

Job Quality Indicators and Perceived Job Quality: The Moderating Roles of Individual Preferences and Gender

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Abstract

Job quality is critical for policy makers, but little is known about the factors that shape perceived job quality among employees. This study aimed to explore the importance of several traditional job quality indicators: employment characteristics (type of contract, employment relationship, schedule predictability) and educational misfit (horizontal, vertical) in predicting perceived job quality. Additionally, the moderating roles of preferred employment characteristics and gender were tested. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted in a sample of 562 Spanish employees. The results demonstrated that all the indicators, except schedule predictability, were related (and contributed equally) to perceived job quality. Gender moderated the interaction effect between the current and preferred employment relationship. For women, the full-time preference boosted the effect of full-time jobs on perceived job quality, whereas for men, the part-time preference boosted this effect. The findings indicate the importance of adopting a contextual approach to perceived job quality, considering individuals' preferred employment characteristics and gender.

Keywords: perceived job quality, employment characteristics, preferred employment characteristics, gender, educational misfit.

Indicadores de Qualidade do Trabalho e Qualidade Percebida do Trabalho: os Papéis Moderadores das Preferências Individuais e do Gênero

Resumo

A qualidade do trabalho é crítica para os formuladores de políticas, mas pouco se sabe sobre os fatores que moldam a percepção da qualidade do trabalho entre os funcionários. Este estudo teve como objetivo explorar a importância de vários indicadores tradicionais de qualidade do emprego: características do emprego (tipo de contrato, relação de trabalho, previsibilidade de horário) e desajuste educacional (horizontal, vertical) na previsão da qualidade percebida do emprego. Além disso, os papéis moderadores de características de emprego preferenciais e gênero foram testados. Uma análise de regressão múltipla hierárquica foi realizada em uma amostra de 562 funcionários espanhóis. Os resultados demonstraram que todos os indicadores, exceto a previsibilidade do cronograma, estavam relacionados (e contribuíam igualmente) para a qualidade percebida do trabalho. O gênero moderou o efeito da interação entre a relação de trabalho atual e a preferencial. Para as mulheres, a preferência de tempo integral impulsionou o efeito dos empregos de tempo integral na percepção da qualidade do trabalho, enquanto para os homens, a preferência de meio período aumentou esse efeito. Os resultados indicam a importância de adotar uma abordagem contextual para a percepção da qualidade do trabalho, considerando as características de emprego preferidas dos indivíduos e gênero.

Palavras-chave: qualidade percebida do trabalho, características do emprego, características preferenciais do emprego, gênero, desajuste educacional.

Indicadores de Calidad del Empleo y Calidad Percibida del Trabajo: los Roles Moderadores de las Preferencias Individuales y el Género

Resumen

La calidad del trabajo es fundamental para los responsables de la formulación de políticas, pero se sabe poco sobre los factores que dan forma a la calidad del trabajo percibida entre los empleados. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar la importancia de varios indicadores tradicionales de calidad del trabajo: características del empleo (tipo de contrato, relación laboral, previsibilidad del horario) y desajuste educativo (horizontal, vertical) para predecir la calidad del trabajo percibida. Además, se probaron los roles moderadores de las características laborales preferidas y el género. Se realizó un análisis de regresión múltiple jerárquica en una muestra de 562 empleados españoles. Los resultados demostraron que todos los indicadores, excepto la previsibilidad del horario, estaban relacionados (y contribuían por igual) a la calidad del trabajo percibida. El género moderó el efecto de interacción entre la relación laboral actual y la preferida. Para las mujeres, la preferencia a tiempo completo impulsó el efecto de los trabajos a tiempo completo sobre la calidad percibida del trabajo, mientras que para los hombres, la preferencia a tiempo parcial aumentó este efecto. Los hallazgos indican la importancia de adoptar un enfoque contextual de la calidad del trabajo percibida, considerando las características laborales preferidas de las personas y el género.

Palabras clave: calidad percibida del trabajo, características del empleo, características preferidas del empleo, género, desajuste educativo.

The quest for job quality is currently a priority for policy-makers, due to its effect on attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes at the individual, organizational, and national levels (Adamson & Roper, 2019; Findlay et al., 2017; Warhurst et al., 2017; Findlay et al. 2013). Poor quality jobs produce costs for individuals and societies. On an individual level, poor job quality implies costs for employees, for instance, via low salaries, skill underutilization, unstable employment, and poor work-related physical and mental health, ultimately affecting employees' well-being (Findlay et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017). Moreover, poor job quality can disrupt society's well-being, generate in-work poverty and exacerbate child poverty, create and perpetuate gender inequality in the labor market and beyond, and constrain job and social mobility (Carré et al., 2012). As Findlay et al. (2013) argue, "bad jobs do not provide for sustainable economies" (p.443). Hence, international institutions such as the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2019) and the European Commission (2019) defend the importance of job quality in policy making.

However, defining job quality remains a challenge for scholars in many disciplines, such as economy, sociology, and psychology. In fact, scholars refer to job quality 'as one of those concepts ... which everyone understands yet it is difficult to define precisely' (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). The lack of a precise definition can be due to the fact that job quality is a multidimensional and contextual phenomenon (Findlay et al., 2013). In addition, job quality may not have the same meaning for everyone. Therefore, workers' perceptions of the quality of their jobs are important to fully understand how job quality impacts well-being. However, most research has neglected employees' perceived job quality (Handel, 2005).

In this study, we argue that the employment characteristics traditionally considered indicators of higher job quality (e.g. permanent contracts, full-time jobs, predictable schedules, or jobs that match the person's educational level) are not necessarily perceived as such by employees, and they do not contribute equally to individuals' perceptions of job quality. Individual circumstances (career stages, economic burdens, etc.) can affect the way individuals experience their jobs and their preferences for various employment characteristics (Kalleberg, 2018; Peiró et al.,

2015), which may influence their understanding of "job quality". In fact, some evidence shows that, when certain employment characteristics are voluntarily chosen and aligned with employees' preferences, employees experience positive outcomes (Loughlin & Murray, 2013). In some countries, such as Spain, involuntary temporary and part-time jobs have increased steadily during the economic crisis (Kalleberg, 2018; Maestripieri & Leon, 2019), and they may increase even more in the coming months due to the unique COVID-19 labor market situation (Eurofound, 2020). Therefore, it is both timely and relevant to study the impact of employment preferences on the relationship between job quality indicators and perceived job quality.

Another important factor that may affect perceptions of job quality is gender. Reports show that women are more likely to have lower quality jobs than men (Castaño, 2015; Crompton & Lyonette, 2010; Ficapal-Cusi et al., 2018; García-Mainar et al., 2016; ILO, 2016; Warren, 2010). However, the concept of job quality might be gendered because it has traditionally revolved around the male breadwinner model (Wright, 2013). Hence, there is a gap in the literature about whether job quality indicators shape men's and women's perceptions of job quality differently or not. Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests that, due to different gender roles, men and women differ in their expectations, preferences, and priorities in work-life domains, which may affect the way they perceive their jobs.

