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Job Quality: Antecedents and Influence on Employee Health and Wellbeing

DOCTORAL THESIS

Marija Davcheva

Directors:

Vicente González Romá, PhD, Ana María Hernández Baeza, PhD

& María Inés Tomás Marco, PhD

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General Introduction

“What the whole world wants is a good job ... now and in the future.”

Bill Shorten, 2012

“The centrality of work to individuals, organizations, and societies makes the topic of job quality fundamental to an understanding of individual well-being and social welfare.”

Arne Kalleberg, 2011

The quest for job quality is not a new one. Besides the continuous variation of terms used to describe job quality, its importance has remained unquestionable. Job quality matters and has continuously done so for many years and for years to come (Warhurst et al., 2022). Job quality matters for individuals, organizations, and societies (Adamson & Roper, 2019; Findlay et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017; Warhurst et al., 2017). Poor quality jobs produce costs, whereas high job quality foster sustainable benefits for individuals and societies.

Given the amount of time people spend at work, job quality is crucial in shaping overall quality of life. On an individual level, poor job quality implies costs for employees, for instance, via low salaries, skill underutilization, unstable employment, and poor working conditions; and it can hinder employee health, well-being, and productivity (Findlay et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017). Moreover, poor job quality implies costs for organizations due to its negative impact on employee health and wellbeing. Poor job quality impairs organizations as it increases absenteeism and turnover rates (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Clark, 2005; Goulden, 2010; Sisson, 2014), thus generating high costs for organizations. On a societal level, poor job quality can contribute to in-work poverty and exacerbate child poverty, create and perpetuate gender inequality in the labour market and beyond, and constrain job and social mobility (Carré et al., 2012), thus producing costs for societies.

The Oxford Handbook of Job Quality contemplates job quality as a key to address contemporary challenges, such as health, welfare, productivity, innovation, economic competitiveness, democracy and democratic participation, and societal equality (Warhurst et al., 2022). In one of the chapters of this handbook, Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2022) discuss how job quality can drive innovation in both organizations and societies, but also how innovation drives job quality. It is one of many examples that highlight the important role of job quality for sustainable development. The commitment toward improving job quality is not based only on the great business case job quality makes for organizations and societies but goes hand in

hand with the moral responsibility organizations and societies have to create quality jobs (Findlay et al., 2017). As such, it is no wonder that policy makers around the world mark job quality on their agendas as a key challenge in the twenty first century. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is advocating for member countries to not only increase the quantity of jobs, but also improve their quality (OECD, 2003). The European Union (EU) recognizes the importance of increasing employment rates while simultaneously enhancing the quality of jobs as part of its efforts to promote regional recovery. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN) emphasize the significance of better jobs for a stronger economy, this is reflected in the 8th sustainable development goal: *Decent work and economic growth*.

The worldwide importance and relevance of job quality is undisputable, but as Findlay et al. (2013) indicate, in order for policy to focus on job quality and academics to properly scrutinize policy interventions and their outcomes, there is a prerequisite for a greater consensus around three key areas: the *dimensions* of job quality; the *antecedents* or *factors* that influence job quality; and the *outcomes* or *impact* of job quality. Research in line with these key areas will facilitate the needed consensus and enrich both theory and practice. To contribute in doing so, this doctoral thesis aims to tackle important gaps in these key areas and advance the notion of job quality by investigating various job quality indicators, its antecedents and influence on employee health and wellbeing.

First, important gaps remain in terms of the dimensions of job quality and the factors that influence job quality. What is job quality is not an easy question, in fact Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011, p.4) argue that “Job quality is ‘elusive’ because ‘it is one of those concepts . . . which everyone understands yet it is difficult to define precisely.’” The complexity of job quality has been attributed to its multidimensional nature and the fact that it is a contextual phenomenon (Findlay et al., 2013). In terms of its multidimensionality, some scholars have

highlighted the importance of distinguishing between work quality and employment quality (Warhurst & Knox, 2020) because in essence, jobs are composed of both work and employment. The first refers to the quality of job characteristics (features regarding the work task), and the latter to the quality of employment characteristics (terms and conditions of the employment relation) (Peckham et al., 2019; Vanroelen et al., 2021). In this thesis, we follow this distinction in order to avoid the terminology overlap that has prevailed in job quality research and argue that job quality is a broader concept that includes employment quality as a subset of its indicators, such as salary and type of job contract (the other subset is composed of indicators of work quality, such as task variety and work meaningfulness) (Warhurst et al., 2022). Moreover, indicators of job quality can be divided into objective and subjective indicators. The objective-subjective dichotomy can be viewed from the perspective of whether the dimensions of job quality should be limited to the inherent characteristics of the jobs or if they should also consider the viewpoints and circumstances of the workers themselves (Warhurst et al., 2022). For instance, salary is an objective indicator of job quality, whereas salary satisfaction is a subjective one that may depend on the salary itself but also on personal circumstances. In this regard, it has been argued that the predominant approach in job quality research has been the objective one while the importance of the subjective approach such as individuals' perceptions of job quality, has been neglected (Handel, 2005). However, scholars argue that it is not a question of which approach is better or more needed. Instead, the current scholarly conversation advocates for an interplay of the subjective and objective approaches to job quality with the aim of providing the needed holistic view about job quality (Knox & Wright, 2022). In this line, understanding *what* objective job quality indicators contribute to subjective job quality, *how* and *when*, is much needed. Accordingly, research based on Person-Job Fit theory (Edwards, 1991) has shown that when employees' preferences are aligned with their actual job characteristics, employees are more likely to experience positive outcomes

(Loughlin & Murray, 2013). This raises the question of the moderating role of employment characteristics preferences in the relationship between objective job quality indicators and perceived job quality. Additionally, as Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests, employees' preferences, norms, and expectations, can be guided by employee gender roles. Thus, it is timely to approach job quality research via a contextualized approach and investigate what objective job quality indicators contribute to perceived job quality, and whether these relationships depend on individual circumstances, such as employment characteristics preferences (e.g., preference for type of job contract temporary vs permanent) and gender. We aim to tackle this gap in Study 1 in this thesis.

Second, the world of work has been experiencing important changes in the working arrangements. The neoliberalism movement in politics has triggered an upward trend in nonstandard employment and a downward trend in standard employment around the world, a transformation considered to be the reason for the degrade in employment quality (Matilla-Santander et al., 2020). Neoliberal policies were designed to promote flexibility in labour markets and provide priority to a more casual workforce, driven by the perceived necessity for easier mobility of workers in and out of jobs (Standing, 2014). As a result, there was a shift from traditional standard employment relationships, characterized by full-time and stable employment with collective bargaining power and social rights and protections, towards nonstandard and atypical employment relationships (Bosch, 2004). Besides the ongoing transformation of employment arrangements, the standard employment relationship characterized by high salary and full-time permanent job contract is still considered the gold standard of employment quality (Vanroelen et al., 2021). These ongoing transformations of employment arrangements and subsequent changes in employment quality highlight the urgent need to investigate the consequences of employment quality (Kalleberg, 2018), in particular for employees' health (Benach et al., 2014). The research conducted so far shows that

employment quality is positively related to employee health (Benach et al., 2014; Donnelly, 2021; Giudici & Morcelli, 2019; Peckham et al., 2019; Van Aerden et al., 2016; Vives et al., 2011). Studies focusing on separate employment quality indicators have indicated that standard employment arrangements, such as permanent contracts, high salary, and full-time jobs, have a positive relationship with employee health, whereas nonstandard employment characteristics, such as temporary, part-time, low paid jobs, have a negative relationship with employee health (Gevaert et al., 2021; Quinlan & Bohle, 2015). Only few studies have investigated the underlying mechanisms of the abovementioned relationship. For instance, Peckham et al. (2019) suggested that low employment quality may deteriorate employee health via several mechanisms, such as material deprivation, employee stressors, and occupational risk factors. However, with the exception of the stressor pathway, little is known about the underlying psychological mechanisms of this relationship, in other words, *why* employment quality is related to employee health (Ahonen et al., 2019). This knowledge is especially important in the light of the increase in nonstandard employment and the fact that employment quality is one of the most important social determinants of health, yet mostly overlooked (Benach et al., 2016; Vanroelen et al., 2021). We aim to respond to this gap in Study 2 of this thesis.

Third, a subjective indicator of job quality (in particular an indicator of the job quality subarea - work quality) that has caught the attention of researchers and practitioners is work meaningfulness (i.e., work experienced as personally significant and worthwhile and with a positive valence; Rosso et al., 2010). Work meaningfulness is seen as one of the most prominent job aspects employees look for in a job (Achor et al., 2018; Hu & Hirsh, 2017). Accordingly, the inquiry into how employees derive meaning from their work is essential in shaping their attitudes, behaviours, and overall work experiences (Brief & Nord, 1990; Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Previous research on the antecedents of work meaningfulness has primarily focused on the *work centric* approach to work meaningfulness,

emphasizing objective aspects of work that lead to the experience of meaningfulness. This research has been inspired by the Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This approach focuses on modifying the work design in order to foster sources of work meaningfulness. In addition to this approach, a recent shift in focus has opened the doors for a *worker centric* approach to work meaningfulness. This approach focuses on understanding the subjective experience of meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010). Rosso et al. (2010) suggested that “perceptions of meaningfulness must necessarily travel through the self” (p. 15). According to the worker-centric approach, work meaningfulness is a subjective experience that depends on what employees themselves bring to work (Chalofsky, 2003; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). In this line, investigating personal resources proposed by the vocational psychology literature as antecedents of work meaningfulness is an avenue to develop the worker centric approach to work meaningfulness. In addition, work meaningfulness is a construct with an eudaimonic direction (Steger et al., 2012) due to its alignment with the philosophical approach to eudaimonia that encompasses personally valuable and worthwhile experiences (Haybron, 2016). As such, it may be important in explaining the experience of eudaimonic wellbeing at work (i.e., optimal functioning and human growth at work; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Most of the research conducted on eudaimonic wellbeing is domain free, thus scholars have called for research on eudaimonic wellbeing at work by using measures adapted to the work and career context (Dagenais-Desmarais et al., 2017).

Research is needed to understand *how* and *why* personal work specific resources influence eudaimonic wellbeing at work, which calls for mediation studies that can help to identify the underlying (work specific) mechanisms linking these resources to eudaimonic wellbeing at work. In fact, in this thesis we argue that investigating subjective indicators of job quality such as work meaningfulness may be an answer to the call for the integration of

vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing literatures (Dik et al., 2019). Understanding *how* and *why* personal resources contribute to work meaningfulness and the subsequent influence of the latter on eudaimonic wellbeing at work is crucial for theory development and expansion of the nomological network of this subjective job quality indicator. In particular, we aim to tackle this gap in Study 3 of this thesis.

This thesis aims to tackle the aforementioned gaps and provide a better understanding of the nomological network of job quality by investigating its various indicators, both objective and subjective, its antecedents, and its health and wellbeing outcomes. Specifically, this thesis has three objectives that correspond to the three conducted studies presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. In addition, an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) shows a brief literature review on job quality. In this chapter, we also present the theoretical background for the three studies. Chapter 2 provides information about the methodological aspects of the three studies that make up this thesis. In Chapter 3, we present Study 1, in which we investigate the contributions of different objective indicators of job quality to perceived job quality. Specifically, we focus on objective indicators of employment quality, the employment characteristics: type of contract, employment relationship, schedule predictability, and the following characteristics from a person-job fit perspective: horizontal educational fit and vertical educational (mis)fit (i.e., overeducation). Moreover, we investigate whether the employment characteristics - perceived job quality relationships are moderated by employees' employment characteristics preferences and gender.

In the next chapter, Chapter 4 (Study 2), we examine the psychological mechanisms that explain the relationship between employment quality and employee health, specifically health complaints, by investigating two parallel mediators: work engagement and affective job insecurity.

In Chapter 5 (Study 3), we investigate the relationship between four person centred employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social capital, and human capital), on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, on the other hand. In addition, we examine the mediating role of work meaningfulness (a subjective job quality indicator) in the above-mentioned relationships.

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses and integrates the general findings of this thesis, provides a number of theoretical and practical implications, the limitations of the studies and possible future research directions, and outlines the main conclusions that can be derived from the doctoral thesis. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 provide a summary of the thesis in English and Spanish respectively, in order to comply with the requirements for the international mention of the doctoral degree.

Chapter 1: Job Quality, its Antecedents and Influence on Health and Wellbeing: A Theoretical Framework

1.1 Job Quality Matters

It is inevitable to start off this chapter by trying to answer the question *why* should we care about job quality. The answer to this *why* is illustrated in the importance that job quality has worldwide. The answer might be long, but it is quite straightforward. Job quality matters. Job quality matters for individuals, organizations, and societies (Adamson & Roper, 2019; Findlay et al., 2017; Findlay et al., 2013; Warhurst et al., 2017). One side of the arguments underlines the main idea that high job quality fosters sustainable benefits for individuals and societies. Job quality is a steppingstone toward overall quality of life. Research suggests that job quality can positively impact individuals' job satisfaction, general life satisfaction, health, and wellbeing. Moreover, it has a positive impact on employees' family health and household welfare (Knox et al., 2011). At the workplace, employees in high quality jobs are more productive, and have lower absenteeism and turnover rates (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Clark, 2005; Goulden, 2010). Organizations also benefit from job quality since employees reciprocate high quality working and employment conditions via greater effort, retention, and engagement (Clark, 2015). Societies benefit from job quality since it drives innovation, collective quality of life, environmental sustainability, and societal equality (Warhurst et al., 2022).

The other side of the arguments underlines the idea that poor quality jobs produce costs. On an individual level, poor job quality implies costs for employees. For instance, via low salaries, skill underutilization, unstable employment, and poor working conditions, low job quality can hinder employee health, well-being and productivity (Findlay et al., 2017; Findlay et al., 2013). Moreover, poor job quality can disrupt organizational and societal well-being, generate high turnover rates (Sisson, 2014), in-work poverty and child poverty, create and perpetuate gender inequality in the labour market and beyond, and constrain job and social mobility (Carré et al., 2012).

In a nutshell, job quality is a solution to key social, economic and political challenges in the twenty first century (Warhurst et al., 2022). It is a driver for health, innovation, economic development, and social justice. As such, it is essential to expand our understanding of job quality in order to create better quality jobs as a basis for individual well-being and social welfare (Kalleberg, 2011).

1.2 Job Quality: A Brief History

To commence the discussion about job quality, we must begin by reviewing its history. To do so, we will try to answer several questions, such as when the interest in job quality was triggered, how it evolved, and what socio-political contextual factors played a role in its evolution.

The origins of the job quality literature can be found in the quality of working life movement. This movement emerged in the late 1940s and highlighted the need for a better fit between the social and technical systems of the workplace (Warhurst et al., 2022). It started with the work of the Tavistok Institute of Human Relations and the evidence of better production and higher work satisfaction when the socio-technical system is optimized. This work was later continued in Norwegian research projects by Emery and Thorsrud (1976), who included Lewin's ideas (Lewin et al., 1939) on the power of groups in order to redesign work and form the foundation of the famous concept of autonomous working groups. As Guest (2022) highlights, these authors set some general psychological requirements about the content of jobs that were considered the criteria to determine whether the work redesign was successful, such as the need for work to be demanding, some learning opportunities at the job, some degree of decision making, a minimal degree of social support, the ability to relate what the workers do and what they produce to their social lives, and the need to feel that the job leads to some sort of desirable future.

Moreover, sociologists suggest that the movement of quality of working life was set in a larger framework: the quality of life approach that emerged in 1960s and 1970s (Burchell et al., 2014). Quality of life emerged as opposed to the continuous quantifying of living conditions mostly based on economic criteria. Thus, social indicators such as the nature of employment and quality of work were included in the policy and research agenda to capture non-pecuniary aspects of work and employees' experience (Seashor, 1974). Furthermore, factors such as the simplification of tasks and de-skilling in the world of work, triggered neo-Marxist advocates to emphasize job autonomy and employee self-development as crucial aspects of job quality (Braverman, 1974).

The 70s are also known for the great achievements in work psychology research regarding job quality. In terms of job design, Hackman and Oldham (1976) elaborated their remarkable theory on job characteristics, which aimed to explain workers' intrinsic motivation and other important employee outcomes. This theory proposed several job characteristics (autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance, and feedback) that triggered three psychological states (work meaningfulness, responsibility of the work outcomes, and knowledge of the results), which in turn lead to personal and work outcomes, such as high intrinsic motivation, low absenteeism and turnover, high job satisfaction, and high-quality performance. Besides the popularity of work and job redesign, there was a need to include a wider approach to describe the quality of working life. Hence, Walton (1974) identified eight global characteristics of quality of working life: 1. Adequate and fair compensation, 2. Safe and healthy working conditions, 3. Opportunity to use and develop human capacities, 4. Opportunity for continued growth and security, 5. Social integration in the work organization, 6. Constitutionalism in the work organization, 7. Work and the total life space, 8. The social relevance of work life.

Around the 80s, occupational health psychologists expanded their research in stress at the workplace resulting in theories such as the Job Demands - Control model (Karasek, 1979), which posits that control buffers the impact of job demands on strain and can help enhance employees' job satisfaction with the opportunity to engage in challenging tasks and learn new skills. This shifted the focus of work redesign toward control and autonomy as a way of coping with stressful hazards at the workplace and job quality promotion.

The increased research in job quality was accompanied by the intensified interest of policy making on job quality and the legislation processes that were initiated (Guest, 2022). For instance, employees' rights complemented the European charter on Human rights and in 1975 the European Commission founded The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions with the aim to identify further improvement areas in job quality. As a result, in the upcoming years many European legislations were reinforced. For instance, organizations were obliged to provide equal pay for work of equal value, offer equal opportunities regardless gender, race, or creed, improve safety at work, and promote the health work environment.

In addition to the new legislation, factors such as globalization, the growing proportion of women in the labour market, and the increasing implementation of technology, triggered crucial changes in the world of work and organizations. To remain competitive, organizations had to attract talent and that meant fitting the work to the employees' needs providing quality of work life with flexibility, part-time jobs, training and development, and good pay. However, the increased flexibility in the labour market introduced a shift from traditional standard employment relationships, characterized by full-time and stable employment with collective bargaining power and social rights and protections, towards nonstandard and atypical employment relationships (Bosch, 2004). This resulted in a dual labour market polarization, with low quality employment being far away from the standard employment relationship. In

addition, this polarization highlighted the fact that low quality employment arrangements are typically obtained by marginalized groups in society. Moreover, the start of the gig economy increased the number of nonstandard, free-lancer project workers that usually lack social rights and protection. This means that nonstandard employment arrangements are steadily becoming the new normal (Hipp et al., 2015). International institutions have also been involved in tackling the job quality issue by policy advocacy. For instance, ILO in 1999 presented the concept of decent work (i.e., productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity), a concept that is trending up until today and is reflected in the United Nations sustainable development Goal 8: *Decent work and economic growth*. Policy making on this topic at the European level expanded. For instance, the European Union committed itself at the Lisbon meeting of the European Commission in 2000 to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and *better* jobs and greater social cohesion (OECD, 2003). Based on this, institutional revision and measurement of job quality has become a common contemporary practice. For instance, OECD has introduced the OECD Guidelines for Measuring the Quality of the Working Environment (OECD, 2017; Murtin et al., 2022), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has implemented the Quality of Employment Index (UNECE, 2015), and the European Union has been running the European Working Conditions survey since 1999. More details about different contemporary job quality frameworks will be presented in section 1.4. on *Job Quality Indicators*.

With the abovementioned brief overview of the history of job quality we did not intend to describe the whole evolution of job quality. Instead, we acknowledge that it is a brief reflection of the complex evolution of this phenomenon. In fact, throughout this historical overview we mentioned several related concepts, such as quality of working life, decent work, job quality, and employment quality. This is due to the fact that various concepts have been

developed overtime, sometimes overlapping but all linked to the job quality literature. As scholars have suggested, describing this phenomenon is not an easy task, and in fact it is convenient to talk about job quality as a family of concepts (Green et al., 2021; Warhurst et al., 2022). Accordingly, we dedicate the following section to the description of job quality as a family of concepts.

1.3 Job Quality: A Family of Concepts

The fact that job quality is a multidimensional concept studied by different disciplines is not the only challenge for its research and policy development. Scholars have acknowledged that there is a family of concepts that are related, sometimes overlap and have been used interchangeably to describe any kind of quality in terms of work and employment (Green, 2021; Warhurst et al., 2022). To set the foundation of a rigours research and policy intervention process, an overview of these concepts is needed (Warhurst et al., 2022). Next, we provide that (brief) overview.

1.3.1 Decent Work

Unlike numerous other ideas explored in the field of work and organizational behaviour, the concept of decent work originated as a public policy endeavour introduced and spread by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999. The ILO is an international organization associated with the UN that serves as a platform that brings together governments, employers, and workers from 187 member States to establish labour standards, formulate policies, and create programs that advocate for the provision of fair and suitable employment for all individuals, regardless of gender (ILO, 2022). The definition of decent work is founded on four interdependent principles framing the so-called Decent Work Agenda, an agenda which defines the parameters of decent work (ILO 2008). The four principles are: (a) employment creation: access to decent and productive work that ensures equity, security, and dignity; (b)

human rights within the workplace that are both legislated and part of consensually agreed upon norms and values; (c) social dialogue that includes workers, employers, labour unions, and governments; and (d) social protections, including safe working conditions, adequate time for rest, and other supports for workers and their families. These parameters encompass globally important attributes of work such that ideally, they should be evident in all jobs across the world (Blustein et al., 2023). Besides various attempts to measure and operationalize decent work, it has been suggested that it is best understood as a programmatic, aspirational political and social agenda (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). Green et al. (2021) suggest that decent work has various levels of analysis. It tackles the job, the person, the society, and the labour market by focusing on various domains, such as employment opportunities, earnings and productive work, decent working time, combining work, family and personal life, ethical work, security and stability of work, equal opportunity and treatment, safe work environment, social security, and social dialogue (Anker, 2003; ILO, 2013). Decent work is a clear baseline for employees globally (Brill, 2021) and as such decent work can be regarded as the minimum basic job quality.

1.3.2 Fair Work

The concept of fair work is also a widely used concept related to job quality. Specifically, it is a concept applied in Australia and the United Kingdom. In Australia, the concept of fair work focuses on ensuring the establishment of basic employment standards. For instance, the Australian federal government has established a framework for fair work, which is reflected in the form of ten National Employment Standards (NES) and a national minimum wage (NMW). The NES are legally mandated minimum working conditions that encompass various aspects, including the maximum number of weekly work hours, the right to request flexible work arrangements, parental leave and associated entitlements, annual leave, personal carers' leave and compassionate leave, community service leave, long service leave, public

holidays, notice of termination and redundancy pay, provision of an information statement by the employer, and the NMW (Cooper & Ellem, 2009). We can conclude that in Australia fair work highlights the quality of employment conditions, in particular, the minimum standards of employment quality and employee rights.

In contrast, in the UK, fair workplaces emphasize fostering social partnership as both a characteristic of and a means to support sustainable workplaces (Warhurst et al., 2017). The concept of fair work encompasses actions towards effective communication, opportunities for growth, employment security, personal fulfilment, and respect. It aims to strike a balance between the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees (Warhurst et al., 2017).

1.3.3 Employment Quality and Precarious Employment

Employment quality refers to a set of employment characteristics established by the terms and conditions of the employee-employer relationship (Eisenberg-Guyot et al., 2020; Julià et al., 2017). It is considered to be a “multi-dimensional construct, grasping into different features of the employment conditions and relations, including the stability and controllability of contracts, level and stability of wages, working hours (amount, timing, discretion), access to social rights, future employability, collective bargaining, and interindividual relations (with management)” (Vanroelen et al., 2021, p. 237). To understand employment quality, a useful theoretical framework is the segmented labour market theory, also known as the dual labour market theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). This theory posits that the labour market is divided into two segments: a primary segment that includes the established core of the labour market, and a secondary segment that consists of peripheral jobs. On the one hand, the primary segment is represented by jobs with standard employment relationships (SER), such as full-time, permanent and higher salary working arrangements, whereas nonstandard working arrangements are characterized by temporary, part-time and lower salary jobs as part of the secondary segment (Ahonen et al., 2018). According to this theoretical model, the gold

standard of employment quality is the SER. Other specific employment arrangements that deviate from it downwards indicate a deterioration in employment quality.

Research on employment quality has increased due to the ongoing labour market transformation. As a result of the labour market flexibilization, the diminishing union influence, and a decline in workers' social protection, there has been a progressive erosion of what was previously considered the norm in high-income countries. This erosion has led to the emergence of diverse forms of nonstandard, flexible, and unprotected employment (Padrosa et al., 2022). To encompass the entire spectrum of these nonstandard employment arrangements, the term *precarious employment* was introduced (Benach et al. 2016).

Conceptually *precarious employment* is related to employment quality because it is considered to be as a *specific case of employment quality*, where there is an accumulation of unfavourable employment quality characteristics that is essentially due to the weak bargaining power of a worker (Benach et al., 2014; Julia et al. 2017; Vanroelen et al., 2021). Vanroelen et al. (2021) suggest a multidimensional concept of employment quality encompassing seven dimensions of employment: (1) temporariness (i.e., the duration of the formal contract), (2) disempowerment (i.e., representation and participation), (3) vulnerability (i.e., adverse interpersonal relations and administrative issues), (4) workplace rights (i.e., lack of access and lack of power to exercise rights), (5) economic unsustainability (i.e., low or unstable income), (6) undesirable working times (i.e., long, irregular, unpredictable, or at “unsocial” moments), and (7) low employability opportunities (i.e., training and internal labour market careers). As such, employment quality and precarious employment are concepts that only capture quality in terms of employment relationship characteristics without focusing on work characteristics, the working environment, or any characteristics directly related with the job activities and tasks at work.

1.3.4 Quality of Working Life

As mentioned previously, the idea of Quality of Working Life (QWL) originated in the late 1940s with a focus on improving the alignment between the technical and social systems within workplaces. It is an approach that addresses the needs of workers and aims to enhance the overall quality of their working lives (Warhurst et al., 2022). Its initial focus was on job redesign, however later it included wider aspects, such as adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, opportunity to use and develop human capacities, opportunities for continued growth and security, social integration in the work organisation, constitutionalism in the work organisation, work and the total life space, and the social relevance of work life (Walton, 1974). Nevertheless, the economic recession in the 70s was followed by an increased focus on job creation, which lost the focus of quality of working life (Guest et al., 2021). In fact, Guest (2022) noted various problems with the QWL movement, for instance conceptual meandering and lack of agreed focus. However, in the early twenty-first century, as work arrangements expanded beyond traditional employer-employee relationships and on-site work, the concept QWL gained renewed significance due to its broader applicability. This shift in focus has led to a renewed interest in researching QWL, particularly in relation to the gig economy and nonstandard forms of employment. Researchers have called for a revitalization of QWL studies in these contexts (Grote & Guest, 2017; Warhurst & Knox, 2022), advocating for minimum standards of quality of working life with an especial focus of employment characteristics (Warhurst & Knox, 2022).

The abovementioned concepts in the family of concepts named job quality further shows the complexity of job quality research and policy making initiatives. To gain more clarity about these overlapping concepts and a better understanding of job quality, next we will outline and review some categorizations of job quality indicators.

1.4 Job Quality Indicators

What is job quality is not an easy question. In fact, Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011) argue that “Job quality is elusive because it is one of those concepts . . . which everyone understands yet it is difficult to define precisely” (p. 4). To try to understand the concept job quality, we turn to the extensive literature on job quality indicators. Scholars have acknowledged the complexity of job quality and attributed it to its multidimensional nature and the fact that it is a contextual phenomenon (Findlay et al., 2013). In addition, understanding job quality is a challenge undertaken by various social science disciplines, as such its complexity to determine general indicators of job quality rises, as it needs a multidisciplinary focus (Findlay et al., 2013). As Findlay et al. (2013) suggest, there are conceptual differences among disciplines in the terms of job quality. Job quality indicators such as pay is predominant among economists, sociologists highlight skill and autonomy, whereas psychologists focus on job satisfaction. It is not even unusual to find inconsistencies in job quality and lack of operationalization among researchers in the same discipline, such as the lack of consensus in sociology whether or not contingent employment is a synonym for poor job quality (Kalleberg et al., 2000). Similarly, reviews on job quality have highlighted how distinct job quality indicators are emphasized by different disciplines and scientific approaches (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2009; Warhurst et al., 2017). For instance, the *orthodox economic approach* focuses on compensating in particular wage differentials; the *radical economic approach* highlights power relations and exploitation; the *behavioural economic approach* considers participation; the *traditional sociological approach* has to do with alienation and intrinsic quality of work; the *institutional approach* focuses on segmentation and employment quality; the *occupational health medicine and psychology approach* focuses on physical and psychosocial risks and the impact of work on health/well-being; the *work–life balance approach* considers working time, including duration, scheduling, flexibility and intensity; and the *industrial democracy* approach

highlights employees' voice, including union membership and collective bargaining (Warhurst et al., 2017). Besides these differences, contemporary job quality research tries to undertake a multidimensional approach (Steffgen et al., 2020; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2022). To obtain a more detailed vision of the job quality indicators used in research we will turn to some proposed research streams and categorizations of job quality indicators.

1.4.1 Work Quality versus Employment Quality

Given the different conceptualization and non-consensus in the measurement of job quality, sometimes employment quality has been included as a dimension of job quality. Moreover, terms such as job quality, employment quality, and work quality, have been used interchangeably. However, scholars have highlighted the importance of distinguishing between work quality and employment quality as two broader categories or subareas of job quality (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011; Warhurst & Knox, 2022). This distinction is crucial to overcome the measurement and operationalization issue in job quality research. In fact, the 'Index of Job Quality' that has been tested in various EU member States (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2009; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011) follows and incorporates this distinction. In particular, whereas work quality refers to specific features of the work tasks, employment quality refers to specific terms and conditions of the employment (Peckham et al., 2019; Vanroelen et al., 2021).

Besides the recommendation to distinguish work and employment aspects, some measures are denominated by using only one term (work vs employment), but they encompass a mixture of different work and employment indicators. For example, the UN's measure of employment quality in their *Handbook for Measuring Quality of Employment: A Statistical Framework*, includes work and employment quality indicators (UN, 2015).

In this thesis, we follow the distinction between work and employment quality and consider them as different subareas of job quality in order to avoid a confusing overlap and

provide a more nuanced view of job quality. A more refined operationalization of job quality is vital for a rigorous investigation of job quality antecedents and consequences. Moreover, a more nuanced and detailed knowledge about job quality is the basis for theory advancement and evidence-based practical implications.

1.4.2 The Subjective - Objective Distinction in Job Quality

Job quality research has been influenced by the subjective vs objective indicators dichotomy. In other words, some authors have emphasised the use of objective characteristics of job quality referring to elements of the job per se (e.g., salary, working time), while other authors have focused on the subjective approach, considering employees' preferences and perceptions guided by employees' circumstances (Knox & Wright, 2022).

With regards to objective job quality indicators, they can be both economic, such as salary, or non-economic such as type of contract (temporary vs. permanent) or task variety (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Subjective job quality indicators involve employee perceptions and assessments, for instance a personal evaluation of work meaningfulness. In addition, they can be conceptualized from a fit perspective, which focuses on the extent to which the job is congruent with the individual preferences, individual circumstances, and characteristics. In this line, researchers agree that the subjective evaluation of job quality or what is a good or bad job may depend on sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and qualifications (Knox & Wright, 2022). Moreover, individual circumstances (e.g., career stages, economic burdens, family issues) may affect how individuals experience their jobs and their preferences for various job characteristics (Kalleberg, 2018; Peiró et al., 2015), which may affect their *understanding* of job quality.

1.4.3 Fit Between the Job Requirements and the Job Incumbent's Characteristics

As mentioned before, the literature on job quality indicators is not limited to either objective characteristics of the job or to personal (subjective) assessments of the job features. There are job quality indicators that focus on the match or fit between the person and the job. This opens an interesting question in job quality research, an aspect that is not independent from the employee but instead reflects a direct relationship between the job and some employee characteristics. Accordingly, the focus of analysis tackled by this type of job quality indicators is denominated Person-Job (P-J) fit (Green et al., 2021). For instance, the European Union's Employment in Europe (2001, 2002) report suggests that job quality assessments must also include evaluations of the worker-job match. An example of such a person-job fit indicator is educational fit. Previous research has highlighted two types of educational fit, horizontal and vertical (Somers et al., 2019). Horizontal fit refers to the fit between employees' educational field of study and the field of their job. Vertical fit refers to the fit between the educational level required by the job and the educational level attained by the employee. Educational fit has been used as a job quality indicator in previous research (González-Romá et al., 2018). In addition, UNECE's job quality index measures horizontal fit by ascertaining the extent to which individuals' skills match the skills requirements of jobs (UNECE, 2015). Educational fit is an important indicator of job quality, and conversely educational misfit has been related to various negative employee consequences. Horizontal educational misfit often has unfavourable effects on employees' outcomes, such as wage penalty and low job satisfaction (Somers et al., 2019). Moreover, vertical misfit, specifically overqualification and overeducation, has been negatively related to wellbeing, job satisfaction and positively to turnover (see for a review and meta-analysis Harari et al., 2017).

1.4.4 Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Indicators of Job Quality

Another categorization of the indicators of job quality is their intrinsic versus extrinsic nature. The characteristics of work considered "intrinsic" are those that focus on the nature of the activity itself, or also considered as inherent aspects of the job or work process itself (Cascales Mira, 2021; Warhurst et al., 2022). For instance, variety, control, work effort, autonomy, and work meaningfulness. A good example of intrinsic job quality indicators can be found in the literature of job design based on the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and its expanded version: the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) proposed by Morgerson and Humphrey (2006). In contrast, the extrinsic aspects refer to the consequences of the work or outcomes of carrying out a job. For instance, salary and prestige, since they are not deployed within the workplace (Warhurst et al., 2022).

Intrinsic job quality indicators have been widely used in various international indexes and surveys, especially in Europe by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). Through their European Working Conditions Survey, Eurofound examines various aspects of intrinsic job quality and regularly report on the most significant dimensions. In 2012, Green and Mostafa utilized data from the fifth wave of the survey to analyse work quality in Europe in their report titled "Trends in Job Quality in Europe." This report introduces an "Index of Intrinsic Work Characteristics" comprising dimensions such as the quality of the work itself (including skills and autonomy), a positive social environment (workplace relationships and absence of negative aspects), a favourable physical environment (lack of risks), and lower work intensity (effort required). Additionally, the report "Health and well-being at work: A report based on the fifth European Working Conditions Survey" (2012) highlights, based on the model proposed by Green and Mostafa (2012), the intrinsic characteristics of work as one of the fundamental dimensions of work quality. Recently, another indicator used to measure job quality with a specific focus on the

intrinsic job characteristics is the European Intrinsic Job Quality Index (Cascales-Mira, 2021). This measure focuses on four intrinsic job quality indicators: autonomy, interaction, meaningfulness, and intensity (the latter with a reverse scoring).

We have reviewed various categorizations of job quality indicators. This is important to answer the call made by one of the most prominent researchers in job quality, Muñoz de Bustillo, who encourages the use of various indicators across the outlined categorizations. One of the first conceptualization of job quality that followed this recommendation is the *Index of Job Quality*, which has been tested in various EU member States (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2009; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). The authors proposed several indicators such as *employment quality*, including pay, contractual stability, development opportunities, working time duration, scheduling flexibility, and intensity. These indicators were accompanied by *intrinsic work quality* indicators, which were divided into *objective* indicators (autonomy and skills) and *subjective* indicators (such as powerfulness, meaningfulness, social support and self-fulfilment). It is important to mention that in this model the authors operationalize autonomy as an objective indicator of job quality because it is naturally measured at the job level and refers to the degree of freedom or discretion that the employee has within his or her job. In this model, autonomy is measured via three variables *autonomy for methods*, whether the employee can choose or change the order of the work tasks; *autonomy for scheduling*, whether the employee can choose the speed of work and can decide on the work schedule, and finally *autonomy for criteria*, whether the worker has to assess by himself/herself the quality of his/her own work. The objectivity is argued by the nature of the job, for instance professionals and the self-employed workers have high autonomy, whereas machine operators have low autonomy. Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge that autonomy is similar to powerfulness (a subjective indicator) based on Blauner's model of subjective perception of latitude at work. In fact, in

their model, autonomy and powerfulness are measured by the same items. We can conclude that autonomy can have both an objective and subjective aspect.

