in both subjective and objective terms. Our model, therefore, in addition to recognising the multidimensional nature of the phenomena (which we shall discuss shortly), must incorporate these two basic analytical perspectives – one concerned with subjective assessments, the other with objective data – together with their various internal components.

Table 1 Perspectives for analysing quality of working life

<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Component</i>	<i>Specific objects of analysis</i>
Subjective	a Satisfaction	An expression of the worker’s <i>level of satisfaction</i> in relation to <i>intrinsic</i> (work times etc.) and <i>extrinsic</i> (continuity of employment, work-life balance, etc.) aspects of the job.
	b Worker’s assessment	Worker’s assessment of <i>certain aspects of his or her job</i> (intensity, degree of autonomy, options for professional development, relationships with colleagues, etc.).
Objective	a Behaviours	Accounts of actual <i>working behaviours</i> (hours worked, travel time to and from work, training undertaken, etc.)
	b Organisational set-up	A model of the <i>organisational set-up</i> affecting the work and the work-life relationship (scheduling of shifts, availability of services, etc.).

Although, as we said earlier (Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente and Fernández Macías, 2005), subjective satisfaction for work cannot be considered as an indicator of quality of working life, we think that subjective assessment is still important, as a component, even in relation to the objective assessment.

To evaluate the subjective aspects of the quality of working life, we require certain information about the relevant culture of work. We are starting with the theoretical and methodological premise that to comprehend the quality of working life from a subjective standpoint by examining levels of satisfaction and the worker's own assessment (and therefore perception), we need to understand the importance that he or she attributes to various aspects of work (wages, professional development, relationships with colleagues etc.). This is why an integral part of the analysis model is an exploration of the culture of work.

From an analytical perspective, much like the question of quality of working life, the culture of work can be examined in terms of multiple dimensions. The primary aim is to identify the meanings attributed to work, and the origin of attitudes and behaviours. In particular, in forming a picture of a particular "culture of work" it should be possible to identify at least seven different dimensions for analysis (Table 2). Specifically, these concern the evaluation of:

- 1 the 'characteristics of the job' that are considered most important, e.g., wages, activities involved, job security, relations with colleagues and superiors, etc.
- 2 the 'importance of work', in the sense of the position of work in the hierarchy of the various areas of the worker's life, e.g. family, friends, free time, cultural enrichment, etc.
- 3 'experiences of work' to date, in terms of the nature of work performed, career to date (entry into work, contract types, etc.), working conditions etc.
- 4 'broader changes in the world of work', specifically flexibility (working hours, function, wages, etc.), routes into work, potential for career development, etc.
- 5 the 'role' attributed to work 'in the context of personal relationships', and as such, its capacity for generating meaningful relationships, connections, trust, sharing, etc.
- 6 the 'role' attributed to work in the wider 'social context', e.g., its capacity to generate social integration and cohesion, socio-economic development, well-being, etc.

By analysing these six dimensions, we can form an understanding of the meaning attributed to work, or rather, we can understand whether the population studied, or a section of it, tends towards an instrumental/expressive/relational (etc.) outlook that might influence its subjective assessment of the quality of working life.

"Relational thinking" (Bourdieu, 1992) is another key strategy in our attempts to examine the quality of working life, and in particular, our attempts to interpret innovation as an emergent property that is generated by the relationship between needs/aspirations/capabilities and the way work is organised. It entails the adoption of an outlook that is "relational, but also generative" (Bourdieu, 1994) in order to observe the influence exerted reciprocally by the various factors at play – such as that between the 'habitus' of the worker and the 'field' (or fields) within which the job is organised – and move beyond the dualistic (e.g., actor against system), substantialist, subjectivist and

objectivist alternatives. As such, we draw on the theory of ‘generative structuralism’, and which can also be termed ‘structural constructivism’, an approach that, for reasons of space, we shall not elucidate further other than to state, that it concerns the way in which social practices and structures are generated and reproduced.

Table 2 Dimensions for analysing the culture of work

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Object of analysis</i>	<i>Specific elements of analysis</i>
1 Characteristics of the work	Assessment of the characteristics of the work that are considered most important	Wages, work hours, nature of work activities, job security, career prospects, proximity of workplace and home, relationships with colleagues, etc.
2 Importance of work	Assessment of the importance of work in terms of a hierarchy of different areas of life	Work, family, friends, free time, cultural enrichment, social engagement, political engagement, religion, financial resources, etc.
3 Experiences of work	Assessment of actual experiences of work accrued	Nature of the activities performed, career path, working conditions, social/working relationships, training completed, etc.
4 Changes in the world of work	Assessment of current and recent changes in the wider world of work	Flexibility (working hours, function, wages etc.), routes into work, potential for career development, job security, etc.
5 Work and personal relationships	Assessment of the role attributed to work in relation to personal relationships	Work as a factor in developing meaningful relationships, social connections, moral support, trust, shared plans, etc.
6 Work and social context	Assessment of the role attributed to work in the context of the wider society	Work as a factor in social integration, social change, social cohesion, social identity, socio-economic development, well-being, etc.