Taking into account the aforementioned considerations, this study has three aims: 1) to explore the differential contribution of some traditional indicators of job quality, such as employment characteristics (i.e., type of contract, employment relationship, and schedule predictability) and educational misfit (horizontal and vertical (i.e., over-education)) to perceived job quality; 2) to investigate the moderating role of preferred employment characteristics in the current employment characteristics - perceived job quality relationship; and 3) to investigate the moderating role of gender in the two-way interactions between current and preferred employment characteristics. The model is shown in Figure 1.

Our study attempts to make several contributions to the literature in order to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive

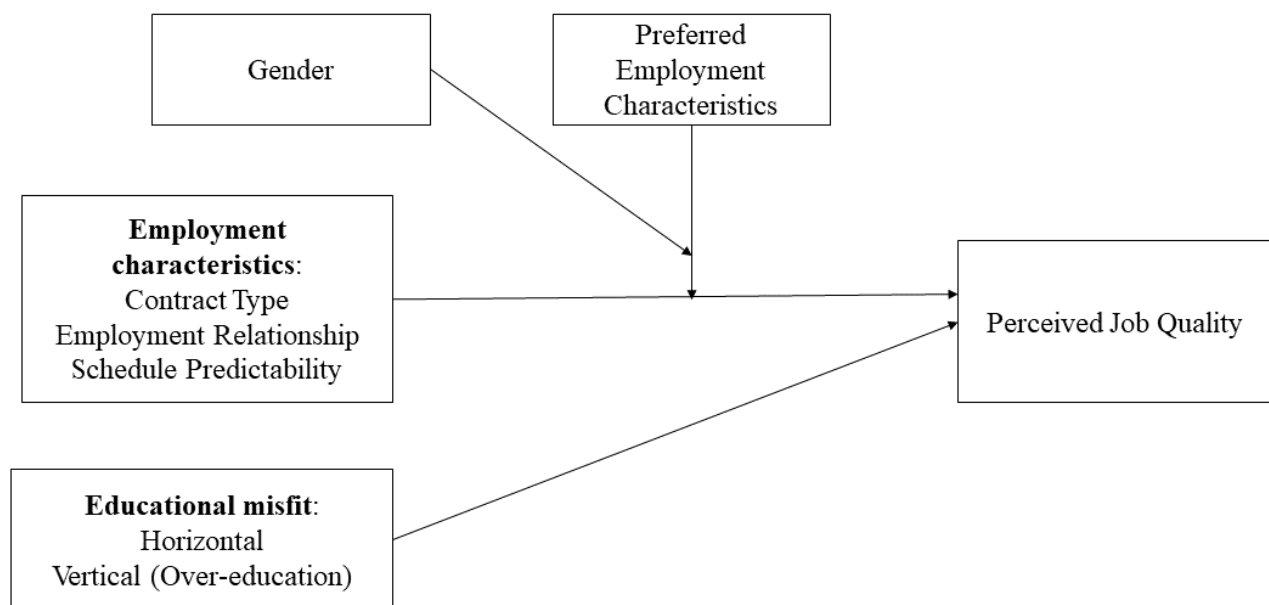


Figure 1. The Hypothesized Model

account of the job quality concept. First, we perform a subjective assessment of job quality, taking into consideration several traditional job quality indicators to grasp its multidimensional nature. Second, to understand the differential contribution of several traditional job quality indicators, we explore their relative importance in shaping employees' perceptions of the quality of their jobs. Third, to capture the contextual nature of job quality, we apply the Person-Job fit theory (Edwards, 1991) to test whether the relationship between the current employment characteristics and perceived job quality depends on preferred employment characteristics. Finally, we apply Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) to capture the gendered perspective of job quality and explain why the moderating effects of preferred employment characteristics on the relationship between employment characteristics and perceived job quality might differ between men and women. From a practical perspective, our study will suggest ways to foster perceived job quality, taking into consideration differences in employees' preferences and gender.

Employment Characteristics, Educational Misfit, and Perceptions of Job Quality

The literature on job quality indicators has focused on employment characteristics such as type of contract, employment relationship, and schedule predictability. Abraham et al. (2018) defines a traditional job as one with a permanent contract, full-time employment relationship, and predictable schedule. Research has shown that jobs have better quality when they have traditional, as opposed to non-traditional, employment characteristics. For instance, regarding type of contract, temporary workers are less satisfied and receive less pay and training than permanent workers (Booth et al., 2002). In the case of the employment relationship, employees who work part-time are more likely to have limited access to career prospects, related pay raises, and skill development than full-time employees (Asao, 2011; Fagan et al., 2014; McDonald et al., 2009). Moreover, an unpredictable work schedule can negatively affect job quality due to a disruption of the work-life balance (Fagan, 2004). In this study, schedule predictability is based on the Purcell et al.'s (1999) differentiation between fixed workdays and irregular workdays. Whereas the former allows for predictability and employees' sense of control, the latter are unpredictable and accommodate employers' (instead of employees') needs.

A job-person qualification fit is another important job quality indicator (González-Romá et al., 2018). Two types of fit are relevant: horizontal fit, or the fit between employees' educational field of study and the field of their job; and vertical fit, or the fit between the educational level required by the job and the educational level attained by employees. Research has shown that educational misfit (horizontal and vertical) has negative consequences. Regarding the horizontal misfit, a recent literature review indicated that a horizontal educational misfit often has unfavorable effects on employees' earnings, occupational status, and job satisfaction (Somers et al., 2019). With regard to the vertical educational misfit, most research has focused on a particular type of misfit, over-education (having more education than the job requires), without addressing the phenomenon of under-education (having less education than the job requires) (Meroni & Vera-Toscano, 2017; Pascual Sáez et al., 2016). We also focus on the over-education side of vertical misfit for two reasons. First, over-education is a growing issue in Spain that affects over a quarter of its working population (Capsada-Munsech, 2019). Second, under-education is not synonymous with having a bad job. Undereducated employees benefit from a wage premium

compared to employees with an educational fit at the same level of education, whereas overeducated employees suffer from a wage penalty. In fact, they are seen as workers with atypical successful careers (Hartog, 2000; Büchel & Mertens, 2004; Nieto & Ramos, 2017). Research on over-education has shown that overeducated employees receive lower salaries and have less job satisfaction than workers with a similar educational background and fitted jobs (Allen & Van der Velden, 2001; Hartog, 2000). In addition, a meta-analysis on over-qualification, which includes the concept of over-education, shows that this misfit leads to negative outcomes such as turnover intention, low job satisfaction, and low employee wellbeing (Harari et al., 2017).