1.5 Theoretical framework for Study 1: Does the relationship between objective and subjective job quality indicators depend on preferences and gender?

Study 1 of this doctoral thesis investigates the contribution of several objective indicators of job quality to perceived job quality as a subjective job quality indicator. Specifically, in this study we focus on the following employment characteristics: type of contract (permanent vs. temporary), employment relationship (full-time vs. part-time), schedule predictability (fixed vs. irregular working days), and the following job characteristics: horizontal educational fit and vertical educational (mis)fit (i.e., overeducation). Moreover, to provide a person-centred approach, we investigate whether the relationships between employment characteristics and perceived job quality are moderated by employees' employment characteristics preferences and gender.

To justify the study and the theoretical framework used, we start off by presenting the literature on the relationship between objective and subjective job quality indicators. We next turn to comprehend the individual context in perceived job quality by presenting two theories used to explain the relationships investigated in our study. First, we present the Person-Job fit theory (Edwards, 1991), which highlights the importance of fit between the employee and the job. We use this theory to explain the moderating role of employment preferences in the employment characteristics-perceived job quality relationship. Second, we present the Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987), which explains the influence of gender on human behaviour, preferences and perceptions. In our study, we use this theory as the rationale for the moderating role of gender in the two-way interaction between the current employment characteristics and the preferred employment characteristics when explaining perceived job quality.

1.5.1 The Relationship Between Objective and Subjective Job Quality Indicators

As we described previously, an important aspect in job quality research is the objective versus subjective dichotomy. The objective domain has been more common perhaps because it has been applied by a wider range of disciplines that investigate job quality using objective indicators. Although interest in subjective aspects of job quality has been rising recently (especially with the scholarly conversation moving toward a person-centred contextualized approach to job quality, Findlay et al., 2013), subjective job quality has been neglected in most research (Handel, 2005). Understanding employee assessments of job quality is especially important because beliefs and assessments can impact behaviour (Warhurst et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that there might be an interesting interplay between objective and subjective job quality indicators, such as the research on objective and subjective job insecurity shows (Klandermans et al., 2010). Knox and Wright (2022) specifically advocate for an interplay between a subjective and an objective approach to job quality with the aim of providing the needed holistic view about job quality. Therefore, an interplay between objective and subjective indicators of job quality may be a path to improve our understanding about individual perceptions of job quality. As the subjective approach to job quality suggests, to understand individual perceptions of job quality we also need to consider individual circumstances. For instance, employee preferences for some job characteristics can influence the perceptions and experience of the actual job characteristics (Findlay et al., 2013; Kalleberg, 2018; Warhurst et al., 2022). However, employees' preferences are not created in a social vacuum, but they might be rather largely influenced by sociodemographic characteristics and social norms (Kalleberg et al., 2018; Peiró et al., 2015).

1.5.2 Person-Job Fit Theory

The research underlying Person-Job Fit (P-J) Fit Theory (Edwards, 1991) is a result from various studies in industrial-organizational psychology that aim to understand how

individuals interact with their job environment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Many studies in organizational behaviour and occupational health psychology have emphasized the importance of *fit*, or match between employee characteristics and job characteristics for obtaining positive employee and organizational outcomes. This theory proposes two basic categories of fit. The first one is the Demands-Abilities fit, which refers to the extent to which the employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities match those required by the job, for instance an educational fit. The second is the Needs-Supplies fit, which refers to the extent to which the employee's needs, desires and preferences match what the job provides to meet those needs (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Oh et al., 2014). Empirical evidence has supported that when a person's needs, preferences or abilities fit the ones demanded by the job, employees experience various positive outcomes such as high performance, work engagement, meaningfulness, and job satisfaction, on the one hand, and low stress and less intentions to quit on the other hand (see for a review Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Langgeng et al., 2021). Given the importance of person job fit for the overall work experience, this can be a fruitful theoretical framework to understand the interplay between objective and subjective indicators of job quality. In fact, when studying the fit between the actual and preferred employment characteristics, researchers introduce the term job status congruence or voluntary jobs (Loughlin & Murray, 2013; Veliziotis et al., 2015). Research has shown that being in temporary jobs involuntarily has greater negative impact on job satisfaction than when being voluntarily in these employment types (Krausz, 2000; Silla et al., 2005). Moreover, studies have shown that employees experience work more negatively when they have part-time jobs involuntarily than when they are in these work arrangements voluntarily (Spreitzer et al., 2017).

1.5.3 Social Role Theory

As mentioned previously, employees' preferences are not created in a social vacuum, in fact they might be rather largely influenced by sociodemographic characteristics and social

norms (Kalleberg et al., 2018; Peiró et al., 2015). To better grasp the influence of one of the most influential individual characteristics on behaviour, expectations, and perceptions – gender- we turn to one of the most popular theories on gender - the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987). Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) poses that societies have traditionally assigned different social roles and responsibilities to men and women. According to this theory, men and women have distinct social roles and exhibit variations in their emotions, thoughts, and actions as a result of their differing beliefs about gender roles. Gender role beliefs refer to individuals' understandings of the societal roles assigned to men and women in a specific culture or community (Eagly, 1987; Kugler et al., 2017). These beliefs are shaped through social learning, as men and women observe how social roles are performed, leading to the development of distinct thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in each gender (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Traditionally, the male role has been associated with being the provider or breadwinner, while the female role has been linked to being the homemaker (Eagly et al., 2000; Konrad et al., 2000). Men are typically expected to prioritize work, while women are expected to prioritize family, nurturing and caregiving tasks (Ellemers, 2018).

Research has shown that acting in an incongruent way with one's gender role can lead to punishment because one is breaking the social norm of the specific gender role (Akinola et al., 2019; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Studies suggest that men in part-time and temporary employment may be seen as violating standard breadwinning models of masculinity (Cha, 2010). Moreover, it has been shown that 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). Similarly, women face many challenges throughout their careers and sometimes have to accommodate to meet female gender role expectations. Thus, they may accept objectively low employment quality characteristics, as

occupational downgrading and reducing work hours, to fulfil family responsibilities (Kalleberg, 2018).

Thus, it seems that the preferences for certain employment characteristics might be guided by social gender role beliefs, and as Fagan (2004) suggests more women, compared to men, might prefer part-time jobs to accommodate domestic responsibilities and childcare. Although the idea that gender role beliefs may trigger differences in preferences about job characteristics has some theoretical and empirical support, not all the empirical evidence supports gender differences in job characteristics preferences. For instance, 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.

In conclusion, this theory provides a solid foundation to understand possible gender differences in specific interactions between employment preferences and actual employment characteristics that will facilitate a more contextualized knowledge of perceived job quality.

1.6 Theoretical Framework for Study 2: The Influence of Employment Quality on Employee Health

With Study 2 in this doctoral dissertation, we aim to contribute to the knowledge of *how* and *why* employment quality is related to employee health by investigating two mediating mechanisms in this relationship: work engagement and affective job insecurity. To understand the need and theoretical framework for this study, we start this section by presenting the literature on the job quality-health relationship. Next, we focus on a specific subarea within the job quality field (employment quality) and its impact on employee health. We continue to present the theoretical rationale of the study, which is based on four theories.

First, we present the Dual Labour Market Theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971) as a basis for the operationalization of the employment quality construct in our study. Second, we present the Job Demands-Resources Theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) used to explain the relationship between employment quality and work engagement. Third, we describe the Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004) to explain the relationship between work engagement as a positive psychological state and employee health. Fourth, we describe the Stress Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) as a theoretical justification for the mediator role of affective job insecurity in the employment quality-health relationship.

1.6.1 Job Quality Promotes Health

As we mentioned previously, job quality is considered a key factor that enables sustainable development for societies, organizations, and employees (Findlay et al., 2017; Warhurst et al., 2022). In this regard, a particular topic of interest is the influence that job quality has on employee health and wellbeing. In fact, job quality is a widely recognized social determinant of health (Benach et al., 2014; Quinlan & Bohle, 2015; WHO, 2014). The literature about consequences of job quality has emphasized employee health as a key outcome. The existence of occupational health medicine and occupational psychology as specific disciplines that investigate working conditions and their influence on health are additional indicators of the importance of the job quality-health relationship.

Before we delve into the literature of the relationship between job quality and health, we need to note that they are two different concepts. Some research considers health and wellbeing as indicators of job quality; for instance, if an employee is healthy and satisfied, this itself is considered an indicator of high job quality. However, this approach has been criticized (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011; Green et al., 2021). Green et al. (2021) propose that although there is a rationale supporting that job quality indicators should be positively associated with health and wellbeing, it is important to distinguish between these concepts and investigate the

relative importance of different job quality indicators for different health indicators. This is of particular importance due to the fact that these concepts (job quality, health, and wellbeing) are multidimensional (Green et al., 2021). Similarly, an approach to use wellbeing as an indicator of job quality has been criticized. For instance, the use of job satisfaction as a general job quality indicator has been criticized (Warhurst et al., 2022). The main critics revolve around the fact that although there is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and job quality, there are many unrelated and endogenous variables that affect job satisfaction levels, as a result, job satisfaction should not be used as a general job quality indicator (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011).

There is a well-established positive relationship between job quality and health/wellbeing. As mentioned above, because we aim to provide a more nuanced knowledge about the outcomes of job quality, we will distinguish between work quality and employment quality. We need to note that most of the research examining the relationship between job quality and health/wellbeing, has focused on work quality. This is in line with the evolution of job quality research, which in the beginning focused on work characteristics.

Moreover, in its early stages the focus of occupational health research was on environmental factors and physical hazards at the workplace that may damage employee health (Peckham et al., 2019). The focus shifted to psychosocial risks at the workplace especially in the 1980s, with studies on working conditions and their influence on work stress, depression, and sick leave (Albin et al., 2022). One of the most prominent theories used to explain the relationship between job characteristics and health/wellbeing is the demand-control model by Karasek (1979). This theory posits that working conditions characterized by excessive demands, lack of control and lack of social support, are likely to produce health risks for the employees.

Considering the increased changes in the employment arrangements around the world, there is a great need to expand the knowledge on the job quality- health relationship by investigating the impact employment quality has on employee health.

1.6.2 The Influence of Employment Quality on Health

In general, previous research has highlighted the role of work characteristics in employee health, however it has neglected the role of employment characteristics in employee health (Benach et al., 2014; Peckham et al., 2019). Hence, an important omission in the job quality-health relationship exists. By distinguishing work quality from employment quality, researchers can advance knowledge about the job quality-health relationship and provide specific policy directions for health promotion at work (Peckham et al., 2019). Moreover, it is important to investigate the consequences of employment quality for health due to the change in employment arrangements reflected in the increase in nonstandard working arrangement (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Recent research has pointed out on a positive relationship between employment quality and health (Benach et al., 2014; Donnelly, 2021; Giudici & Morcelli, 2019), however understanding *why* employment quality has an impact on employee health is not sufficiently clear and is crucial for both theory and practice (Ahonen et al., 2019). Previous research has highlighted some possible underlying mechanisms, such as material deprivation, employee stressors, and occupational risk factor. However, psychological mechanisms with the exception of stress have not been considered and are a crucial missing piece of the puzzle that needs to be investigated in order to understand the impact of employment quality on health (Ahonen et al., 2019).

1.6.3 Dual Labour Market Theory

As mentioned previously, to define and operationalize employment quality we can look at the labour market theories that explain the differences between distinct working arrangements. Specifically, the dual labour market theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971) posits that

the labour market is divided into two segments: a primary segment that includes the established core of the labour market, and a secondary segment that consists of peripheral jobs. The primary segment is composed of jobs with standard employment relationships (SER), which are characterized by full-time, permanent contracts and higher salaries, whereas the secondary segment is characterized by nonstandard working arrangements characterized by part-time, temporary, and low paid jobs. On one hand, the primary labour market segment and the associated SER working arrangements represent high quality employment. On the other hand, the secondary labour market segment includes nonstandard working arrangements triggered by the neoliberal politics of market flexibilization and represent low quality employment (Peckham et al., 2021). The SER-type of employment is still deeply embedded in employees' mindsets as the gold standard for employment quality (Vanroelen et al., 2021).

1.6.4 Job Demands-Resources Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JDR) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) was developed with the aim to merge and build upon the knowledge of occupational health theories such as the demand-control theoretical model by Karasek (1979). The JDR theory posits that all job characteristics, whether they are related to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job, can be categorized into two main groups: job demands and job resources. These categories encompass the specific and distinct characteristics of any given job, work environment, or role (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Job demands refer to those “physical, social or organizational job aspects that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). For instance, examples of job demands include job monotony, interpersonal conflicts, role conflict, and high workload.

Contrary to job demands, *job resources* are related to “physical, social and organizational aspects of the job that: may be functional in achieving work-related goals;

reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; and stimulate personal growth and development” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). Some of the well-researched job resources are social support, autonomy, feedback, and opportunities for development.

The core idea of the JD-R theory is that job demands and job resources trigger distinct processes (Demerouti et al., 2001). The first process refers to the fact that job demands can initiate a *health-impairment* process where prolonged exposure to high job demands leads to energy drain and strain in employees. Empirical evidence has supported this idea showing a negative association between job demands and exhaustion, fatigue, and anxiety (Bakker et al., 2006; Rai, 2018), which in result can lead to health problems. In particular, burnout has been found to be the result of long exposure to job demands. Burnout is a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic stressors on the job characterized by emotional exhaustion, a cynical attitude towards one's work, and doubts about one's competence (Maslach et al., 1996). Burnout is one of the most popular topics in occupational health psychology since it has been found to harm both physical and mental health (Demerouti et al., 2021).

The second process in the JDR model refers to a *motivational process* stimulated by job resources. When employees have ample job resources, they become more motivated, which leads to increased work engagement. Work engagement refers to a mental state characterized by energy, enthusiasm, and deep immersion in one's work, making time seem to pass quickly (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job resources can trigger both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Regarding intrinsic motivation, job resources stimulate intrinsic motivation via the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, job resources can trigger extrinsic motivation by facilitating the achievement of work goals (Li et al., 2022).

Although initially these processes were conceptualized independently, nowadays research has shown that there are cross-links between the two processes, so that resources are also negatively related to employee strains, and demands are also negatively related to motivational states (Alarcon, 2011; Crawford et al., 2010; González-Romá et al., 2020; Lesener et al., 2019; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

The JD-R theory has been widely applied in job quality research. In fact, it is the theoretical framework for the OECD Guidelines for Measuring the Quality of the Working Environment (OECD, 2017). The results from OECD research based on these guidelines highlights the importance of the quality of the working environment for workers' well-being and health, especially the importance of balancing the job resources that are available to workers to meet their job demands (Murtin et al, 2022).

Considering the importance of this theory for job quality research and its specific explanation on the motivational pathway, we believe it is a suitable theory to comprehend how and why employment quality can engage employees.

1.6.5 A Positive Psychology Approach to Health: The Broaden and Build Theory

To fully understand how jobs can influence health, we need to expand our view beyond the stress strain approach and look at how positive psychological states can influence health. In this regard, we draw on one of the most renowned positive psychology theories: The Broaden-and-Build Theory (Frederickson, 2004). This theory posits that unlike negative emotions, which narrow people's ideas about action (e.g., fight or flight), positive emotions and positive affective states broaden the mindset and encourage new ways of thinking and action (Fredrickson, 2004). As a result of broadened mindsets, people build personal psychosocial resources (e.g., resilience, optimism) as reserves that can be especially important in challenging times.

Accordingly, it has been hypothesized that cognitive and behavioural repertoires triggered by positive emotions and positive affective states may produce biopsychosocial resources useful for coping with stress and promoting health (Garland et al., 2010). Empirical evidence has supported the importance of positive emotions as an avenue toward health (De Steno et al., 2013). Studies have shown that people who frequently experience positive emotions can adapt their characteristic cardiovascular patterns toward better health (Kok et al., 2013). Regarding mental health, unlike depression that narrows thinking and triggers a downward spiral of wellbeing, positive affective states trigger broader thinking and an upward spiral of wellbeing and mental health (Green et al., 2016).

In the context of work, research has shown that psychological states such as work engagement represent a *positive affective-motivational* state, which in line with the Broaden and Build theory, can trigger an upward spiral of growth of personal resources (Salanova et al., 2010). Salanova et al. (2010) argue that work engagement is more persistent and pervasive than momentary positive emotions, nevertheless it represents a distinct positive affective-motivational state that may broaden personal resources. In addition, and according to the Broaden and Build theory, it has been shown that work engagement is an initiator of positive emotions among employees. As such, it triggers the broaden and build pathway towards personal resources (Salanova et al., 2010; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008).

Taking into consideration the powerful positive impact that positive affective states can have on health via changes in behavioural, cognitive, and physiological processes, we assume that engaged workers are not just more motivated but also more likely to be healthier than nonengaged employees. In a nutshell, this theory explains how and why work engagement, as a positive psychological state, may promote employee health.

1.6.6 Job Insecurity as a Stress Pathway

In relation to health, previous research has supported the health benefits of having standard employment arrangements in comparison to nonstandard working arrangements (Quinlan & Bohle, 2015). Nonstandard employment is typically viewed as precarious employment, a type of employment defined as low employment quality (Vives et al., 2013). Peckham et al. (2019) have suggested that nonstandard employment may deteriorate employee health via several mechanisms, such as material deprivation, employee stressors, and occupational risk factors. The stress among workers in nonstandard working arrangements has particularly caught the attention of researchers. Scholars have suggested that the precarity of nonstandard working arrangements plays a role as workplace stressor (Amable et al., 2001; Kalleberg et al., 2000). This has been especially emphasized by the *job insecurity* employees in nonstandard working arrangements experience. Literature on job insecurity distinguishes two aspects: *cognitive* insecurity, and *affective* insecurity (Jiang & Lavayasse, 2018). Specifically, Cognitive Job Insecurity (CJI) refers to the perceived risk of losing one's job or job-related aspects, (Shoss, 2017). Whereas Affective Job Insecurity (AJI) can be described as the emotional responses that arise from the perceived job threat, including feelings of concern, worry, anxiety, and fear (Huang et al., 2010). Temporary and part-time employees generally show higher levels of job insecurity (i.e., perceived powerlessness to maintain the desired continuity in a threatened job situation, Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) than employees in permanent full-time jobs. Keim et al. (2014) argue that temporary jobs are inherently insecure due to the limited duration of the temporary job contract. Moreover, nonstandard workers are usually hired to work on non-core activities of the organization, meaning that besides temporary workers even part-time workers and low-paid workers may experience job insecurity since organizations do not invest as much in them and are not protected by the organization as their colleagues in permanent and full-time jobs (Sparks et al., 2001).

Literature on job insecurity is firm on the fact that job insecurity is one of the most prominent workplace stressors (De Witte et al., 2016). One of the theories used to explain how stress develops is the appraisal framework (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which we describe in the next section.

1.6.7 Stress Appraisal Theory

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), “psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). Thus, this is a transactional theory that highlights the interaction between the individual and the environment.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed a two-stage cognitive appraisal process to explain why people vary in their responses to stressful situations. The first stage, known as primary appraisal, involves assessing the level of harm posed by the situation. The second stage, called secondary appraisal, entails an evaluation of the resources the individual possesses to cope with the situation. When a situation is perceived as threatening and there is a perception of lack of resources to deal with it, a stress response occurs, which can have long lasting negative impacts on both physical health and psychological wellbeing (Lazarus et al., 1985).

In addition, the authors highlight some situational characteristics that can make a situation potentially threatening. First, situations *associated with negative consequences*, especially if the individual knows the damage of the negative consequences of such situation. Second, the *ambiguity* that is associated with aspects related to the situation of threat (e.g., its duration). Ambiguity happens when there is a lack of information, for instance, when people do not know when and how something will happen, or its duration. Third, the *uncertainty* about whether the threat situation is going to take place or not. In this regard, the uncertainty about the occurrence of an event makes it difficult to take actions to deal with it, which leads to

feelings of worry, anxiety, and discomfort. Moreover, the authors highlight that individuals will react differently depending on the *duration* of exposure to the stressful situation, so that prolonged events may have the potential to trigger higher stress. Similarly, dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty triggers lack of control which makes it challenging to handle the situation.

Accordingly, job insecurity can be a source of stress due to the anticipation of a distressing event with adverse outcomes. Job insecurity is particularly challenging to deal with because it encompasses the risky characteristics of a stressful situation, ambiguity, uncertainty, and usually employees lack control over the situation. As such, job insecurity is a stressor that may negatively impact employee health.

1.7 Theoretical Framework for Study 3: Antecedents of Subjective Intrinsic Job Quality and its Impact on Wellbeing

With Study 3, we aim to zoom in on a specific subjective intrinsic job quality indicator: work meaningfulness. Specifically, we aim to expand its nomological network by first, investigating personal yet work-related resources (i.e., employability dimensions) as its antecedents, and second, by investigating its impact on a specific type of wellbeing: eudaimonic wellbeing at work. In this study, we propose work meaningfulness as a mediator between the employability dimensions career identity, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital, on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, on the other hand. We also examine the direct relationships between the employability dimensions and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. With this research we aim to uncover the role of a subjective job quality indicator as a possible integrator on two literature streams, vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing.

The literature and theoretical background for this study is explained below. We first present a short overview on the work meaningfulness literature with a special focus on its

antecedents. We then present the worker centric approach to work meaningfulness highlighting the theory of pathways to work meaningfulness by Rosso et al. (2010). This theory tries to explain the psychological processes based on the *self* that may trigger work meaningfulness. Next, we present the concept of employability as a personal psychosocial resource based on the theoretical model by Fugate et al (2004) and the literature on employability as antecedent of job quality. Finally, we present the concept of wellbeing highlighting the literature on eudaimonic wellbeing at work as a job quality outcome.

1.7.1 Subjective Intrinsic Job Quality: Work Meaningfulness

Work meaningfulness is considered to be one of the most important job quality indicators. It is an indicator valued by employees, sometimes even preferred over other job characteristics, such as higher salary (Achor et al., 2018; Hu & Hirsh, 2017). Although there are some slight variations in the definition of work meaningfulness, the overall consensus is that it refers to the extent to which work is experienced as personally significant and worthwhile, and with a positive valence (Rosso et al., 2010). According to the Oxford Handbook of Job Quality, work meaningfulness is categorized as a subjective intrinsic indicator of job quality (Warhurst et al., 2022) because it emphasizes the personal subjective evaluation and experience of something as worthy. It is subjective as it necessarily travels through the self (Knox & Wright, 2022).

It is considered an especially important job quality indicator because of its various positive consequences for employees. Research has shown that work meaningfulness had the largest effects on employee mental health in comparison with other job quality indicators, such as earnings, career prospects, and physical environment (Wang et al., 2022). In addition, empirical evidence supports its positive impact on employee outcomes such as job satisfaction (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010), work engagement (Lee et al., 2016; Steger, et al., 2013), performance (Harris et al., 2007), health (Wang et al., 2022), life meaning and life satisfaction

(Bailey et al., 2019). Allan's (2019) meta-analysis supported the notion that people who experience work meaningfulness *feel better and work better*.

1.7.2 Antecedents of Work Meaningfulness

Given the importance of work meaningfulness for employees and organizations, there has been a wide range of studies focusing on identifying the antecedents of work meaningfulness.

A recent review of work meaningfulness antecedents has identified and categorized its antecedents on various levels: individual, work, organizational, and societal (Lysova et al., 2019). Research on this topic began from a work centric approach focusing on work characteristics and work design that enables employees a meaningful experience. In this regard, research has mostly drawn on the Job Characteristics Theory (JCT; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This theoretical model outlines the factors (job characteristics) required for employees to be internally motivated and achieve high performance in their work. It suggests that five aspects of a job (skills variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) lead to three essential psychological states (work meaningfulness, feeling responsible, and having knowledge of results), which in turn produce positive outcomes (intrinsic motivation, high-quality performance, job satisfaction, and reduced absenteeism). According to the Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), workers experience positive emotions when they successfully complete a task that holds personal significance. In addition to this theory, the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the theory on job crafting (Tims & Bakker, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) explain how employees feel a sense of self-determination and craft their jobs to align it with their preferences and needs to ultimately experience work meaningfulness (Lysova et al., 2019). Supportive and high-quality workplace relationships have also been found to be an important work aspect that facilitates meaningfulness at work (Bailey & Madden, 2016).

Another category of antecedents has emphasized organizational factors. Following this approach, variables such as leadership has been investigated. For instance, Lysova et al. (2019) outline that leadership, especially specific leadership styles such as transformational and charismatic leadership, have been found to foster work meaningfulness. Moreover, the type of organizational culture is important for work meaningfulness, with some research highlighting the role of supportive and innovative organizational culture (Cardador & Rupp, 2011) as well as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) organizational policies and practices in fostering work meaningfulness (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Akdoğan et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, it is surprising that personal antecedents of work meaningfulness have not received much attention. Only some studies have indicated that personal narratives (i.e., individuals' idiosyncratic, internal, dynamic life stories, constructed by people to achieve coherence from their experience), characteristic adaptations (i.e., implicit goals prompted by personality traits which comprehensively capture individual differences in intrinsic motivation, such as striving for competence, autonomy, status/power, or relatedness), and some dispositional signatures (e.g., personal strengths that capture the individual qualities and their potential to contribute to the world around them and achieve well-being) may foster work meaningfulness (Bailey et al. 2019; Lysova et al., 2019). Moreover, there is a lack of studies that focus on personal resources in the work context that may be beneficial for work meaningfulness. This has been underlined by authors that raised the concern that there are some important gaps in our understanding of how and why some individuals might find their work more or less meaningful than others (Bailey et al., 2019).

1.7.3 Worker Centric Pathways to Work Meaningfulness

In addition to the work centric approach to work meaningfulness that focused on the work characteristics that can trigger work meaningfulness, there has been a recent shift toward understating work meaningfulness from a worker centric approach. The worker centric

approach focuses on the importance of the worker and the self in the experience of work meaningfulness. For instance, scholars suggest that “perceptions of meaningfulness must necessarily travel through the self” (Rosso et al., 2010 p. 15). Accordingly, this approach considers employees as active creators of meaning (Rosso et al., 2010), concluding that the experience of work meaningfulness depends on what employees themselves bring to work (Chalofsky, 2003).

Based on the worker centric approach, and to answer how this experience of work meaningfulness travels via the self, Rosso and colleagues (2010) developed a theoretical framework that explains the specific mechanisms that allow employees to experience work meaningfulness. The authors of this model argue that the experience of work meaningfulness resides in the intersection of two dimensions: agency-communion and self-others. Figure 1.1 shows the theoretical model, the two dimensions, and the intersections of these dimensions where meaningfulness can occur. Because we focus on work meaningfulness as an experience that travels via the self, we will only highlight the pathways in the areas obtained by the intersections of the *self* with the agency and communion poles accordingly.

The authors propose that when the self interacts with the communion aspect (i.e., drive to connect, contact, attach) it triggers the area *self-connection* which encompasses actions that foster alignment with one's self-perception and inner identity. Additionally, they propose that the area where the *self* aligns with agency (i.e., drive to differentiate, master) is called *individuation* and refers to actions that imbue the self with meaning by defining its value and worthy. The actions in the self-connection and individuation areas are based on different mechanisms.

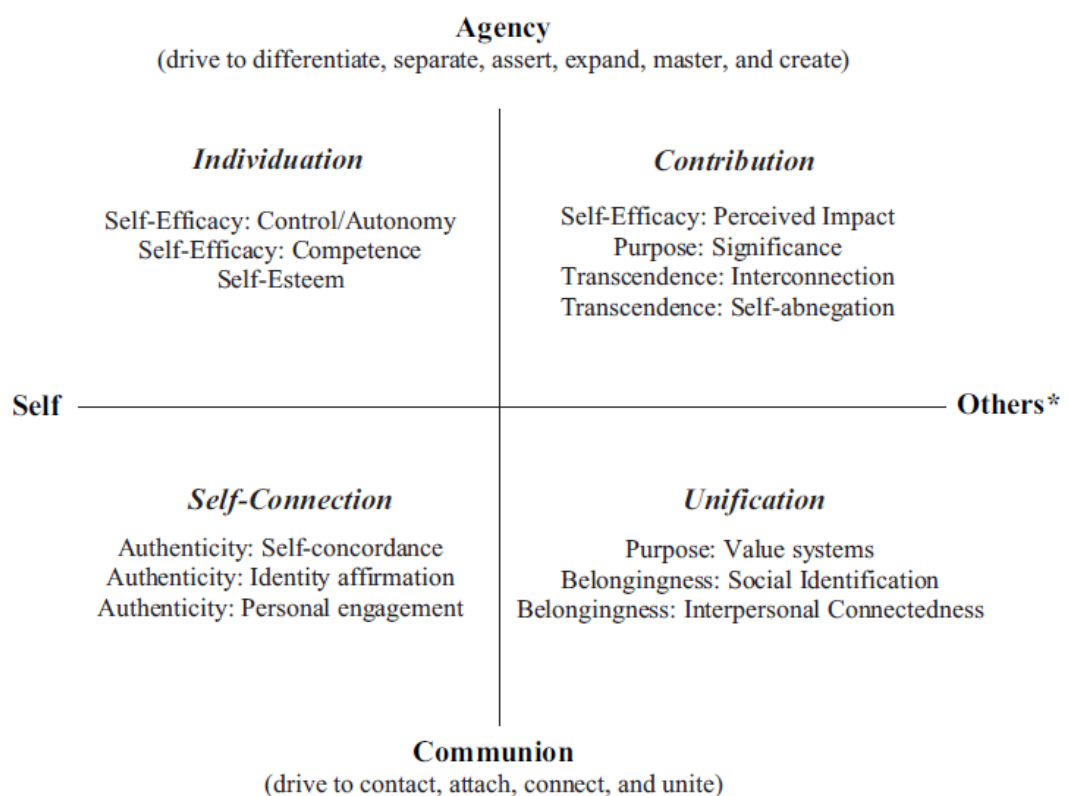
With regards to the work meaningfulness mechanisms related to *self-connection* the authors highlight the authenticity pathway. The *authenticity* pathway is based on the sense of coherence or alignment between one's behaviour and perceptions of the “true” self. According

to this pathway employees experience work meaningfulness when they engage in work activities congruent to their self and which reaffirm their identity.

The individuation area of work meaningfulness is based on two different mechanisms. First, the *self-efficacy* pathway based on self-beliefs that the individual has the power and ability to produce an intended effect or make a difference (Bandura, 1977). This pathway has been seen as a way to meaningfulness because it reassures individuals that they have power, are agentic actors, and have autonomy and control (Rosso et al., 2010). Second, the *self-esteem* pathway refers to the individual's assessment of his or her own self-worth. Feelings of accomplishment or affirmation resulting from successful work experiences can help individuals to feel they are valuable and worthy individuals, which is a basic human need. This meaningfulness is rooted in the senses of oneself as worthwhile (Rosso et al., 2010).

Figure 1.1

Theory of Four Pathways to Work Meaningfulness by Rosso et al. (2010)



*Others = other individuals, groups, collectives, organizations, and higher powers

1.7.4 Employability as Antecedent of Job Quality

Given the rapid transformation of the world of work, employability is a particularly relevant individual resource, since it can facilitate people to face with more confidence the constant changing labour market (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015). Throughout its evolution employability has been operationalized in various ways. According to the review of Di Fabio (2017), some authors highlight employability as maintenance of work (Hillage & Pollard, 1998), personal resources (Fugate et al., 2004), employability orientation (Van Dam, 2004), sustainability of work, qualifications, and future-oriented perspectives (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), and meta-competences (Coetzee, 2008).

Of particular interest for our research is the operationalisation of employability as a personal resource. In this line, the theory of employability as a psychosocial construct by Fugate et al. (2004) posits that employability is composed of four dimensions (personal resources) that act synergistically to facilitate the identification and the materialization of job opportunities. According to these authors, the first dimension of employability is career identity. It answers the questions “who I am” or “who I want to be” careerwise. Career identity is the motivational and cognitive component of employability, also referred to as the ‘internal’ cognitive compass. that guides individuals in managing their career by directing and regulating their behaviour (Fugate et al., 2004). The second dimension of employability is personal adaptability, which refers to the ability to adapt to changing situations, based on personal characteristics that predispose individuals to engage in (pro)active adaptive efforts (Fugate et al., 2004). Aadaptability allows individuals to be highly tolerant towards uncertainty in the labor market and be comfortable in new changing situations (O’Connell et al., 2008). The third dimension of employability is social capital, which captures the interpersonal aspect of employability. This dimension refers to the ‘know-who’, that is, the social network that an individual has from which he or she can obtain career relevant information. This network can

be in the professional domains, like colleagues and experts in the professional field, or outside the professional domains, such as friends and family. The fourth and last dimension of employability is human capital, which is seen as a set of factors that can affect career and development opportunities (such as the education, training, professional experience, and competences that individuals possess). As such, human capital is a valuable personal resource employees bring in organizations because it facilitates job performance.

According to McArdle et al. (2007), this conceptualization of employability is a person-centred, psycho-social view, decoupled from one's employment status (referring to the fact that a person may be employable without necessarily being employed). This is in line with the idea that employability, as a psychosocial construct, is a personal resource that can facilitate obtaining a job and the maintenance of the employment relationship. As such, it provides support for the rationale that, conceptualized in this way, employability dimensions are resources, and the individual can and should be proactive in the development of these resources throughout his or her professional life. Alongside the benefits of increasing the opportunities for employment, employability has been positively associated with various outcomes, such as job performance (Rosenberg et al., 2012) and wellbeing indicators, specifically life satisfaction (Green, 2011) and job satisfaction (Gamboa et al., 2009; González-Romá et al., 2018).

The literature has suggested that employability is an antecedent of job quality. Gamboa et al. (2009) argued that employability allows employees to fulfil employers' expectations, making them more appealing to employers; in turn this allows employees more negotiation power when choosing employment. Accordingly, highly employable employees can obtain higher quality jobs because employers are likely to provide them with better quality jobs, but also because employees are likely to choose jobs according to their expectations and needs. Research has supported the notion of employability as antecedent of job quality. In particular,

González-Romá et al. (2018) have shown that employability is an antecedent of objective job quality indicators such as pay, hierarchical level, and vertical and horizontal educational fit.

Thus, the focus on employability as antecedent of job quality has been on objective job quality indicators, lacking to capture its impact on subjective intrinsic job quality features. In addition, given the importance of the construct there has been a recent call in the literature to expand the research on employability as antecedent of employee wellbeing outcomes such as eudaimonic well-being (Di Fabio, 2017) which we describe next.

1.7.5 Conceptualizations of Wellbeing

Besides health, wellbeing is another crucial outcome of job quality. Nowadays, the dominant conceptualization of wellbeing in psychology research considers two types of wellbeing: hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing (Grant & McGhee, 2021).

Hedonic wellbeing highlights the avoidance of pain and getting pleasure (Watson et al., 1988). Hedonic wellbeing has been widely researched in work psychology and has its cognitive and affective components (Diener et al., 2003). Positive and negative affect are measures of affective hedonic wellbeing, whereas job satisfaction is a cognitive indicator of hedonic wellbeing (Fisher, 2014; Grant & McGhee, 2021).