Summing up, then: in developing the model proposed in this article, a number of basic requirements have been considered, specifically the need to:

- 1 Move from the analysis of quality of work to an analysis of the quality of working life (which includes both the quality of work and the quality of the work-life relationship).
- 2 Consider the relationship between the needs, aspirations, and capabilities of the worker and the way the work in question has been organised (in both a restricted and a broader sense).
- 3 Consider, together, both the subjective and objective aspects that characterise each dimension of analysis.
- 4 Study the relative culture of work to identify the meanings attributed to work and thus the aspects that might influence the worker’s subjective assessment of the quality of working life.

- 5 Adopt a relational perspective, wherein measurements are drawn by examining multiple dimension of analysis and factors that contribute to the quality of working life in relation to one another; and, referring specifically to innovation.
- 6 Grasp the emerging property, because change in work (in organisation and content) does not necessarily produce innovation. Innovation is when something new and persisting is created in the relationship between the individual and work organisation.

6 The different dimensions of the quality of working life

The framework proposed here for analysing the quality of working life can therefore be seen to be:

- a ‘Multidimensional’, insofar as it comprises multiple analytical dimensions of the relationship between the needs/aspirations/capabilities of the worker and the way the work has been organised (which are treated independently in the analysis, although actual research has frequently revealed a relationship between elements of different dimensions of analysis).
- b ‘Non-hierarchical’, insofar as these dimensions are not arranged a priori on a scale of relevance – for instance, using an incremental logic whereby needs are satisfied in a progressive order from the fundamental (basic, material) to the complex (intangible, symbolic, identity-related) – except in certain cases where the scale of priorities is linked to the culture of work, and thus to the expectations cultivated by the individual in relation to the different dimensions in question.
- c ‘Dynamic’, inasmuch as it is designed to interpret the relationships between the various elements analysed, both within and across the aforementioned aspects.
- d ‘Open’, inasmuch as the elements analysed can be modified and/or integrated in response to research in the field.
- e ‘Contextualised’, since it is necessary to calibrate the model to the characteristics of the specific context analysed, even though the indicators employed are suited to comparative research in a number of different sectors.

This framework for analysing the quality of working life considers nine different dimensions, six that relate to quality of work and three that relate to the relationship between work and other areas of life (Table 3). Each of these dimensions covers a range of different elements of the relationship between the worker’s needs/aspirations/capabilities and the way the work is organised. Over the next few pages, we identify the most pertinent elements of each dimension analysed. In discussing these elements, we also consider a number of tendencies that have emerged from recent empirical research at both a European (Eurofound, 2012a; 2012b) and an Italian (ISFOL, 2013) level.

The six dimensions that relate specifically to quality of work are the ‘economic’ and ‘ergonomic’ dimensions, ‘complexity’, ‘autonomy’, ‘control’ and ‘symbolic’ dimension.

The 'economic' dimension includes such considerations as covering basic living costs, financial security, financial recognition of work carried out and so on. Within the analytical model, it implies categories of analysis that relate to the individual's economic situation (payment, wages, etc.), economic progress (growth in earnings, etc.), and financial recognition (performance-related pay, productivity bonuses, fringe benefits, etc.) In addition to addressing considerations of workers' material need to maintain themselves and their families, the economic dimension of quality of work offers insights into the extent to which work is experienced as a source of security. Indeed, this area of analysis employs indicators of job security, and indicators that measure the gender pay gap and the spread of the condition of 'working poverty'. In recent years, we have witnessed processes such as the concentration of earnings from employment, an increase in inequality, a tendency towards individual rewards, and income uncertainty and discontinuity.