As mentioned earlier, studies on job quality typically revolve around these traditional objective job quality indicators (employment characteristics and educational (mis)fit). However, they are not able to capture the subjective perspective of job quality. Capturing this subjectivity by considering perceived job quality can help to understand employees' behaviors, attitudes, emotions, and well-being within and beyond the workplace. As Warhurst and Knox (2015) argue, including both objective and subjective assessments of job quality can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive account. In this study, we assess whether, as expected, the traditional indicators of job quality are related to perceived job quality. Specifically, taking into consideration the above-mentioned research, we assess whether three particular employment characteristics (type of contract, employment relationship, and schedule predictability) and educational misfit (horizontal misfit and over-education) are related to perceived job quality. Specifically, we hypothesize the following:

H1. Employees with permanent job contracts will perceive higher job quality than employees with temporary job contracts.

H2. Employees who work full-time will perceive higher job quality than employees who work part-time.

H3. Employees who have fixed workdays will perceive higher job quality than employees with irregular workdays.

H4. Horizontal educational misfit will be negatively related to perceived job quality.

H5. Vertical educational misfit, i.e., over-education, will be negatively related to perceived job quality.

All the indicators are expected to be related to perceived job quality. However, we propose an additional research question in this study: whether all five job quality indicators are equally important drivers of perceptions of job quality. As far as we know, no previous studies have analyzed the differential relevance of employment characteristics (type of contract, employment relationship, and schedule predictability) and educational misfit (horizontal and vertical) in predicting perceived job quality. This analysis is relevant because it could potentially shed light on which traditional indicators of job quality are more or less important in shaping perceptions of job quality.

The Moderating Role of Preferred Employment Characteristics

If precisely defining job quality is already difficult, it becomes even more complex when considering individuals' preferences. It is important to assess individuals' preferences when evaluating which jobs are viewed as problems or opportunities by employees (Kalleberg, 2018; Peiró et al., 2015). As mentioned earlier, the traditionally desirable employment characteristics may not be suitable for everyone. For example, students and young people might prefer temporary contracts (Guest, 2004; Silla et al., 2005), and employees might have diverse reasons for preferring part-time arrangements that accommodate a variety of life activities (Fagan,

2004; Clarke, 2015).

To understand why preferences may play a role in employees' perceptions of job quality, we draw on the Person-Job (P-J) Fit theoretical framework (Edwards, 1991). P-J differentiates between two types of fit: the Demands-abilities fit (i.e., whether the employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities match those required by the job) and the Needs-Supplies fit (i.e., whether the employees' needs match what jobs provide to meet those needs) (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014). In this study, we focus on the needs-supplies fit, which occurs when the employee's needs, desires, or preferences regarding their jobs (in our case, the preferred employment characteristics) are met by the jobs they perform (in our case, the actual characteristics of employees' jobs). As Kristof-Brown et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis shows, Person-Job fit, and particularly needs-supplies fit, is positively associated with important outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and to a lesser extent performance, and negatively with intent to quit and strain.

When studying whether employees' employment characteristics are aligned with their preferences for these characteristics (a specific type of needs-supplies fit), scholars refer to job status congruence or voluntary jobs (Loughlin & Murray, 2013; Veliziotis et al., 2015). Research has shown that job status congruence is related to positive organizational and employee outcomes. Particularly, when focusing on specific employment characteristics such as type of contract, voluntary temporary employment is positively related to job satisfaction (Ellingson et al. 1998; Krausz, 2000) and life satisfaction (Silla et al., 2005), and negatively related to job insecurity (Guest et al., 2003) and job stress (Krausz, 2000). Regarding full vs. part-time jobs, a recent literature review on alternative work arrangements (Spreitzer et al., 2017) shows that employees experience work more negatively when they have part-time jobs involuntarily. Employees with involuntary part-time jobs have higher levels of job stress and lower levels of life satisfaction compared to employees in voluntary part-time jobs (Sturman & Walsh, 2014). In addition, Loughlin and Murray (2013) demonstrated that being in a particular employment relationship by choice is negatively related to turnover via affective commitment and positively related to workers' psychological and physical health via work-related negative mood. To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has investigated the preferences for schedule predictability regarding workdays. However, based on P-J fit arguments, preferences should also matter in this case.

Thus, we expect preferred employment characteristics to moderate the relationship between employment characteristics and perceived job quality. Specifically, the positive "effect" of traditional employment characteristics on perceived job quality will be buffered when employees prefer non-traditional employment characteristics. Specifically,

H6a. Preferences about the type of contract will moderate the relationship between the type of job contract (permanent vs. temporary) and perceived job quality. The positive "effect" of having permanent vs. temporary jobs on perceived job quality will be reduced when employees prefer temporary jobs to permanent jobs.

H6b. Preferences about the type of employment relationship will moderate the relationship between the type of employment relationship (full-time vs part-time) and perceived job quality. The positive "effect" of having full-time vs. part time jobs on perceived job quality will be reduced when employees prefer part-time jobs to full-time jobs.

H6c. Preferences about schedule predictability will moderate the relationship between schedule predictability (fixed vs irregular workdays) and perceived job quality. The positive "effect" of

having fixed vs. irregular workdays on perceived job quality will be reduced when employees prefer irregular workdays to fixed workdays.

The Moderating Role of Gender

The question of what job quality is may be gendered because it has traditionally revolved around the male breadwinner model (Wright, 2013). Research has shown gender differences in positive subjective experiences such as job satisfaction (Clark, 1997). Particularly, women are more satisfied in objectively poor-quality jobs than men are. Clark (1997) suggested that this was due to women's lower expectations about their jobs, given the uneven gender labor market distribution, gender wage gap, and gender discrimination in the workplace. However, as Sloane and Williams (2000) showed, men and women differ in the determinants of job satisfaction. For instance, salary is more important for men than for women. In this regard, Redmond and McGuinness (2019) found that men preferred jobs with a higher salary and career progress more than women did. In comparison, women preferred jobs that they intrinsically liked and that provided a work-life balance more than men did.

In line with this research, we can assume that men and women differ in the value they assign to various employment characteristics; hence, some job quality indicators might be more salient predictors of perceived job quality for men, whereas others may be more salient for women. To explain the rationale behind these assumptions, we turn to Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987). This theory suggests that men and women have different social roles and differ in their affect, cognition, and behavior, due to different gender role beliefs. Gender role beliefs are people's perceptions of men's and women's social roles in a certain society (Eagly, 1987; Kugler et al., 2017). These beliefs are formed through social learning when men and women observe how social roles are performed, ultimately eliciting different thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in men and women (Eagly & Wood, 2012). The male role has typically been characterized as the breadwinner or income provider, whereas the female role is characterized as the homemaker (Eagly et al., 2000; Konrad et al., 2000). Work is seen as an anticipated priority for men, and family is the priority for women (Ellemers, 2018).