Contrary to hedonic wellbeing, eudaimonic well-being emphasizes a life well lived rather than pleasant. This idea is based on Aristotle's book *Nicomachean Ethics* (Haybron, 2016). Eudaimonic well-being has been often operationalized as psychological well-being (PWB), which focuses on positive optimal functioning rather than feelings. Eudaimonic wellbeing highlights growth, virtue, self-fulfilment, and right action (Grant & McGhee, 2021). The most widely used theory of eudaimonic well-being is the psychological well-being model by Ryff (1989). Ryff (1989) argues that eudaimonic wellbeing emphasizes individual flourishing and fulfilment of one's potential. Accordingly, this theory encompasses an individual's growth and fulfilment in six dimensions. The proposed dimensions of

psychological or eudemonic wellbeing are self-acceptance, purpose of life, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, autonomy, and personal growth (Ryff 1989; Ryff & Keyes 1995). However, personal growth and purpose in life are considered the two key dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

1.7.6 Job Quality a Way Towards Eudaimonic Wellbeing at Work

Recently, scholars have proposed that employee eudaimonic wellbeing is especially important and consider it an avenue toward achieving sustainable organizations, because it fosters employee health, intrinsic motivation, and, ultimately, performance (Sonnentag, 2015). Employee eudaimonic wellbeing has been positively related to health, and previous studies have emphasized its role in the prevention of mental illness and psychological distress (Ryff, 2016). Some research suggests that it may be even more important than hedonic wellbeing for some employee outcomes. For instance, in comparison with hedonic wellbeing at work, eudaimonic wellbeing at work is a stronger predictor of work performance (Peiró et al., 2019). Thus, understanding employee eudaimonic wellbeing is of particular importance not just for the wellbeing of employees itself, but for the overall organizational effectiveness and welfare.

Job quality has been positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing. Research on some of the concepts in the job quality family, such as quality of work life (Rathi et al., 2009; Rathi et al., 2011) and psychosocial working conditions (Schütte et al., 2014), have been positively associated with eudaimonic wellbeing. Furthermore, authors have highlighted job quality indicators, such as the job resources feedback, social support, task significance, and autonomy as antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2020).

However, most of the research on employee eudaimonic wellbeing has been domain free, measuring employee eudaimonic wellbeing without capturing the work context. In other words, a major part of the literature has measured employee eudaimonic wellbeing as domain free, thus neglecting to understand whether and how the job relates to the eudaimonic wellbeing

of employees. To comprehend better employee eudaimonic wellbeing, scholars have called for more work domain specific research. Research focused on domain-free eudaimonic wellbeing is inferior in capturing the particularities of contextualized wellbeing in comparison to work domain specific eudaimonic wellbeing research (Dagenais-Desmarais et al., 2017). As such, investigating work-specific eudaimonic well-being is crucial to understand employee eudaimonic wellbeing since “Wellbeing, construed as growth and human fulfillment, is profoundly influenced by the surrounding contexts” (Ryff & Synger, 2008, p. 14).

In line with the fact that specific eudaimonic wellbeing at work research is needed we would like to highlight that, there are important omissions regarding, how, and why employees experience eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Insight into the antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work is still limited (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2020). In this regard, when examining the antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work, research has focused on context-free personal resources such as psychological capital (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013), ignoring work-specific personal resources. Given the multidimensionality of job quality, more research is needed to understand personal work specific resources that may contribute to subjective job quality indicators, which in turn may facilitate eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Accordingly, scholars have called for an integration of vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work as a way to expand theory and the literature streams (Dik et al., 2019). Thus, a way forward to explain how job quality impacts eudaimonic wellbeing is to integrate literature streams and investigate personal resources from vocational psychology as antecedents of job quality and eudaimonic wellbeing.

1.8 Objectives of the doctoral dissertation

Taking into account the considerations above, we conclude that job quality is both a timely and relevant issue to investigate. As Findlay et al. (2013) state, the first step for providing job quality interventions and evidence-based job quality policy making starts at filling in some

important omissions in the job quality literature. Specifically, there is a call for a greater consensus around three key areas: the *dimensions of job quality*; the *antecedents* or *factors* that influence job quality; and the *outcomes or impact* of job quality (Findlay et al., 2013).

Acknowledging the complexity and multidimensional nature of job quality, this thesis aims to answer this call and tackle some of the unanswered questions about job quality by investigating the relationship between specific job quality indicators (objective and subjective), their antecedents (in particular antecedents of subjective job quality), and, in particular their consequences on employee health and wellbeing (in particular eudaimonic wellbeing at work). By doing so, we aim to answer the call for research that entangles the complexity of job quality and contributes to a refinement of the job quality theory while offering practical guidelines for the multiple stakeholders involved in the job quality challenge (Findlay et al., 2013; Warhurst et al., 2022).

1.8.1 Main Objective

The main objective of this thesis is to advance our knowledge about the nomological network of job quality by examining the relationships between specific objective and subjective job quality indicators, as well as identifying their antecedents and consequences for employee health and wellbeing.

Additionally, we divided the main objective into three specific objectives, each tackled by a separate study. These studies are presented in the corresponding chapters of the present doctoral thesis (Study 1: Chapter 3, Study 2: Chapter 4, and Study 3: Chapter 5).

1.8.2 Specific Objectives

Objective 1: To investigate the contribution of different objective indicators of job quality to perceived job quality (subjective job quality indicator). Specifically, we will focus on the following objective indicators of employment quality the employment characteristics: type of contract, employment relationship, schedule predictability, and

the following job characteristics from a person-job fit perspective: horizontal educational misfit and vertical educational misfit (i.e., overeducation). Moreover, we will investigate whether the employment characteristics - perceived job quality relationships are moderated by employees' employment characteristics preferences and gender.

As outlined above, objective and subjective job quality indicators may be related. It is particularly important to understand why a certain job can be perceived as high quality or low quality for some people. This will contribute to the lack of studies focusing on subjective job quality indicators (Handel, 2005). To do so, research is needed to understand what shapes perceived job quality. As mentioned before, employees may value different job aspects differently. Thus, it is important to examine the differential contribution of job characteristics to perceived job quality. In this study, we aim to investigate 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 indicators from the person-job fit perspective in particular educational misfit (horizontal and vertical (i.e., overeducation)) to perceived job quality. In addition, as the subjective approach to job quality highlights, preferences for certain employment characteristics and individual circumstances and characteristics may shape work experiences and perceptions (Warhurst et al., 2022; Knox & Wright, 2022). To provide a more nuanced contextual understanding of perceived job quality, it is important to investigate the moderating role of employment characteristics preferences and individual characteristics (such as gender) in the relationship between employment characteristics and perceived job quality. There is a well-documented literature on gender differences in objective job quality indicators favouring men (Ficapal-Cusí et al., 2018; Stier, 2012). However, whether these gender differences exist in subjective job quality remains an important gap in literature that needs to be tackled. Thus, based on Person-Job Fit theory (Edwards, 1991) and Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987), we aim to investigate whether

the employment characteristics - perceived job quality relationships are moderated by employees' employment characteristics preferences and gender.

By doing so, we want to deepen our theoretical understanding of the relationships between objective and subjective job quality indicators, provide information about when and do these relationships take place (or become stronger) by identifying the moderating roles of employment characteristics preferences and gender in these relationships. Practically, understanding what shapes perceived job quality and when, will provide person-centered guidelines to improve employees' perceived job quality.

Objective 2: To investigate whether the relationship between employment quality (particularly the degree to which employees have desirable employment characteristics: full-time jobs, permanent contracts, and higher salaries (vs. part-time jobs, temporary contracts, and lower salaries)), on the one side, and employee health complaints, on the other side, is mediated by work engagement and affective job insecurity.

Our literature review has shown that most of the research regarding the job quality-health relationship has focused on the impact that work quality has on employee health and not so much on the impact that employment quality can have on employee health. The increase in the labour market flexibility and nonstandard working arrangements has shifted the focus toward the influence of employment quality on health. Research supports the positive relationship between employment quality and employee health. On the one hand, specific studies focusing on employment quality indicators such as standard working arrangements characteristics (full-time, permanent, high paid jobs) show a positive relationship to employee health (Kalleberg, 2018). On the other hand, research on nonstandard employment has shown that employees in nonstandard working arrangements suffer more health problems than employees in standard working arrangements (Quinlan, 2015). Although research interest in the relationship between employment quality and health has been expanding, there is still a

significant omission in understanding the mechanisms underlying this relationship. With the exception of the stressor pathway, little is known about the underlying psychological mechanisms of this relationship, in other words, *why* employment quality is related to employee health (Ahonen et al., 2019).

Understanding the *why* in the employment quality-employee health is a crucial “increase in knowledge and an important refinement of the theory” (Spencer et al., 2005, p. 846). Especially, given the fact that employment quality is a social determinant of health that has been overlooked in job quality research. From a practical point of view, identifying the mechanisms involved in this relationship can provide policy makers and organizations with a refined evidence-based knowledge to make decisions on occupational health interventions, resulting in a betterment of employee health.

Hence, our second objective is to investigate whether the relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints is mediated by work engagement and affective job insecurity. In doing so, we want to expand the theoretical knowledge on the mechanisms underlying the employment quality-employee health relationship and answer the call for a better theoretical understanding about why employment quality is related to employee health (Ahonen et al., 2018; Benach et al., 2016). Moreover, we want to provide a more nuanced view of the relative importance of each of these mediators in the abovementioned relationship by comparing the two indirect effects of employment quality on employee health complaints via work engagement and affective job insecurity. Practically, providing evidence on the employment aspects that improve health can enrich the policy and decision making towards a healthy workforce.

Objective 3: To examine the relationships between Fugate et al.’s (2004) four employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital), on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, on the other hand.

In addition, to examine the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the abovementioned relationships, focusing then on the antecedents and consequences of this subjective indicator of job quality.

As our literature review has shown, work meaningfulness is a particularly relevant job quality indicator, concretely a subjective work quality indicator. However, important omissions in the nomological network of work meaningfulness exist in terms of its antecedents and outcomes. In particular, the identification of personal work-related antecedents of work meaningfulness has been neglected (Bailey et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019). Moreover, although previous research has shed light on the outcomes of work meaningfulness, research has not paid much attention to eudaimonic wellbeing at work as an outcome of work meaningfulness. Eudaimonic wellbeing is an increasingly important concern for organizations and employees, but the lack of domain specific eudaimonic wellbeing research has limited the knowledge on how subjective job quality may influence this concept (Mendonça et al., 2022).

Zooming out of work meaningfulness and focusing on eudaimoninc wellbeing literature we identified a similar gap in terms of personal work-related antecedents. As our review showed, most of the research focused on other factors beyond the individual or domain free personal antecedents (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2020).

To address these omissions, we shifted our attention to a recent idea that personal work-related resources can be found in the vocational psychology literature and integrating the literatures on vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work can be an opportunity to advance theory development (Dik et al., 2019).

Of specific interest in vocational psychology is the construct of employability as a personal resource (Fugate et al., 2004) that may help individuals to cope with the challenges of the current world of work (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015; Blustein et al., 2018) and obtain high quality jobs (González-Romá et al., 2018). However, employability has not been investigated

in relation to subjective indicators of job quality, such as work meaningfulness, nor to eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Di Fabio, 2017). In study 3, we suggest that employability is a personal resource that may be antecedent of work meaningfulness and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Additionally, we suggest that work meaningfulness may act as the underlying mechanism by which employability has an indirect effect on eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

Hence, our third objective is to fill in these important omissions in the subjective job quality literature by integrating literature streams on vocational psychology, work meaningfulness and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. In particular, with this study, we aim to address these gaps by examining the relationships between Fugate et al.'s (2004) four employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital), on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, on the other hand. In addition, to uncover the mechanisms underlying these relationships, we aim to examine the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the aforementioned relationships.

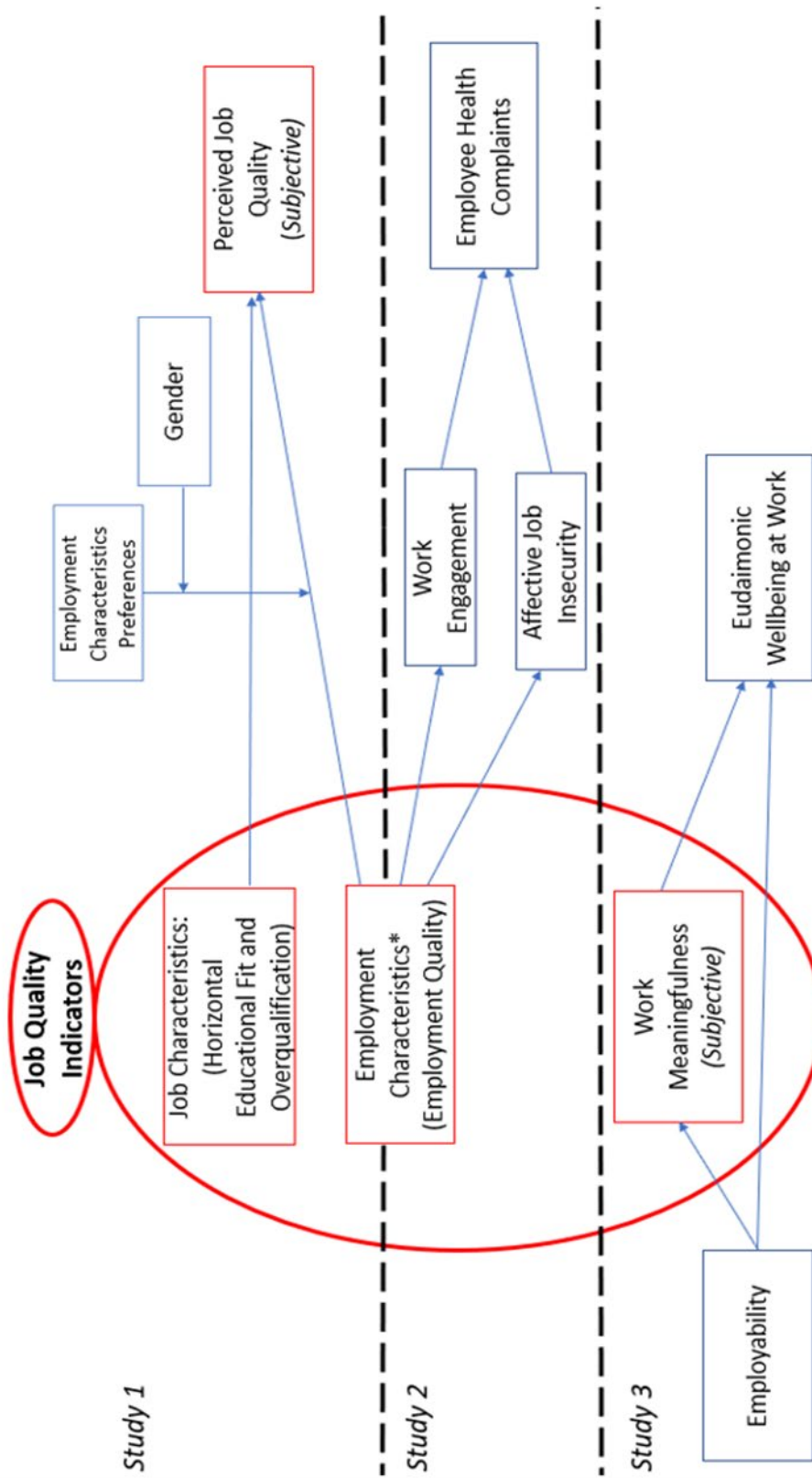
By doing so, we aim to contribute to refining eudaimonic wellbeing theory by extending the nomological network of eudaimonic wellbeing at work and prevent the overgeneralization of findings from domain-free eudaimonic wellbeing research to the work domain (Mendonça et al., 2022). Moreover, understanding *how* and *why* these personal antecedents are related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work by identifying one of the mechanisms (work meaningfulness) can additionally contribute to eudaimonic wellbeing literature. Our study also aims to contribute to the literature on work meaningfulness from a worker-centric approach. By investigating several employability dimensions (personal resources) as its antecedents, we aim to answer the call to fill in the important gaps in our understanding of how and why some individuals might find their work more or less meaningful than others (Bailey et al., 2019). Moreover, we also aim to show how a subjective job quality indicator such as work meaningfulness can be useful to integrate theoretical accounts from the fields of vocational

psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Thus, we try to answer the call for a theoretical expansion of the relationship between vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Dik et al., 2019). From a practical perspective, our study can also contribute to guiding career development interventions aimed at fostering employee work meaningfulness and ultimately eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

Figure 1.2 aims to provide a general vision and summary of the research objectives outlined in the three studies of this doctoral thesis. It is important to note that these descriptions are broad in nature. In the forthcoming chapters (3, 4, 5), the specific issues will be defined in greater detail, and the specific research hypotheses will be outlined.

Figure 1.2

General Overview of the Doctoral Thesis Studies



Note. *In Study 1 the employment characteristics investigated are: type of job contract (permanent vs temporary), employment relationship (full-time vs part-time) and schedule predictability (fixed vs irregular workdays), whereas in Study 2 we investigate type of job contract, employment relationship and salary.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The three studies presented in this doctoral thesis share some commonalities regarding the procedure, the participants and some measures. This is due to the fact that they were conducted in a framework of a larger longitudinal research project financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and the European Regional Development Fund (Reference: MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ and by ERDF A way of making Europe (grant PSI2017-86882-R)). Below, we will present the general methodological commonalities of the thesis, however the specific method for each of the three studies will be explained in detail in its corresponding chapter.

2.1 Procedure

The data for this doctoral thesis were collected at five time points separated by three months starting from January 2020 through January 2021 as part of a broader research project. The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Valencia. To collect the data, we used the services of a market research company that managed a respondent panel. Panel members who were invited to participate in the study had to be over 17 years old and could not be self-employed. 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). Those who agreed to participate received a link to the online questionnaire. At the beginning of the questionnaire, they provided their informed consent and anonymity, and confidentiality of the responses were guaranteed.

For study 1 we implemented a cross sectional design, so data were collected at one time point Time 1 (January 2020). For Study 2 and Study 3 we implemented a time lagged design. For study 2, data were collected at three time points, T1 (July 2020), T2 (October 2020) and

T3 (January 2021). For Study 3, data were also collected at three time points, T1(April 2020), T2 (July 2020) and T3 (October 2020). We would like to note that the Covid-19 pandemic started during the data collection in T2 of our project. This affected the number of participants in our studies since the pandemic produced many changes, such as unemployment, being employed but not going to work (except for essential workers) while receiving financial help called ERTE etc.

2.2 Participants

In Study 1 the initial sample was composed of 707 participants. 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. 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. The sample was heterogenous in terms of the occupational sector. The participants held jobs in the administrative sector (11%), followed by education (10%), information and communication (9%), health and social services (8%), scientific sector (7%), artistic sector (6,4%), touristic (6%) and construction (6%) among others.

In Study 2, the initial sample (Time 1, T1) was composed of 611 participants. At Time 2 (T2), 578 participants responded (response rate: 94.6 %). At Time 3 (T3), 540 of the 578 participants who responded at T1 and T2 also answered the questionnaire (response rate based on the T1 sample: 88.4 %). Thus, the initial longitudinal sample was composed of 540 participants. Respondents who were unemployed at T1 (74), at T2 (21), and at T3 (16) were eliminated from the longitudinal sample, yielding $N = 429$ participants. Moreover, participants who changed jobs between time points (T1-T2: 26 participants, and T2-T3: 12 participants) were also removed from the sample (yielding $N = 391$). To ensure data quality, we identified inattentive participants by using three attention items (e.g., 'Please choose response option 4 now') throughout the questionnaire at each measurement point. We eliminated subjects who responded incorrectly to any of these items. Based on this criterion, 68 participants at T1, 39 participants at T2, and 31 participants at T3 were removed. Therefore, our final sample was composed of 253 employees (50.6 % men; mean age = 37 years, $SD = 10$) who held the same job throughout the study period. The participants had a variety of jobs across different industrial sectors (health and social services, 12%; construction, 8.7%; information and communication, 8.3%; education, 8.3 %; administrative services, 6.3%; among others).

Additionally, given that our sample showed high attrition across time, we conducted a response-nonresponse analysis. No significant differences in the study variables were found

between participants who had only responded in T1, responded in T1 and T2 and who responded in all three time points, hence attrition seemed to have no relevant effect on the study variables. More details about this analysis can be found in the method section of Chapter 4.

In Study 3, at T1, 664 participants answered the questionnaire, at T2, 611 participants responded (92% response rate), and, finally, at T3, 579 participants answered the questionnaire (87.2% response rate based on the initial sample of 664 participants). One participant had missing values on the employability dimensions; thus, our longitudinal sample was composed of 578 participants. Moreover, unemployed participants at T1 (136), T2 (27), and T3 (12) were also eliminated from the longitudinal sample. To ensure the quality of the data, we included three attention control items (e.g., “To control the quality of the questionnaire responses, tick the ‘always’ option now”) in the questionnaires and eliminated any participants who failed one or more of these items. Following this criterion, 77 participants at T1, 34 participants at T2, and 29 participants at T3 were eliminated from the sample. Thus, our final longitudinal sample consisted of 263 employees. They were between 22 and 59 years old ($M = 37$, $SD = 10$), and 48% were female. The participants worked in various occupational sectors, such as education (11.5%), health and social services (9%), construction (7.8%), information and communication (7.8%), administrative (7.4%) among others.

Additionally, similarly to Study 2, given the time lagged research design we tested for sample attrition bias in this study, by conducting a response-nonresponse analysis. We compared three groups of subjects: 1. those who only responded at T1 ($N_1 = 65$); 2. those who only responded at T1 and T2 ($N_2 = 88$); and 3. those who responded at all three time points (T1, T2, and T3; $N_3 = 263$) on the variables of the study. Overall, the results showed that there was no attrition bias in this study. More details about this analysis can be found in Chapter 5.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Common Measures

There are only two common variables across the thesis. In particular, **type of job contract and employment relationship** are variables common for Study 1 and Study 2. In Study 1 these variables are considered as separate employment characteristics and predictors of perceived job quality. In Study 2 they are considered as indicators (together with salary) of employment quality as a latent variable. These employment quality indicators are naturally considered objective (they do not depend on interpretation but on objective facts) nevertheless we need to note that we measured them via self-reported measures. In both studies, type of job contract and employment relationship were measured by directly asking individuals the following questions “What type of job contract do you have?” and “Do you work part-time or full-time?” respectively. The non-traditional employment characteristics were coded as 0 (temporary contract, part-time,) and the traditional ones as 1 (permanent contract, full-time).

2.3.2 Study 1 Measures

Schedule Predictability was measured by asking the participants to “Indicate which days you work”. The response options were 0 (irregular workdays) and 1 (fixed workdays).

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.

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. In this study 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?’

2.3.3 Study 2 Measures

Employment Quality (T1) was measured via three objective employment characteristics: type of job contract, employment relationship, and salary. As mentioned previously *Type of Job Contract* was measured by directly asking individuals “What type of job contract do you have?” (0 = temporary and 1= permanent;). *Employment Relationship* was measured by directly asking participants “Do you work part-time or full-time?” (0 = part-time and 1= full-time). *Salary* was measured by asking participants to indicate their average monthly net earnings on a graded scale from 0 (less than 450 euros) to 6 (more than 2100 euros). Lower values on these characteristics indicate low employment quality, whereas higher values indicate high employment quality.

Work Engagement (T2) was measured with the 3-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, proposed and validated by Schaufeli et al. (2019). The scale includes one item for each of the three work engagement dimensions: vigor (i.e., “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”), dedication (i.e., “I am enthusiastic about my job”), and absorption (i.e., “I am immersed in my work”). Respondents answered using a 6-point frequency rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always). Cronbach’s alpha was .86.

Affective Job Insecurity (T2) was measured with a 4-item scale (Llosa et al., 2017) (i.e., “I fear that I might lose my job”). Participants answered using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Employee Health Complaints (T3) were measured with an 8-item psychosomatic symptoms scale (Hagquist, 2008). The participants were asked to report how many days in the past week they had experienced vertigo, headache, stomachache, sleep difficulties, concentration difficulties, low appetite, and feelings of tension and sadness. Participants answered using an 8-point scale ranging from 0 (0 days) to 7 (all 7 days). Cronbach’s alpha was .86.

2.3.4 Study 3 Measures

Employability

The four dimensions of personal employability were measured at T1.

Career Identity was measured with a 4-item scale (e.g., “I have a clear idea about the place where I want to address my professional career.”) (González-Roma et al., 2018). Participants answered on a response scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .88.

Personal Adaptability was measured with a 3-item scale (e.g., “I am able to adapt to the changing circumstances of my environment”) whose items were based on previous measures

(Ployhart & Bliese, 2006; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Participants answered on a scale from 1 (None) to 5 (A lot). Cronbach alpha was .88.

Social Capital was measured with a 4-item scale (e.g., “I have a broad network of professional contacts that will help me to find job opportunities.”) based on previous research (González-Roma et al., 2018). Participants answered on a response scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .80.

Human Capital was measured by 6 items focusing on several generic competences required of university graduates by the labor market (Hernández-March et al., 2009). Participants were asked to indicate the level they have on each of these six competences (1. oral and written communication skills, 2. problem solving skills, 3. time and resource management abilities, 4. capacity for teamwork, 5. continuous learning, ongoing education, and lifelong learning, and 6. capacity to take on responsibilities) on a scale from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High). Cronbach alpha was .80.

Work Meaningfulness

This variable was measured at T2 by a 5-item scale (May et al., 2004) (i.e., “The work I do on this job is worthwhile.”). Participants answered on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .95.

Eudaimonic Wellbeing at Work

We focused on two dimensions of Ryff’s (1989) psychological wellbeing scale. Because this is a domain-free eudaimonic wellbeing measure, and our study focuses on the work specific domain, we reworded the items for the work/career context, as in previous studies (Culbertson et al., 2010).

Personal Growth at Work was measured by van Dierendonck’s (2004) 7-item version of Ryff’s (1989) personal growth original scale. A sample item is “I feel that at my job I

continue to learn more about myself”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .92.

Purpose in Career was measured by van Dierendonck’s (2004) 6-item version of Ryff’s (1989) purpose scale. A sample item is “I enjoy making plans for my professional career and working toward making them a reality”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .95.

We controlled for job changes in the study by creating two measures: Job change at T2 (0. no job change between T1 and T2; 1. job change between T1 and in T2) and Job change at T3 (0. no job change between T2 and T3; 1. job change between T2 and T3) which we included in the model as control variables.

2.4 Data Analysis

In all studies descriptive analysis were conducted and the descriptive statistics were calculated and reported for the data within each study (e.g., means and standard deviations). Moreover, reliability was analysed, and the Cronbach alpha statistic was reported (see section Measures 2.3). To analyse the validity of the measures factor analysis were conducted. In Study 1, since perceived job quality was a measure constructed by the research team, we applied exploratory factor analysis which had satisfactory results the one-factor solution that explained 69% of the variance, with factor loadings larger than .74. In Study 2 and 3, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted where we compared the fit of the hypothesized models with the fit of a one factor solution model. In study 2, the four-factor model (employment characteristics, work engagement, affective job insecurity, employee health complaints) showed a better fit to data (χ^2 (df) = 194.41 (129), $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = .06) than the one-factor solution, which did not show an acceptable fit (χ^2 (df) = 597.07 (135), $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.48; RMSEA = 0.11; SRMR = 0.14). In Study 3, the hypothesized 7-factor model (four dimensions of employability (career identity, personal

adaptability, social capital, human capital), work meaningfulness, two dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing at work (personal growth at work, purpose in career,)) showed an acceptable fit to data ($\chi^2(539) = 1226.6$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.05; CFI = 0.91), with statistically significant factor loadings ranging between .54 and .96. Moreover, the hypothesized model was compared to a 1-factor model and showed a better fit.

In Study 1 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. 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. Moreover, 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 of the hierarchical regression by using Clogg et al.'s (1995) comparison formula and we used the Bonferroni correction, considering the number of comparisons made.

In Study 2, we tested the model by using latent Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as implemented in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). Given that two of the indicators of employment quality (type of contract and employment relationship) were dichotomous, we used a robust weighted least squares estimation method (WLSMV). Because indirect effects do not follow a normal distribution (MacKinnon et al., 2002), the hypothesized indirect effects were tested by means of bootstrapping methods with 1000 replications and 95% Confidence Intervals (CI).

In Study 3, we conducted path analysis with observed variables, using Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) and the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method. More specifically, we fitted a mediation model in which we controlled for the influence of job change at T2 on the mediator (work meaningfulness) and the influence of job change at T3 on the outcome variables (personal growth at work and purpose in career). To analyze Hypotheses 1 to 4, we tested a model that included only the direct relationships between the employability dimensions and the eudaimonic wellbeing at work dimensions. To analyze Hypotheses 5 to 8, we introduced the mediator (work meaningfulness) in the model. To test for the hypothesized indirect effects, we computed the corresponding 95% bias-corrected (BC) bootstrap confidence intervals (MacKinnon, et al., 2004; Williams & MacKinnon, 2008) after bootstrapping 1000 samples.

Chapter 3: Job Quality Indicators and Perceived Job Quality: The Moderating Roles of Individual Preferences and Gender (Study 1)

3.1 Introduction and Theoretical Background

The quest for job quality is currently a priority for policy-makers, due to its effect on attitudes, behaviours, 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 labour 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 labour 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.

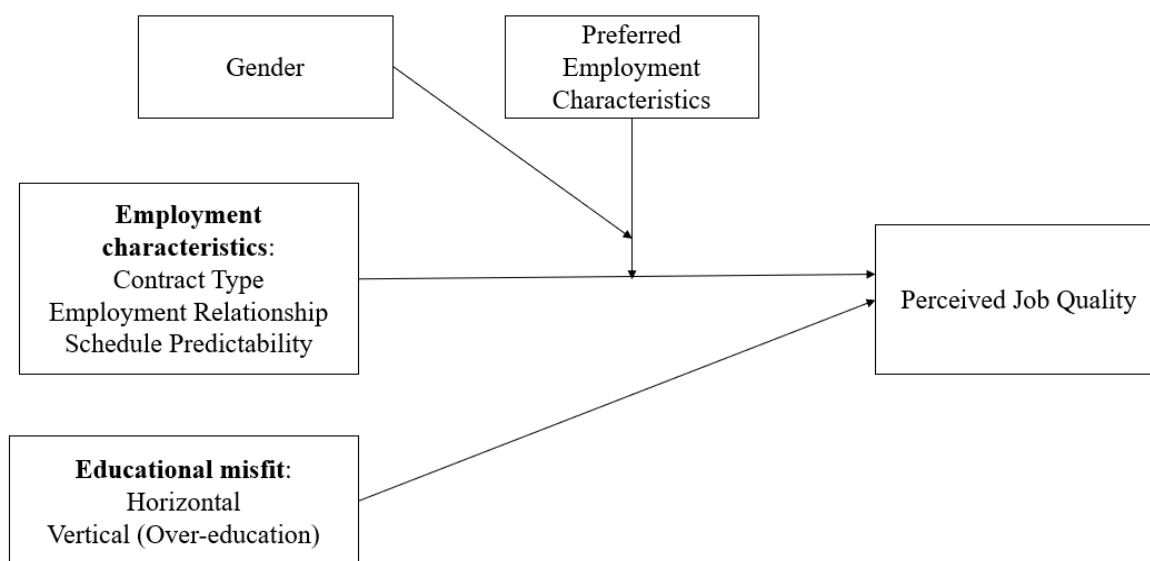
Another important factor that may affect perceptions of job quality is gender. Reports show that women are more likely to have lower quality jobs than men (Castaño, 2015; Crompton & Lyonette, 2010; Ficapal-Cusi et al., 2018; García-Mainar et al., 2016; ILO, 2016; Warren, 2010). However, the concept of 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 3.1.

Figure 3.1

The Hypothesized Model



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

3.1.1 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 unfavourable effects on employees' earnings, occupational status, and job satisfaction (Somers et al., 2018). 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 analysed 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.

3.1.2 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.

3.1.3 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 labour 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 behaviour, 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 behaviours 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, 2017).

Gender role incongruent behaviour 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 behaviour. 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, Sullivan 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. (2019) 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, 2017). However, women also face difficulties when demonstrating gender incongruent behaviour. 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 fulfil 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 labour 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.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 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.

3.2.2 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 analysing 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. The participants held jobs in the administrative sector (11%), followed by education (10%), information and communication (9%), health and social services (8%), scientific sector (7%), artistic sector (6,4%), touristic (6%) and construction (6%) among others.

3.2.3 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?’

3.2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analysed 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.

3.3 Results

Table 3.1 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations between the study variables.

Table 3.1
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 of 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 = Civil/Cohabitation Status; Number of children = Number of

economically dependent children; ER = Employment relationship; SP = Schedule predictability.

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 3.2) explained an additional 7% of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = .07$; $p < .05$).

Table 3.2

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

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 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 3.3 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.

Table 3.3

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 nonstandardized. SE: Standard errors. ER: Employment relationship. SP: Schedule predictability.

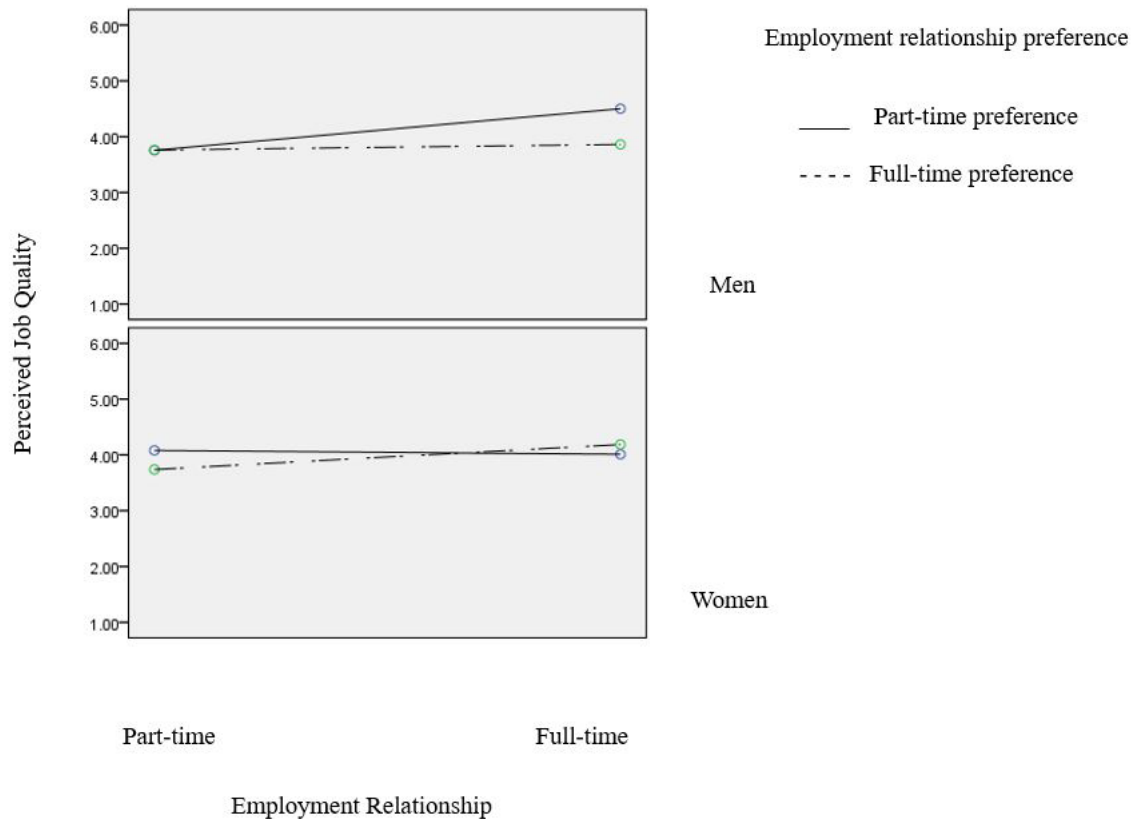
* $p < .05$

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 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 3.2 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 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 ($B = -.08$, $t(539) = -.27$, $p > .05$).

Figure 3.2

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



3.4 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.

3.4.1 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 analysing 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 (Findley 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 analysing 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., 2019). 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, 2017). 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.

3.4.2 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 labour market can encourage men to hold part-time job positions when they prefer them, without being penalized for it.

3.4.3 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 [$Y = a + b(P-J) = a + b1P -$

b2J; where b1 equals b2 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.