Table 3 Perspectives and dimensions for analysing quality of working life

<i>Perspectives and component</i>	<i>Dimensions of the quality of working life</i>	
	<i>Quality of work</i>	<i>Quality of the work-life relationship</i>
Subjective	1 'Economic' dimension (basic living costs, financial security, financial recognition etc.)	7 Work-life balance dimension (compatibility of work and life choices, self-determination, etc.)
a 'Satisfaction' (with the work)		
b 'Worker's own assessment' (of the work)	2 'Ergonomic' dimension (physical, psychological and social wellbeing, psychological and physical demands, etc.)	8 Dimension of social protection (career planning, continuity of employment, etc.)
Objective		
a (Actual) 'behaviours'		9 Dimension of social engagement (participation in the life of the wider society, social involvement, etc.)
b (Organisational) 'set-up'	3 Dimension of 'complexity' (commitment and development, accumulation of experience, relationality, etc.)	
	4 Dimension of 'autonomy' (possibility to exercise discretion and determine the operational framework, etc.)	
	5 Dimension of 'control' (participating in decision making, control over working conditions, etc.)	
	6 'Symbolic' dimension (appreciation, visibility, social utility, recognition etc.)	
10 Dimension of 'discriminating factors' (profile of the individual, of the organisation, of the immediate context and macro-context)		

The 'ergonomic' dimension regards such considerations as well-being and the psychological, physical and social demands placed on the worker. It translates into a range of categories of analysis such as time (work hours, travel time, etc.), space (space available for work, the possibility of personalising the workspace etc.), work intensity (work patterns, workload, etc.), the physical work environment (workstations, physical hazards, etc.), hygiene and environmental factors (presence of chemical/biological agents, noise, extremes of temperature, etc.), physical and psychological demands (handling heavy loads, repetitive movements, mental effort, emotional involvement, etc.), the social context of the workplace (trust, conflict, discrimination, violence, etc.), tools and instruments (technologies, materials, etc.), purpose (extent to which purpose can be identified, attainability of objectives, etc.) and health and safety (workplace accidents, absence from work, etc.) Despite improvements to physical working environments, we continue to register levels of work-related fatigue (both psychological and physical), a tendency towards more intense, less continuous working patterns, and cognitive ergonomic issues (relating to the identification of purpose and comprehension of working processes). We also find that increased heterogeneity in the social composition of workplaces can translate into an increase in horizontal conflict.

The dimension of 'complexity' concerns issues of commitment and professional growth, development of creativity, acquisition of experience, and the relational character of the work involved. It relates to such categories of analysis as the nature of the job (task variety, problems and unexpected situations, use of different technologies and methodologies, correspondence between tasks and skills possessed, etc.), professional growth (training, self-training, learning opportunities, etc.), relationships (relations with colleagues, superiors, customers/users and representatives of other organisations, involvement in working groups, etc.) and dynamism (career options, etc.). Research in the field has revealed a pronounced tendency in work towards diversification – in terms of the aforementioned types of complexity – accompanied by an increasing polarisation in the sphere of professional qualifications, a growing gap between the tasks required of workers and the skills they possess, and a tendency towards sideways movement between jobs, rather than vertical mobility.

The 'autonomy' dimension concerns the level of discretion afforded to workers, and the degree to which they can determine their own work activities and contribute to defining the wider operative and organisation framework. This aspect references categories of analysis such as influence over operational decisions (when to take breaks, setting working patterns, task order, how to carry out a particular task, etc.), responsibility (deciding personal work objectives and quality requirements) and resource (availability of tools and necessary know-how to enable operative decision-making, etc.). Gallie et al. (2004, p.244) use the term "task discretion", which is understood as "the degree of initiative that employees can exercise over the immediate work task". This concept helps us to form a distinct understanding of autonomy as the "objective capacity for personal self-development", an "important form of employee involvement, along with various forms of 'group' participation" and a "mechanism for strengthening organisational control". Today's new, complex, flexible organisational models, which are designed with a view to achieving constant development, require increased operational engagement and autonomy on the part of the worker. However, even in this case research has registered a relatively diverse set of circumstances, and it is not the case that engagement necessarily translates effectively into operational self-determination.