Gender role incongruent behavior can lead to punishment for both men and women due to violation of gender expectations. Research shows that men are more heavily penalized than women for their gender incongruent behavior. For instance, men are penalized more heavily than women for taking a leave of absence or leaving work for family reasons (Allen & Russell, 1999; Butler & Skattebo, 2004, Sullivann et al., 2018). Moreover, Cha (2010) suggests that men in part-time and temporary employment may be seen as violating standard breadwinning models of masculinity. Pedulla (2016) found that men are penalized for part-time employment histories, whereas women are not penalized because part-time jobs are congruent with the female role. She explains that decisions about "voluntarily" moving away from traditional high-quality employment can be considered heavily gendered. A male employment history with non-traditional work arrangements signals the inability to be a real man. As Berdahl et al. (2018) suggest, masculinity needs to be demonstrated repeatedly, and it is best demonstrated in the workplace if the job characteristics are typical of the male gender role. Moreover, men who work part-time experience less career progress, professional development, and promotion speed than men who work full-time and women in general (van Osch & Schaveling, 2020). However, women also face difficulties when demonstrating gender incongruent

behavior. Full-time work is incongruent with women's role. Thus, in trying to meet female gender role expectations, women may accept occupational downgrading and reduce their work hours to fulfill family responsibilities. As Kallberg (2018) suggests, women mostly work in part-time jobs voluntarily in order to balance their work role with their housekeeper and childcare role. Along the same lines, Fagan (2004) suggested that more women, compared to men, might prefer part-time jobs to accommodate domestic responsibilities and childcare. Hence, the gender role can yield different preferences for men and women and drive different perceptions about the quality of the jobs they have. However, not all research supports this claim. Cifre et al. (2013) did not find gender differences in job feature preferences (i.e., supportive environment). However, they found a positive effect of the congruence between preferred and actual job features on job satisfaction for women but not for men.

Thus, to better grasp the concept of perceived job quality, it is important to understand how the effects of the interaction between current and preferred employment characteristics on perceived job quality may vary depending on gender. In fact, Loughlin and Murray (2013) called for research on gender and employment preferences, suggesting that men's and women's differential labor market distribution could yield different implications of employment characteristics-preferences congruence for men and women. In this study, we respond to this call and test whether the strength of the moderating effect of preferred employment characteristics on the relationship between employment characteristics and perceived job quality changes for men and women depending on whether these employment characteristics and/or preferences are (in)congruent with the gender role. Considering the arguments presented above, we propose the following non-directional hypotheses:

H7a. Gender will moderate the two-way interaction between the current type of job contract and the job contract preference on perceived job quality.

H7b. Gender will moderate the two-way interaction between the current type of employment relationship and the employment relationship preference on perceived job quality.

H7c. Gender will moderate the two-way interaction between the current type of schedule predictability and the schedule predictability preference on perceived job quality.

Method

Participants

The initial sample consisted of 707 employees in Spain. We posed several exclusion criteria. First, individuals who chose the option 'other' in the categorical variables (gender, type of contract, employment relationship, schedule predictability, and employment characteristics preferences) were excluded. Thus, we focused on the dichotomous variables typically considered when analyzing employment characteristics as job quality indicators. Second, undereducated employees were excluded to focus on the most problematic type of vertical misfit: over-education (Capsada-Munsech, 2019; Nieto & Ramos, 2017). Following the exclusion criteria, 64 subjects with an 'other' response on the employment characteristic variables and 51 subjects with an 'other' response on the employment preferences variables (representing 9.1% and 7.2% of the initial sample, respectively) were removed. Twenty undereducated subjects (representing 2.8% of the initial sample) were excluded from the sample. Finally, respondents with 'other non-university' and 'other university' responses for the educational level (10 participants, representing 1.4% of the initial sample) were

also excluded from the sample because these categories lacked clarity about the educational level. Thus, the final sample consisted of 562 employees in Spain, 49% female, aged between 21 and 59 years ($M=34.8$, $SD=9.6$ years). Regarding permanent-temporary status, 45% of the employees had a temporary contract. With regard to full-time vs. part-time status, 49% worked part-time, and, finally, regarding fixed-irregular workdays, 15% had irregular workday schedules. Regarding the educational level, 0.2% had no formal education, 4.6% had finished lower secondary education, 5.9% had vocational education—first level, 14.9% had vocational education—second level, 11.4% had a high school diploma, 10.1% had a three-year university/technical engineering degree, 29.4% had a five-year university/engineering degree, 21.7% had a master's degree, and 1.8% had a doctorate degree.

Instruments

Employment Characteristics. Type of contract, employment relationship, and schedule predictability were measured by directly asking individuals the following three questions "What type of job contract do you have?"; "Do you work part-time or full-time?"; and "Indicate which days you work". The non-traditional employment characteristics were coded as 0 (temporary, part-time, and irregular workdays) and the traditional ones as 1 (permanent, full-time, and fixed workdays). The 'other' responses were coded as 2 and excluded from the analysis.

Preferred Employment Characteristics. The preferences about type of contract, employment relationship, and schedule predictability were also measured by directly asking participants three questions: "Indicate the type of job contract you would like to have?"; "Indicate whether you prefer to work full or part time?"; and "Indicate what days you would like to work". Preferences for non-traditional characteristics were coded as 0 (temporary, part-time, and irregular workdays), and preferences for traditional characteristics were coded as 1 (permanent, full-time, and fixed workdays). The 'other' responses were coded as 2 and excluded from the analysis.

Educational Misfit. *Vertical misfit* (i.e., over-education) was measured as the difference between the responses to two questions: 'What is the highest educational level you completed?'; and 'What educational level is required by your job position?' Given that we excluded responses from individuals who reported lower levels of education than what was required by the job position, the difference is an indicator of over-education, where 0 refers to a vertical educational fit and larger values indicate more over-education. *Horizontal educational misfit.* It was measured by adapting the single direct question used by González-Romá et al. (2018) for university graduates. Specifically, we asked participants: 'To what extent is your current job related to your educational field?' The response scale ranged between 1 (not at all) and 5 (a lot). For consistency with the other indicators considered, we recoded the scale to range from 0 to 4. Additionally, to obtain the score for horizontal educational misfit, we reversed the scores. Thus, 0 refers to horizontal educational fit, and larger values indicate greater horizontal educational misfit.

Perceived Job Quality. It was measured using a 3-item scale designed for the study: 'The quality of my job is high', 'The quality of the job I have is good.', and the reversed item 'I have a low quality job'. The items were responded to using a six-point Likert scale (1. Strongly disagree, 6. Strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha was .86. Exploratory Factor Analysis showed a one-factor solution that explained 69% of the variance, with factor loadings larger than .74.

Gender. We directly asked participants. Responses were

coded 0=men and 1=women. We included the response category “Other”, but nobody selected this option.