3.4.4 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.¹

¹ This study was published, and the corresponding reference is as follows: Davcheva, M., Tomás, I., & Hernández, A. (2020). Job Quality Indicators and Perceived Job Quality: The Moderating Roles of Individual Preferences and Gender. *Revista Psicologia: Organizações e Trabalho*, 20(4), 1198-1209. <https://doi.org/10.17652/rpot/2020.4.04>

**Chapter 4: The Influence of Employment
Quality on Employee Health
Complaints: A Parallel Mediation Model
(Study 2)**

4.1 Introduction

Employment conditions have drastically changed in recent years due to socioeconomic recessions and transformations in the industrial and services sectors (Ahonen et al., 2018; Kalleberg, 2016). Thus, employment quality (i.e., a set of employment characteristics established by the terms and conditions of the employee-employer relationship; Eisenberg-Guyot et al., 2020; Julià et al., 2017) has caught the attention of researchers and policy makers around the world (Kalleberg, 2018). Researchers have suggested that a standard employment relationship characterized by a full-time, permanent contract and a high salary is the gold criterion for employment quality (Vanroelen et al., 2021). However, the significant decline in standard employment relationships (high-quality employment) and the increase in nonstandard employment arrangements (low-quality employment) in Western countries highlights the urgent need to investigate their consequences (Kalleberg, 2018), including for employees' health (Benach et al., 2014). This is especially important given the great burden of bad health conditions and sick leave to organizations and societies (OECD, 2015). Moreover, continuous investigation about the consequences of employment quality is strongly encouraged in order to guide evidence-based policy making (Eurofound & ILO, 2019).

The research conducted so far shows that employment quality is positively related to employee health (Benach et al., 2014; Donnelly, 2021; Peckham et al., 2019; Van Aerden et al., 2016; Vives et al., 2011). However, few studies have examined the mechanisms underlying the relationship between employment quality and employee health (Ahonen et al., 2018; Findlay et al., 2017). This omission is worrisome for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, it shows that we do not fully understand *why* employment quality is related to employee health. To remedy this problem, we need to uncover the underlying mechanisms (i.e., mediators) that intervene in this relationship. The identification of the mediators through which

a predictor is related to an outcome often represents “an increase in knowledge and an important refinement of the theory” (Spencer et al., 2005, p. 846). From a practical perspective, identifying the mechanisms involved can help policy makers and employers design occupational health interventions aimed at improving employee health.

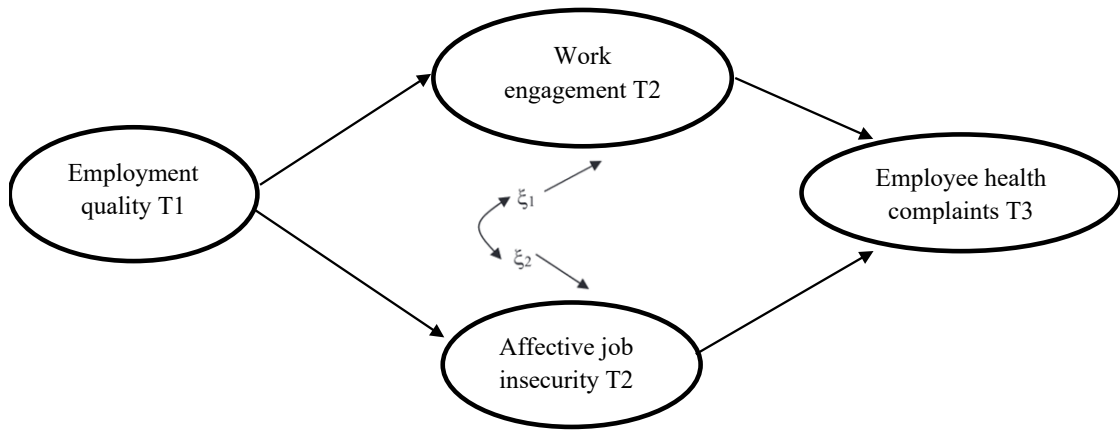
Thus, in the present study, we tested a mediation model that posits that employment quality, particularly the degree to which employees have desirable employment characteristics: full-time jobs, permanent contracts, and higher salaries (vs. part-time jobs, temporary contracts, and lower salaries) is related to employee health complaints via two mediators: work engagement (i.e., “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind ... characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption”; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295) and affective job insecurity (i.e., employees’ emotional reactions, such as concern, worry, or anxiety, to the perceived possibility of total job loss or job feature losses; Huang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2018). We draw on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001;) to frame our study. This theory posits that job features can be classified in two categories: *job resources* (“aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development”; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274) and *job demands* (aspects that hinder goal attainment and require sustained effort) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The JD-R theory argues that job resources and job demands trigger two processes that impact employee health: 1. a motivational process, through which job resources are positively related to motivational states (i.e., work engagement), which in turn are positively related to employee health; and 2. a health-impairment process, through which job demands are positively related to employee strains (i.e., affective job insecurity), which in turn are negatively related to employee health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Initially, these processes were considered independent (Demerouti et al., 2001). However, several meta-

analyses and empirical studies have also shown cross-links between the two processes, so that resources are also negatively related to employee strains, and demands are also negatively related to motivational states (Alarcon, 2011; Crawford et al., 2010; González-Romá et al., 2020; Lesener et al., 2019; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

We argue that employment quality is an important resource for employees (Vahle-Hinz et al., 2013). High-quality employment reflects the possession of employment resources (i.e., higher salary, full-time employment, and a permanent job contract). Based on the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and the aforementioned cross-links, we posit that employment quality is related to employee health complaints via two parallel mediators: work engagement and affective job insecurity (see Figure 1). We chose work engagement as a mediator because it is a positive psychological state that is promoted by job resources (Bakker et al., 2008) and considered a key antecedent of employee health (Salanova, 2021). We focused on affective job insecurity as a mediator because it is associated with nonstandard employment arrangements (i.e., part-time and temporary jobs) (Kalleberg, 2018), and a recent meta-analysis showed that it is associated with negative health outcomes (more strongly than cognitive job insecurity; Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). Finally, we focused on employee psychosomatic health complaints as an indicator of employee health because they encompass both psychological and somatic aspects and, therefore, provide a more comprehensive view of employee health. In fact, psychosomatic health complaints are crucial in occupational health research, given that they are very common reasons for visits to general practitioners, and they are associated with high sick-leave costs and lack of productivity (Brosschot & Van Der Doef, 2006). Figure 4.1 presents our research model.

Figure 4.1

The Hypothesized Research Model



This study aims to make several contributions. First, we contribute to the occupational health literature by identifying two mediators (work engagement and affective job insecurity) in the relationship between employment quality and employee health, specifically employee health complaints. This knowledge improves our understanding about *why* the former variable is related to the latter. Our study responds to the call for better theoretical understanding of how and why employment quality is related to employee health (Ahonen et al., 2018; Benach et al., 2016). Second, by comparing the two indirect effects of employment quality on employee health complaints via the two mediators considered, we provide a more nuanced view of the relative importance of each of these mediators in the abovementioned relationship. Third, our results contribute to extending the JD-R theory in two directions: 1. by highlighting the existence of cross-links between the motivational and health-impairment processes; and 2. by showing that this theory can be used as a theoretical framework to examine the relationships between employment quality and its hypothetical consequences. Finally, from a practical perspective, we provide implications for organizations and policy makers that can be useful for improving employee health and other relevant criteria.

4.2 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

4.2.1 Defining and Operationalizing Employment Quality

In this study, we operationalized employment quality by considering three employment characteristics: type of job contract (full-time vs. part-time), employment relationship (permanent vs. temporary contract), and salary. We chose these indicators for the following reasons. First, the segmented labor market theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971) posits that the labor market is divided into two segments: a primary segment that includes the established core of the labor market and a secondary segment that consists of peripheral jobs. On the one hand, the primary segment is represented by jobs with standard employment relationships (SER), which are characterized by full-time, permanent contracts and higher salaries. These characteristics define high-quality employment situations. On the other hand, the peripheral segment of the labor market consists of nonstandard jobs, which are characterized by part-time, temporary contracts and lower salary jobs. These characteristics define low-quality employment situations. Second, scholars have suggested that the SER-type is deeply embedded in employees' mindsets as the gold standard for employment quality (Vanroelen et al., 2021), and previous studies have highlighted the health benefits of SER compared to nonstandard employment arrangements (Gevaert et al., 2021; Van Aerden et al., 2016). Third, objective indicators of employment quality are needed to facilitate measurement and comparison across studies (Hofmans et al., 2020). In fact, occupational health researchers have suggested that employment conditions should be characterized as objectively as possible (Peckham & Seixas, 2021). Thus, we define high employment quality as having SER-like objectifiable characteristics (full-time jobs, permanent contracts, and higher salaries), and low employment quality as having non-SER-like characteristics (part-time arrangements, temporary contracts, and lower salaries).

4.2.2 From Employment Quality to Employee Health Complaints: The Mediator Role of Work Engagement

We posit that employment quality is positively related to work engagement. According to the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), job resources are positively related to work engagement. High employment quality means that employees have access to important resources. Organizations and employers provide more resources to employees in standard (high-quality) employment relationships than in nonstandard (low-quality) employment relationships (Ahonen et al., 2018; O'Connor et al., 2020). For instance, research has shown that permanent employees receive more training and information about how to perform their jobs than temporary employees (Macmillan & Shanahan, 2021). Moreover, research has shown that supervisor and coworker support are other resources that are more present among employees in full-time and permanent jobs than among employees in part-time, temporary jobs (Menéndez et al., 2007; Saloniemi et al., 2004). Salary is also considered an important resource for employees because it can facilitate the attainment of employment and personal goals (Farndale & Murrer, 2015; Kulikowski & Sedlak, 2020).

Because employment quality is an important resource for employees, it should be positively related to work engagement. High-quality employment arrangements generally offer employees more autonomy to perform their tasks (Standing, 2011), a broader network of social contacts at work (Spreitzer et al., 2017), and more challenging tasks to complete (Gevaert et al., 2021). Thus, high-quality employment helps employees to meet their basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, triggering intrinsic motivation and work engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

We also posit that work engagement is negatively related to employee health complaints. We base this assumption on two approaches, physiological and psychological. Regarding the physiological approach, the association between work engagement and employee health seems to be mediated by the autonomic nervous system. This system has two

different components: the sympathetic nervous system (which activates the body to respond to environmental demands) and the parasympathetic nervous system (which facilitates restorative and regulation functions) (Seppälä et al., 2012). Work engagement increases the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system, thus promoting healthy and adaptable responses that contribute to employee health (Seppälä et al., 2012). Moreover, work engagement has been related to better self-related health, due to work engagement triggering a better immune system to easily confront challenging situations (Shalom et al., 2006). In this regard, employees who are engaged in their work are expected to be less likely to experience health complaints.

For the psychological underpinning of the relationship between work engagement and health we draw on positive psychology, specifically the Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004). The broaden-and-build theoretical model of positive emotions explains how positive affect has a health protective role both on a psychological and physical level (Fredrickson, 2004). Positive affect states can raise awareness and trigger an upward spiral model of personal resources that can help individuals cope better with stress (Fredrickson, 2013). Scholars have argued that as an active and energetic affective psychological state, work engagement can foster the mobilization of resources in challenging conditions (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012).

Moreover, individuals who experience positive psychological states adopt healthier behaviours, through goal setting, self-efficacy, motivation, and self-regulation (De Steno et al., 2013). Empirical research has supported the idea that work engagement has positive spillover effects on employees' health behaviours (Amano et al., 2020). With regards to psychosomatic health, research has shown highly engaged employees experience less psychosomatic symptoms, such as headaches, chest pain, back and neck pain, than employees with low work engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001; Peterson et al., 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Overall, results from a recent meta-analysis (Mazzetti et al., 2021) showed that work engagement is positively related to physical health and negatively related to psychological distress. Considering the arguments and empirical relationships mentioned above, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1. There is a negative indirect effect of employment quality on employee health complaints via work engagement, so that employment quality is positively related to work engagement, which in turn is negatively related to employee health complaints.

4.2.3 From Employment Quality to Employee Health Complaints: The Mediator Role of Affective Job Insecurity

We posit that employment quality is negatively related to affective job insecurity. Low-quality employment involves objective characteristics that reflect some instability (Urbanaviciute et al., 2021), which triggers affective job insecurity. The latter is a “subjective translation” of the employee’s labour market position (De Witte et al., 2015). This position is indicated by various objective characteristics, such as the type of job contract (full-time vs. part-time) and employment relationship (permanent vs. temporary contract) and the salary. Employees with low-quality employment arrangements have objectively weaker labour market positions because they are part of the secondary labour market (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Urbanaviciute et al., 2021). Thus, employees in low-quality employment situations should experience higher affective job insecurity than employees in high-quality employment situations. There is empirical evidence supporting this relationship (Chung, 2019; Keim et al., 2014; van Wijk et al., 2021).

We also posit that affective job insecurity is positively related to employee health complaints. Experiencing affective job insecurity means that the employment situation is perceived as threatening (because there is fear of losing the job). If, in addition, employees

cannot change the employment arrangement (as occurs with employees with low-quality employment), the threatening situation will trigger a stress response that may have negative consequences for employee health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In fact, previous studies have viewed job insecurity as a severe work stressor that is detrimental to employee health (De Cuyper et al., 2010; De Witte et al., 2016; Shoss et al., 2020). Empirical evidence from longitudinal studies supports this relationship. In their review of 30 years of longitudinal studies on the association between job insecurity and health, De Witte et al. (2016) found support for the influence of job insecurity on self-perceived health and psychosomatic complaints. A meta-analysis by Llosa et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between job insecurity, on the one hand, and depression and anxiety, on the other. In general, employees with more job insecurity have worse mental and physical health than employees with less job insecurity (De Witte et al., 2015; Henares-Montiel et al., 2021; Högnäs et al., 2022; Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Llosa et al., 2017; Thomson & Hünefeld, 2021). The overall empirical evidence suggests that job insecurity is positively related to employee health impairment (De Witte & Van Hootegem, 2021). Given the theoretical and empirical arguments presented above, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2. There is a negative indirect effect of employment quality on employee health complaints via affective job insecurity, so that employment quality is negatively related to affective job insecurity, which in turn is positively related to employee health complaints.

4.3 Method

4.3.1 Procedure and Sample

This study was conducted within a broader research project that was approved by the corresponding Committee of Research Ethics. To collect the data, we used the services of a market research company that managed a respondent panel. Panel members who were invited to participate in the study had to be over 17 years old and could not be self-employed. Those

who agreed to participate received a link to the online questionnaire. On the first part of the questionnaire, they provided their informed consent.

We implemented a time-lagged design with data collection at three time points separated by three months starting in July 2020. We used a three-month lag between subsequent time points because time lags should be long enough to mitigate common method biases, but not long enough to hide a relationship that actually exists (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012). Moreover, previous studies using this time lag reported significant relationships involving some of the investigated variables (e.g., De Cuyper et al., 2022; Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Topa & Aranda-Carmena, 2022).

The initial sample (Time 1, T1) was composed of 611 participants. At Time 2 (T2), 578 participants responded (response rate: 94.6 %). At Time 3 (T3), 540 of the 578 participants who responded at T1 and T2 also answered the questionnaire (response rate based on the T1 sample: 88.4 %). Thus, the initial longitudinal sample was composed of 540 participants.

Respondents who were unemployed at T1 (74), at T2 (21), and at T3 (16) were eliminated from the longitudinal sample, yielding $N = 429$ participants. Moreover, participants who changed jobs between time points (T1-T2: 26 participants, and T2-T3: 12 participants) were also removed from the sample (yielding $N = 391$). To ensure data quality, we identified inattentive participants by using three attention items (e.g., 'Please choose response option 4 now') throughout the questionnaire at each measurement point. We eliminated subjects who responded incorrectly to any of these items. Based on this criterion, 68 participants at T1, 39 participants at T2, and 31 participants at T3 were removed. Therefore, our final sample was composed of 253 employees (50.6 % men; mean age = 37 years, $SD = 10$) who held the same job throughout the study period. The participants had a variety of jobs across different industrial sectors (administrative services, 6.3%; health and social services, 12%; construction, 8.3%; education, 8.7%; information and communication, 8.3 %; among others).

Additionally, given that our sample showed high attrition across time, we conducted a response-nonresponse analysis. We compared three groups of subjects: 1. those who *only* responded at T1 (N_1); 2. those who *only* responded at T1 and T2 (N_2); and 3. those who responded at *all* three time points (T1, T2, and T3; $N_3 = 253$). First, we filtered participants at each time point according to the abovementioned criteria, eliminating the participants who were unemployed, those who changed jobs between adjacent time points, and those who had attention errors. At T1, of the 611 initial participants, we eliminated 86 unemployed subjects and 92 who had attention errors at T1, yielding a sample of 433 respondents at T1. To identify the sample of participants who (at the least) responded at T1 and T2 from this sample of 433 respondents, we further eliminated the unemployed participants at T2 (38), those who changed their jobs between T1 and T2 (26), and those who had attention errors (41) at T2. This yielded a sample of 328 participants who (at the least) responded at T1 and T2. The difference $433 - 328 = 105$ represented the group of participants who responded *only* at T1 ($N_1 = 105$). To identify the sample of participants who *only* responded at T1 and T2 from the group of 328 subjects who (at the least) responded at T1 and T2, we subtracted the group of participants who responded at *all* three time points ($N_3 = 253$), yielding $N_2 = 328 - 253 = 75$.

We compared the group of participants who responded at *all* three time points ($N_3 = 253$) with the other two groups on the variables measured at Time 1: type of job contract and employment relationship (using several chi-square tests) and salary (with an ANOVA). We found no significant relationship between the distribution of the participants in these three groups, on the one hand, and the type of job contract and employment relationship, on the other. Likewise, we found no significant differences in salary among the three groups.

We also compared the final sample of participants who responded at all three times ($N = 253$) with the participants who *only* responded at T1 and T2 ($N = 75$). This comparison focused on the variables measured at Time 2: work engagement and affective job insecurity

(using independent sample *t*-tests), and the results showed no significant differences between the two groups on these variables. Thus, attrition seemed to have no relevant effect on the study variables.

4.3.2 Measures

Employment Quality (T1) was measured via three objective employment characteristics: type of job contract, employment relationship, and salary. *Type of Job Contract* was measured by directly asking individuals “What type of job contract do you have?” (0 = temporary and 1 = permanent; *Mean* = .63, *SD* = .48). *Employment Relationship* was measured by directly asking participants “Do you work part-time or full-time?” (0 = part-time and 1 = full-time; *Mean* = .57, *SD* = .49). *Salary* was measured by asking participants to indicate their average monthly net earnings on a graded scale from 0 (less than 450 euros) to 6 (more than 2100 euros) (*Mean* = 2.64, *SD* = 1.62). Lower values on these characteristics indicate low employment quality, whereas higher values indicate high employment quality.

Work Engagement (T2) was measured with the 3-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, proposed and validated by Schaufeli et al. (2019). The scale includes one item for each of the three work engagement dimensions: vigour (i.e., “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”), dedication (i.e., “I am enthusiastic about my job”), and absorption (i.e., “I am immersed in my work”). Respondents answered using a 6-point frequency rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always) (*Mean* = 3.52, *SD* = 1.13). Cronbach’s alpha was .86.

Affective Job Insecurity (T2) was measured with a 4-item scale (Llosa et al., 2017) (i.e., “I fear that I might lose my job”). Participants answered using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) (*Mean* = 3.01, *SD* = 1.22). Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Employee Health Complaints (T3) were measured with an 8-item psychosomatic symptoms scale (Hagquist, 2008). The participants were asked to report how many days in the

past week they had experienced vertigo, headache, stomachache, sleep difficulties, concentration difficulties, low appetite, and feelings of tension and sadness. Participants answered using an 8-point scale ranging from 0 (0 days) to 7 (all 7 days); ($Mean = 1.20$, $SD = 1.16$). Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Moreover, to gather evidence about the validity of the study measures in our sample, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We compared the fit of the hypothesized four-factor measurement model (employment quality, work engagement, affective job insecurity, and health complaints) with the fit of a one-factor model. The four-factor model showed a better fit to data (χ^2 (df) = 194.41 (129), $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = .06) than the one-factor solution, which did not show an acceptable fit (χ^2 (df) = 597.07 (135), $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.48; RMSEA = 0.11; SRMR = 0.14). For the four-factor model, which showed satisfactory goodness-of-fit, all the items' standardized factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .01$) and ranged between .30 and .89. Regarding the correlations among the four factors, as expected, employment quality had a negative correlation with affective job insecurity ($r = -.21$, $p = 0.005$) and employee health complaints ($r = -.21$, $p = 0.009$), and a positive correlation with work engagement ($r = .21$, $p = 0.007$). Work engagement was negatively correlated with affective job insecurity ($r = -.34$, $p < 0.001$) and employee health complaints ($r = -.31$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, affective job insecurity was positively correlated with employee health complaints ($r = .34$, $p < 0.001$).

4.3.3 Analysis

To fit our research model and obtain the parameter estimates, we used latent Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as implemented in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). Given that two of the indicators of employment quality (type of contract and employment relationship) were dichotomous, we used a robust weighted least squares estimation method (WLSMV). Because indirect effects do not follow a normal distribution (MacKinnon et al.,

2002), the hypothesized indirect effects were tested by means of bootstrapping methods with 1000 replications and 95% Confidence Intervals (CI).

4.4 Results

Correlations among the latent study variables are displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Correlations Among the Latent Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Employment quality (T1)	-			
2. Work engagement (T2)	.25**	-		
3. Affective job insecurity (T2)	-.25**	-.34**	-	
4. Employee health complaints (T3)	-.12**	-.32**	.35**	-

Note. ** $p < .01$.

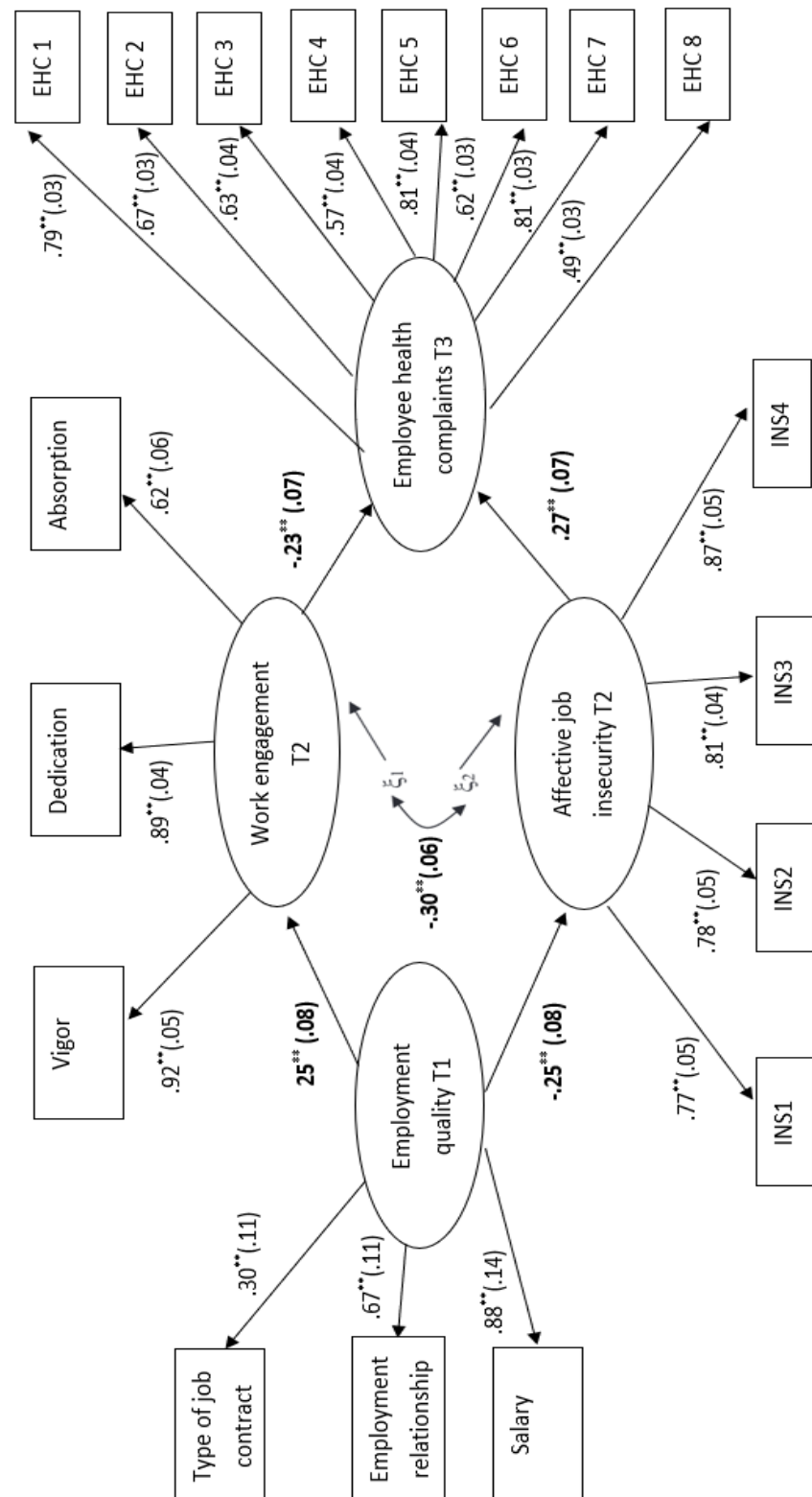
The hypothesized research model showed a good fit to data (χ^2 (df) = 191.56 (2), $p < .001$; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.06). We compared the fit of the research model with the fit of a model that included the direct relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints. The results showed that there were no significant differences between the fit of the two models ($\Delta\chi^2$ (Δ df) = 1.96 (1), $p = 0.16$). Moreover, the standardized direct effect of employment quality on employee health complaints was not significant ($\beta = -.11$, $p = 0.16$). Thus, the most parsimonious model (that is, our research model) was retained.

The standardized parameter estimates obtained are shown in Figure 4.2. Employment quality was positively related to work engagement ($\beta = .25$, $p = .002$) and negatively related to

affective job insecurity ($\beta = -.25, p = .001$). Work engagement was negatively related to employee health complaints ($\beta = -.23, p = .001$), and affective job insecurity was positively related to employee health complaints ($\beta = .27, p < .001$).

Figure 4.2

Parameter Estimates for the Hypothesized Research Model



Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Coefficients are standardized. Standard errors are in brackets. INS: Affective job insecurity item; EHC: Employee health complaints item.

To facilitate the comparison of the hypothesized indirect effects, we report the completely standardized indirect effects associated with the hypothesized relationships (Preacher & Kelley, 2011). The indirect effect (IE) of employment quality on employee health complaints via work engagement was negative and statistically significant ($IE = -0.06$, 95% CI: $-0.130, -0.011$). In other words, employee health complaints decreased by .06 standard deviations (SD) for every one-SD increase in employment quality via work engagement. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

The indirect effect of employment quality on employee health complaints via affective job insecurity was negative and statistically significant ($IE = -0.07$, 95% CI: $-0.194, -0.008$). This means that employee health complaints decreased by .07 standard deviations (SD) for every one-SD increase in employment quality via affective job insecurity. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported. The total standardized indirect effect of employment quality on employee health complaints was $-.13$, which means that employee health complaints decreased by .13 SD for every one-SD increase in employment quality via the two mediators, work engagement and affective job insecurity.

In addition, we compared the two hypothesized indirect effects to ascertain whether their magnitudes were different by using the “model test” command in Mplus and the corresponding Wald test. The Wald test was not statistically significant ($W(1) = .08, p = .77$), indicating that the two indirect effects were not statistically different from each other and that both mediators contributed equally to explaining the relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints.

4.5 Discussion

The main aim of this study was to ascertain whether the relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints was mediated by work engagement and affective job insecurity. As we hypothesized, our results showed that employment quality had

a negative indirect effect on employee health complaints via the two mediators considered. The two indirect effects did not significantly differ from each other, which shows that the two proposed mediators play an equally important role as explanatory mechanisms of the employment quality – employee health complaints relationship. These results have theoretical and practical implications that we discuss below.

4.5.1 Theoretical Implications

First, our findings uncover two of the mechanisms (work engagement and affective job insecurity) that help to understand *why* employment quality is negatively related to employee health complaints. According to the first mechanism and our theoretical framework, employment quality (represented by full-time, permanent job contracts and higher salaries) is a resource that initiates a motivational process by fostering work engagement, which in turn decreases employee health complaints. The explanation underlying this indirect effect is that high-quality employment helps employees to meet their basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, thus fostering intrinsic motivation and work engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Then, work engagement stimulates the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system, which facilitates restorative and regulation functions that help employees to enact healthy and adaptable responses that decrease their health complaints (Seppälä et al., 2012). In addition, in line with Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson, 2004), as a positive affective psychological state work engagement helps employees to adopt healthy behaviours and mobilize personal resources to cope with stressful challenges, resulting less health complaints. Focusing on the second mediating mechanism, employment quality is negatively related to employment health complaints via affective job insecurity because employees with low-quality employment (represented by part-time, temporary job contracts and lower salaries) have objectively worse labour conditions (Urbanaviciute et al., 2021) that lead them to experience their employment situation as insecure (De Witte et al., 2015). This

increased affective insecurity represents a real threat to employees because they fear they will lose their jobs. The threat experienced triggers a stress response that impacts employee health and is observed in an increase in self-reported health complaints (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The identification of these two mediating mechanisms represents a valuable increase in knowledge and an important refinement of the theory involved (Spencer et al., 2005) because we are now better able to understand and explain the relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints. Uncovering intervening variables contributes to moving our discipline forward (Mathieu et al., 2008).

Second, the two indirect effects examined in this study (employment quality → work engagement → health complaints, *and* employment quality → affective job insecurity → health complaints) were of similar magnitudes (that is, the difference between them was not statistically significant). This result is important because previous research has often focused on the relationship between employment quality and job insecurity and its associated health outcomes (Bolibar et al., 2021; Peckham et al., 2019) while disregarding the potential relationship between employment quality and work motivation states and its associated consequences. Our findings highlight that the influence of employment quality on certain employee outcomes via functional motivational states (i.e., work engagement) may be as strong as its influence via dysfunctional threatening states (i.e., affective job insecurity). Future studies and theoretical models should include both types of mediators in order to improve our understanding of the mechanisms through which employment quality influences employee criteria. By considering one of the mediators investigated here (work engagement) and its associated consequences (e.g., job performance, Christian et al., 2011; Mazzetti et al., 2021; turnover intention, Mazzetti et al., 2021), future studies could examine the indirect effects of employment quality via work engagement on a variety of important employee criteria.

Third, our findings also have implications for the JD-R theory. We showed that the resource we investigated (employment quality) can start the expected motivational process, based on the JD-R theory, for resources via key motivational states (e.g., work engagement). However, we also showed that employment quality can negatively impact health complaints through its influence on affective job insecurity. This last result is congruent with the idea that cross-links exist between the motivation and health-impairment processes embedded within the JD-R theory. Based on these cross-links, resources may also have an impact on strain variables (e.g., affective job insecurity, emotional exhaustion), and demands may also have an impact on motivational states. These cross-links have been reported by previous empirical studies and meta-analyses (Alarcon, 2011; Crawford et al., 2010; González-Romá et al., 2020; Lesener et al., 2019; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Thus, future studies using the JD-R theory as their theoretical framework should consider including cross-links between the two aforementioned processes.

Finally, researchers have frequently used the JD-R theory to investigate the influence of job resources (e.g., autonomy, variety, feedback from the job; Crawford et al., 2010; Morgeson et al., 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2009) that are characteristic of high-quality jobs when job quality is based on job content (i.e., job tasks). Our results and theoretical framework show that the JD-R theory can also be used to examine the influence of the characteristics of the employment relationship on employees' health complaints, and these findings contribute to extending the applicability of the JD-R theory in occupational health research.

4.5.2 Practical Implications

Our study shows that employment quality contributes to employee health. Thus, policy makers should approve norms, regulations, and programs that promote high-quality employment arrangements among employers. Regulations of low-quality employment (in our

study operationalized as nonstandard work arrangements) can be done via the limitation of the use of these arrangements for non-core business activities or limiting the total number of nonstandard workers nationally (ILO, 2016).

Policy makers could also launch evidence-based communication campaigns that show the benefits of high-quality employment. For instance, the European Union's policy has tried to foster quality employment by stressing the importance of "promoting job creation on permanent contracts, ensuring that temporary contracts represent stepping stones and not dead-ends..." (European Commission, 2018, p. 7). All of this can help employers make informed decisions about the employment arrangements they offer. Organizations implement low quality employment arrangements such as temporary part-time low paid jobs as a way to reduce organizational costs. However, as our study shows, the negative impact these arrangements have on employee health is a cost in the long run for organizations. Making informed decisions about employment arrangements that are not informed by prior analysis may lead to unnecessary adverse outcomes for both companies and workers (Walker, 2011).

Thus, being aware of the importance of offering high-quality conditions to their employees *and* the impact this may have on their organizations can help build a business case for high quality employment. For instance, based on the association between employee health complaints and absenteeism (Roelen et al., 2010), offering high-quality employment can help to reduce absenteeism in organizations and its associated costs.

Moreover, based on the positive relationship we observed between employment quality and work engagement, on the one hand, and the positive relationship between the latter and job performance documented in the literature (Mazzetti et al., 2021), on the other, we suggest that by offering high-quality employment, employers can foster job performance. Furthermore, based on the negative relationship we found between employment quality and affective job insecurity, on the one hand, and the negative relationship between the latter and employee

wellbeing reported in the literature (De Witte et al., 2015; Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018), on the other, we suggest that by offering high-quality employment, employers can improve employee wellbeing.

4.5.3 Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, data were collected from a single source using self-reported questionnaires, which might have inflated the relationships between the study variables. However, the implementation of a time-lagged design with a temporal separation among the study variables should have reduced this potential problem (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Second, we operationalized employment quality using three indicators (type of job contract, employment relationship, and salary). We chose these indicators based on the segmented labour market theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971) and because they are more objective than other indicators employed in the literature (e.g., whether employees feel easily replaceable, Vives et al., 2010). However, some scholars have suggested other indicators, such as working time arrangements and interpersonal power relations, among others (Kalleberg, 2018; Padrosa et al., 2021). Future research should examine whether the relationships observed here are found when other operationalizations of employment quality are used.

Our study also shows several strengths. First, by implementing a time-lagged research design, we more rigorously test the study relationships, and we overcome the limitations of a cross-sectional research design, which has been the most frequent way of testing the relationship between employment quality and health indicators (Matilla-Santander et al., 2020; Steffgen et al., 2020; Vanroelen et al., 2021). Second, by measuring employment quality via objective indicators that focus on key employment characteristics, we provide a more adequate measurement of employment quality (Peckham et al., 2022). Moreover, by implementing this measurement approach, we contribute to discriminating between employment quality and

employees' self-reported experiences (work engagement and job insecurity) and health complaints (Eisenberg-Guyot et al., 2020).

4.5.4 Conclusion

Our study helps to explain *why* employment quality is negatively related to employees' health complaints by showing that work engagement and affective job insecurity are equally important mediators in this relationship. By identifying these two mediators, we hope to provide a better theoretical understanding of a research topic that is highly relevant to policy makers, employers, and employees²

² This study is currently under review in a scientific journal.

Chapter 5: Employability as Antecedent of Eudaimonic Wellbeing at Work: The Mediating Role of Work Meaningfulness (Study 3)

5.1 Introduction and Theoretical Background

To fully understand job quality, in addition to consider its objective indicators we need to take into account its subjective indicators, those which necessarily travel through the self of employees (Knox & Wright, 2022). Accordingly, work meaningfulness (i.e., work experienced as personally significant and worthwhile and with a positive valence; Rosso et al., 2010) is an important subjective intrinsic indicator of job quality (Warhurst et al., 2022).

The increased research about work meaningfulness has highlighted its positive association with crucial employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010), work engagement (Lee et al., 2016; Steger, et al., 2013), performance (Harris et al., 2007), and health (Wang et al., 2022). Allan's (2019) meta-analysis supported the notion that people who experience work meaningfulness *feel* better and *work* better. Thus, work meaningfulness as a subjective indicator of job quality is crucial for understanding key employee outcomes. Nowadays, work meaningfulness is seen as one of the most prominent job aspects employees look for in a job. This idea is supported by research results indicating people's willingness to accept significantly lower salaries in exchange for a more meaningful work (Achor et al., 2018; Hu & Hirsh, 2017). In addition, research has shown that work meaningfulness as a job quality indicator had the largest effects on employee mental health in comparison with other job quality indicators, such as earnings, career prospects, and physical environment (Wang et al., 2022).