If the ‘autonomy’ dimension of quality of work relates to immediate operational decisions, the dimension of ‘control’ is instead concerned with the possibility of participating in decision-making processes and even influencing long-term strategy. In this construct, ‘autonomy’, which draws on the worker’s skill set and experience, is related to short-term operational discretion, while ‘control’ is concerned with the possibility for the worker to participate in the broader decision-making process and determine certain aspects of the wider production process (and, consequently, his or her own working conditions), even to the extent of influencing longer-term strategic policy. The ‘control’ dimension involves categories of analysis such as: the conditions required to exercising control (availability of and access to information, space and time dedicated to sharing/involvement, etc.), the decision-making process (participation in meetings and discussions, and planning and scheduling processes, etc.) and strategic decision-making (participation in meetings where strategic objectives are discussed and decided, and in the process of formulating development plans, etc.). The ‘control’ dimension therefore relates to both direct and indirect, and both formal and informal, participation. To fully appreciate its specific characteristics, we need to consider the difference, for instance, between involvement (informing and earning the consensus of workers, if only with a view to increasing motivation), and participation (the process of forming a decision in a democratic manner), sharing (assumption of direct responsibility as an outcome of the decision-making process), co-management (participation in such entities that are involved in the organisation’s strategic decision-making). Participation can become an instrument with which we redefine the very nature of “work”, and promote, steer and reinforce processes of change (Borzeix et al., 2015; Spire, 2015). This discussion of participation, therefore, also relates to the meaning of work and processes of democratisation within organisations. In studying systems of direct participation, Gallie (2013) explored three solutions:

- a ‘individual task discretion’, which has an impact on worker involvement insofar as autonomy creates the necessary conditions for participation
- b ‘semi-autonomous team work’, which provides for participation through a system of collective control
- c ‘consultative participation’, which concerns involvement through discussion groups, problem-solving sessions, etc.

For Gallie, individual task discretion proves to be the most effective means of generating direct participation since, for all that it concerns the autonomy of individual workers, it includes them in a process of operational decision-making by allowing them to exert direct control over their own jobs. Some of the changes that we are currently witnessing in the sphere of work, particularly those related to processes of production (such as the fragmentation and increased distribution of chains of supply etc.), employment and individuals’ experiences of the labour market (such as the tendency towards greater heterogeneity among workplaces and less continuous employment patterns), make it more difficult to participate in decision-making processes and exert any meaningful influence over organisational and strategic decisions. It appears, analogously, that we are seeing a rise in informal, more individualistic modes of participation.

The sixth, and last, dimension of quality of work is the symbolic dimension, which concerns such factors as appreciation, social visibility, social utility, identity and sense of belonging. It is a dimension that, like the others, can be interpreted in subjective and

objective terms, but that is often not considered in assessments of quality of working life in the sociological literature.

In terms of the elements we can employ to analyse this symbolic dimension, these include the utility of the job (for the worker, for the organisation, for the worker's family, for society, etc.), visibility (social prestige, etc.), appreciation (satisfaction with work performance, the possibility of tailoring the job to the worker, etc.), values (the reputation of the organisation within society, the congruity of the worker's personal values and the values/objectives of the organisation, etc.), expectations (degree to which the job meets expectations, the opportunity to form expectations in relation to the job, etc.), narration (work as a means of telling one's story, of participating in the story of the collective memory, etc.), trust (which the worker perceives in the workplace). In short, this symbolic dimension is one that relates to identity and recognition, two constituent elements of the quality of work that, themselves, are subject to the pressures of fragmentation and the shift to less continuous employment that we see with increasing frequency in the personal work experiences of individuals and the labour market as a whole.

Turning to the 'quality of the work-life relationship', we identify three defining dimensions: 'work-life balance', 'social protection', and 'social participation'.

The dimension of 'work-life balance' is concerned with the compatibility (or otherwise) of work choices and life choices, and with levels of self-determination in the relationship between work and other areas of life. We can study this aspect using categories of analysis such as: boundaries (the relationship between the spaces and times used for work and other areas of life and between objectives/responsibilities in work and in life, etc.), impact (aspects of the job that affect other areas of life, and vice versa, etc.), the way work is organised (flexible working times, the possibility for workers to organise their own workload, etc.), the way the family is organised (allocation and distribution of family tasks, etc.), the way relevant services are organized (services within the organisation and within the local area that facilitate better work-life balance, etc.), image and perception (society's perception of the work-life relationship, and male and female roles, etc.). It is a complex area, which touches on multiple aspects of working life (the organisation of work activities, company policies, welfare systems, family lifestyles, etc.). In certain countries, the question of balance has often been interpreted as a "women's issue", one that is linked to women's "dual presence", rather than as a social problem that can only be addressed by involving the various organising agents involved. The blurring of the spatial and temporal boundaries that we are currently witnessing in the world of work, spread to the boundaries between work and other areas of life. If the trend towards non-standard, flexible working patterns and the domestication of the workspace and wider spatial distribution of work activities can create new opportunities to reconcile the demands of work and other areas of life, it is a process that requires concerted effort, both cognitively and in terms of organisation. The greater the mixing of work and life in processes of production, the more it is necessary to identify new organisational solutions to replace conventional practices.