Control Variables. We controlled for physical working conditions because the work environment is an aspect of the quality of work life and related to physical health and job satisfaction (Becker, 1995). Physical working conditions were measured using three dimensions from Morgeson and Humphrey’s (2006) Work Context scale: Ergonomics (three items, i.e., “The seating arrangements on the job are adequate (e.g. ample opportunities to sit, comfortable chairs, good postural support)”; Physical demands (three items, i.e., “The job requires a great deal of muscular strength”); and Working conditions (five items, i.e., “The work place is free from excessive noise”). The items were responded to using a six-point Likert scale (1. Strongly disagree, 6. Strongly agree). For consistency, we recoded the scale to range from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Cronbach’s alphas were acceptable ($\alpha = .70$ for Ergonomics, $\alpha = .97$ for Physical demands, and $\alpha = .77$ for Working conditions). In addition, we controlled for marital/cohabitation status and the number of economically dependent children because they may influence the relationship between employees’ gender and their preferred employment characteristics (Fagan, 2014; Pedulla & Mueller-Gastell, 2019). *Marital/Cohabitation Status* was measured by asking: “What is your marital or cohabitation status?” Specifically, we differentiated between those with and without a partner; hence, two groups were formed: 0=single, divorced, widowed, separated without a new partner; and 1=married, in a relationship, separated or divorced with a new partner. *Number of economically dependent children* was measured by asking “How many children do you have who are economically dependent on you?”

Data Collection Procedures and Ethical Considerations

The data for this study were collected during a three-week period in January 2020. We contracted the services of a market research company that managed a respondent panel. This company invited the employed members of its panel to participate in the study, provided that they were not self-employed and were between 20 and 60 years old. We aimed for a final sample with an equal gender distribution (50% women and 50% men), young employees (50% between 20 and 30 years old), a high percentage of temporary employees, and different types of employment characteristics (permanent vs temporal contract; full-time vs part-time; fixed workdays vs irregular workdays). The project for this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the researchers’ university. Participants were asked for their informed consent, and anonymity and confidentiality of responses were guaranteed.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression analysis in SPSS. Because all the variables included in the analysis have a meaningful 0 after recodification, we did not mean center the variables before computing the interaction terms. In fact, centering does not solve the potential problem of multicollinearity when adding the interaction term (e.g. Edwards, 2009; Dalal & Zickar, 2012). Moreover, the detrimental effects of multicollinearity associated with additive multiple regression are not necessarily present in moderation analysis, where correlations between predictors can be beneficial (Shieh, 2010).

We created seven variables to capture all the two-way interactions: between gender and the three employment characteristics, between gender and two employment characteristic

preferences (employment relationship and schedule predictability), between the employment relationship and its preference, and between schedule predictability and its preference. We also created the two three-way interactions between gender, employment relationship, and its preference and between gender, schedule predictability, and its preference. We did not include contract type preferences and the corresponding interactions in the analysis because there were only eight employees in our sample who preferred temporary contracts (1.4%). Hence, we were not able to test the moderating effect of contract preference (Hypotheses 6a and 7a) due to lack of sample variability for this variable.

To test the hypotheses, the control variables were entered in Step 1. The three employment characteristics (type contract, employment relationship, schedule predictability), horizontal educational misfit, and over-education were entered in Step 2. The moderators (gender, employment relationship preference, and schedule predictability preference) were entered in Step 3. The seven two-way interactions were entered in Step 4. Finally, the two three-way interactions were included in Step 5. For Hypotheses 1 to 6 we used one-tailed tests, which are suitable for directional hypotheses derived from theory (Cho & Abe, 2013; Wonnacott & Wonnacott, 1984). The three-way interactions were tested with two-tailed tests because these hypotheses were not directional. To compare the importance of the traditional indicators in explaining perceived job quality, we compared the absolute size of the regression coefficients in Step 2 by using Clogg et al.’s (1995) comparison formula. In this case, we used Bonferroni correction, considering the number of comparisons made.

Results

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations between the study variables.

The first five hypotheses referred to the relationships between employment characteristics (type of contract, employment relationship, schedule predictability) and educational misfit (horizontal misfit and over-education), on the one hand, and perceived job quality, on the other. After partialling out the effects of the control variables, the job quality indicators (see Table 2) explained an additional 7% of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = .07$; $p < .05$).

As expected, type of contract ($B = .16$, $p < .05$) and employment relationship ($B = 0.25$, $p < .01$) were positively and significantly related to perceived job quality. Specifically, employees with permanent job contracts and employees who work full-time perceived higher job quality than those with temporary job contracts and those who work part-time, respectively, supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. Contrary to our expectations, schedule predictability ($B = .03$, $p > .05$) was not significantly related to perceived job quality. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Regarding educational misfit, both horizontal educational misfit ($B = -.11$, $p < .01$) and over-education ($B = -.08$, $p < .01$) were negatively related to perceived job quality, supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5, respectively (see Table 2).

To test whether the relationships between the four significant job quality indicators and perceived job quality are equally important, and considering that different signs were expected for the coefficients (positive for type of contract and employment relationship, and negative for the two indicators of educational misfit), we compared the absolute size of the regression coefficients (see Clogg et al., 1995). Because this involves 6 two-by-two comparisons, we applied Bonferroni correction by dividing alpha .05 by 6 (.008). The z scores obtained for differences between the regression coefficients ranged between 0.35 and 1.87 ($p > .008$ in all cases). Hence, the differences between the regression

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between the Study Variables

Variable	Range	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.Perceived Job Quality	1-6	3.92	1.18	-												
2.Ergonomics	0-5	3.16	1.15	.45**	-											
3.Physical Demands	0-5	1.45	1.58	-.31**	-.56**	-										
4.Working Conditions	0-5	3.02	1.10	.36**	.50**	-.37**	-									
5.Marital/Cohab Status	0-1	0.57	0.50	.09*	.06	.01	.08#	-								
6.Number ecd children	0-3	0.48	0.79	.12**	.01	.06	-.02	.39**	-							
7.Type Contract	0-1	0.55	0.50	.08#	-.03	-.02	.03	.17**	.30**	-						
8.Employment Relationship (ER)	0-1	0.51	0.50	.17**	.12**	-.14**	-.03	-.08#	-.10*	-.09*	-					
9.Schedule Predictability (SP)	0-1	0.85	0.35	.13**	.13**	-.14**	.12**	.06	.10*	.02	.11**	-				
10.Horizontal Educational Misfit	0-4	1.75	1.55	-.30**	-.24**	.28**	-.15**	.08#	.10*	.11*	-.20**	-.15**	-			
11.Over-education	0-8	1.40	1.75	-.27**	-.16**	.16**	-.07#	-.05	-.06	-.03	-.14**	-.14**	.47**	-		
12.Gender	0-1	0.49	0.50	.05	.03	-.08*	.08*	.06	.10*	.19**	-.12**	.08#	-.04	-.06	-	
13.ER Preference	0-1	0.80	0.40	-.06	.03	.01	-.01	-.12**	-.21**	-.17**	.23**	-.05	-.05	.06	-.14**	-
14.SP Preference	0-1	0.94	0.24	-.02	.01	-.06	.08#	.01	-.01	-.01	.01	.23**	.01	.04	.04	.08#

Note. N=562, # $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, (two-tailed). Marital/Cohab Status = Marital/Cohabitation Status; Number ecd children = Number of economically dependent children; ER = Employment relationship; SP = Schedule predictability.