The literature on work meaningfulness antecedents is in increasing demand, due to the fact that understating what makes employees experience work meaningfulness can guide organizations, employers, and employees to foster this important job quality dimension and its subsequent positive outcomes. Previous research on work meaningfulness has identified and categorized its antecedents on various levels: individual, work, organizational, and societal (Lysova et al., 2019). Regarding the work level antecedents of work meaningfulness, research

has mostly drawn on the Job Characteristics theory (JCT; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This theoretical model outlines the factors (job characteristics) required for employees to be internally motivated and achieve a high performance in their work. It suggests that five aspects of a job (skills variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) lead to three essential psychological states (work meaningfulness, feeling responsible, and having knowledge of results), which in turn produce positive outcomes (intrinsic motivation, high-quality performance, job satisfaction, and reduced absenteeism). According to the Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), workers experience positive affect when they successfully complete a task that holds personal significance. Moreover, in line with Self-Determination theory and the theory of job crafting (Tims & Bakker, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), employees feel a sense of self-determination and craft their jobs to align it with their preferences and needs to ultimately experience work meaningfulness (Lysova et al., 2019).

Regarding organizational level antecedents, Lysova et al. (2019) outline that leadership, especially specific styles such as transformational and charismatic, have been found to foster work meaningfulness. Also, supportive and innovative organizational culture as well as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) organizational policies and practices seem to promote work meaningfulness (Lysova et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, in comparison with work and organizational level antecedents of work meaningfulness, research on personal antecedents of work meaningfulness is limited. Some studies have investigated some individual level antecedents, such as personal narratives, characteristic adaptations (e.g., goals such as striving for competence, autonomy, status/power, or relatedness), and some dispositional signatures (e.g., personal strengths that capture the individual qualities and their potential to contribute to the world around them and achieve well-being) (see for a review Lysova et al., 2019). However, most of these studies focus on generic, domain-free variables, which raises the following unanswered research question: are personal

work-related resources beneficial for experiencing work meaningfulness? And if the answer is yes, what personal work-related resources are the most beneficial?

As mentioned above, work meaningfulness is generally considered a positive phenomenon that contributes to employee wellbeing and overall quality of life (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2019). Recently, researchers' focus has shifted toward eudaimonic wellbeing, a concept that is in line with the eudaimonic direction of work meaningfulness (Steger et al., 2012).

Unlike hedonic wellbeing, which focuses on experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain, eudaimonic wellbeing focuses on optimal functioning and human growth (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The increasing number of studies on eudaimonic wellbeing have highlighted its importance for quality of life (Vitterso, 2016). Eudaimonic wellbeing has been positively related to life satisfaction and mental health, and negatively related to physical health problems such as sleep complaints (Friedman et al., 2015). In the context of work, employee eudaimonic wellbeing is considered an avenue toward achieving sustainable organizations because it fosters employee health, intrinsic motivation, and, ultimately, performance (Sonnentag, 2015). Employee eudaimonic wellbeing has been positively related to health, and previous studies have emphasized its role in the prevention of mental illness and psychological distress (Ryff, 2016). Moreover, in comparison with hedonic wellbeing at work, eudaimonic wellbeing at work is a stronger predictor of work performance (Peiró et al., 2019). Thus, it is important to understand not only *what* shapes eudaimonic wellbeing at work, but also *how* and *why* this occurs (Bartels et al., 2019). The present study contributes to this understanding.

Scholars have highlighted that in order to fully understand employees' eudaimonic wellbeing, we need to move beyond the dominant context-free conceptualization of eudaimonic wellbeing. In particular, some authors have suggested investigating eudaimonic

wellbeing at work by using measures adapted to the work and career context (Dagenais-Desmarais et al., 2017).

Research on antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing is crucial in order to understand what shapes eudaimonic wellbeing at work, and how and why this occurs. Despite the advances made in the research on the antecedents of context-free eudaimonic wellbeing (see for a review, Mishra & Venkatesan, 2023), insight into the antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work is still limited (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2020). In this regard, when examining the antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work, research has focused on context-free personal resources such as psychological capital (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013) while ignoring work-specific personal resources. It is important to address this situation for several reasons. First, research on work-specific personal resources as antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work could provide urgently needed, refined, contextualized knowledge on eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Mendonça et al. 2022). Based on the principle of compatibility (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974), constructs matched at similar levels of specificity (work specific resources and wellbeing at work) are more strongly related to each other than constructs with different levels of specificity (context – free personal construct and wellbeing at work) (Leary & Hoyle, 2009). In this line, scholars have highlighted the importance of integrating the literatures on vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work as an opportunity to advance theory development (Dik et al., 2019). Second, in order to improve our understanding of *how* and *why* personal work specific resources influence eudaimonic wellbeing at work, there is a need for mediation studies that can help to identify the underlying (work specific) mechanisms linking these resources to eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Third, by understanding which personal work-related resources foster eudaimonic wellbeing at work and unravelling the mechanisms that explain *why* this relationship occurs, practitioners and career counsellors will be better

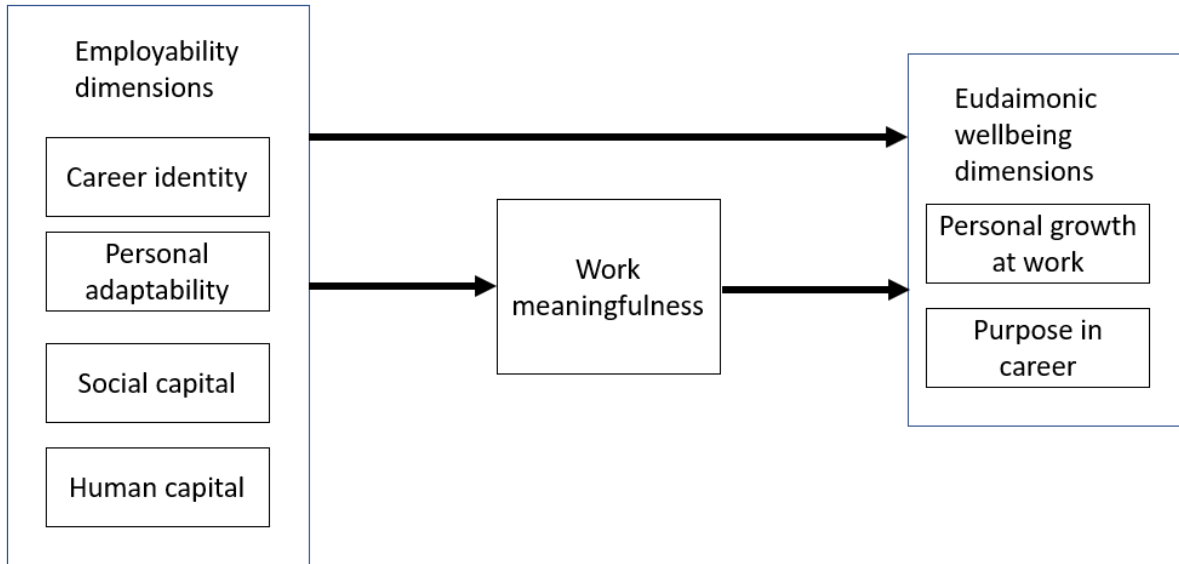
equipped to develop interventions to foment these resources and, ultimately, eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

In the vocational psychology literature, the concept of employability (i.e., a psychosocial construct that can facilitate the identification and realization of career opportunities; Fugate et al., 2004) is considered a personal work-specific resource on which individuals can rely to cope with the challenges of the current world of work (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015; Blustein et al., 2018) and obtain high quality jobs (González-Romá et al., 2018). Given its importance, it is surprising that it has rarely been investigated in relation to context-free eudaimonic wellbeing (Di Fabio, 2017), and even less so in relation to eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Shedding light on this under-investigated relationship can integrate the vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing research and provide necessary guidance for professional career development practices.

This study aimed to address this problem by examining the relationships between Fugate et al.'s (2004) four employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social and human capital), on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, on the other. In addition, to uncover the mechanisms underlying these relationships, we examined the mediating role of work meaningfulness (i.e., work experienced as personally significant and worthwhile and with a positive valence; Rosso et al., 2010) in the above-mentioned relationships. Our research model is displayed in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1

The Research Model



We propose work meaningfulness as an underlying mechanism through which employability could foster eudaimonic wellbeing at work for several reasons. First, by adopting the worker-centric approach of work meaningfulness, we argue that employees are active creators of meaning (Rosso et al., 2010), and that work meaningfulness depends on what employees themselves bring to work (Chalofsky, 2003). We draw on Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability as a psychosocial construct composed of career identity, personal adaptability, social capital, and human capital. We view employability as a set of personal resources that employees bring to work that can increase work meaningfulness. We propose that employability is an antecedent of work meaningfulness because previous research has suggested that work activities that are congruent with one's identity (in this case, one's career identity) are crucial for experiencing meaningful work (Lysova et al., 2018). In addition, scholars have argued that having an extensive social network (that is, social capital; Robertson

et al., 2020), adaptability (Nejad et al., 2021), and human capital (e.g., competence; Rosso et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2002) contribute to employees experiencing their work as meaningful.

Second, we argue that work meaningfulness is positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work because it has been considered a construct with an eudaimonic direction (Steger et al., 2012) due to its alignment with the philosophical approach to eudaimonia that encompasses personally valuable and worthwhile experiences (Haybron, 2016). Hence, as such, work meaningfulness is a prerequisite for eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Chalofsky & Cavallero, 2019).

With this study, we aim to contribute to the literature in several ways. First, we contribute to refining eudaimonic wellbeing theory by identifying some of its personal work-related antecedents in a specific domain (e.g., eudaimonic wellbeing at work). This knowledge allows us to extend the nomological network of the latter construct and prevent the overgeneralization of findings from domain-free eudaimonic wellbeing research to the work domain (Mendonça et al., 2022). Second, we also extend the aforementioned theory by identifying one of the mechanisms (work meaningfulness) through which employability is related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work. This knowledge contributes to improving our understanding of the experience of eudaimonic wellbeing at work and moves our discipline forward (Mathieu et al., 2008). Third, we contribute to the literature on work meaningfulness from a worker centric approach by expanding its nomological network and identifying several employability dimensions as its antecedents. Fourth, by integrating the literature streams on employability, the worker-centric approach to work meaningfulness, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, we answer the call for a theoretical expansion of the relationship between vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Dik et al., 2019). Finally, based on the practical implications of our findings, our study can also contribute to guiding career development interventions aimed at fostering employee eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Our

model proposes that interventions that improve employability dimensions should contribute to increasing eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

5.1.1 Employability and Eudaimonic Wellbeing at Work

We posit that employability is directly and positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Eudaimonic wellbeing highlights individual flourishing and fulfilment of one's potential, and it is predominantly conceptualized as optimal functioning, according to Ryff's (1989) construct of psychological wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing encompasses an individual's growth and fulfilment in six dimensions. However, personal growth and purpose in life are the key dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Although it was initially conceptualized as being context-free, scholars have highlighted the importance of conceptualizing eudaimonic wellbeing at work because there may be context-specific factors that contribute to growth and purpose in the workplace (Dagenais-Desmarais et al., 2017). Therefore, we focused on personal growth at work (i.e., the extent to which employees have a feeling of continuous development, see themselves as growing, and have a sense of realizing their potential at work (Ryff, 1989)) and purpose in career (i.e., "people's identification of, and intention to pursue, particular highly valued, overarching career goals"; Steger & Dik, 2010, p. 133), given that employees, now more than ever, seek continuous growth and purpose in their jobs and careers (Bartels et al., 2019).

Personal resources are functional in the accomplishment of work goals and may stimulate personal growth and development (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). For instance, psychological capital is a context-free personal resource that has been found to be positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013). However, it has been argued that vocational psychology constructs such as work-related personal resources (i.e., personal employability) may contribute to optimal employee functioning (Akkermans et al., 2020). In particular, variables matched at similar levels of specificity, such as work-related

resources and wellbeing at work, are more strongly related to each other than constructs with different levels of specificity (general personal resources and wellbeing at work) (Leary & Hoyle, 2009). Hence, investigating a work-related resource (i.e., employability) in relation to eudaimonic wellbeing at work can provide a more nuanced understanding of how employees come to experience eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Dik et al., 2019).

As previously mentioned, we draw on Fugate et al.'s (2004) theoretical model of employability as a work-specific resource composed of four dimensions: career identity, personal adaptability, social capital, and human capital. In this study, we argue that these resources can not only facilitate identification and realization of career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004), but they can also provide motivation and agency to take advantage of growth opportunities at work and pursue overarching purposeful career goals. Below, we outline our arguments for proposing each of these employability dimensions as antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

First, career identity refers to the way people define themselves in the career context, describing 'who I am' or 'who I want to be' (Fugate et al., 2004). It serves as a cognitive compass that directs, regulates, and maintains their behavior, representing the motivational component of employability (González-Romá et al., 2018). Awareness of the discrepancy between what employees currently do and what they would like to do careerwise stimulates employees to engage in personal growth activities at work to reduce this discrepancy (Self-discrepancy theory; Higgins, 1987). For instance, employees experience personal growth when they leave their comfort zone and tackle new challenging tasks at work (Hommelhoff et al., 2020). Moreover, employees who have a clear career identity are more likely to engage in activities that allow them to pursue their career goals (Savickas, 2002). Having a clear identity motivates employees to collect information about career opportunities and select work

experiences that align with their overarching career goals and, thus, experience purpose in career (Dalla Rosa et al., 2019). Based on these ideas, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a. Career identity will be positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 1b. Career identity will be positively related to purpose in career.

Second, personal adaptability refers to the ability to adapt to changing situations, based on personal characteristics that predispose individuals to engage in (pro)active adaptive efforts (Fugate et al., 2004). Adaptability is especially important nowadays because the world of work is characterized by change and uncertainty. Therefore, adaptability plays a crucial role in employees' career development and wellbeing (Araujo & do Céu Taveira, 2009; Nejad et al., 2020; Porfeli, & Lee, 2012).

Adaptability is positively related to openness to experience (Martin et al., 2012), suggesting that employees are likely to engage in activities that are outside their comfort zone and be open to opportunities for personal growth at work. Employees with greater adaptability also have the capacity to better manage difficulties by means of their resilience (O'Connell et al., 2008). In the context of work and career, high levels of employee adaptability trigger self-regulatory skills that result in a greater capacity to deal with uncertain, variable, and challenging situations at work and in one's career (Nejad et al., 2020). Hence, adaptability can guide employees' identification of overarching career goals and foster the pursuit of these goals and the experience of purpose in career. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2a. Personal adaptability will be positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 2b. Personal adaptability will be positively related to purpose in career.

Third, social capital refers to employees' social network that helps them to obtain work- and career-related information, which are considered crucial instrumental resources (Robertson et al., 2020). Social capital extends an individual's ability to identify and take advantage of

opportunities between organizations, across industries, and over entire careers (Dess & Shaw, 2001; Higgins & Kram, 2001). The wider the social network, the more work- and career-related information is available for the employee. According to Moser and Ashforth (2021), the instrumentality stemming from social capital supports the motive for self-enhancement and the realization of the need for personal growth. Because these instrumental resources are *work-related*, they can provide guidance about how employees should act *at work* in order to grow professionally. Thus, we argue that the knowledge and information provided by an employee's social capital is a steppingstone to challenging tasks at work and, ultimately, personal growth at work. Furthermore, the resources from social capital are not restricted to work activities and can be transferred to a broader career context. Employees with a variety of these instrumental resources are better equipped to understand what is expected of them to succeed in their careers (i.e., identify significant career goals) and proactively engage in activities to pursue and, ultimately, achieve these goals (Robertson et al., 2020). In this line, empirical evidence has supported the claim that more social capital (i.e., a large social network) fosters employees' career success (Seibert et al., 2001). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a. Social capital will be positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 3b. Social capital will be positively related to purpose in career.

Fourth, human capital refers to the competences, education, and work experience individuals have (Fugate et al., 2004). In this study, we focus on employees' generic competences, which refer to the knowledge, skills, and abilities a person can apply in different contexts, regardless of the field of expertise (Barrie, 2006). In particular, we focus on graduates' generic competences required by the labor market, as identified by Hernández-March et al. (2009): 1. oral and written communication skills, 2. problem solving skills, 3. time and resource management abilities, 4. capacity for teamwork, 5. continuous learning, ongoing education and lifelong learning, and 6. capacity to take on responsibilities. Given the generic

nature of these competences, employees who possess them are likely to perform better at their workplaces and have higher self-esteem (Rao, 2010). Frequent high performance can trigger self-efficacy (i.e., a person's confidence about his or her capabilities to successfully perform a specific task within a specific context; Bandura 1986). Employees with high self-efficacy are not only more likely to self-initiate challenging situations at work, but they are also more likely to perform well in them (Van Vianen, et al., 2019). In fact, it has been suggested that performing in challenging situations is a requisite for personal growth at work (Hommelhoff et al., 2020). Moreover, highly competent employees are more likely to develop role breadth self-efficacy (i.e., belief in one's ability to engage in proactive, social, and integrative activities beyond their job descriptions; Parker, 1998), due to their frequent involvement in challenging tasks and successful performance on these tasks. Role breadth self-efficacy inspires employees to engage in proactive work behavior throughout their careers (Syamsudin et al., 2022). Based on this rationale, employees with a high level of generic competences can proactively enact these competences when identifying career goals and their achievement, which shapes their purpose in career. Previous research has shown that employees with high levels of generic competences are more likely to be successful in achieving their career goals because they can work well with others and solve problems (Lan, 2020), which are essential for navigating through one's career. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4a. Human capital will be positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 4b. Human capital will be positively related to purpose in career.

5.1.2 The Relationships Between Employability Dimensions and Work Meaningfulness

We posit that employability will have a positive indirect effect on eudaimonic wellbeing at work via work meaningfulness, so that employability will be positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn will be positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

In contrast to the work-centric perspective (e.g., the literature on job characteristics; Hackman & Oldham, 1975), the worker-centric perspective conceptualizes meaningful work in a more agentic way, assuming that employees are active creators of meaning who naturally engage in meaning-making (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Rosso et al. (2010) concluded that “perceptions of meaningfulness must necessarily travel through the self” (p. 15). According to this approach, work meaningfulness is a subjective experience that depends on what employees themselves bring to work (Chalofsky, 2003; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Hence, we turn to the worker-centric approach of work meaningfulness to investigate the role played by Fugate et al.’s (2004) employability dimensions in the subjective experience of work meaningfulness and, ultimately, eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

In line with this approach, Rosso et al. (2010) propose several pathways to work meaningfulness. One of the most researched pathways is the *authenticity* pathway. This pathway deals with a sense of coherence or alignment between one’s behavior and perceptions of the “true” self, which is based on several processes including self-congruence and identity affirmation processes. First, work that is congruent with their self-concept would allow employees to enact their ‘true’ authentic self and, therefore, be meaningful (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). Second, according to identity theory (Burke, 1991), engaging in work activities that are congruent with one’s identity is a source of meaningfulness. Both processes lead to higher levels of work meaningfulness because they enable individuals to behave consistently with their attitudes, beliefs, values, and identities while working (Shamir, 1991).

According to Rosso et al. (2010), another pathway to work meaningfulness is via *self-efficacy*. This pathway is related to individuals’ beliefs that they have the power and ability to produce an intended effect or make a difference (Bandura, 1977), and it is especially triggered by *feelings of competence* that result from successfully overcoming challenges at work. This feeling of competence provides a sense of work meaningfulness (Gecas, 1991) because it

enables individuals to feel that they have the ability to effect change in their environment (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991).

Rosso et al.'s (2010) third proposed pathway passes through *self-esteem*, that is, individuals' assessment or evaluation of their own self-worth (Baumeister, 1998). When employees successfully accomplish their work tasks, they feel like valuable and worthy individuals (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991; Judge et al., 1998), which enhances their perception of work meaningfulness because it allows them to strengthen their favorable views of the self (Rosso et al., 2010).

We argue that *career identity* is positively related to work meaningfulness because it triggers the abovementioned authenticity pathway (Rosso et al., 2010). Having a clear career identity motivates employees to identify and engage in self-congruent work activities. Additionally, when employees engage in activities that are congruent with their career identity, they affirm, express, and strengthen this identity (Kira & Balkin, 2014). Career identity is a central part of one's self-concept at work because it initially shapes "who I am" (self) and "who I want to be" (future self at work), thus providing a direction that is necessary for authenticity and the experience of work meaningfulness.

Regarding the relationship between *personal adaptability* and meaningfulness at work, first, we must acknowledge that personal adaptability encompasses cognitive aspects, such as the way employees change and adapt their appraisal of work events (Garland et al., 2015). Although it does not trigger any of the meaningful pathways proposed by Rosso et al. (2010), being cognitively adaptive can lead to the reappraisal of work situations as positive and meaningful (Garland et al., 2017). Thus, adaptability as a proactive construct allows employees to see alternative options for coping (Martin & Rubin, 1995; Moore, 2013), which results in the ability to 'fluidly reconstruct meaning' (Garland et al., 2015, p. 385). In fact, Lysova et al.

(2022) showed that employees who have high cognitive adaptability are able to interpret relevant interpersonal cues in ways that enable them to experience work meaningfulness.

We argue that *social capital* is positively related to work meaningfulness because it triggers the self-efficacy and self-esteem pathways to work meaningfulness. A growing body of research has supported the notion that social relationships can foster employees' experience of work meaningfulness (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Robertson et al., 2020). Research has focused on the quality (Colbert et al., 2016; Kahn, 2007; Lysova et al., 2019) of social relationships in the experience of meaningfulness. However, a recent theoretical framework developed by Robertson and colleagues (2020) argues that the quantity of social relationships may also foster work meaningfulness. Given that Fugate et al.'s (2004) operationalization of social capital refers to the quantity of social relationships, in this study we empirically examine whether social capital is an antecedent of work meaningfulness. According to Robertson et al. (2020), social capital provides instrumental resources. These resources can be in the form of knowledge and strategic career-relevant information, such as job opportunities (Lawler, 1992). The more instrumental resources employees have available, the better they can comprehend what is expected of them in order to succeed at work. This, in turn, leads to the experience of self-esteem and provides employees with tools to perform better (Spreitzer, 1995). In other words, having more social capital increases employees' instrumental resources that facilitate work accomplishments, individual self-efficacy, and self-esteem, which ultimately lead to the experience of work meaningfulness (Robertson et al., 2020).

Similarly, we argue that *human capital* (generic competences) fosters work meaningfulness, based on Rosso et al.'s (2010) pathways of feelings of competence and self-esteem toward work meaningfulness. Employees with a high level of generic competences perform better at work, which provides them with a sense of mastery and competence. For instance, employees who see themselves as effectively managing challenges at work and

performing well are more likely to feel more personally competent and efficacious in their work (Masten & Reed, 2002; Spreitzer et al., 2005). In addition, highly competent individuals will accomplish more at work, which helps to fulfil employees' motivation to believe that they are valuable (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991; Judge et al., 1997), thus triggering the self-esteem mechanism toward meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010). In fact, Rao (2010) argued that generic competences contribute to building self-esteem, and empirical evidence has supported this idea (Hernandez et al., 2022).

5.1.3 The Relationships Between Work Meaningfulness and Eudaimonic Wellbeing

Focusing on *personal growth at work*, the positive psychology literature argues that meaningful experiences can facilitate growth (Niles & Gutierrez, 2019; Seligman, 2004). Work meaningfulness is a motivational force that triggers goal-directed behaviors and leads to positive affective states and wellbeing (Allan, 2019; Chalofsky, 2003; Hackman & Oldham, 1975). It is a positive experience that allows employees to refocus their cognitive effort and be open to learning opportunities that will foster their growth at work (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Experiencing work meaningfulness triggers a learning and personal growth mindset (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2019). In fact, Turner (2005) showed how learning was innately embedded in the employees who felt their work was meaningful. Employees with work meaningfulness were more likely to continuously question their ideas at work, dig deeper to obtain more knowledge, and reflect on what the new knowledge at work means to them, their personal values, and beliefs. Moreover, scholars have argued that employees who experience work meaningfulness not only continually strive, learn, and grow, but they also continually strive for personal mastery (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2019). "Personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a lifelong process. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, *their growth areas*" (Senge, 1990, p.142). We argue that striving to attain personal mastery helps employees with work meaningfulness to

identify their personal growth needs at work. When employees can identify their personal growth needs and have a proactive learning mindset at work, they can realize their potential and experience personal growth at work.

With regard to the relationship between work meaningfulness and *purpose in career*, it is important to note that the career construct is broader than work. Chen (1998) argued that an employee's career is constructed by different life and work roles and corresponding events that always have certain meanings for the person. Thus, one's career is not a mere reflection of work experiences, but rather a subjective interpretation of different work experiences in the context of a life story. In fact, through meaningful work, employees seek to find purpose in their personal and professional lives (i.e., career) (van der Walt, 2022). Empirical evidence has shown a positive relationship between work meaningfulness and meaning and purpose in life (Allan, 2019), suggesting that meaning at work can be translated into meaning and purpose in a broader life domain (i.e., one's career). Work is considered one of the most important sources of meaning and purpose of life; in other words, work meaningfulness is a subdomain of a meaningful life (Allan, 2019). In this line, Arnoux-Nicolas et al. (2016) argued that employees' meaningful work experience gives them direction and refers them to future projects on which they may elaborate. Thus, we argue that the experience of work meaningfulness can be translated into a perception of a purposeful career, especially because employees are motivated and engage in goal-directed behaviours that can guide them in pursuing their overarching professional life goals.

5.1.4 The Indirect Effect of Employability Dimensions on Eudaimonic Wellbeing via Work Meaningfulness

Taking into account the relationships between the investigated employability dimensions and work meaningfulness, described above, and work meaningfulness and the two dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing examined (personal growth at work and purpose in

career), we posit that the influence of the employability dimensions on eudaimonic wellbeing is also transmitted through work meaningfulness. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5a. There is a positive indirect effect of career identity on personal growth at work via work meaningfulness, so that career identity is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 5b. There is a positive indirect effect of career identity on purpose in career via work meaningfulness, so that career identity is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to purpose in career.

Hypothesis 6a. There is a positive indirect effect of personal adaptability on personal growth at work via work meaningfulness, so that personal adaptability is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 6b. There is a positive indirect effect of personal adaptability on purpose in career via work meaningfulness, so that personal adaptability is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to purpose in career.

Hypothesis 7a. There is a positive indirect effect of social capital on personal growth at work via work meaningfulness, so that social capital is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 7b. There is a positive indirect effect of social capital on purpose in career via work meaningfulness, so that social capital is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to purpose in career.

Hypothesis 8a. There is a positive indirect effect of human capital on personal growth at work via work meaningfulness, so that human capital is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to personal growth at work.

Hypothesis 8b. There is a positive indirect effect of human capital on purpose in career via work meaningfulness, so that human capital is positively related to work meaningfulness, which in turn is positively related to purpose in career.

5.2 Method

5.2.1 Procedure and Sample

Data were collected through an online panel managed by a market research company. Panel members were invited to participate in the study on the condition that they had to be older than 17 years and not self-employed. Data were collected at three time points separated by three months: Time 1 (T1) April 2020, Time 2 (T2) July 2020, Time 3 (T3) October 2020. We used a three-month period because time lags should be long enough to reduce common method biases, but not long enough to hide an existing relationship (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Moreover, previous studies in the same research area have also used this time lag (Allan et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2021). At T1, 664 participants answered the questionnaire, at T2, 611 participants responded (92% response rate), and, finally, at T3, 579 participants answered the questionnaire (87.2% response rate based on the initial sample of 664 participants). One participant had missing values on the employability dimensions; thus, our longitudinal sample was composed of 578 participants. Moreover, unemployed participants at T1 (136), T2 (27), and T3 (12) were also eliminated from the longitudinal sample. To ensure the quality of the data, we included three attention control items (e.g., “To control the quality of the questionnaire responses, tick the ‘always’ option now”) in the questionnaires and eliminated any participants who failed one or more of these items. Following this criterion, 77 participants at T1, 34 participants at T2, and 29 participants at T3 were eliminated from the sample. Thus, our final longitudinal sample consisted of 263 employees. They were between 22 and 59 years old ($M = 37$, $SD = 10$), and 48% were female. The participants worked in various occupational sectors

such as education (11.5%), health and social services (9%), construction (7.8%), information and communication (7.8%), administrative (7.4%) among others.

5.2.2 Sample Attrition Analysis

Additionally, to test for sample attrition bias in our study, we conducted a response-nonresponse analysis. We compared three groups of subjects: 1. those who *only* responded at T1 ($N_1 = 65$); 2. those who *only* responded at T1 and T2 ($N_2 = 88$); and 3. those who responded at *all* three time points (T1, T2, and T3; $N_3 = 263$).

First, we filtered the participants at each time point, eliminating unemployed participants and careless respondents. At T1, from the 664 initial participants, we eliminated 151 unemployed participants and 96 participants who had attention errors at T1, yielding a sample of 417. To define the sample of participants who (at the least) responded at T1 and T2, from this sample of 417 participants, we eliminated the unemployed participants at T2 (26) and those who had attention errors (39) at T2, yielding a sample of 352. To obtain the sample of participants who *only* responded at T1 (N_1), we calculated the difference between 417 and 352, resulting in a sample composed of 65 participants ($N_1 = 65$). To define the sample of participants who *only* responded at T1 and T2, from the group of 352 participants (i.e., those who (at the least) responded at T1 and T2), we subtracted the group of participants who responded at all three time points ($N_3 = 263$), yielding a sample of $N_2 = 89$. Moreover, we further eliminated one participant who had missing values on the employability dimensions at T2; hence, the sample consisting of those who *only* responded at T1 and T2 (N_2) was composed of 88 participants.

We compared the group of participants who responded at *all* three time points ($N_3 = 263$) with the other two groups on gender (with a chi-square test), age, and the variables measured at Time 1: career identity, personal adaptability, social capital, and human capital (with 5 one-way ANOVAs). We found no significant relationships between the distribution of

the participants in these three groups and gender. Moreover, we found no significant differences in age, career identity, personal adaptability, or human capital between the three groups. However, we found significant differences in social capital between the three groups ($F(2,413) = 3.75, p = .02$). Post-hoc comparisons using the LSD test indicated that the mean score on social capital in the drop-out samples of participants who *only* responded at T1 (N_1) ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.1$) and the sample of those who *only* responded at T1 and T2 (N_2) ($M = 3.21, SD = 1.02$) was significantly higher than the mean score of the final sample of participants who responded at all three time points (N_3) ($M = 2.95, SD = .98$) ($M_{N1} - M_{N3} = .29, p = .03$; $M_{N2} - M_{N3} = .26, p = .03, \eta^2 = .02$). However, as indicated by the small value of eta squared η^2 (proportion of variance associated with each main effect and interaction effect in the ANOVA), the attrition bias was quite small.

We also compared the final sample of participants who responded at all three time points ($N=263$) with the participants who *only* responded at T1 and T2 ($N = 89$) on work meaningfulness. The t-test results showed no significant differences between these two groups.³

5.2.3 Measures

Employability

The four dimensions of personal employability were measured at T1.

Career Identity was measured with a 4-item scale (e.g., “I have a clear idea about the place where I want to address my professional career.”) (González-Roma et al., 2018). Participants answered on a response scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .88.

³ The results from this analysis are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Personal Adaptability was measured with a 3-item scale (e.g., “I am able to adapt to the changing circumstances of my environment”) whose items were based on previous measures (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Participants answered on a scale from 1 (None) to 5 (A lot). Cronbach alpha was .88.

Social Capital was measured with a 4-item scale (e.g., “I have a broad network of professional contacts that will help me to find job opportunities.”) based on previous research (González-Roma et al., 2018). Participants answered on a response scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .80.

Human Capital was measured by 6 items focusing on several generic competences required of university graduates by the labor market (Hernández-March et al., 2009). Participants were asked to indicate the level they have on each of these six competences (1. oral and written communication skills, 2. problem solving skills, 3. time and resource management abilities, 4. capacity for teamwork, 5. continuous learning, ongoing education, and lifelong learning, and 6. capacity to take on responsibilities) on a scale from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High). Cronbach alpha was .80.

Work Meaningfulness

This variable was measured at T2 by a 5-item scale (May et al., 2004) (i.e., “The work I do on this job is worthwhile.”). Participants answered on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .95.

Eudaimonic Wellbeing at Work

It was measured at T3. As mentioned earlier, we focused on two dimensions of Ryff’s (1989) psychological wellbeing scale. Because this is a domain-free eudaimonic wellbeing measure, and our study focuses on the work specific domain, we reworded the items for the work/career context, as in previous studies (Culbertson et al., 2010).

Personal Growth at Work was measured by van Dierendonck's (2004) 7-item version of Ryff's (1989) personal growth original scale. A sample item is "I feel that at my job I continue to learn more about myself". Participants responded on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .92.

Purpose in Career was measured by van Dierendonck's (2004) 6-item version of Ryff's (1989) purpose scale. A sample item is "I enjoy making plans for my professional career and working toward making them a reality". Participants responded on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Cronbach alpha was .95.

To evaluate the validity of the scales in the present study, we conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method. The hypothesized 7-factor model showed an acceptable fit to data ($\chi^2(539) = 1226.6, p < .01$; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.05; CFI = 0.91), with statistically significant factor loadings ranging between .54 and .96. Moreover, the hypothesized model was compared to a 1-factor model. The latter model yielded a poor fit to the data ($\chi^2(560) = 4306.4, p < .01$; RMSEA = 0.15; SRMR = 0.12; CFI = 0.51, which was significantly worse than the hypothesized 7-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(21) = 3079.8, p < .01$). These results provide evidence for the validity of the study measurement instruments.

Control Variables

Considering the time lagged nature of our data collection, we controlled whether our participants changed their jobs throughout the study. In this regard, we defined two control variables: Job change at T2 (0. no job change between T1 and T2; 1. job change between T1 and in T2) and Job change at T3 (0. no job change between T2 and T3; 1. job change between T2 and T3).

5.2.4 Analysis

We tested our hypotheses by means of path analysis with observed variables, using Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) and the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method. More specifically, we fitted a mediation model in which we controlled for the influence of job change at T2 on the mediator (work meaningfulness) and the influence of job change at T3 on the outcome variables (personal growth at work and purpose in career). To analyse Hypotheses 1 to 4, we tested a model that included only the direct relationships. To analyse Hypotheses 5 to 8, we introduced the mediator (work meaningfulness) in the model. To test for the hypothesized indirect effects, we computed the corresponding 95% bias-corrected (BC) bootstrap confidence intervals (MacKinnon et al., 2004; Williams & MacKinnon, 2008) after bootstrapping 1000 samples.

5.3 Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are reported in Table 5.1

Table 5.1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among the Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Career Identity (T1)	4.20	1.10	.88								
2. Personal Adaptability (T1)	3.82	0.72	.16**	.88							
3. Social Capital (T1)	2.95	0.98	.35**	.15*	.80						
4. Human Capital (T1)	4.11	0.51	.28**	.59**	.17**	.80					
5. Work Meaningfulness (T2)	4.24	1.13	.57**	.12	.32**	.25**	.95				
6. Personal growth at work (T3)	4.04	0.99	.53**	.22**	.31**	.30**	.60**	.92			
7. Purpose in Career (T3)	3.91	1.15	.71**	.15*	.38**	.26**	.59**	.68**	.95		
8. Job Change T1-T2	.04	0.19	.06	.04	.08	.10	-.05	.09	.12*	-	
9. Job Change T2-T3	.05	.22	.08	.07	-.01	.05	-.01	.12	.11	.32**	-

Note. N = 263. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Entries in italics that appear in the main diagonal are Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients.

The model that modelled only the direct relationships showed a good fit to data ($\chi^2 (4) = 3.4, p > .05$; RMSEA = 0; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = 0.02). Standardized estimates for the bivariate relationships involved in the model are displayed in Table 5.2. Focusing on the direct relationships between the four dimensions of employability and the two dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing, we obtained the following results. Regarding Hypotheses 1a and 1b, the results obtained showed that career identity was positively related to both personal growth at work (.44, $p < .01$) and purpose in career (.64, $p < .01$), providing support for these hypotheses. The direct ‘effects’ of personal adaptability on personal growth at work (.05, $p > .05$) and purpose in career (-.01, $p > .05$) were not significant, and so Hypotheses 2a and 2b were not supported. Social capital was positively related to personal growth at work (.13, $p < .05$) and to purpose in career (.15, $p < .05$), supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Human capital was not related to personal growth at work (.13, $p > .05$) or purpose in career (.07, $p > .05$). Therefore, Hypotheses 4a and 4b were not supported by the data.