'Social protection', as a factor in the quality of the work-life relationship, concerns such issues as career planning, and the continuity and security of the employment situation. It is addressed using categories of analysis such as continuity (stability of the job/employment situation, continuity of income, continuity in skill development, etc.), accessibility of employment (chances of finding and/or changing job, support during

transitional phases, etc.), employment protection (cover for illness, option of taking leave for personal reasons, etc.), and social networks (supportive relationships, formal and informal networks, etc.). If, today, we are witnessing a period of increased uncertainty and insecurity, a magnified perception of risk and social vulnerability – thanks to changes in the world of work – and faltering faith in certain protective mechanisms that have traditionally characterised salaried society, any study of the quality of the work-life relationship must necessarily give some consideration to the heterogeneity of mechanisms of social protection (formal and informal, personal and community-based, public and private, etc.). This dimension also considers the influence (direct and indirect) of the different institutional contexts and welfare state systems (as demonstrated by research), and the importance of labour relations and collective bargaining.

The ‘social engagement’ dimension concerns involvement, via work, in the social-economical-cultural life of the local area and the community to which the worker belongs, but also in that of more distant contexts. In a more general sense, it is concerned with the worker’s contribution to democratic life and initiatives for development. Like the symbolic dimension, the question of ‘social engagement’ has been treated sparingly in attempts to study quality of working life. Yet, in a period in history in which work seems to have lost some of its importance in the collective, social imagination, considering at least certain aspects of this dimension takes on even greater significance. In examining this aspect, we employ categories of analysis such as involvement (involvement, through work, in social initiatives, and projects that target development and the production of common resources, etc.), participation (participation, through work, in decision-making processes outside of the organisation, and affiliation with labour movements and institutions, etc.). Social participation, as an aspect of the quality of working life, therefore relates to the political connotations of work (Borzeix et al., 2015). Attempts to restore political significance to work are not aided by the crisis that has undermined the position of work in the collective consciousness, where it is often understood as an occasional, instrumental, discontinuous phenomenon. ‘Social participation’, in this sense, is closely associated with the aspect of ‘control’, inasmuch as the opportunity to influence decision-making processes within one’s own organisation is often accompanied by more general processes of democratic participation.

To complete our framework for analysing quality of working life, which comprises the six dimensions of quality of work and the three dimensions of the quality of the work-life relationship (Table 3), we need to include a tenth dimension, that of ‘discriminating factors’, in which we bring together all of the elements that help us to differentiate between the other aspects. To apply these factors, we have to consider four different ‘profiles’, that of the ‘person’ (sex, age, academic qualifications, family status, contract status, skills, etc.), that of the ‘organisation’ (sector in which it operates, size, what it provides/produces, technologies used, organisation of production processes, etc.), that of the ‘specific context’ (work regulations, systems of industrial relations, education system, job market, etc.), and that of the ‘macro-context’ (patterns of production, the welfare system, the political-administrative system, etc.).

7 Closing considerations

In the preceding pages, we have proposed a model for analysing quality of working life that allows us to identify aspects of innovation that have entered the sphere of work.

Innovation is understood in the terms discussed in the early sections of this essay, which is to say, as a dynamic, non-linear, multidimensional process. Examining quality of working life requires a similarly multidimensional, non-linear, relational approach. We must therefore apply “relational thinking” both to those elements that relate to the individual (needs, aspirations, capabilities) and to those that relate to the way work is organised (division of work, organisational processes, etc.).

The result is a complex framework whose component indicators and categories of analysis can be expanded and refined, as needed, in response to empirical analysis and the application of specific working configurations. It can be used to analyse the quality of an individual’s working life, but can also serve to help us design better jobs or, in other words, to bring innovation to the workplace by implementing the principle of ‘decent work’ in real-world situations.

The analytical perspective we have presented seems, to us, to be particularly beneficial in identifying factors that might be useful in generating innovation and instilling the work of all the different categories of workers involved in the production of goods and services with “value”. It is therefore a prospect that is concerned with the generation of innovation and value for the worker, and, indirectly, for his or her organisation. New processes in the production of goods and services are reshaping the relationship between people and work, and redefining the space-time profile of work and the old boundaries between work and life. The field of sociology of work can help us to form an understanding of innovation in production processes, products, organisational models and so on, as seen from the point of view of workers, by identifying the dimensions in terms of which we can analyse quality of working life, and the factors that drive innovation in this area. Such a contribution would be especially valuable at this point in time, with the emergence of significant crises in working conditions. If we wish to restore dignity to work and facilitate the various opportunities for innovation, it is essential that we also consider the question of quality of working life.

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