Table 2
Results of Step 2 in the Hierarchical Regression Analysis to Predict Perceived Job Quality

Predictors	B	SE	ΔR^2
Step 2. Variables			.07*
Ergonomics		.29**	.05
Physical Demands		-.01	.03
Working Conditions		.19**	.04
Marital/Cohab Status		.04	.09
Number ecd children	.17*	.06	
Type Contract	.16*	.09	
Employment Relationship	.25**	.09	
Schedule Predictability	.03	.12	
Horizontal Educational Misfit	-.11**	.03	
Over-education	-.08**	.03	

Note. Regression coefficients are non-standardized. SE: standard errors. Marital/Cohab Status: Marital/Cohabitation Status. Number ecd children: Number of economically dependent children. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed for regression coefficients).

coefficients were not significant for any of the comparisons performed. The type of contract, the employment relationship, and horizontal and vertical educational misfit contribute equally (and significantly) to employees' perceptions of job quality.

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical regression model when including the moderators and the interaction effects. Hypothesis 6 proposes that preferred employment characteristics moderate the relationship between employment characteristics and perceived job quality, such that the positive "effects" of traditional characteristics (H6a. permanent contract, H6b. full-time, H6c. fixed workdays) on perceived job quality are buffered in employees who prefer the corresponding non-traditional characteristics. As mentioned above, the lack of employees with a temporary contract preference in our sample kept us from testing H6a. The two-way interactions between the employment relationship and its preference ($B = -.01$, $p > .05$) and between schedule predictability and its preference ($B = .56$, $p > .05$) were not significant ($\Delta R^2 = .01$; $p < .05$). Thus, H6b and H6c were not supported.

Finally, adding the three-way interaction "effects" significantly improved the model, although this step only explained an additional 1% of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = .01$; $p < .05$). The results obtained demonstrated partial support for Hypothesis 7. Only one of the two three-way interaction terms that we were able

Table 3
Results of the Hierarchical Regression With Moderators (Steps 3, 4, and 5)

Predictors	B	SE	ΔR^2
Step 3. Moderators			.004
Gender	-.02	.09	
ER Preference	-.18	.11	
SP Preference	-.14	.18	
Step 4. Two-way Interaction Effects			.01
Gender x Type contract	-.26	.17	
Gender x ER	.18	.18	
Gender x SP	.27	.25	
Gender x ER Preference	.08	.23	
Gender x SP Preference	.09	.37	
ER x ER Preference	-.01	.24	
SP x SP Preference	.56	.37	
Step 5. Three-way Interaction Effects ^a			.01*
Gen x ER Preference x ER	1.18*	.48	
Gen x SP Preference x SP	1.00	.74	

Note. ^aThe three-way interaction effects were tested with two-tailed tests (because we did not hypothesize a specific direction in H7). For the two-way interaction effects, we used one-tailed tests (because the H6 hypotheses were directional). Regression coefficients are non-standardized. SE: Standard errors. ER: Employment relationship. SP: Schedule predictability. * $p < .05$

to test in our data, specifically the interaction between gender, the employment relationship, and its preference, was statistically significant ($B = 1.18$, $p < .05$), supporting H7b. Conversely, the three-way interaction between gender, schedule predictability, and its preference ($B = 1.00$, $p > .05$) was not significant and did not support hypothesis H7c. As mentioned above, the lack of employees with a temporary contract preference in our sample kept us from testing H7a.

To interpret the 3-way interaction patterns by plotting and testing the conditional effects (i.e., simple slopes), we used Model 3 in PROCESS (Hayes & Matthes, 2009; Preacher et al., 2007). Figure 2 shows the gender differences in the two-way interaction between the employment relationship and its preference on perceived job quality. For men with part-time preferences, there was a significant positive "effect" of a full-time job on perceived job quality ($B = .72$, $t(539) = 2.24$, $p < .05$). For men with full-time

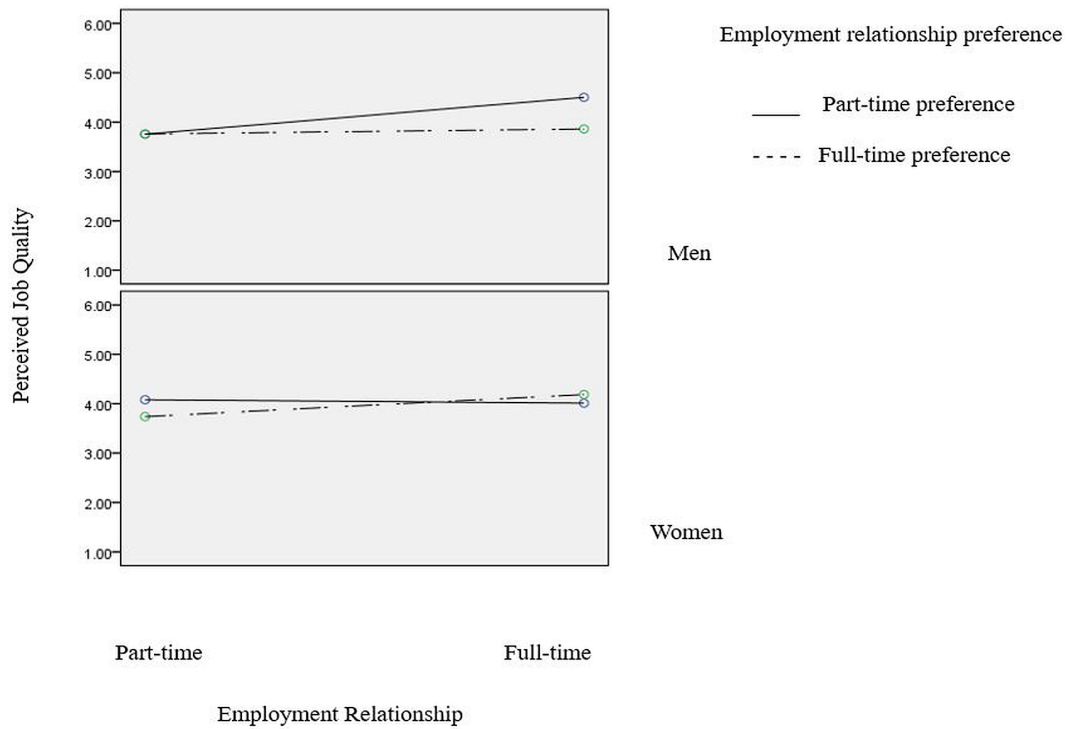


Figure 2. Gender Moderates the Two-way Interaction Between Employment Relationship and Employment Relationship Preference on Perceived Job Quality

preferences, a full-time job was not perceived as higher quality than a part-time job because the simple slope was not statistically significant ($B = .08$, $t(539) = .64$, $p > .05$). Conversely, for women, the positive “effect” of a full-time job on perceived job quality was greater when they had full-time preferences ($B = .46$, $t(539) = 3.26$, $p < .01$). For women with part-time preferences, there were no differences between having a part-time or full-time job because the simple slope was not statistically significant ($B = -.08$, $t(539) = -.27$, $p > .05$).