Table 5.2

Standardized Estimates for the Bivariate Relationships Involved in the Research Model

Path	Estimate	SE
Career Identity → Personal Growth at Work	.23**	.07
Career Identity → Purpose in Career	.51**	.05
Personal Adaptability → Personal Growth at Work	.07	.07
Personal Adaptability → Purpose in Career	-.01	.05
Social Capital → Personal Growth at Work	.07	.05
Social Capital → Purpose in Career	.12**	.04
Human Capital → Personal Growth at Work	.07	.05
Human Capital → Purpose in Career	.04	.05

Note. SE = Standard Error.

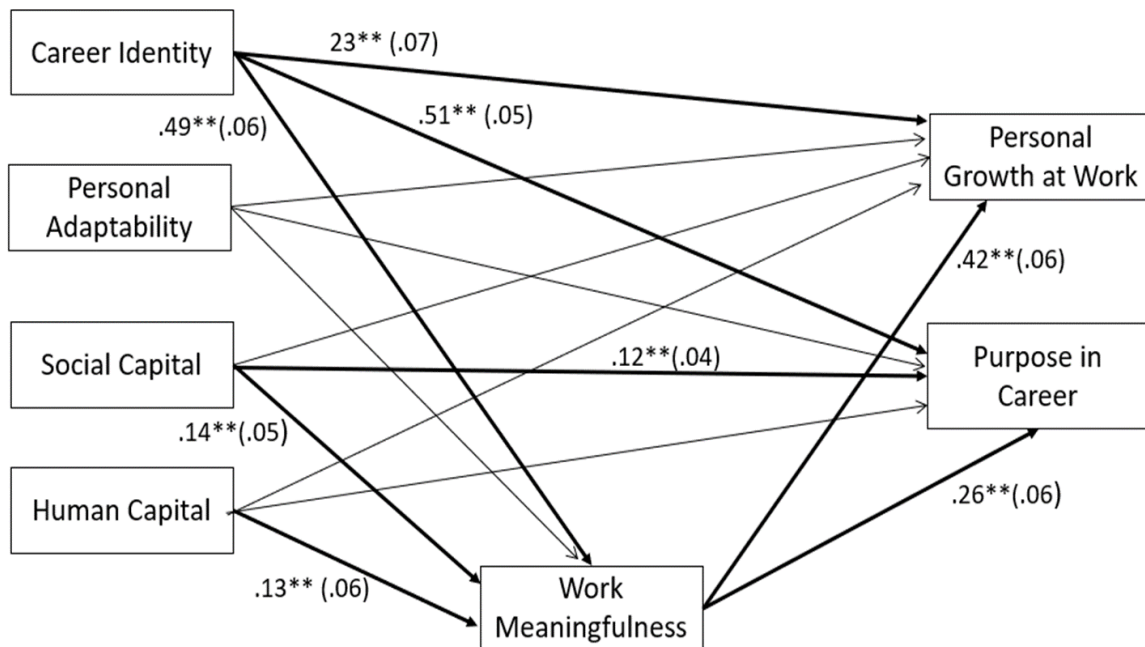
** $p \leq .01$, (two-tailed).

The hypothesized research model that included the mediator showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(11) = 11.95, p > .05$; RMSEA = 0.02; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; SRMR = 0.04).

For simplicity, Figure 5.2 displays only the statistically significant standardized estimates obtained for the paths in the model.

Figure 5.2

Standardized Path Estimates for the Model Including Work Meaningfulness as a Mediator



Note. For simplicity, the standardized path estimates are shown only for the statistically significant paths (in bold) (Standard errors within brackets). $^{**}p \leq .01$

Results (standardized estimates) for the relationships between the employability dimensions and work meaningfulness showed that, as expected, career identity ($.49, p < .01$), social capital ($.14, p < .01$), and human capital ($.13, p < .05$) were positively related to work meaningfulness. However, contrary to our expectations, personal adaptability was not significantly related to work meaningfulness ($-.06, p > .05$). Regarding the relationships between work meaningfulness and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, as expected, work meaningfulness was positively related to the two dimensions considered: personal growth at work ($.42, p < .01$) and purpose in career ($.26, p < .01$). Interestingly, when the mediator was introduced in the model, the direct relationship between social capital and personal growth at

work was not statistically significant ($.07, p > .05$), highlighting the importance of work meaningfulness as a mediator in this relationship.

Regarding the hypothesized indirect effects, the results obtained are displayed in Table 5.3. To facilitate comparison of the obtained estimates, we report the standardized indirect effects. The indirect effects of career identity, via work meaningfulness, on personal growth at work ($0.21, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.14, 0.30]$) and purpose in career ($0.13, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.06, 0.21]$) were positive and statistically significant. Thus, Hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported.

Contrary to our expectations, the indirect effects of personal adaptability on the two eudaimonic wellbeing dimensions via work meaningfulness were not statistically significant (personal growth at work: $-0.02, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.08, 0.03]$; purpose of career: $-0.01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.05, 0.02]$). Thus, our results did not support Hypotheses 6a and 6b.

Social capital had positive indirect effects on personal growth at work ($0.06, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.02, 0.11]$) and purpose in career ($0.04, \text{CI } 95\% = [0.01, 0.07]$) via work meaningfulness. Thus, Hypotheses 7a and 7b were supported.

Finally, the indirect effects of human capital, via work meaningfulness, on personal growth at work ($0.06, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.01, 0.11]$) and purpose in career ($0.03, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.01, 0.08]$) were positive and significant. Therefore, Hypotheses 8a and 8b were supported.

Table 5.3

Standardized Indirect Effects

Indirect effects	Estimate	Bootstrapped 95% CI
Career Identity → Work Meaningfulness → Personal Growth at Work	<i>0.21</i>	<i>0.14; 0.30</i>
Career Identity → Work Meaningfulness → Purpose in Career	<i>0.13</i>	<i>0.06; 0.21</i>
Personal Adaptability → Work Meaningfulness → Personal Growth at Work	<i>-0.02</i>	<i>-0.08; 0.03</i>
Personal Adaptability → Work Meaningfulness → Purpose in Career	<i>-0.01</i>	<i>-0.05; 0.02</i>
Social Capital → Work Meaningfulness → Personal Growth at Work	<i>0.06</i>	<i>0.02; 0.11</i>
Social Capital → Work Meaningfulness → Purpose in Career	<i>0.04</i>	<i>0.01; 0.07</i>
Human Capital → Work Meaningfulness → Personal Growth at Work	<i>0.06</i>	<i>0.01; 0.11</i>
Human Capital → Work Meaningfulness → Purpose in Career	<i>0.03</i>	<i>0.01; 0.08</i>

Note. Statistically significant indirect effects are in italics.

5.4 Discussion

In this study, we examined the relationships between Fugate et al.'s (2004) four employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social capital, and human capital), on the one hand, and two eudaimonic wellbeing at work outcomes (personal growth at work and purpose in career), on the other. Moreover, based on the worker-centric approach to work meaningfulness, we examined whether these relationships are mediated by work meaningfulness. In general, our findings demonstrate a positive relationship between employability and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. All employability dimensions (career identity, social capital, and human capital), with the exception of personal adaptability, were positively directly or/and indirectly related to personal growth at work and purpose in career. These results have several theoretical and practical implications that we discuss below.

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

Our study contributes to the current literature on eudaimonic wellbeing in several ways. First, the vast majority of prior research on employees' eudaimonic wellbeing focused on investigating eudaimonic wellbeing in a context-free way, thus neglecting to examine the specific characteristics of eudaimonic wellbeing *at work* (Dagenais-Desmarais et al., 2017). Scholars have addressed the need for refined contextualized knowledge about the antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2020). Our study expands the nomological network of *eudaimonic wellbeing at work* by investigating Fugate et al.'s (2004) employability dimensions as its antecedents. In line with previous literature that has shown that employability is positively related to crucial employee outcomes, such as affective commitment (De Cuyper et al., 2009) and hedonic wellbeing indicators (e.g., job satisfaction, De Cuyper et al., 2009), our study supports the notion that employability (specifically career identity, social capital, and human capital) is a valuable personal work-related resource that

fosters eudaimonic wellbeing at work (specifically, personal growth at work and purpose in career).

Second, in addition to identifying employability as an antecedent of eudaimonic wellbeing at work, we identify *work meaningfulness* as a mechanism that helps to understand *why* employability dimensions are positively (and indirectly) related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Based on our theoretical rationale, employees' career identity, social capital, and human capital stimulate specific pathways to work meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010), which in turn triggers eudaimonic wellbeing (personal growth at work and purpose in career). Specifically, *career identity* is expected to trigger the *authenticity pathway* to work meaningfulness because it motivates and guides employees to know who they are and who they want to become careerwise. Employees can plan and engage in self-congruent work activities that confirm their career identity, which is one of the most important sources of work meaningfulness (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). Moreover, *social capital* is expected to provide instrumental resources that enable employees to understand what is expected of them in order to be successful at work, as well as tools that facilitate the accomplishment of these expectations. In this regard, employees are more likely to experience *self-efficacy* and *self-esteem*, which are other pathways to meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010). Similarly, having *human capital* (generic competences) is expected to facilitate successful work performance, which should trigger feelings of competence (self-efficacy) and self-esteem pathways to work meaningfulness work in employees. Work meaningfulness is a subjective experience that stimulates employees to be open to learning and have a personal growth mindset (Chalofksy & Cavallaro, 2019).

Furthermore, employees who experience meaningful work should identify and take advantage of growth opportunities at work more easily (Chalofksy & Cavallaro, 2019), which should result in an overall sense of personal growth at work, as our results suggest. Moreover,

experiencing work meaningfulness is a source of finding purpose in one's personal and professional life (van der Walt, 2022). In line with previous evidence that supports the notion of work meaningfulness as transitional (translates from the work domain to another life domain) (Allan, 2019), we showed that it indeed can be translated to a broader life domain - one's career. We did so by identifying a positive relationship between work meaningfulness and purpose in career, a result suggesting that work meaningfulness provides guidance in reaching personally purposeful goals reflected in one's career (Arnoux-Nicolas et al., 2016). Hence, by uncovering the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the employability-eudaimonic wellbeing at work relationship, we refine the theoretical knowledge on employee eudaimonic wellbeing. Understanding *why* certain relationships occur and, especially, shedding light on these relationships in the work domain, are significant contributions that are pivotal to our discipline's progress (Mathieu et al., 2008).

It is surprising that personal adaptability did not have any direct or indirect "effect" (via work meaningfulness) on eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Personal adaptability was the only employability dimension that did not fit any of Rosso et al.'s (2010) proposed pathways to work meaningfulness. This calls for a reflection that personal adaptability might act as a trigger of work meaningfulness for other reasons (e.g., cognitive flexibility, Garland et al., 2017). In fact, previous research has emphasized the cognitive aspect of adaptability (cognitive flexibility, see. Garland et al., 2017) as an antecedent of work meaningfulness. Cognitively flexible individuals can engage in fluid reconstruction of meaning because they are able to change the cognitive evaluation of new situations and view and reappraise them as positive rather than negative (Garland et al., 2015; Garland et al., 2017). It is possible that our measure of personal adaptability does not fully capture the cognitive aspect of adaptability that is important for experiencing work meaningfulness and, ultimately, eudaimonic wellbeing at work. We encourage future research to further investigate whether cognitive personal

adaptability aspects are related to work meaningfulness and, consequently, eudaimonic wellbeing.

Third, by using a worker-centric approach, we contribute to expanding the nomological network of work meaningfulness. Previous research on work meaningfulness antecedents has focused on organizational and job-level antecedents, whereas only a few studies have investigated individual-level antecedents (Bailey et al., 2019). In addition, scholars have called for the examination of multiple antecedents of work meaningfulness simultaneously (Martela et al., 2021). By identifying several employability dimensions (career identity, social capital, and human capital) as individual-level antecedents of work meaningfulness, we contribute to better understanding a crucial construct in work, organizational, and human resources psychology (Bailey et al., 2019).

Fourth, the present research answers the call for an integration of two literature streams: vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Dik et al., 2019). By empirically testing employability (Fugate et al., 2004) as an antecedent of eudaimonic wellbeing at work, we provide evidence that vocational psychology constructs are a promising line of research for explaining eudaimonic wellbeing in the work domain. To further build on the integration of these literature streams, future studies should investigate other personal resources grounded in vocational psychology as antecedents of eudaimonic wellbeing at work. For instance, work volition (i.e., the perceived capacity to make occupational decisions despite constraints; Duffy et al., 2012) has been positively related to work meaningfulness, and so it would be interesting to investigate whether work meaningfulness can act as a mediator in the work volition - eudaimonic wellbeing at work relationship.

5.4.2 Practical Implications

Our findings have several practical implications for both employees and organizations. First, given that career identity showed positive relationships (direct and indirect via work

meaningfulness) with the two eudaimonic wellbeing at work outcomes, it is vital for organizations to invest in career counselling programs and interventions that enhance employees' career identity. For instance, engagement in career planning can promote career identity (Praskova et al., 2015). Organizations can implement career counselling programs, such as narrative career counselling based on the life-design framework, to guide employees in the construction of their career identity through narrative storytelling (Savickas, 2012). Second, our results demonstrate that increased social capital is beneficial for finding purpose in career as well as experiencing meaningful work and, ultimately, personal growth at work. To expand their social capital, employees can engage in networking activities, join professional associations, and discuss their work and career with their friends and relatives (González-Roma et al., 2018). Moreover, organizations can implement various human resources practices to support employees' network management, such as training programs that facilitate the evaluation, diagnosis, and management of employees' personal social networks (Methot et al., 2018). Third, our study shows that generic competences (our indicator of human capital) can facilitate work meaningfulness, which in turn leads to eudaimonic wellbeing at work (personal growth at work and purpose in career). Employees can enhance their generic competences by attending continuous professional development programs, which can include seminars, workshops, and short training courses. Additionally, collaborative ways of working have been found to stimulate the development of generic competences at work (Crebert et al., 2004). Hence, in addition to investing in professional development programs for their employees, organizations can further develop employees' generic competences at work by promoting collaborative and interactive group work.

5.4.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Our study has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the study results. First, data were collected from a single source using self-reported questionnaires, which

might have inflated the relationships between the study variables. However, this problem should have been mitigated by the implementation of a time-lagged design with a temporal separation among the study variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Moreover, the fact that the correlations between some of the investigated variables were nonsignificant and low (personal adaptability and work meaningfulness, $r = .12, p > .05$) suggests that common-method variance was not a serious problem (Spector, 2006).

Second, in this study we focused on generic competences as indicators of human capital. Future studies can investigate other, more objective indicators of human capital, such as education and work experience. Finally, based on the worker-centric approach to work meaningfulness used in our study, we investigated work meaningfulness as a mediator in the employability- eudaimonic wellbeing at work relationship. However, research has shown that other factors operating at levels beyond the individual can influence work meaningfulness (Lysova et al., 2019). For instance, leaders can influence how employees experience work meaningfulness (Wang & Xu, 2019). Therefore, an important future research direction is to expand our research model by integrating higher-level variables. For instance, future studies can simultaneously investigate both personal (e.g., employability) and organizational or work-unit (e.g., leadership) level antecedents and examine their relationships with work meaningfulness and, ultimately, employees' eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

5.4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, our study contributes to the understanding of *how* and *why* some of Fugate et al.'s (2004) employability dimensions are related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work. We uncovered work meaningfulness as an underlying mechanism between employability and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. In particular, our results highlight the importance of the

employability dimensions career identity, social capital, and human capital as personal resources that foster work meaningfulness and, ultimately, eudaimonic wellbeing at work⁴.

⁴ This study is currently under review in a scientific journal.

Chapter 6: General Discussion

In this chapter, we aim to provide an overview and integration of the most important research findings from the three studies that compose this doctoral dissertation. We will discuss how these findings contribute to the job quality literature focusing on its antecedents and impact on health and wellbeing. We start this chapter by summarizing the main results from the three studies. Next, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these studies followed by an acknowledgment of their limitations and some guidelines for future studies. We end this chapter with a summary of the main conclusions drawn from this doctoral thesis as a whole.

6.1 Summary of Main Results

6.1.1 Study 1

In Study 1, we investigated the differential contribution of traditional job quality indicators, such as employment characteristics (i.e., type of contract (permanent vs. temporary), employment relationship (full-time vs. part-time), and schedule predictability (fixed vs. irregular working days)), and characteristics from a person-job fit perspective, such as educational misfit (horizontal and vertical (i.e., over-education)), to perceived job quality. In addition, we investigated the moderating role of preferred employment characteristics and gender in the employment characteristics -perceived job quality relationships.

Our results supported the hypotheses that employees in standard (full-time and permanent) employment perceived higher job quality than employees in nonstandard (part-time and temporary) employment. Moreover, as expected, both educational misfit variables (horizontal misfit and overeducation) were negatively related to perceived job quality. These job quality indicators equally contributed to perceived job quality. However, the results did not support our hypothesis that employees with fixed workdays perceive higher job quality than those with a schedule with irregular workdays. Regarding the moderating effects, contrary to our expectations there was not a statistically significant moderating effect of employment

characteristics preferences on the current employment characteristics-perceived job quality relationships. Nevertheless, our results showed that preferences for employment relationship (full-time vs part-time) play a moderating role when gender was included as a moderator in the model. In particular, the full-time job preference boosted the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality only for women. In contrast, for men, having a part-time job preference boosted the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality.

As such, our findings indicate the importance of considering a person-centred approach in job quality research by acknowledging sociodemographic and personal characteristics as factors that might explain differences in perceived job quality.

6.1.2 Study 2

The objective of Study 2 was to test the mediator role of work engagement and affective job insecurity in the employment quality-employee health complaints relationship. Employment quality was measured via three objective employment characteristics: type of job contract (permanent vs temporary), employment relationship (full-time vs part-time) and salary. We hypothesized a negative indirect effect of employment quality on employee health complaints via work engagement and a positive indirect effect of employment quality on employee health complaints via affective job insecurity.

Latent structural equation modelling analysis supported the two indirect effects hypotheses. On the one hand, employment quality was negatively related to employee health complaints via work engagement. On the other hand, employment quality was positively related to employee health complaints via affective job insecurity. The two indirect effects were not statistically different from each other indicating that both mediators contributed equally to explaining the employment quality-employee health complaints relationship.

6.1.3 Study 3

In this study we examined the relationships between Fugate et al.'s (2004) four employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital), on the one hand, and two eudaimonic wellbeing at work dimensions (personal growth at work and purpose in career) on the other hand. We also investigated the mediator role of work meaningfulness in these relationships.

We found that in general there is a positive relationship between employability and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Specifically, our results supported direct positive relationships between career identity and the two eudaimonic wellbeing at work dimensions considered. Also, we found that social capital was positively directly related to the two eudaimonic wellbeing at work dimensions. Our results showed positive relationships between career identity, social capital, and human capital on the one hand, and work meaningfulness. on the other hand. Also, as expected, work meaningfulness was positively related to the two eudaimonic wellbeing at work outcomes. Our results supported the hypothesized mediating role of work meaningfulness in the relationships between career identity, social capital, and human capital, on the one hand, and personal growth at work and purpose in career, on the other hand. However, we did not find support for the hypothesized direct and indirect relationship between personal adaptability and eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The studies in this thesis offer several theoretical contributions to the job quality literature. In particular, the thesis as a whole contributes to the call for a deeper analysis in three key areas: the dimensions of job quality; the antecedents or factors that influence job quality; and the outcomes or impact of job quality (Findlay et al., 2013). To make a valuable contribution, in our research we acknowledged the multidimensional nature of job quality and tackled some of the unanswered questions about this construct. Thus, we expanded its

nomological network by investigating the relationship between specific job quality indicators (objective and subjective) and some of its hypothetical antecedents and outcomes (employee health and wellbeing, in particular eudaimonic wellbeing at work).

Holistically speaking, theoretical knowledge on job quality can be expanded only when we consider different job quality indicators, their subjective and objective nature, and when we benefit from the integration of different psychology streams. Guided by this holistic approach to job quality, this thesis provides a variety of theoretical implications. Next, we explain these implications and contributions in more detail.

6.2.1 Study 1

Study 1 makes several contributions to the nomological network of job quality. They are based on: 1) testing the (differential) influence that objective traditional indicators of job quality have on shaping employees' perceptions of job quality, and 2) analysing the individual boundary conditions (employees' preferred employment characteristics and gender) that make traditional indicators of job quality more or less salient.

First, by investigating the relationship between several objective job quality indicators and a subjective job quality indicator (perceived job quality), we identified some objective employment quality indicators as antecedents of perceived job quality. In line with previous research, our findings showed 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), are positively related to perceived job quality. Moreover, in line with existing findings, educational misfit (horizontal misfit and over-education) (Allen & Van der Velden, 2001; Harari et al., 2017; Hartog, 2000) was negatively related to perceived job quality. Contrary to previous research, we could not find support for schedule predictability as a predictor of perceived job quality. Additionally, our contribution is boosted by the fact that our study shows that all of the investigated traditional job quality indicators (type of contract,

employment relationship, educational misfit) contribute equally to perceived job quality, and to our knowledge this is a first study that tackles such an integration of objective and subjective job quality aspects.

Second, our study sheds light on the importance of taking a contextualized person-centered approach in job quality research. By examining the moderating roles of employment characteristics preferences and gender, we show that perceptions of job quality may depend on individual characteristics, which has been highlighted as an important endeavour for subjective job quality research (Findlay et al., 2017). Specifically, we add value to the literature that highlights the fact that the same job can be seen as an opportunity or a burden depending on employees' preferences (Findley et al., 2013; Kalleberg, 2018; Peiró et al., 2015). We do so by showing that employment relationship preferences (e.g., preferences for full-time vs. part-time jobs) may have different importance depending on gender. This research shows that the topic of congruence between person's preferences and actual job characteristics is important in job quality research, but that there is a necessity to take on a gender perspective to fully understand it. Our study indicates that the P-J fit theory predictions about the benefits of fit (Edwards, 1991) do not work equally for men and women.

Third, by looking into the moderating role of gender on the interaction between the employment characteristics preferences and actual characteristics on perceived job quality, we contribute to a more gender sensitive understanding of perceived job quality. Our results indicated that for men voluntary part-time work (working part-time when this is preferred) did not have the expected positive effect on perceived job quality. We offered possible explanations for the moderating role of gender in the above-mentioned relationships drawing on the renowned Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) and the concepts of breadwinner and gender role congruence. 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., 2019). In addition, preference for part-time jobs may be due to various reasons, such as a high workload or to increase the time available for other intrinsically satisfying activities. However, changing to a part-time job results in a reduction in working hours and this is risky for status and income, which are valuable aspects for the male gender role (Hiemer & Andresen, 2019). On the other hand, working a part-time job is an unusual or non-normative choice for men, and therefore it might be seen as an exception to the norm of masculinity. Research has shown that role incongruent behaviour is often penalized (Borgkvist et al., 2016; Pedulla, 2016; Pedulla & Mueller-Gastell, 2019; van Osch & Schaveling, 2017). We argue that men might rationalize staying in a full-time job that is incongruent with their part-time preference by perceiving it as a high-quality job.

With regards to the results for women, we showed that 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 (Ficapal-Cusí et al., 2018; Warren & Lyonette, 2018). Literature has suggested that childcare may be the reason for women working for part-time jobs, although they prefer a full-time job (Fagan, 2004; ILO, 2016). Our additional intersectional analysis with women in different age groups and childcare circumstances 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.

In general, this study supports the idea of job quality as a concept best understood by integrating both objective and subjective indicators (Brown et al., 2012). Our study adds value

by showing how this idea can be empirically tested with a person-centred approach to job quality. Our study highlights intersectionality of different sociodemographic and personal characteristics preferences as a tool to unravel the complexity of perceived job quality.

6.2.2 Study 2

Study 2 sheds light on an important relationship in work and organizational psychology: the relationship between employment quality and employee health. The changing world of work and the increase in new nonstandard work arrangements has increased the interest in the job quality subarea of employment quality, specifically its relationship with health. However, scholars have argued that knowledge on the mechanisms, especially psychological mechanisms, underlying this relationship is still limited (Ahonen et al., 2019; Benach et al., 2014). In particular, this study contributes to the understanding of *why* employment quality is negatively related to employee health complaints by identifying two mediators in this relationship: work engagement (the motivating pathway) and affective job insecurity (the stress pathway). With regards to the first mechanism, our study shows that employees in high employment quality conditions (full-time, permanent job contracts and higher salaries) are more engaged at work, and we attribute this to the fact that according to the JD-R theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) employment quality can be considered as a resource that helps employees meet their needs and fosters intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to psychobiology and physiology research on work engagement, this variable can trigger the parasympathetic nervous system responsible for restoring regulative body functions and enact healthy responses among employees (Seppälä et al., 2012). Moreover, considering that work engagement is a positive affective psychological state, and consistent with the Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson, 2004), positive affective psychological states can help employees to adopt healthy behaviours and mobilize personal resources resulting in fewer health

complaints. Regarding the second mechanism involving affective job insecurity, our results are in line with previous findings that show that job insecurity prevails among employees with low quality employment (nonstandard work) (ILO, 2016; Keim et al., 2014). In line with Stress Appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) supported by previous research on job insecurity (De Witte et al., 2015), our study highlights job insecurity as a powerful stressor that damages employee health.

The identification of these two mediating mechanisms represents a valuable increase in knowledge and an important refinement of the theory involved (Spencer et al., 2005). Additionally, we contribute to knowledge of these mediators by analysing the strength of the two indirect effects and concluding that these effects had similar magnitudes. This is an important theoretical insight that sheds light on the fact that the influence of employment quality on certain employee outcomes via functional motivational states (i.e., work engagement) may be as strong as its influence via dysfunctional threatening states (i.e., affective job insecurity). Thus, we show that the motivational pathway operates simultaneously and in an equally strong way as the stress pathway in the employment quality-health relationship. This points out to an additional area of future employment quality research that can complement the prevalent area focused on job insecurity.

Finally, we make a twofold contribution to the JD-R theory. First, previous research using this theory has focused on job resources (e.g., autonomy, variety, feedback from the job; Crawford et al., 2010; Morgeson et al., 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2009). These typically originate from the job content and job experiences, as such they can be classified in the job quality subarea denominated work quality. Our study shows that this theory can be implemented as a theoretical framework to examine the outcomes of *employment* characteristics. Thus, we expand the applicability of this theory to another subarea of job quality: employment quality. Second, in this study we consider employment quality as a resource and show that it can trigger

both the motivational and the health impairment process within the JD-R model. As such, we contribute to the empirical evidence of cross-links (links that exist between the motivation and health-impairment processes) embedded within the JD-R theory (González-Romá et al., 2020; Lesener et al., 2019; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This finding is in accordance with previous research that has shown that resources may have an impact not only on work engagement, but also on strain variables, such as affective job insecurity in our research model. Thus, we encourage the inclusion of cross links in future research models based on the JD-R theory.

6.2.3 Study 3

As it focuses on a subjective indicator of job quality (work meaningfulness), Study 3 expands knowledge on job quality from a subjective intrinsic perspective. Nevertheless, the contributions of this study are not limited to the job quality literature because they provide an integration among the literature streams of vocational psychology, work meaningfulness, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

First, our study contributes to the expansion of the work meaningfulness nomological network. Previous research on the antecedents of work meaningfulness have mostly focused on job and organizational level variables, thus neglecting the role of personal antecedents (Bailey et al., 2019). In this study, we uncovered the employability dimensions of career identity, social capital, and human capital as antecedents of work meaningfulness. Testing several personal antecedents simultaneously contributes to a better understanding of this job quality indicator. This highlights the integration between vocational psychology constructs (employability) and the job quality literature, in particular work meaningfulness. Moreover, we uncovered positive associations between work meaningfulness and two dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing at work: personal growth at work and purpose of career. This study supports the scholarly idea that work meaningfulness has a eudaimonic wellbeing

direction (Steger et al., 2012) and highlights eudaimonic wellbeing at work as an important outcome of this job quality indicator.

Second, by uncovering work meaningfulness as a mediator in the relationship between employability and eudaimonic wellbeing at work we contribute to understanding *why* this relationship occurs, which is an important theoretical contribution (Mathieu et al., 2008). By drawing on the worker centric approach to work meaningfulness, specifically applying the Rosso et al. (2010) theoretical framework on pathways to work meaningfulness, we provide an explanation about *why* and *how* employability is a personal resource that can trigger meaningful experiences at work, which in turn fosters eudaimonic wellbeing at work. We showed how personal variables such as the investigated employability dimensions can foster work meaningfulness by acknowledging a worker centric approach to work meaningfulness focusing on the theoretical *self-pathways* to work meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010). This study highlights the role of the self and the personal resources that help employees experience meaningfulness at work. Specifically, *career identity* is expected to trigger the *authenticity pathway* to work meaningfulness because it motivates and guides employees to know who they are and who they want to become careerwise. Moreover, *social capital* is expected to provide instrumental resources that enable employees to understand what is expected of them in order to be successful at work, as well as tools that facilitate the accomplishment of these expectations. In this regard, employees are more likely to experience *self-efficacy* and *self-esteem*, which are other pathways to meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010). Similarly, we suggested that having *human capital* (generic competences) is expected to facilitate successful work performance, which should trigger feelings of competence (self-efficacy) and self-esteem pathways to work meaningfulness.

Third, this study also contributes to the eudaimonic wellbeing literature. By focusing on eudaimonic wellbeing *at work*, with this study we expand the knowledge about this

construct in a domain specific way. By doing so we prevent the overgeneralization of findings from domain-free eudaimonic wellbeing research to the work domain (Mendonça et al., 2022). Additionally, by focusing on eudaimonic wellbeing at work we answer the call for a more contextualized knowledge on eudaimonic wellbeing (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2020). In this line, we expand its nomological network by identifying Fugate et al.'s (2004) employability dimensions of career identity, social capital, and human capital as its antecedents. Our study goes in line with the literature on employability as a personal resource that fosters important employee outcomes, such as hedonic wellbeing and affective commitment (De Cuyper et al., 2009; Di Fabio, 2010).

Fourth, the present research answers a specific call for an integration of two literature streams: vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Dik et al., 2019). By showing *how* and *why* some employability dimensions are directly and indirectly related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work, we provide empirical evidence that such integration of literature streams is possible and necessary for their development.

Finally, as we showed in Study 3, by integrating literature streams we aimed to expand the nomological network of work meaningfulness-a subjective job quality indicator. Thus, we can zoom out the implications of this study to note that job quality research can benefit from an integration of psychology literature streams. This integration of vocational psychology and positive psychology streams can be a potential useful tool in identifying and explaining job quality antecedents and outcomes.

6.3 Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical implications, the present doctoral thesis offers several practical implications. As Findlay et al. (2017) suggest, opportunity knocks for job quality, but this opportunity is conditioned on the mutual and simultaneous effort from various stakeholders. We agree with this notion, and as our research suggests, there are many

opportunities for practical interventions outside and inside the workplace that can be implemented with the aim to promote job quality and consequently foster employee health and wellbeing. Next, we present the practical implications based on the results of the three studies included in this doctoral thesis.

Study 1 shed light on the equivalent importance of several job quality indicators such as standard employment characteristics (permanent, full-time jobs), as well as educational fit for individual job quality perceptions. To ensure educational fit, policy makers, educational systems, and organizations should collaborate and adequately plan and select employees for job positions that enable the person-job fit. In other words, vertical educational fit should be the goal whereas overeducation and undereducation should be avoided. In terms of horizontal fit, organizations should foster the fit by enabling employees to express the obtained competences throughout their education. Additionally, educational institutions, specifically universities, should strategically compose and implement educational plans to include the competences needed in organizations and the current labour market.

This study also highlights how perceived job quality among employees in different types of employment relationships (full-time vs part time job) depends on preferences and gender. As our study suggests, gender sensitive policies and practices are important to ensure perceived job quality. Women especially perceive low job quality when they work involuntarily in part-time jobs. As such, politics around work family balance, flexibility and autonomy to decide on working arrangements may provide women with more opportunities to maintain a full-time job when they prefer so. As Denia and Guillú (2019) suggest, in Spain involuntary part time jobs have been more frequent among women than men, and a solution for this imbalance could be found at the labour market level. More precisely a labour market reform that prevents the abuse of involuntary part-time work for women.

Moreover, our study suggests that due to the gender role incongruence, men perceive part-time jobs of low quality even when they have part-time jobs preference. According to Pedulla (2016), being in a part-time job heavily penalizes men's careers. This idea indicates that in order to support men's employment relationship preferences we need to make systematic changes in the way organizations and society portray the ideal worker and expectations of men's working role. Avoiding penalization of men's voluntary involvement in part-time jobs may lead to perceptions of part-time jobs as high quality jobs, which additionally may help the previously mentioned gender sensitive labour market reform.

From a practical perspective, **Study 2** offers guidelines on how to improve employee health by considering some crucial employment relationship characteristics that represent high employment quality. Our study showed that employees who have standard employment arrangements (full-time, permanent, high paid jobs) have less health complaints than employees in nonstandard working arrangements (part-time, temporary, low paid jobs). Considering these results, interventions and initiatives are needed in order to promote these characteristics that represent employment quality. First, policy making is crucial as governmental and institutional bodies have the power to raise awareness about employment quality. Second, governments and policy makers can contribute to evidence-based decision making of organizations by raising awareness of the importance of employment quality for employee health. Additionally, regulation via legislation can limit the abuse of nonstandard work and support employment quality nationally and internationally as the International Labour Organization has advocated for (ILO, 2016). Finally, although, some organizations operate on a low-cost business model supported by nonstandard work, labour market policies and organizational practice is needed to ensure that low quality employment arrangements are *steppingstones* and not *dead ends* in individuals' careers. This is especially important since

research has suggested that being trapped in low employment quality has devastating long-term impacts on employee health (Giudici & Morcelli, 2019).

Study 3 highlights employability as antecedent of a subjective indicator of job quality (work meaningfulness) and eudaimonic wellbeing at work. These findings emphasize the importance of employability as a personal resource, and as such practical guidelines drawn from this study focus on interventions to foster employability. These interventions can be initiated by various agents, and we suggest that the most efficient way toward employability is paved by interventions initiated by employees and organizations. In particular, as our findings suggest, the focus should be on the employability dimensions of career identity, social capital, and human capital, since they can foster work meaningfulness, which in turn fosters personal growth at work and purpose in career.

First, career identity is constructed via an individual reflective process which can be supported by various programmes. For instance, it has been found that programmes such as career planning can promote career identity (Praskova et al., 2015), as well as narrative career counselling based on the life-design framework (Savickas, 2012). On the one hand, organizations should offer career planning and career counselling to their employees as part of their professional development programs. On the other hand, employees can be proactive and willing to search and participate in such programmes given the benefits for their eudaimonic wellbeing.

Second, to increase social capital employees can increase their social network by joining professional associations, online professional communities, and networking events. Additionally, human resources practices aimed at supporting employee's network management can be an additional tool through which organizations can help establish and strengthen their employees' social networks (Methot et al., 2018).

Third, human capital, in particular generic competences, can be developed by attending continuous professional development programs. For instance, workshops, and short training courses aimed at developing generic competences. Additionally, organizations and leaders can promote collaborative ways of working since they have been found to stimulate the development of generic competences at work (Crebert et al., 2004).

6.4 Limitations

As with every research, the findings of this thesis should be interpreted with a set of limitations in mind.

First, in all three studies we used single source, self-reported measures, which might have inflated the relationships between the study variables. However, to mitigate this issue, in Study 2 and Study 3, we implemented a time-lagged design with a temporal separation among the study variables, which is a recommended technique for reduction of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Study 1 has a cross sectional nature, which limits the derivation of causal relationships. Future research based on multi-source data and a longitudinal design may overcome these limitations.