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the contribution of traditional indicators of job quality, specifically employment characteristics (type of contract, employment relationship, schedule predictability) and educational misfit (horizontal and vertical (i.e., over-education) to perceived job quality, while examining the moderating roles of preferred employment characteristics and gender.

As expected, employees with permanent contracts and employees with full-time jobs, had greater perceptions of job quality, whereas the two types of educational misfit were negatively related to perceived job quality. Contrary to our expectations, schedule predictability was not significantly related to perceived job quality. However, our sample might not have been sensitive enough to detect differences, given that only 15% of the participants had an irregular workday schedule.

In addition, and contrary to our expectations, preferences about employment characteristics did not moderate the relationship between employment characteristics (particularly employment relationships and schedule predictability) and perceived job quality. However, for employment relationships (full vs. part-time jobs), preferences played a moderating role when gender was included as an additional moderator. Specifically, gender moderated the two-way interaction between employment relationship and employment relationship preference on perceived job quality. Only for women, the full-time job preference boosted the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality. Interestingly, for men, having a part-time job preference boosted

the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality. These findings have several important implications that we discuss below.

Theoretical Implications

Our study contributes to expanding the nomological network of job quality in two ways: 1) by testing the (differential) influence that “objective” traditional indicators of job quality have on shaping employees’ perceptions of job quality; 2) by analyzing the individual boundary conditions, depending on employees’ preferred employment characteristics and gender, that make traditional indicators of job quality more or less salient.

First, in line with previous research, we show that traditional employment characteristics, such as permanent contracts and full-time jobs (Asao, 2011; Booth et al., 2002; Fagan et al., 2014; McDonald et al., 2009), and educational misfit (horizontal misfit and over-education) (Allen & Van der Velden, 2001; Harari et al., 2017; Hartog, 2000) are significantly related to perceived job quality. Interestingly, our results show that all four indicators contribute equally to shaping perceived job quality. Hence, because the four indicators are equally important predictors of perceived job quality, all four should be taken into consideration as drivers of perceived job quality and its consequences. Schedule predictability, however, is not seen as a key predictor. To our knowledge, this is the first study to compare the importance of predictors of perceived job quality.

Second, our study adds value by investigating the moderating roles of preferred employment characteristics and gender in the relationship between employment characteristics and perceived job quality. Previous literature suggested that employees’ preferences may play a role when studying perceived job quality; therefore, the same job can be seen as an opportunity or a burden depending on employees’ preferences (Findlay et al., 2013; Kalleberg, 2018; Peiró et al., 2015). Our results show that these preferences have different importance depending on gender. Thus, as Loughlin and Murray (2013) and Cifre et al. (2013) suggested, gender should be taken into account when analyzing the fit or congruence between employees’ actual and preferred employment characteristics.

In particular, our results show that, after controlling for demographic factors that can differentially affect men's and women's preferred employment characteristics, such as marital status and number of children, the two-way interaction between employment characteristics and the corresponding preferences was moderated by gender. As mentioned earlier, conditional "effects" showed that, for women, full-time preferences boosted the "effect" of full-time jobs on perceived job quality, whereas this "effect" was not significant for men. Interestingly, men perceived higher job quality in full-time jobs than in part-time jobs, even when they had part-time preferences. Thus P-J theory predictions about the benefits of fit (Edwards, 1991) do not work equally for men and women. We turn to Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) to offer several possible explanations for these results, although future research should test whether any of these explanations are tenable.

On the one hand, the male gender role revolves around the breadwinner concept, and part-time jobs are less well-paid than full-time jobs. Hence, voluntary part-time work might not have the expected positive effect on perceived job quality for men because earnings are especially valuable to the male gender role (Berdahl et al., 2018). Men may feel overemployed and prefer to reduce their work time for various reasons, such as a high workload or to increase the time available for other intrinsically satisfying activities. However, overemployment as a preference to work fewer hours is related to the employee's income and status. A reduction in working hours has risks, such as loss of status and income (Hiemer & Andresen, 2019). Thus, despite the part-time preference, men who work part-time will not perceive the job as better quality than a full-time job.

On the other hand, the higher perceived job quality of full-time jobs compared to part-time jobs, even when part-time is preferred, may be more salient due to men's rationalization to stay in full-time jobs that are congruent with their gender role. Having a part-time job is an unusual or non-normative choice for men, and so it is seen as an exception to the norm of masculinity that is often penalized (Borgkvist et al., 2016; Pedulla, 2016; Pedulla & Mueller-Gastell, 2019; van Osch & Schaveling, 2020). Hence, men rationalize staying in a full-time job that is incongruent with their part-time preference by perceiving it as a high-quality job. Thus, perhaps we did not find a significant "effect" for men working full time with this preference because this preference is congruent with their gender role. When men work full-time and have a preference for part-time work, the "effect" on perceived job quality is not high because it lies within the social norms and expectations for men.

Finally, differences in job market opportunities can explain why women with full-time jobs and employment preferences that are incongruent with their gender role (i.e., full-time job preference) perceive higher job quality (Ficapal-Cusí et al., 2018; Warren & Lyonette, 2018). For women, both the fact that full-time jobs are traditionally considered better quality and the challenge of achieving these types of jobs can explain the enhanced perceptions of job quality. Achieving the standard high-quality job (full-time) when they are looking for it may have a special reinforcing value for women, especially for younger women who mostly prefer full-time jobs.