Second, in our sample some variables had a small variability. For instance, in Study 1 there was a small number of participants with temporary contract preferences and with irregular workdays, which prevented us from capturing the ‘true’ relationships these variables may have with perceived job quality. Future studies with more heterogeneous samples in terms of these variables may mitigate these issues. For instance, conducting research on national samples from statistical institutions or using open access data from European surveys on work quality (e.g., European Working Conditions survey, EWCS).

Third, considering the vast number of job quality indicators, our studies can only drive conclusions to a limited number of job quality indicators operationalized in a specific manner. In Study 2, we operationalized employment quality considering three traditional indicators

based on the double labour market theory: type of job contract, employment relationship and salary. However, recently scholars have suggested employment quality operationalizations that include other variables, such as working time arrangements and interpersonal power relations (Kalleberg, 2018; Padrosa et al., 2021). In Study 3, we focused on generic competencies as an indicator of the employability dimension human capital. Nevertheless, human capital is a broader concept not limited to the self-evaluation of generic competences. As such, future studies may include other indicators of human capital that will provide a more objective approach, such as education and work experience.

6.5 Future Research

The findings of this doctoral thesis as a whole prompt some new questions that can be tackled in future research in order to expand our understanding of job quality, its antecedents, and outcomes.

With Study 1, we highlighted the need for research to integrate objective and subjective job quality indicators. However, given the complexity of job quality and the wide range of indicators available, there are still some open questions for future research to address. For example, *why* some employees in objectively high quality jobs perceive low subjective job quality, and vice versa, why some employees in objectively low quality jobs perceive high job quality? What job quality indicators or personal characteristics are responsible for these differences? We agree with Knox and Wright's (2022) suggestion that future research based on qualitative methods is crucial in the understanding of this integration, since it helps researchers to have an insider's view about how employees perceive the quality of their jobs, and how they are positioned within a broader organizational labour market and societal context. For instance, future qualitative research can delve deeper into the intersectionality between gender, age, particular family responsibilities, and preferred employment characteristics to help understand

the reasons why employees, particularly women, prefer part-time jobs at different ages, as our results from Study 1 suggested.

On a similar note, we would like to suggest that future research should consider the integration of the two wide job quality subareas: employment quality and work quality. In Study 2, we focused on the impact employment quality has on employee health. Nevertheless, future research can investigate the interaction between employment quality and other work quality indicators (e.g., Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics model) in relation to employee health and wellbeing outcomes. This will provide a detailed understanding of the impact various subareas of job quality may have on employee outcomes.

Moreover, besides the integration of job quality indicators, future research may investigate the integration of job quality antecedents coming from different levels. The findings in Study 3 highlighted the role of personal level antecedents of work meaningfulness such as employability dimensions. Nevertheless, to fully understand what fosters work meaningfulness, future studies can simultaneously investigate both personal (e.g., employability) and organizational or work-unit (e.g., leadership) level antecedents. Future research can examine their relationships with work meaningfulness and, ultimately, employees' eudaimonic wellbeing at work in order to provide a more nuanced view of this crucial subjective job quality indicator.

To strengthen the business case for job quality, future research may investigate other business-related job quality outcomes. Study 2 highlighted health as an important outcome of employment quality. But going beyond health and wellbeing outcomes, future studies should examine turnover, absenteeism and innovation as employment quality outcomes. Doing so can additionally contribute to the job quality business case.

Further, future job quality research should undertake a gender perspective. In Study 1, we highlighted the importance of gender and other related sociodemographic variables in order

to contextualize perceived job quality research. Participants in Study 1 identified themselves only as male or female. However, to fully tackle the impact that gender has on perceived job quality future studies should consider participants who identify with other gender types beyond the binary gender categories. This gender perspective may be explored not only in perceived job quality research, but also in studies on the relationships of job quality with its various outcomes, such as health and wellbeing.

Finally, we would like to provide some directions about the methodology of future job quality research. The majority of studies regarding job quality and its outcomes, including the studies in this thesis, do not follow a longitudinal approach, which limits the understanding of job quality as a dynamic construct. In this line, we encourage future research to consider a dynamic longitudinal perspective. For instance, implementing within-subject research designs and longitudinal growth trajectories analysis (Benach et al., 2014). This person centered approach can help understand individuals' job quality trajectories, which, in today's constantly changing world of work, are dynamic..

6.6 Conclusions

1. Job quality is a multidimensional construct. As, such to understand the construct, its drivers and consequences, it is important to consider and analyse different job quality indicators (objective, subjective, extrinsic and intrinsic) to enrich and improve our knowledge and decisions regarding job quality.
2. Traditional objective indicators of job quality are important antecedents of subjective perceptions of job quality. Interestingly, our results indicate that all the considered indicators are equally important in shaping the perceptions of job quality. Specifically, perceived job quality is higher among permanent, full-time employees with horizontal and vertical educational fit in comparison to

employees in non-traditional jobs (temporary, part-time), overeducated and with horizontal educational misfit.

3. Taking a gender perspective in subjective job quality research is important, as gender moderates the interaction between current employment relationship and employees' preference on perceived job quality. Specifically, only for women, full-time preferences boost the "effect" of full-time jobs on perceived job quality. On the contrary, men perceive higher job quality in full-time jobs than in part-time jobs, even when they have part-time preferences.
4. Employees in high employment quality conditions (full-time, permanent, high paid jobs) are more engaged and experience less affective job insecurity than employees in low employment quality conditions (part-time, temporary, low paid jobs). Thus, employment quality is important to foster an engaged and secure workforce but also to promote healthy employees, since engaged employees and employees with low affective job insecurity experience less health complaints.
5. The negative relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints is mediated by work engagement and affective job insecurity, and both mediators are equally important.
6. Promoting high quality employment arrangements is not only a way to create engaging and secure jobs, but a way to positively impact employees' health.
7. Employability dimensions, particularly career identity, social capital, and human capital, are antecedents of the subjective job quality indicator of work meaningfulness.
8. Employees who experience work meaningfulness are likely to experience eudaimonic wellbeing at work (personal growth at work and purpose in career).

Thus, fostering work meaningfulness is a way to improve eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

9. Employability (career identity, social capital, and human capital) is a personal resource that fosters work meaningfulness, and ultimately eudaimonic wellbeing at work. It is important to invest in increasing employees' career identity, social capital, and human capital as they can foster the subjective job quality experience (work meaningfulness), and ultimately, promote eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

To conclude, this doctoral thesis had an objective to contribute to the scientific and practical knowledge of job quality. This objective was guided by the recent call for a deeper analysis in three key subareas: 1) what is job quality and what are the dimensions of job quality, 2) the antecedents and factors that influence job quality, 3) the outcomes and influence of job quality (Findlay et al., 2013). With this thesis, we tried to answer this call by advancing our knowledge about the nomological network of job quality by examining the relationships between specific objective and subjective job quality indicators, as well as identifying some of their antecedents (particularly person-centred employability) and consequences (particularly employee health and wellbeing).

First, regarding its *antecedents*, we focused on analysing the antecedents of subjective job quality indicators. In the first place we investigated the relationships between some objective indicators and perceived job quality as a subjective job quality indicator. We found that traditionally considered job quality indicators, such as type of contract, employment relationship and educational fit are equally important antecedents of the subjective indicator - perceived job quality (Study 1). Employees in standard employment characteristics such as permanent and full-time jobs with vertical and educational fit perceived higher job quality. We further identified employees' preferences for employment relationship and gender as

moderating variables in the relationship between employment relationship type and perceived job quality. In the case of the employment relationship type (full-time vs part-time), we found that the full-time job preference boosted the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality only for women. In contrast, for men, having a part-time job preference boosted the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality. Thus, we shed light on some person-centred characteristics as moderating factors in the objective-subjective job quality relationship.

Additionally, regarding the antecedents of job quality, in Study 3, we identified three employability dimensions: career identity, social capital, and human capital as antecedents of a subjective job quality indicator- work meaningfulness. Thus, we expanded the knowledge on personal level antecedents of subjective job quality. This is a particularly useful insight, since these employability dimensions can be developed and improved by various interventions coming from both employees and organizations.

Second, regarding the *influence of job quality on health*, we showed that the subarea of job quality named employment quality (operationalized as permanent, full-time, high paid job) is negatively related to employee health complaints, and we uncovered *why* this occurs (Study 2). In particular, we identified work engagement and affective job insecurity as mediators in the relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints, thus providing theoretical insights on the influence employment quality has on employee health.

Third, regarding the *job quality's influence on employee wellbeing*, we showed that a subjective job quality indicator work meaningfulness is positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work specifically two dimensions personal growth at work and purpose in career (Study 3). We also uncovered work meaningfulness as a mediator in the relationships between the employability dimensions career identity, social capital and human capital on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing (personal growth at work in purpose in career) on the other hand.

This finding highlights the importance of considering subjective job quality indicators in practice and in research, as they may explain why some personal resources (e.g., employability) can lead to beneficial outcomes for employee such as eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

Chapter 7: Summary

In this chapter we synthesize the main aspects of the doctoral thesis. We start off with a brief introduction, followed up by an outline of the objectives of the thesis. In addition, we present a summary of the methodology used, and present a summary of the three studies carried out to achieve the formulated objectives, and the main results and implications of the studies. We comment on the overall thesis limitations and future research directions, and we conclude with the main key messages that can be derived from this doctoral thesis.

7.1 Introduction

This doctoral thesis addresses a key issue for today's world of work. It addresses the topic of *job quality*, and it does so because job quality matters and has continuously done so for many years and for years to come (Warhurst et al., 2022). Job quality matters for individuals, organizations, and societies (Adamson & Roper, 2019; Findlay et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017; Warhurst et al., 2017). Poor quality jobs produce costs, whereas high job quality foster sustainable benefits for individuals, organizations and societies. In fact, the Oxford Handbook of Job Quality contemplates job quality as a key to address contemporary challenges, such as health, welfare, productivity, innovation, economic competitiveness, democracy and democratic participation, and societal equality (Warhurst et al., 2022). The commitment toward improving job quality is not based only on the great business case job quality makes for organizations and societies but goes hand in hand with the moral responsibility organizations and societies have to create quality jobs (Findlay et al., 2017). As such, it is no wonder that policy makers around the world such as The European Union (EU), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN) mark job quality on their agendas as a key challenge in the twenty first century.

Nevertheless, for policy makers to focus on job quality and academics to properly scrutinize policy interventions and their outcomes, there is a prerequisite for a greater consensus around three key areas: *what is job quality* and what are the key dimensions of job

quality; *the antecedents* or factors that influence job quality; and the *outcomes or impact of* job quality (Findlay et al., 2013). To contribute to shaping such consensus, this doctoral thesis aims to tackle important gaps in these key areas and advance the notion of job quality by investigating various job quality indicators, its antecedents and influence on two important outcomes: employee health and wellbeing.

Regarding the first area *what* is job quality, we need to note that this question remains a challenge for policy makers and scholars. The fact that job quality is a multidimensional concept studied by different disciplines is not the only challenge for its research and policy development. Scholars have acknowledged that there is a family of concepts that are related, sometimes overlap and have been used interchangeably to describe any kind of quality in terms of work and employment (Green, 2021; Warhurst et al., 2022). According to Warhurst et al. (2022) among the members of this family of concepts are decent work, fair work, employment quality and precarious employment, quality of working life. These concepts highlight various aspects or indicators which further indicate the complexity of the concept “job quality”. Moreover, different disciplines emphasize different job quality indicators. For instance, the behavioural economic approach considers participation; the traditional sociological approach typically examines alienation and intrinsic quality of work; the institutional approach focuses on segmentation and employment quality; and the occupational health medicine and psychology approach focuses on physical and psychosocial risks. Therefore, to better understand what job quality is, it is helpful to overview the most common groups of job quality indicators.

7.1.1 Job Quality Indicators

The existing literature highlights various categorizations of job quality indicators. First of all, scholars have highlighted the importance of distinguishing between work quality and employment quality as two broader categories of job quality (Warhurst & Knox, 2022; Muñoz

de Bustillo et al., 2011). In particular, whereas work quality refers to specific features of the work tasks, employment quality refers to specific terms and conditions of the employment (Peckham et al., 2019; Vanroelen et al., 2021). In this thesis we follow this distinction and consider employment quality and work quality as different aspects of job quality in order to avoid a confusing overlap and provide a more nuanced view of job quality. Second, scholars have highlighted the objective vs subjective dichotomy in job quality indicators research. The objective approach to job quality refers to elements of the job per se (e.g., salary, working time), while the subjective approach, considering employees' perceptions guided by the work and employment characteristics, but also by their preferences and circumstances (Knox & Wright, 2022). Objective indicators can be both economic, such as salary, or non-economic such as type of contract (temporary vs. permanent) or task variety in a job description (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Subjective job quality indicators involve employee perceptions and assessments, for instance a personal evaluation of work meaningfulness. In addition, they can be conceptualized from a fit perspective, which focus on the extent to which the job is congruent with the individual preferences, individual circumstances, and characteristics. In this line, researchers agree that the subjective evaluation of job quality or what is a good or bad job may depend on sociodemographic variables, such as age, gender, and qualifications (Knox & Wright, 2022). In this line, a categorization of job quality indicators that focuses on fit has emerged and is denominated Person-Job (P-J) fit (Green et al., 2021). For instance, a fit between the actual job characteristics and the person's preferences and needs. Traditionally used example of a *fit* indicator in the job quality literature is educational fit (i.e., the degree to which there is a match between the educational level required by the job and the educational level a person has). Third, indicators of job quality may be differentiated by their intrinsic versus extrinsic nature. The characteristics of work considered "intrinsic" are those that focus on the nature of the activity itself, or also considered as inherent aspects of the job or work

process itself (Cascales Mira, 2021; Warhurst et al., 2022). For instance, autonomy, task variety concepts found in the literature of job design based on the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). In contrast, the extrinsic aspects refer to the consequences of the work or outcomes of carrying out a job. For instance, salary and prestige, since they are not deployed within the workplace (Warhurst et al., 2022).

7.1.2 The Relationship Between Objective and Subjective Job Quality Indicators

Scholars have argued that the predominant approach in job quality research has been the objective one while the importance of the subjective approach, such as individuals' perceptions of job quality, has been neglected (Handel, 2005). However, the current scholarly conversation advocates for an interplay of the subjective and objective approaches to job quality with the aim of providing the needed holistic view about job quality (Knox & Wright, 2022). In this line, understanding what objective job quality indicators contribute to subjective job quality, how and when, is much needed. Accordingly, research based on Person-Job fit theory (Edwards, 1991) has shown that when employees' preferences are aligned with their actual job characteristics, employees are more likely to experience positive outcomes (Loughlin & Murray, 2013). This raises the question of the moderating role of employment characteristics preferences in the relationship between objective job quality indicators and perceived job quality. Additionally, as Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests, employees' preferences, norms, and expectations, can be guided by employee gender role. This issue is addressed in the first study of this thesis.

7.1.3 The Influence of Employment Quality on Employee Health

Regarding the outcomes of job quality, particularly is timely and relevant to investigate the health outcomes of the job quality subarea named employment quality. The ongoing transformations of employment arrangements and subsequent changes in employment quality highlight the urgent need to investigate the consequences of the later (Kalleberg, 2018). We

focus on a consequence that is especially important: employees' health (Benach et al., 2014), particularly health complaints, and pay attention to the mechanisms that explain the relationships between employment quality and health. Research conducted so far shows that employment quality is positively related to employee health (Benach et al., 2014; Donnelly, 2021; Giudici & Morcelli, 2019; Peckham et al., 2019; Van Aerden et al., 2016; Vives et al., 2011). In particular, studies focusing on separate employment quality indicators have indicated that employees with standard employment arrangements, such as permanent contracts, high salary, and full-time jobs, have better health, compared to employees with nonstandard employment arrangements, such as temporary, part-time jobs, and low salary (Gevaert et al., 2021; Quinlan & Bohle, 2015). Only few studies have investigated the underlying mechanisms of the abovementioned relationship. With the exception of the stressor pathway, little is known about the mediating psychological mechanisms that explain *why* employment quality is related to employee health (Ahonen et al., 2019). We aim to tackle this omission in Study 2 of this thesis.

7.1.4 Antecedents of Subjective Intrinsic Job Quality and its Influence on Wellbeing

With regards to the factors and influence of job quality, it is particularly important to consider a subjective indicator of job quality (particularly work quality) that has caught the attention of researchers and practitioners: work meaningfulness (i.e., work experienced as personally significant and worthwhile and with a positive valence; Rosso et al., 2010). The inquiry into how employees derive meaning from their work, in other words, work meaningfulness, is essential in shaping employees' attitudes, behaviours, and overall work-related experiences (Brief & Nord, 1990; Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In addition, work meaningfulness aligns with the philosophical approach of eudaimonia that encompasses personally valuable and worthwhile experiences (Haybron, 2016; Steger et al., 2012). As such, it may be important in explaining the experience of eudaimonic wellbeing at

work (i.e., optimal functioning and human growth at work; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Taking this into consideration research is needed to understand *how* and *why* personal work specific resources influence eudaimonic wellbeing at work. In this thesis, we argue that work meaningfulness is one of the psychological mechanisms that can explain *why* personal work specific resources influence eudaimonic wellbeing at work. Understanding how and why personal resources contribute to work meaningfulness and the subsequent influence of the latter on eudaimonic wellbeing at work is crucial for theory development and expansion of the nomological network of this subjective job quality indicator. In particular, we aim to tackle this gap in Study 3 of this thesis.

7.2 Thesis Objectives

7.2.1 Main Objective

Considering the job quality literature review and the identified gaps, the present doctoral thesis has a main objective to advance our knowledge about the nomological network of job quality by examining the relationships between specific objective and subjective job quality indicators, as well as identifying some of their antecedents (particularly person-centred employability) and consequences (particularly employee health and wellbeing).

7.2.2 Specific Objectives

The main objective was further divided into three specific objectives tackled by a separate study in this thesis (see Figure 1.2).

Objective 1: To investigate the contribution of different objective indicators of job quality to perceived job quality (subjective job quality indicator). Specifically, we will focus on the following objective indicators of employment quality: type of contract (permanent vs. temporary), employment relationship (full-time vs. part-time), and schedule predictability (fixed vs. irregular working days), as well as the following characteristics from a person-job fit

perspective: horizontal educational misfit (i.e., the misfit between employees' educational field of study and the field of their job) and vertical educational misfit (i.e., overeducation). Moreover, we will investigate whether the employment characteristics - perceived job quality relationships are moderated by employees' employment characteristics preferences and gender.

Objective 2: To investigate whether the relationship between employment quality (particularly the degree to which employees have desirable employment characteristics: full-time jobs, permanent contracts, and higher salaries (vs. part-time jobs, temporary contracts, and lower salaries)), on the one side, and employee health complaints, on the other side, is mediated by work engagement and affective job insecurity.

Objective 3: To examine the relationships between Fugate et al.'s (2004) four employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital), on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing at work, on the other hand. In addition, to examine the mediating role of work meaningfulness in the abovementioned relationships, focusing then on the antecedents and consequences of this subjective indicator of job quality.

7.3 Methodology

The data for this doctoral thesis were collected at five time points separated by three months starting from January 2020 through January 2021, as part of a broader research project. To collect the data, we used the services of a market research company that managed a respondent panel. Panel members who were invited to participate in the study had to be over 17 years old and could not be self-employed. We collected data via an online questionnaire. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants provided their informed consent and anonymity, and confidentiality of the responses were guaranteed. For Study 1 we implemented a cross sectional design, so data were collected at one time point, Time 1 (January 2020). For Study 2 and Study 3 we implemented a time lagged design. For Study 2, data were collected at three time points, T1 (July 2020), T2 (October 2020) and T3 (January 2021). For Study 3, data

were also collected at three time points, T1(April 2020), T2 (July 2020) and T3 (October 2020). Given the time lagged nature of Studies 2 and 3 which resulted in a high attrition rate, in both cases we conducted a preliminary sample attrition analysis. The results showed that there was no attrition bias in the studies, so we proceeded with analysis necessary to test the proposed hypotheses. Regarding the measures implemented in the thesis, only two variables (type of job contract, and employment relationship) are common for Study 1 and Study 2. The rest of the variables differed across studies. All measures showed good reliability (Cronbach alpha > .70). Results from the confirmatory factor analysis supported the validity of the scales used. Regarding the main analyses, in Study 1, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted by means of SPSS. In Study 2, we used latent structural equation modelling and in Study 3 we used path analysis. In both cases analyses were run with Mplus 8.

7.4 Summary of Studies, Results and Implications

Study 1 addresses the first objective where we investigated the differential contribution of traditional job quality indicators, such as employment characteristics (i.e., type of contract (permanent vs. temporary), employment relationship (full-time vs. part-time), and schedule predictability (fixed vs. irregular working days)) as well as educational misfit (horizontal and vertical (i.e., over-education)) to perceived job quality (see Figure 3.1). In addition, we investigated the moderating role of preferred employment characteristics and gender in the employment characteristics -perceived job quality relationships.

To capture the contextual nature of job quality and based on the Person-Job fit theory (Edwards, 1991) we tested whether the relationship between the employment characteristics and perceived job quality depends on preferred employment characteristics. Moreover, we applied 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.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted in a sample of 562 Spanish employees. Our results showed that employees in standard (full-time and permanent) employment perceived higher job quality than employees in nonstandard (part-time and temporary) employment. Moreover, as expected, both educational misfit variables horizontal misfit and overeducation were negatively related to perceived job quality. These job quality indicators equally contributed to perceived job quality. However, the results did not support our hypothesis that employees with fixed workdays perceive higher job quality than those with irregular workday schedule. Regarding the moderating effects, contrary to our expectations there was not a statistically significant moderating effect of employment characteristics preferences on the current employment characteristics-perceived job quality relationships. Nevertheless, our results showed that preferences for employment relationship (full-time vs part-time) play a moderating role when gender was included as a moderator in the model. In particular, the full-time job preference boosted the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality only for women. In contrast, for men, having a part-time job preference boosted the positive “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality. This surprising finding may be explained with the principles of the Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987). The male gender role revolves around the breadwinner concept, and part-time jobs are less 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., 2019). Moreover, having a part-time job is unusual and incongruent with the male gender roles and as such may be penalized (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Pedulla, 2016) which may lead to perceptions of low job quality.

This study highlights the importance of considering a person-centred approach in job quality research by acknowledging socio demographic and personal characteristics as factors that might explain differences in perceived job quality. The study theoretically contributes to extending the nomological network of job quality. In particular: 1) by testing the (differential) influence that objective traditional indicators of job quality have on shaping employees' perceptions of job quality and, 2) by analysing the individual boundary conditions, depending on employees' preferred employment characteristics and gender, that make traditional indicators of job quality more or less salient. This study answers the call of better understanding of perceived job quality and factors that influence job quality (Findlay et al., 2017) in concretely the interaction of objective job quality indicators and subjective employee preferences as antecedents of perceived job quality. Our study highlights intersectionality of different socio demographic and personal characteristics preferences as a tool to unravel the complexity of perceived job quality.

From a practical point of view, it offers guidelines on what objective job quality indicators need to be tackled by organizations to increase subjective job quality. Moreover, it provides practical insights into how organizations and societies can implement gender sensitive policies and practices to achieve perceived job quality especially in terms of the current and preferred employment relationship (full-time vs part-time).

Study 2 addresses the second objective. In this study we tested the mediating role of work engagement and affective job insecurity in the employment quality-employee health complaints relationship (see Figure 4.1). Employment quality was measured via three objective employment characteristics: type of job contract (permanent vs temporary), employment relationship (full-time vs part-time) and salary. It was operationalized based on the dual labour market theory that highlights standard employment relationships (permanent, full-time and high paid jobs) as high employment quality, and nonstandard employment relationships as low

employment quality. We argued that employment quality is an important resource for employees (Vahle-Hinz et al., 2013). Specifically, and based on the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) we hypothesized that employment quality is related to employee health complaints via two parallel mediators: work engagement (motivation path) and affective job insecurity (health impairment path). Based on this theory, job resources trigger the motivation process and hinder the health impairment processes. Drawing on physiological research and the Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson, 2004) we hypothesized that work engagement would be negatively related to employee health complaints. Drawing on the Stress Appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) we hypothesized that affective job insecurity would be positively related to employee health complaints.

The study was conducted in a sample of 252 employees. Latent structural equation modelling analysis showed significant indirect effects from employment quality to employee health complaints via work engagement and via affective job insecurity. Specifically, on one side, employment quality was negatively related to employee health complaints via work engagement. On the other side, employment quality was positively related to employee health complaints via affective job insecurity. The two indirect effects were not statistically different from each other highlighting the equally important role both mediators play in explaining the employment quality- employee health complaints relationship.

The study makes contributions to job quality literature specifically its subarea employment quality. It contributes to the understanding of *how* and *why* employment quality is related to employee health, particularly health complaints, by identifying two mediators in this relationship: work engagement (motivating pathway) and affective job insecurity (stress pathway). The comparison of the strength of the indirect effects sheds light on the fact that the influence of employment quality on certain employee outcomes via functional motivational states (i.e., work engagement) is as strong as its influence via dysfunctional threatening states

(i.e., affective job insecurity). Moreover, this research makes a twofold contribution to the JD-R theory by showing that this is a useful theoretical framework to examine the outcomes of employment characteristics, and we show that employment quality is a resource that can trigger both the motivational and the health impairment processes consistent with the cross-links ideas in the JD-R model.

Practically, the results offer guidelines for policy makers and organizations on how to improve employee health. In particular, this study highlights the importance of interventions and initiatives in order to promote characteristics that represent high employment quality, such as permanent, full-time and high paid jobs.

Study 3 addresses the third objective of the doctoral thesis. Particularly it investigates a subjective job quality indicator -work meaningfulness from a worker centric approach and examines its antecedents and impact on eudaimonic wellbeing. In this study, in a sample of 263 employees, we examined the relationships between Fugate et al.'s (2004) four employability dimensions (career identity, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital), on the one hand, and two eudaimonic wellbeing at work dimensions (personal growth at work and purpose in career), on the other, as well as the mediator role of work meaningfulness in these relationships (see Figure 5.1). In this study, by adopting the worker-centric approach of work meaningfulness, we argue that employees are active creators of meaning (Rosso et al., 2010), and that work meaningfulness depends on what employees themselves bring to work (Chalofsky, 2003). Moreover, we draw on Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability as a psychosocial construct composed of career identity, personal adaptability, social capital, and human capital, which, according to the theory of pathways to work meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010) can be considered personal resources that employees bring to work and increase work meaningfulness. We also argue that work meaningfulness is positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work because it has been considered a construct

with an eudaimonic direction (Steger et al., 2012) due to its alignment with the philosophical approach to eudaimonia that encompasses personally valuable and worthwhile experiences (Haybron, 2016). Hence, as such, work meaningfulness is a prerequisite for eudaimonic wellbeing at work (Chalofsky & Cavallero, 2019). Taken these arguments into account we hypothesized that work meaningfulness is a mediator in the relationships between the employability dimensions and those of eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

Path analysis results showed positive direct relationships between career identity and social capital on the one hand, and personal growth at work and purpose in career on the hand. Moreover, regarding mediation, all employability dimensions, with the exception of personal adaptability, were positively related to the mediator, work meaningfulness, which, in turn, was positively related to both eudaimonic wellbeing at work dimensions. The indirect effects showed that work meaningfulness mediated the positive relationships between career identity, social capital and human capital on the one hand and personal growth at work, and purpose in career on the other hand.

This study expands the nomological network of work meaningfulness by uncovering specific employability dimensions as its antecedents and eudaimonic wellbeing dimensions as its outcomes. It also contributes to the integration of the literature streams vocational psychology and eudaimonic wellbeing at work by identifying work meaningfulness (a subjective job quality indicator) as an underlying mechanism between employability and eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

This study offers several practical implications aimed at increasing employability as a personal resource. In particular, it offers recommendations for organizations and employees on how to increase the employability dimensions career identity, social capital, and human capital (generic competences), which are especially relevant for experiencing work meaningfulness and eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research

We would like to acknowledge some of the limitations of this doctoral thesis and to provide some future research directions. First, in all three studies we used single source self-reported measures which might have inflated the relationships between the study variables. However, to mitigate this issue in Study 2 and Study 3 we implemented a time-lagged design with a temporal separation among the study variables as a recommended practice (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We recommend future research based on multi source data and a longitudinal design to test these models and overcome these limitations. Additionally, some variables in our studies had a small variability, such as small number of participants with temporary contract preferences and with irregular workdays (Study 1). This prevented us from capturing the ‘true’ relationships these variables have with perceived job quality. Future studies with more heterogeneous samples in terms of these variables may mitigate these issues.

Another future research direction derived from the thesis as a whole is to consider the integration of the two wide job quality categories: employment quality and work quality, when investigating the influence of job quality on employee outcomes. Besides the integration of job quality indicators, future research may investigate the integration of different level job quality antecedents. Even if Study 3 highlighted the role of personal level antecedents of work meaningfulness such as employability dimensions, to fully understand what fosters work meaningfulness, future studies can simultaneously investigate both personal (e.g., employability) and organizational or work-unit (e.g., leadership) level antecedents.

7.6 Conclusions

Finally, to conclude this chapter, we outline the most prominent conclusions that can be drawn from this doctoral thesis.

1. Job quality is a multidimensional construct, as such to understand the construct, its drivers and consequences, it is important to consider and analyse different

job quality indicators (objective, subjective, extrinsic and intrinsic) to enrich and improve our knowledge and decisions regarding job quality.

2. Traditional objective indicators of job quality are important antecedents of subjective perceptions of job quality. Interestingly, our results indicate that all the considered indicators are equally important in shaping the perceptions of job quality. Specifically, perceived job quality is higher among permanent, full-time employees with horizontal and vertical educational fit in comparison to employees in non-traditional jobs (temporary, part-time), overeducated and with horizontal educational misfit.
3. Taking a gender perspective in subjective job quality research is important as gender moderates the interaction between current employment relationship and its preference on perceived job quality. Specifically, only for women full-time preferences boost the “effect” of full-time jobs on perceived job quality. On the contrary, men perceive higher job quality in full-time jobs than in part-time jobs, even when they have part-time preferences.
4. Employees in high employment quality conditions (full-time, permanent, high paid jobs) are more engaged and experience less affective job insecurity than employees in low employment quality conditions (part-time, temporary, low paid jobs). Thus, employment quality is important to foster an engaged and secure workforce but also to promote healthy employees, since engaged employees, and employees with low affective job insecurity experience less health complaints.
5. The negative relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints is mediated by work engagement and affective job insecurity and both mediators are equally important.

6. Promoting high quality employment arrangements is not only a way to create engaging and secure jobs, but a way to positively impact employees' health.
7. Employability dimensions, particularly career identity, social capital, and human capital, are antecedents of the subjective job quality indicator - work meaningfulness.
8. Employees who experience work meaningfulness are likely to experience eudaimonic wellbeing at work (personal growth at work and purpose in career), as such fostering work meaningfulness is a way to improve eudaimonic wellbeing at work.
9. Employability (career identity, social capital, and human capital) is a personal resource that fosters work meaningfulness, and ultimately eudaimonic wellbeing at work. It is important to invest in increasing employees' career identity, social capital and human capital as they can foster the subjective job quality experience - work meaningfulness, and ultimately, promote eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

To conclude this thesis, we will encompass its conclusions and contributions under the topic *job quality, antecedents and influence on employee health and wellbeing* as the thesis's title suggests.

First, regarding its *antecedents*, we focused on analysing the antecedents of subjective job quality indicators. In the first place, we investigated the relationships between some objective indicators and perceived job quality as a subjective job quality indicator. We found that traditionally considered job quality indicators, such as type of contract, employment relationship and educational fit are equally important antecedents of the subjective indicator - perceived job quality (Study 1). Employees in standard employment characteristics, such as

permanent and full-time jobs with vertical and educational fit perceived higher job quality. We further identified employees' preferences for employment relationship and gender as moderating variables in the relationship between employment relationship type and perceived job quality. In the case of the employment relationship type (full-time vs part-time), we found that the full-time job preference boosted the positive "effect" of full-time jobs on perceived job quality only for women. In contrast, for men, having a part-time job preference boosted the positive "effect" of full-time jobs on perceived job quality. Thus, we shed light on some person-centred characteristics as moderating factors in the objective-subjective job quality relationship.

Additionally, regarding the antecedents of job quality, in Study 3, we identified three employability dimensions: career identity, social capital, and human capital as antecedents of a subjective job quality indicator- work meaningfulness. Thus, we expanded the knowledge on personal level antecedents of subjective job quality. This is a particularly useful insight, since these employability dimensions can be developed and improved by various interventions coming from both employees and organizations.

Second, regarding the *influence of job quality on health*, we showed that the subarea of job quality named employment quality (operationalized as permanent, full-time, high paid job) is negatively related to employee health complaints, and we uncovered *why* this occurs (Study 2). In particular, we identified work engagement and affective job insecurity as mediators in the relationship between employment quality and employee health complaints, thus providing theoretical insights on the influence employment quality has on employee health.

Third, regarding the *job quality's influence on employee wellbeing*, we showed that a subjective job quality indicator work meaningfulness is positively related to eudaimonic wellbeing at work specifically two dimensions personal growth at work and purpose in career (Study 3). We also uncovered work meaningfulness as a mediator in the relationships between

the employability dimensions career identity, social capital and human capital on the one hand, and eudaimonic wellbeing (personal growth at work in purpose in career) on the other hand. This finding highlights the importance of considering subjective job quality indicators in practice and in research, as they may explain why some personal resources (e.g., employability) can lead to beneficial outcomes for employee such as eudaimonic wellbeing at work.

Chapter 8: Resumen

En este capítulo resumimos los principales aspectos de la tesis doctoral. Comienza con una breve introducción, seguida de la descripción de los objetivos de la tesis. Continúa con un resumen de la metodología utilizada, , un resumen de los tres estudios realizados para alcanzar los objetivos planteados, y los principales resultados e implicaciones de dichos estudios. Finaliza con las limitaciones generales de la tesis y las direcciones futuras de investigación, y concluye con los principales mensajes clave que pueden derivarse de esta tesis doctoral.

8.1 Introducción

Esta tesis doctoral aborda una cuestión clave para el mundo laboral actual. Aborda el tema de la calidad del trabajo, y lo hace dado que la calidad del trabajo importa y lo ha hecho continuamente durante muchos años y lo va a seguir haciendo en los próximos años (Warhurst et al., 2022). La calidad del trabajo es importante para las personas, las organizaciones y las sociedades (Adamson y Roper, 2019; Findlay et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017; Warhurst et al., 2017). Los trabajos de mala calidad generan costos, mientras que los trabajos de alta calidad fomentan beneficios sostenibles para las personas, las organizaciones y las sociedades. De hecho, el Manual de Calidad del Trabajo de Oxford (Oxford Handbook of Job Quality) contempla la calidad del trabajo como la clave para abordar los desafíos contemporáneos, como son: la salud, el bienestar, la productividad, la innovación, la competitividad económica, la democracia y la participación democrática, y la igualdad social (Warhurst et al, 2022). El compromiso de mejorar la calidad del trabajo no solo se basa en los grandes beneficios que la calidad del trabajo reporta a las organizaciones y sociedades, sino que va también ligado con la responsabilidad moral que tienen las organizaciones y sociedades de crear trabajos de calidad (Findlay et al., 2017). Por lo tanto, no sorprende que los legisladores o responsables de la formulación de políticas en instituciones de todo el mundo, como la Unión Europea (UE), la Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT) y las Naciones Unidas (ONU), incluyan en sus agendas la calidad del trabajo como un desafío clave en el siglo XXI.

No obstante, para que los legisladores se centren en la calidad del trabajo y los académicos examinen adecuadamente las intervenciones y sus resultados, es necesario un mayor consenso en torno a tres áreas clave: ¿qué es la calidad del trabajo? y ¿cuáles son las dimensiones clave de la calidad del trabajo?; los *antecedentes o factores* que influyen en la calidad del trabajo; y las *consecuencias o el impacto* de la calidad del trabajo (Findlay et al., 2013). Para contribuir a dar forma a dicho consenso, esta tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo abordar importantes lagunas en estas áreas clave, que han sido detectadas en la revisión de la literatura, y avanzar en la noción de calidad del trabajo mediante la investigación de varios indicadores de calidad del trabajo, sus antecedentes y su influencia en dos resultados importantes: la salud y el bienestar de los empleados.