However, women may accept occupational downgrading due to a lack of full-time jobs with policies allowing them to balance domestic responsibilities (Fagan, 2004; ILO, 2016). Thus, women's preferred employment characteristics may depend on their age and family (childcare and other) responsibilities. To obtain additional insight into this issue, we carried out additional analyses by partitioning the sample of women according to their

employment relationship preferences and age. In Spain, the age when women have young children ranges from 30 to 45 years old (Bedoya, 2018; Tamarit, 2020), and so we paid particular attention to this group, compared to younger (21-29) and older (46-59) women. Interestingly, women in the range from 30 to 45 are not the ones that prefer part-time jobs the most; the percentages of women who prefer part-time jobs increase with age. Specifically, in our study, 15.9% of younger women (21-29) and 29.4% of women between 30 and 45 years old preferred part-time jobs, whereas 48.4% of older women (46-59) preferred this type of job. If we focus on women who work part-time, 65% of the group in the age range of having young children (30-45) had a part-time job, and 41% of them preferred this type of job. In older women (46-59), who may have to take care of elderly family members or still have childcare responsibilities (some studies indicate that 9% of women have their first child in their forties – Tamarit, 2020), the percentage of women who worked part-time and preferred this type of job increased. Specifically, 68% of the women between 46 and 59 years old worked part-time, and the majority, 57%, preferred this type of job. These results contrast with the pattern observed in younger women (21-29 years). In this case, the percentage of women working part-time was lower (42 %), and only 27% of them preferred this type of job. These results suggest that a high percentage of women of all ages work part-time involuntarily. However, the specific percentages seem to depend on age, and they suggest that childcare may not be the only reason to prefer part-time jobs. Hence, we encourage future job quality research to delve deeper into the intersectionality between gender, age, particular family responsibilities, and preferred employment characteristics. In this regard, qualitative research may help to understand the different reasons that employees, particularly women, prefer part-time jobs at different ages.

Practical Implications

All the traditional indicators of job quality considered, except schedule predictability in terms of workdays, are significant and equally important drivers of perceptions of job quality. Thus, they all need to be taken into consideration by organizations and scholars interested in understanding and promoting employees' perceived job quality. However, the relationship between the employment relationship (full vs. part-time) and perceived job quality depends on employees' preferences and gender. Women perceive higher job quality in full-time jobs than in part-time jobs when they prefer a full-time employment relationship. Organizations should facilitate women's preferences for working full-time by introducing work-family policies and making full-time jobs more available to the female gender role. Men who work part-time perceive lower job quality than men who work full-time, even when they prefer part-time work. A culture supportive of a male role change, both inside and outside organizations, can normalize part-time work for men and introduce the possibility of perceiving high job quality. Hence, the labor market can encourage men to hold part-time job positions when they prefer them, without being penalized for it.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged and lead to additional research on the topic. However, whenever possible, we carried out additional analyses to show that our study still makes a significant contribution, despite the limitations.

First, due to lack of sample variability in the type of contract

preference, we could not test how temporary preferences may impact the relationship between type of contract and perceived job quality, and whether this moderating effect depends on gender. Moreover, due to the small subsample of employees with irregular workdays, we may not have a large enough sample to detect the “true” relationship between schedule predictability and perceived job quality. Future studies with more heterogeneous samples in terms of these variables (type of contract preferences and schedule predictability) can shed more light on these issues.

Second, we studied gender as a binary variable, and binary operationalizations of gender have recently been criticized (Cameron & Stinson, 2019; Lindqvist et al., 2020). Although our research took the non-binary conceptualization of gender into account by providing the option *other*, none of the participants chose that option. Thus, future studies with more heterogeneous samples should look beyond gender as a binary category and provide more details about perceived job quality among employees who self-identify as being beyond the binary gender conceptualization.

Third, we operationalized over-education as the difference between the level of education attained by the employee and the level of education required by the job. Difference scores have frequently been used to operationalize over-education and other P-J fit constructs (Arranz et al., 2018; Duncan & Hofmann, 1981; Locke, 1976; Sicherman, 1991). In fact, important organizations, such as the OECD, estimate over-education based on the difference between employees' educational level and the level required for the job (c.f. García-Mainar & Montuenga, 2019). However, difference scores have been criticized for presenting methodological problems, which can be solved by means of polynomial regression and surface analysis (see Edwards, 1994, 2001, 2002). When there is only one type of misfit (i.e., over-education), the main problem has to do with the assumption that components of difference scores have equal but opposite effects on the dependent variable [$Y = a + b(P-J) = a + b_1P - b_2J$; where b_1 equals b_2 and they present opposite signs]. Because the tenability of this assumption can be empirically tested (see Page & Spreng, 2002), we assessed whether our operationalization of over-education was acceptable. We re-ran our research model, separately introducing the two predictors (educational level attained by the employee and educational level required by the job) along with the control variables and the other four job quality indicators assessed, instead of using difference scores. Then we tested the implicit constraint that the regression coefficients of the two variables involved when assessing over-education are opposite and equal. Following Clogg et al.'s (1995) test, results showed that the regression coefficients ($b_1 = -.050$; $SE = .03$ and $b_2 = .095$; $SE = .03$) were not significantly different from each other in absolute size ($z = 1.10$; $p > .05$), and as expected, they had opposite signs. Thus, because the assumption is tenable in the data, the use of difference scores may be feasible. Nevertheless, to rule out the need to model higher-order terms by means of polynomial regression to understand the fit and misfit “effects”, we also added the interaction and quadratic terms of the two separate predictors (J^2 , $J \times P$, P^2) (Edwards, 1994, 2001, 2002). Adding these terms did not significantly increase the amount of explained variance ($R^2 = .003$; $p > .05$). These results also suggest that, in our study, difference scores adequately capture the over-education construct. Because the tenability of the assumptions underlying difference scores is an empirical question, future studies on over-education should test the adequacy of difference scores or apply polynomial regression and surface analysis instead.

Fourth, our study has a cross-sectional research design, making it difficult to derive causal relationships. Although the indicators

considered (e.g. the type of contract employees have) cannot depend on the perceptions of job quality, preferred employment characteristics may depend on job quality perceptions. Thus, we encourage future longitudinal research that can help to understand how and why perceptions of job quality change over time.

Fifth, in our study, the traditional job quality indicators explained a low percentage (7%) of the perceived job quality variance. Thus, future studies should focus on other possible drivers of perceptions of job quality. In this regard, it will be interesting to assess the importance of intrinsic job characteristics that have also been considered in the job quality research (e.g. task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy, relationships with others, and feedback) (Butterworth et al., 2011; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Loughlin & Murray, 2013), in comparison with the job quality indicators considered in our study, and how the effects of intrinsic job characteristics depend on individuals' preferences and gender.

Finally, future research should address the reasons behind the preferences for non-traditional employment characteristics in men and women, in order to fully understand gender differences in these preferences and, ultimately, their impact on perceived job quality.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of the study, our results show that traditional indicators of job quality (except schedule predictability) make similar contributions to employees' perceptions of job quality. Interestingly, the impact of some employment characteristics, such as employment relationships, depends on preferred employment characteristics and gender. Our findings show the importance of adopting a contextual approach to understanding perceived job quality, taking into consideration individuals' preferred employment characteristics and gender.

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