Respecto a la primera área, ¿qué es la calidad del trabajo?, debemos señalar que esta cuestión sigue siendo un desafío para los responsables políticos y los académicos. El hecho de que la calidad del trabajo sea un concepto multidimensional estudiado por diferentes disciplinas no es el único desafío para su investigación y desarrollo de políticas. Los académicos han reconocido que existe una familia de conceptos que están relacionados, los cuales a veces se superponen y utilizan indistintamente para describir cualquier tipo de calidad en términos de trabajo y empleo (Green, 2021; Warhurst et al., 2022). Según Warhurst et al. (2022) entre los integrantes de esta familia de conceptos se encuentran el trabajo decente (decent work), el trabajo justo (fair work), la calidad del empleo (employment quality), el empleo precario (precarious employment) y la calidad de vida laboral (quality of working life). Estos conceptos resaltan varios aspectos o indicadores destacando aún más la complejidad del concepto “calidad del trabajo”. Además, diferentes disciplinas se centran en distintos indicadores de calidad del trabajo. Por ejemplo, el enfoque económico conductual considera la participación; el enfoque sociológico tradicional suele examinar la alienación y la calidad intrínseca del trabajo; el enfoque institucional se centra tanto en la segmentación como en la calidad del

empleo; y los enfoques de la medicina y psicología ocupacional de la salud se centran en los riesgos físicos y psicosociales en el trabajo. Por consiguiente, para comprender mejor *qué* es la calidad del trabajo, resulta conveniente revisar los grupos de indicadores de calidad del trabajo más comunes en la literatura.

8.1.1 Indicadores de Calidad del Trabajo

La literatura existente destaca varias categorías de indicadores de calidad del trabajo. En primer lugar, los académicos resaltan la importancia de distinguir entre la calidad laboral (work quality) y la calidad del empleo (employment quality) como dos categorías o subáreas de la calidad del trabajo (Warhurst y Knox, 2022; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). En particular, mientras que la calidad laboral se refiere a características específicas de las tareas laborales, la calidad del empleo se refiere a términos y condiciones específicos de la relación de empleo (Peckham et al., 2019; Vanroelen et al., 2021). En esta tesis seguimos esta distinción y consideramos la calidad del empleo (employment quality) y la calidad laboral (work quality) como aspectos que se engloban bajo el concepto de *la calidad del trabajo* (job quality) para evitar una superposición y proporcionar una visión más matizada de la calidad del trabajo.

En segundo lugar, los académicos han destacado la dicotomía objetiva versus subjetiva en la investigación de indicadores de calidad del trabajo. El enfoque objetivo de la calidad del trabajo se refiere a los elementos del propio trabajo (ej., el salario, el tiempo de trabajo), mientras que el enfoque subjetivo considera las percepciones de los empleados derivadas de las propias características laborales y del empleo, pero también de las preferencias y circunstancias de los empleados (Knox y Wright, 2022). Los indicadores objetivos pueden ser tanto económicos (ej., salario), como no económicos, como son el tipo de contrato (temporal o permanente) y la variedad de tareas en la descripción del puesto de trabajo (Hackman y Oldham, 1976). Los indicadores subjetivos de la calidad del trabajo implican percepciones y evaluaciones de los empleados, por ejemplo, una evaluación personal de la importancia del

trabajo. Además, pueden conceptualizarse desde una perspectiva de ajuste, la cual se centra en la medida en que el trabajo es congruente con las preferencias, circunstancias y características individuales. En esta línea, los investigadores coinciden en que la evaluación subjetiva de la calidad del trabajo, es decir, *qué* es un buen o mal trabajo, puede depender de variables sociodemográficas, como la edad, el género o el nivel educativo (Knox y Wright, 2022). Del mismo modo, ha surgido una categoría de indicadores de calidad de trabajo que se centra en el ajuste y se denomina ajuste Persona-Trabajo (P-T) (Green et al., 2021). Por ejemplo, el ajuste entre las características del trabajo y las preferencias y necesidades de la persona. Un ejemplo de indicador de ajuste utilizado tradicionalmente en la literatura sobre calidad del trabajo es el ajuste educativo (es decir, el grado en que existe una congruencia entre el nivel educativo requerido por el trabajo y el nivel educativo que tiene el trabajador).

En tercer lugar, los indicadores de calidad del empleo pueden diferenciarse por su naturaleza intrínseca versus extrínseca. Las características del trabajo consideradas “intrínsecas” son aquellas que se centran en la naturaleza de la propia actividad, o también consideradas como aspectos inherentes al propio puesto de trabajo o procesos laborales (Cascales Mira, 2021; Warhurst et al., 2022). Por ejemplo, los conceptos de autonomía y variedad de tareas que se encuentran en la literatura sobre el diseño de puestos del trabajo basados en el Modelo de Características del Trabajo (Job Characteristics Model, Hackman y Oldham, 1976). En cambio, los aspectos extrínsecos se refieren a las consecuencias del trabajo o los resultados del desempeño de un trabajo. Por ejemplo, el salario y el prestigio, ya que estos no se desarrollan dentro del lugar de trabajo (Warhurst et al., 2022).

8.1.2 La relación Entre los Indicadores de Calidad del Trabajo Objetivos y Subjetivos

Los académicos han resaltado que el enfoque predominante en la investigación sobre la calidad del trabajo ha sido el objetivo, mientras que se ha descuidado la importancia del enfoque subjetivo, como las percepciones individuales de la calidad del trabajo (Handel, 2005). Sin embargo, el debate académico actual aboga por una interacción de los enfoques subjetivo y objetivo de la calidad del trabajo con el propósito de proporcionar la visión holística necesaria sobre la calidad del trabajo (Knox y Wright, 2022). Por ello es necesario comprender qué indicadores objetivos de calidad del trabajo contribuyen a la calidad subjetiva del trabajo, y cómo y cuándo se produce esta relación. En este sentido, la investigación basada en la teoría del ajuste persona-trabajo (Edwards, 1991) ha demostrado que cuando las características laborales de los empleados coinciden con sus preferencias, es más probable que los empleados experimenten resultados positivos (Loughlin y Murray, 2013). Esto plantea la cuestión del papel modulador de las “preferencias en las características del empleo” en la relación entre los indicadores objetivos de calidad del empleo, por un lado, y la calidad percibida del empleo, por otro lado. Además, como sugiere la teoría del rol social (Eagly, 1987), las preferencias, normas y expectativas de los empleados pueden estar guiadas por el rol de género del empleado. Esta cuestión se aborda en el primer estudio de la presente tesis.

8.1.3 La Influencia de la Calidad del Empleo en la Salud de los Empleados

En cuanto a las consecuencias de la calidad del trabajo, resulta particularmente oportuno y relevante investigar la influencia de la calidad del empleo (como subárea de la calidad del trabajo) sobre la salud laboral. El aumento de las formas de empleo atípicas ha impulsado cambios en la calidad del empleo. Por lo tanto, se resalta la urgencia de investigar las consecuencias de la calidad del empleo (Kalleberg, 2018). En esta tesis nos centramos en una consecuencia de la calidad del empleo que es especialmente importante: la salud de los empleados (Benach et al., 2014), concretamente las quejas sobre la salud, y prestamos atención

a los mecanismos que explican la relación entre la calidad del empleo y la salud de los empleados. La investigación previa muestra que la calidad del empleo está relacionada positivamente con la salud de los empleados (Benach et al., 2014; Donnelly, 2021; Giudici y Morcelli, 2019; Peckham et al., 2019; Van Aerden et al., 2016; Vives et al., 2011). Concretamente, los estudios que han utilizado indicadores de la calidad del empleo por separado han mostrado que los trabajadores con empleo estándar (contrato permanente, salario alto, y empleo a tiempo completo) tienen mejor salud, en comparación con los trabajadores en empleos atípicos (contrato temporal, a tiempo parcial, y con salario bajo) (Gevaert et al., 2021; Quinlan y Bohle, 2015). Sin embargo, muy pocos estudios han investigado los mecanismos subyacentes a la relación previamente mencionada. Por lo tanto, a excepción de los procesos de estrés, hay poco conocimiento sobre los mecanismos psicológicos mediadores que explican por qué la calidad del empleo se relaciona con la salud de los empleados, (Ahonen et al., 2019). El objetivo del Estudio 2 de esta tesis es, analizar los mecanismos explicativos de la relación entre la calidad del empleo y la salud de los empleados, para contribuir a esclarecer esta laguna en el conocimiento.

8.1.4 Antecedentes de la Calidad del Trabajo Subjetiva e Intrínseca y su Influencia en el Bienestar

Con respecto a los factores y el impacto de la calidad del trabajo, es particularmente importante considerar un indicador subjetivo de la calidad del trabajo (particularmente la calidad laboral) que ha llamado la atención de los investigadores y profesionales: el trabajo significativo (work meaningfulness), que ha sido definido como el trabajo experimentado como personalmente significativo y valioso (Rosso et al., 2010). La investigación sobre cómo los empleados obtienen significado en su trabajo, es esencial para moldear las actitudes, los comportamientos y las experiencias en el ámbito laboral de los empleados (Brief & Nord, 1990; Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Asimismo, el trabajo significativo se alinea

con el enfoque filosófico de la eudaimonia que abarca experiencias personalmente valiosas y útiles (Haybron, 2016; Steger et al., 2012). Como tal, puede ser importante para explicar la experiencia de bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo (es decir, un funcionamiento óptimo y crecimiento personal en el trabajo; Ryff y Keyes, 1995). Teniendo esto en cuenta, es necesario realizar investigaciones para comprender cómo y por qué los recursos personales y relacionados con el trabajo influyen en el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo. En esta tesis, planteamos que el trabajo significativo (work meaningfulness) es uno de los mecanismos psicológicos que pueden explicar por qué los recursos personales específicos del trabajo influyen en el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo. Comprender cómo y por qué los recursos personales contribuyen al trabajo significativo y la posterior influencia de éste en el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo es crucial para el desarrollo teórico y la expansión de la red nomológica de este indicador subjetivo de calidad del trabajo. En particular, el Estudio 3 de esta tesis pretendemos abordar esta laguna identificada en la investigación previa.

8.2 Objetivos de la Tesis

8.2.1 El Objetivo General

Teniendo en cuenta la revisión de la literatura sobre la calidad del trabajo y las lagunas identificadas, la presente tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo general avanzar en el conocimiento sobre la red nomológica de la calidad del trabajo examinando las relaciones entre indicadores objetivos y subjetivos específicos de calidad del trabajo, así como identificando algunos de sus antecedentes (la empleabilidad desde un enfoque centrado en la persona) y consecuencias (la salud y el bienestar de los empleados).

8.2.2 Objetivos Específicos

A su vez, este objetivo general se divide en tres objetivos específicos abordados en los tres estudios de la tesis (ver Figura 1.2):

Objetivo 1: Investigar la contribución de diferentes indicadores objetivos de la calidad del trabajo a la calidad percibida del trabajo (indicador subjetivo de calidad del trabajo). Específicamente, nos centraremos en los siguientes indicadores objetivos de la calidad del empleo: tipo de contrato (permanente vs. temporal), relación laboral (tiempo completo vs. tiempo parcial) y previsibilidad del horario (horario fijo vs. irregularidad en los horarios de trabajo), así como en las siguientes características desde la perspectiva de ajuste persona-trabajo: el desajuste educativo horizontal (es decir, el desajuste entre el campo de estudios que posee el empleado y el campo de estudios que requiere el puesto de trabajo), y el desajuste educativo vertical (es decir, la sobreeducación). Además, investigaremos si las relaciones entre las características del empleo y la calidad percibida del trabajo están moduladas por las preferencias de las características del empleo y el género de los empleados.

Objetivo 2: Investigar si la relación entre la calidad del empleo (en concreto, el grado en que los empleados tienen características laborales deseables: empleos a tiempo completo, contratos permanentes y salarios altos (frente a empleos a tiempo parcial, contratos temporales y salarios bajos)), por un lado, y las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados, por el otro lado, están mediadas por el “work engagement” y la inseguridad laboral afectiva.

Objetivo 3: Examinar las relaciones entre las cuatro dimensiones de empleabilidad de Fugate et al. (2004) (identidad de carrera, adaptabilidad personal, capital social y capital humano), por un lado, y el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo, por el otro. Además, examinar el papel mediador del trabajo significativo (work meaningfulness) en dichas relaciones, centrándose así en los antecedentes y consecuencias de este indicador subjetivo de la calidad del trabajo.

8.3 Metodología

Los datos para esta tesis doctoral se recogieron en cinco momentos temporales separados cada uno de ellos entre sí por tres meses, desde enero de 2020 hasta enero de 2021,

como parte de un proyecto de investigación más amplio. Para la recogida de datos, contratamos una empresa de investigación de mercados que gestiona un panel de encuestados. Los miembros del panel que fueron invitados a participar en el estudio debían ser mayores de 17 años y no podían trabajar por cuenta propia. Los datos fueron recogidos a través de un cuestionario en línea. Al inicio del cuestionario, los participantes dieron su consentimiento informado y se garantizó el anonimato y la confidencialidad de las respuestas. Para el Estudio 1, se implementó un diseño transversal, por lo que los datos se recopilaban en un momento determinado, el Tiempo 1 (enero de 2020). Para el Estudio 2 y el Estudio 3 implementamos un diseño longitudinal demorado en el tiempo (time-lagged design) con recogida de datos en tres momentos temporales. Para el Estudio 2, se utilizaron los datos recogidos en tres momentos temporales: T1 (julio de 2020), T2 (octubre de 2020) y T3 (enero de 2021). Para el Estudio 3, también se utilizaron datos recogidos en tres momentos temporales: T1 (abril de 2020), T2 (julio de 2020) y T3 (octubre de 2020). Dada la naturaleza de los Estudios 2 y 3, que resultó en una alta tasa de abandono de los participantes a lo largo de los diferentes momentos de recogida de datos, realizamos en ambos casos un análisis de comparación entre la muestra inicial y la muestra final utilizada en el estudio (attrition analysis). Los resultados mostraron que la muestra final de ambos estudios no se vio afectada por el sesgo de abandono de los participantes, por lo que se procedió con los análisis necesarios para analizar las hipótesis propuestas. En cuanto a las medidas utilizadas en la tesis, solo dos variables (tipo de contrato de trabajo, y relación laboral) son comunes para el Estudio 1 y el Estudio 2. El resto de las variables difirieron entre los estudios. Todas las medidas mostraron una fiabilidad satisfactoria (alfa de Cronbach $> 0,70$). Los resultados de los análisis factoriales confirmatorios respaldaron la validez de las escalas utilizadas. En cuanto a los análisis para poner a prueba las hipótesis planteadas, en el Estudio 1 se realizó un análisis de regresión múltiple jerárquico mediante SPSS. En el Estudio 2, se utilizaron modelos de ecuaciones estructurales con variables latentes,

y en el Estudio 3 se utilizó path análisis. En ambos casos los análisis se realizaron con Mplus 8.

8.4 Resumen de los Estudios, Resultados e Implicaciones

El Estudio 1 aborda el primer objetivo, donde investigamos la contribución diferencial de los indicadores tradicionales de calidad del trabajo, como las características del empleo (tipo de contrato (permanente vs. temporal), relación laboral (a tiempo completo vs. a tiempo parcial) y previsibilidad del horario (días laborales fijos vs. irregulares)), así como el desajuste educativo horizontal y vertical ((sobreeducación) en la calidad percibida del trabajo (ver Figura 3.1). Además, investigamos el papel modulador de las preferencias en las características del empleo y del género, en las relaciones entre las características del empleo y la calidad percibida del trabajo.

Para captar la naturaleza contextual de la calidad del trabajo y basándonos en la teoría del ajuste Persona-Trabajo (Edwards, 1991), pusimos a prueba si la relación entre las características del empleo y la calidad percibida del trabajo depende de las preferencias de las características del empleo. Además, aplicamos la teoría del rol social (Eagly, 1987) para captar la perspectiva de género en la calidad del trabajo y explicar por qué los efectos moduladores que las preferencias de las características de empleo pueden tener sobre la relación entre las características del empleo y la calidad percibida del trabajo, pueden diferir entre hombres y mujeres.

Se realizó un análisis de regresión múltiple jerárquico en una muestra de 562 empleados españoles. Nuestros resultados mostraron que los empleados con empleo estándar (a tiempo completo y permanente) percibían una mayor calidad del trabajo que los empleados con empleo no estándar o atípico (a tiempo parcial y temporal). Además, como era de esperar, las dos variables de desajuste educativo, desajuste horizontal y sobreeducación, se relacionaron negativamente con la calidad percibida del trabajo. Estos indicadores de calidad del trabajo

contribuyeron igualmente a la calidad percibida del trabajo. Sin embargo, los resultados no respaldaron nuestra hipótesis de que los empleados con días laborales fijos perciben una mayor calidad del trabajo que aquellos con días laborales irregulares. En cuanto a los efectos moduladores, contrariamente a nuestras expectativas, no hubo un efecto modulador estadísticamente significativo de las preferencias de las características del empleo sobre las relaciones entre las características del empleo y la calidad del trabajo percibida.

Sin embargo, nuestros resultados mostraron que las preferencias por la relación laboral (a tiempo completo vs. a tiempo parcial) juegan un papel modulador cuando el género se incluyó como modulador en el modelo. En concreto, la preferencia por el empleo a tiempo completo reforzó el “efecto” positivo del empleo a tiempo completo sobre la calidad percibida del trabajo, sólo para las mujeres. En cambio, para los hombres, tener una preferencia de empleo a tiempo parcial reforzó el “efecto” positivo del empleo a tiempo completo sobre la calidad percibida del trabajo. Este resultado sorprendente puede explicarse con los principios de la teoría del Rol Social (Eagly, 1987). El rol de género masculino gira en torno al concepto de proveedor para la familia, y los trabajos a tiempo parcial están menos remunerados que los trabajos a tiempo completo. Por lo tanto, para los hombres, el trabajo a tiempo parcial, aunque sea preferido, podría no tener el efecto positivo esperado en la calidad percibida del trabajo porque los ingresos son especialmente valiosos para el rol de género masculino (Berdahl et al., 2019). Además, tener un trabajo a tiempo parcial es inusual e incongruente con los roles de género masculino y, como tal, puede ser penalizado (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Pedulla, 2016), lo que puede generar percepciones de baja calidad del trabajo.

Este estudio destaca la importancia de considerar un enfoque centrado en la persona en la investigación de la calidad del trabajo al reconocer las características sociodemográficas y personales como factores que podrían explicar las diferencias en la calidad percibida del trabajo. El estudio contribuye teóricamente a ampliar la red nomológica de la calidad del

trabajo. En particular: 1) analizando la influencia (diferencial) que los indicadores objetivos tradicionales de calidad del trabajo tienen en la configuración de las percepciones de los empleados sobre la calidad del trabajo y, 2) analizando las circunstancias individuales (en concreto las preferencias de los empleados respecto a las características laborales, y el género), bajo las cuales los indicadores tradicionales de calidad del trabajo son más o menos relevantes. Este estudio responde al llamamiento de una mejor comprensión de la calidad percibida del trabajo y los factores que influyen en la calidad del trabajo (Findlay et al., 2017), en concreto, la interacción de los indicadores objetivos de calidad del trabajo y las preferencias subjetivas de los empleados como antecedentes de la calidad percibida del trabajo. Nuestro estudio destaca la interacción entre diferentes características sociodemográficas y preferencias personales, como una herramienta para desentrañar la complejidad de la calidad percibida del trabajo.

Desde un punto de vista práctico, este estudio ofrece una serie de recomendaciones sobre qué indicadores objetivos de calidad del trabajo deben abordar las organizaciones para aumentar la calidad subjetiva del trabajo. Además, proporciona información práctica sobre cómo las organizaciones y sociedades pueden implementar políticas y prácticas sensibles al género para lograr alta calidad percibida del trabajo, especialmente en términos de la relación laboral (tiempo completo vs. tiempo parcial) que se tiene y la que se prefiere.

El Estudio 2 aborda el segundo objetivo. En este estudio investigamos el papel mediador del “work engagement” y la inseguridad laboral afectiva en la relación entre la calidad del empleo y –las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados (ver Figura 4.1). La calidad del empleo se midió a través de tres características objetivas del empleo: el tipo de contrato de trabajo (permanente vs. temporal), la relación laboral (a tiempo completo vs. tiempo parcial), y el salario. La calidad del empleo se operacionalizó con base en la teoría del mercado laboral dual que destaca las relaciones laborales estándar (empleos permanentes, de tiempo completo

y bien remunerados) como empleo de alta calidad, y las relaciones laborales atípicas como empleo de baja calidad. Argumentamos que la calidad del empleo es un recurso importante para los empleados (Vahle-Hinz et al., 2013). Específicamente, y basándonos en la teoría de Modelo de Demandas y Recursos del Trabajo (MD-R) (Job Demands-Resources theory; Bakker y Demerouti, 2017), planteamos la hipótesis de que la calidad del empleo está relacionada con las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados a través de dos mediadores paralelos: el “work engagement” (proceso motivacional), y la inseguridad laboral afectiva (proceso de deterioro de la salud). Según esta teoría, los recursos laborales desencadenan el proceso de motivación y dificultan los procesos de deterioro de la salud. Basándonos en investigaciones fisiológicas y en la teoría de Ampliación y Construcción (Broaden and Build theory; Fredrickson, 2004), planteamos la hipótesis de que el “work engagement” estaría relacionado negativamente con las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados. Basándonos en la Teoría del Estrés (Stress Appraisal theory; Lazarus y Folkman, 1984), planteamos la hipótesis de que la inseguridad laboral afectiva estaría relacionada positivamente con las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados.

El estudio se realizó en una muestra de 252 empleados. El análisis de modelos de ecuaciones estructurales con variables latentes mostró efectos indirectos significativos de la calidad del empleo sobre las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados a través del “work engagement” y de la inseguridad laboral afectiva. Específicamente, por un lado, la calidad del empleo se relacionó negativamente con las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados a través del “work engagement”. Por otro lado, la calidad del empleo se relacionó positivamente con las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados a través de la inseguridad laboral afectiva. Los dos efectos indirectos no fueron estadísticamente diferentes entre sí, lo que destaca que ambos mediadores tienen un papel igualmente importante a la hora de explicar la relación entre la calidad del empleo y las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados.

El estudio hace contribuciones a la literatura sobre calidad del trabajo, específicamente a la subárea de calidad del empleo. Concretamente, contribuye a comprender *cómo* y *por qué* la calidad del empleo se relaciona con la salud de los empleados, en particular con las quejas sobre la salud, al identificar dos mediadores en esta relación: el “work engagement” (el proceso motivacional), y la inseguridad laboral afectiva (el proceso de estrés-deterioro de la salud). La comparación de la fuerza de los efectos indirectos aclara el hecho de que la influencia de la calidad del empleo en ciertos resultados de los empleados a través de estados motivacionales funcionales (“work engagement”) es tan fuerte como su influencia a través de estados amenazantes disfuncionales (inseguridad laboral afectiva). Además, esta investigación hace una doble contribución a la teoría MD-R al mostrar que este es un marco teórico útil para examinar los resultados de las características del empleo y mostramos que la calidad del empleo es un recurso que puede desencadenar procesos tanto motivacionales como de deterioro de la salud. Estos resultados son consistentes con las ideas de enlaces cruzados en el modelo MD-R.

Del presente trabajo también se derivan implicaciones prácticas para los responsables de la formulación de políticas y para las organizaciones, sobre cómo mejorar la salud de los empleados. En concreto, este estudio destaca la importancia de las intervenciones e iniciativas para promover características que representen una alta calidad del empleo, como empleos permanentes, de tiempo completo y bien remunerados.

El Estudio 3 aborda el tercer objetivo de la tesis doctoral. Concretamente, investiga un indicador subjetivo de calidad del trabajo: el trabajo significativo (work meaningfulness) desde un enfoque centrado en el trabajador, y examina sus antecedentes y su impacto en el bienestar eudaimónico. En este estudio, en una muestra de 263 empleados, examinamos las relaciones entre las cuatro dimensiones de empleabilidad de Fugate et al. (2004) (identidad de carrera, adaptabilidad personal, capital social y capital humano), por un lado, y dos dimensiones del bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo (crecimiento personal en el trabajo y propósito en la

carrera), por otro lado, así como el papel mediador del trabajo significativo en estas relaciones (ver Figura 5.1). En este estudio, al adoptar el enfoque del trabajo significativo *centrado en el trabajador*, sostenemos que los empleados son creadores activos de significado (Rosso et al., 2010), y que el significado del trabajo depende de lo que los propios empleados aportan al trabajo (Chalofsky, 2003). Además, nos basamos en el modelo de empleabilidad de Fugate et al. (2004), en el que la empleabilidad se considera como un constructo psicosocial compuesto de identidad de carrera, adaptabilidad personal, capital social, y capital humano, que según la teoría de las vías hacia la significación del trabajo (Rosso et al., 2010), pueden considerarse como recursos personales que los empleados aportan al trabajo y aumentan el trabajo significativo. Asimismo, planteamos que el trabajo significativo se relaciona positivamente con el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo porque se ha considerado un constructo con una dirección eudaimónica (Steger et al., 2012) debido a su alineación con el enfoque filosófico de la eudaimonia que abarca experiencias personalmente valiosas y útiles (Haybrón, 2016). De este modo, la significación del trabajo es un requisito previo para el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo (Chalofsky y Cavallero, 2019). Teniendo en cuenta estos argumentos, planteamos la hipótesis de que el trabajo significativo es un mediador en las relaciones entre las dimensiones de empleabilidad y las dimensiones de bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo.

Los resultados del path analysis mostraron relaciones directas positivas entre la identidad de carrera y el capital social, por un lado, y el crecimiento personal en el trabajo y el propósito en la carrera, por el otro. Además, en cuanto a la mediación, todas las dimensiones de empleabilidad, a excepción de la adaptabilidad personal, se relacionaron positivamente con el mediador, la significación del trabajo, que, a su vez, se relacionó positivamente con ambas dimensiones del bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo. Los efectos indirectos mostraron que el trabajo significativo mediaba las relaciones positivas entre la identidad de carrera, el capital

social y el capital humano, por un lado, y el crecimiento personal en el trabajo y el propósito en la carrera, por el otro.

Este estudio amplía la red nomológica del trabajo significativo al identificar dimensiones específicas de empleabilidad como sus antecedentes y dimensiones de bienestar eudaimónico como sus consecuencias. Además, el estudio contribuye a la integración de las corrientes literarias de la psicología vocacional y el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo al identificar el trabajo significativo (un indicador subjetivo de la calidad del trabajo) como un mecanismo subyacente entre la empleabilidad y el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo.

Del presente estudio también se derivan varias implicaciones prácticas dirigidas a aumentar la empleabilidad como un recurso personal. En concreto, ofrece recomendaciones para las organizaciones y los empleados sobre cómo aumentar las dimensiones de empleabilidad, identidad de carrera, capital social y capital humano (competencias genéricas), que son especialmente relevantes para experimentar el trabajo significativo y el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo.

8.5 Limitaciones e Investigaciones Futuras

Cabe reconocer algunas de las limitaciones de esta tesis doctoral y proporcionar algunas direcciones de investigación futuras. Primero, en los tres estudios utilizamos medidas de auto-informe de una sola fuente, lo que podría haber hinchado las relaciones entre las variables del estudio. Sin embargo, para mitigar este problema, en los Estudios 2 y 3 implementamos un diseño con una separación temporal entre los diferentes momentos de recogida de datos de las variables del estudio, siguiendo las practicas recomendadas (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Recomendamos realizar investigaciones futuras para probar estos modelos y superar estas limitaciones, utilizando datos de múltiples fuentes y con un diseño longitudinal. Además, algunas de las variables utilizadas en nuestros estudios tuvieron poca variabilidad, como por ejemplo, solamente hubo un pequeño número de participantes con preferencias de contrato

temporal, y pocos participantes con jornadas laborales irregulares (Estudio 1). Esto nos impidió capturar las relaciones “verdaderas” que tienen estas variables con la calidad percibida del empleo. Estudios futuros, con muestras más heterogéneas en términos de estas variables, pueden mitigar estos problemas.

Otra línea de investigación futura, derivada de la tesis en su conjunto, es considerar la integración de las dos amplias categorías de calidad del trabajo (job quality): calidad del empleo (employment quality) y calidad laboral (work quality), al investigar la influencia de la calidad del trabajo en los resultados de los empleados. Además de la integración de indicadores de calidad del trabajo, investigaciones futuras pueden investigar la integración de antecedentes de calidad del trabajo de diferentes niveles. El Estudio 3 puso de manifiesto el papel de los antecedentes a nivel personal de la significación del trabajo, como las dimensiones de empleabilidad; sin embargo, para comprender en más profundidad qué potencia la significación del trabajo, los estudios futuros pueden investigar simultáneamente tanto antecedentes personales (por ejemplo, la empleabilidad) como antecedentes organizacionales o de la unidad de trabajo (por ejemplo, el liderazgo).

8.6 Conclusiones

Para cerrar este capítulo, resumimos las conclusiones más destacadas que se pueden derivar de esta tesis doctoral.

1. La calidad del trabajo es un constructo multidimensional, por lo tanto, para comprender el constructo, sus antecedentes y consecuencias, es importante considerar y analizar diferentes indicadores de calidad del trabajo (objetivos, subjetivos, extrínsecos e intrínsecos) que permitan enriquecer y mejorar nuestro conocimiento y decisiones sobre la calidad del trabajo.
2. Los indicadores objetivos tradicionales de la calidad del trabajo son antecedentes importantes de las percepciones subjetivas de la calidad del trabajo. Curiosamente,

nuestros resultados indican que todos los indicadores considerados son igualmente importantes a la hora de crear las percepciones sobre la calidad del trabajo. Específicamente, la calidad del trabajo percibida es mayor entre los empleados con contrato permanente, a tiempo completo, con ajuste educativo horizontal y vertical, en comparación con los empleados en empleos atípicos (con contrato temporal, a tiempo parcial), con desajuste educativo horizontal y sobreeducación.

3. Es importante adoptar una perspectiva de género en la investigación subjetiva sobre la calidad del trabajo, ya que el género modera la interacción entre la relación laboral y la preferencia en la relación laboral sobre la calidad del trabajo percibida. Específicamente, sólo en el caso de las mujeres, las preferencias por el empleo a tiempo completo refuerzan el “efecto” de los empleos a tiempo completo sobre la calidad laboral percibida. Por el contrario, los hombres perciben una mayor calidad de trabajo en los empleos a tiempo completo que en los empleos a tiempo parcial, incluso cuando tienen preferencias por el trabajo a tiempo parcial.
4. Los empleados en condiciones de empleo de alta calidad (a tiempo completo, contrato permanente, y bien remunerados) presentan más “work engagement” y menos inseguridad laboral afectiva que los empleados en condiciones de baja calidad del empleo (a tiempo parcial, contratos temporales, y mal remunerados). Por lo tanto, la calidad del empleo es importante para fomentar el “work engagement” y la seguridad laboral entre el personal, pero también para promover empleados saludables, ya que los empleados con alto engagement y los empleados con baja inseguridad laboral afectiva, experimentan menos quejas sobre la salud.
5. La relación negativa entre la calidad del empleo y las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados está mediada por el “work engagement” y la inseguridad laboral afectiva, y ambos mediadores son igualmente importantes.

6. Promover empleos de alta calidad no es solo una manera de crear empleos caracterizados por el “work engagement” y la seguridad laboral, sino también una manera de influir positivamente sobre la salud de los empleados.
7. Las dimensiones de empleabilidad, en particular la identidad de carrera, el capital social y el capital humano, son antecedentes del indicador subjetivo de calidad del trabajo: el trabajo significativo (work meaningfulness).
8. Los empleados que experimentan significado en el trabajo probablemente experimenten bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo (crecimiento personal en el trabajo y propósito en la carrera), por consiguiente, fomentar el significado en el trabajo es una forma de mejorar el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo.

9. La empleabilidad (identidad profesional, capital social y capital humano) es un recurso personal que fomenta la significación del trabajo y, en última instancia, el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo. Es importante invertir en el desarrollo de la identidad de carrera, el capital social y el capital humano de los empleados, ya que pueden fomentar la experiencia subjetiva de calidad del trabajo - el trabajo significativo y, finalmente, promover el bienestar laboral eudaimónico.

Para concluir esta tesis, englobaremos sus conclusiones y aportes bajo el tema *calidad del trabajo, antecedentes e influencia en la salud y el bienestar de los empleados* como sugiere el propio título de la tesis.

En primer lugar, en cuanto a sus *antecedentes*, nos centramos en analizar los antecedentes de los indicadores subjetivos de calidad del trabajo. Comenzamos investigando las relaciones entre algunos indicadores objetivos y la calidad del trabajo percibida como un indicador subjetivo. Encontramos que los indicadores de calidad del trabajo tradicionalmente considerados, como el tipo de contrato, la relación laboral y el ajuste educativo, son antecedentes igualmente importantes del indicador subjetivo: calidad

del trabajo percibida (Estudio 1). Los empleados con características laborales estándar, como empleos permanentes y de tiempo completo, que tienen ajuste educativo vertical y horizontal, percibieron una mayor calidad laboral. Además, identificamos las preferencias de los empleados por la relación laboral y el género como variables moduladoras en la relación entre el tipo de relación laboral, por una parte, y la calidad percibida del trabajo, por otra parte. En el caso del tipo de relación laboral (tiempo completo vs. tiempo parcial), encontramos que la preferencia laboral de tiempo completo reforzó el “efecto” positivo de los trabajos a tiempo completo sobre la calidad percibida del trabajo solo para las mujeres. En cambio, para los hombres, tener una preferencia laboral a tiempo parcial reforzó el “efecto” positivo de los empleos a tiempo completo sobre la calidad percibida del trabajo. Así, arrojamus luz sobre algunas características centradas en la persona como factores moduladores de la relación entre la calidad del trabajo objetiva y subjetiva.

Además, con respecto a los *antecedentes* de la calidad del trabajo, en el Estudio 3 identificamos tres dimensiones de empleabilidad (identidad de carrera, capital social y capital humano) como antecedentes de un indicador subjetivo de calidad del trabajo: el trabajo significativo. De esta forma, ampliamos el conocimiento sobre los antecedentes personales de la calidad subjetiva del trabajo. Esta es una idea particularmente útil, ya que estas dimensiones de empleabilidad pueden desarrollarse y mejorarse mediante diversas intervenciones provenientes tanto de los empleados como de las organizaciones.

En segundo lugar, con respecto a la *influencia de la calidad del trabajo en la salud*, mostramos que la subárea de calidad del trabajo denominada calidad del empleo (operacionalizada como trabajo con contrato permanente, a tiempo completo y bien remunerado) está relacionada negativamente con las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados, y descubrimos *por qué* ocurre esta relación (Estudio 2). En particular, identificamos el “work engagement” y la inseguridad afectiva laboral como mediadores en la relación entre

la calidad del empleo y las quejas sobre la salud de los empleados, proporcionando así conocimientos teóricos sobre la influencia que tiene la calidad del empleo en la salud de los empleados.

En tercer lugar, con respecto a la *influencia de la calidad del trabajo en el bienestar* de los empleados, demostramos que un indicador subjetivo de la calidad del trabajo, el trabajo significativo, se relaciona positivamente con el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo, específicamente sus dimensiones: crecimiento personal en el trabajo y propósito en la carrera (Estudio 3). Asimismo, identificamos el trabajo significativo como mediador en las relaciones entre las dimensiones de empleabilidad (identidad profesional, capital social y capital humano) por un lado, y el bienestar eudaimónico (crecimiento personal en el trabajo y propósito en la carrera), por el otro lado. Este hallazgo resalta la importancia de considerar indicadores subjetivos de la calidad del trabajo en la práctica y en la investigación, ya que pueden explicar por qué algunos recursos personales, como es la empleabilidad, pueden fomentar resultados beneficiosos para los empleados, como el bienestar eudaimónico en el trabajo.

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