



<https://doi.org/10.5559/di.34.2.06>

# THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE IN CROATIA IN THE 2020s: INTRODUCING THE SUPERB MODEL OF JOB QUALITY

Zvonimir GALIĆ

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

UDK: 159.44(497.5)"200"  
331.101.3(497.5)"200":159.9

Original scientific paper

Received: February 18, 2025

This study examines the quality of working life (QWL) in Croatia using two nationally representative samples of workers and introduces the SUPERB model of job quality. This heuristic framework integrates key work motivation theories, identifying six core job quality dimensions: Safety, Upgrading, Purpose, Empowerment, Relationships, and Balance. The findings from two studies conducted in 2023 and 2024 indicate generally moderate levels of job quality, with highlighting significant gaps in empowerment and career growth opportunities in Croatian workplaces. Importantly, job quality, as measured by the SUPERB model, predicted job satisfaction, work engagement, turnover intentions, and well-being, even after controlling for biographic variables further emphasising the importance of job quality. The results underscore the need for workplace interventions that enhance autonomy and skill development. By improving job quality, Croatia may better retain its workforce, reduce turnover intentions, and enhance overall well-being, contributing to long-term labour market outcomes and social stability.

Keywords: quality of working life, job quality, SUPERB model of job quality, job satisfaction, job engagement, turnover intentions



Zvonimir Galić, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Lučičeva 3, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia.  
E-mail: [zgalic@ffzg.hr](mailto:zgalic@ffzg.hr)

National human resource management has become a strategic issue for Croatia, as the country faces a demographic crisis characterised by low birth rates, high mortality rates, and significant emigration to other EU member states (World Bank, 2024). These trends pose serious challenges to economic growth and the long-term sustainability of Croatia's social security, pension, and healthcare systems. With a shrinking workforce and an ageing population, the country must not only retain its existing labour force but also implement policies to attract new residents by offering good jobs.

In this paper, we present findings from two studies investigating the quality of working life in Croatia. Using nationally representative samples of Croatian workers, we examine job quality and its associations with key outcomes, including job satisfaction, work engagement, turnover intentions, and subjective well-being. Before describing the details of our research programme, we will explain the quality of working life and job quality constructs and give an overview of the earlier studies on the issue.

### **Quality of working life – what constitutes a good job?**

Quality of working life in a society depends on the quality of individual jobs, and the quality of jobs depends on the extent to which the jobs satisfy important human needs (Jahoda, 1981; Schwartz, 2015; Šverko & Galić, 2009, 2014). So, the key question in quality of working life/job quality research is what are the key human needs that need to be satisfied at work and what constitutes a high quality job?

Psychological needs related to work were the subject of a large body of research in work and organisational psychology. Although various frameworks define the dimensions of high-quality jobs, we highlight three that have recently garnered the most scientific and professional attention and provide a useful structure for understanding this issue: Jahoda's model of latent job functions, Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, and the psychology of working theory by Duffy, Blustein, and colleagues.

According to Marie Jahoda's model of latent functions at work (Jahoda, 1981), employment provides individuals with both manifest and latent functions. While pay is the primary manifest function of employment, providing the means to support one's livelihood, jobs also fulfil various latent functions that satisfy fundamental psychological needs. According to Jahoda (1981), employment provides individuals with: (a) time structure of days and week, (b) feeling of meaning and participation in collective purpose, (c) social contacts and experiences outside of nuclear family, (d) social status that represents the founda-

tion of one's identity, and (e) enforced activity. The main point of this theory is that jobs as well as other social arrangements such as informal economy, retirement, education or household activities vary in the extent to which they provide workers with those needs. The empirical support for the theory seems to be relatively strong. For example, using a representative sample of German citizens, Paul and Batinic (2010) showed that employed people reported more access to latent functions than participants who were not employed (unemployed, students, retirees, and homemakers). Moreover, Batinic et al. (2010) showed that greater access to the five latent benefits in the working population is related to enhanced well-being. Finally, a recent meta-analysis by Aitken et al. (2024) showed that the existence of the five latent benefits was moderately related to both life satisfaction and psychological distress (negatively).

The self-determination theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 2017) is a general theory of human motivation that has been also extensively applied to the world of work (Deci et al., 2017). The theory postulates that workers' performance and well-being are affected by the type of motivation individuals have for their work. On the most general level, the types of motivation can be divided into autonomous motivation that is characterised by a sense of choice, willingness and volition, and controlled motivation that is marked by external pressures and internal obligations (Deci et al., 2017). Autonomous motivation that is related to higher performance and better well-being follows from satisfaction of the three basic human needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy/self-determination. According to the theory, these three needs are universal. Therefore, individuals do not differ in the needs' strength but rather in the extent to which they are fulfilled in the workplace and their daily lives. The more these needs are satisfied at work, the more likely individuals are to develop autonomous motivation for their jobs. This, in turn, leads to better job performance and enhanced well-being, highlighting the importance of high-quality jobs.

Ryan Duffy and David Bluestein (Duffy et al., 2016; Bluestein et al., 2023) recently proposed the psychology of work theory (PWT). The theory differentiates between decent work that defines the baseline attributes of work which satisfy basic human needs, and meaningful work that makes individuals experience meaning and purposefulness. According to PWT, decent work is a threshold that needs to be surpassed before individuals could engage in meaningful work and includes: (a) physically and interpersonally safe working conditions, (b) working time that enables free time and satisfactory rest, (c) company values that are aligned with social and fam-

ily values, (d) satisfactory compensation, and (e) opportunity to receive proper healthcare. Finally, when decent working conditions are met, meaningful work is considered to be a crucial work condition that individuals strive for to experience a sense of significance and fulfil higher-order psychological needs.

Though all three approaches are exceptionally important for contemporary understanding of the psychology of work and have generated a large body of research, each of the theories seems incomplete for understanding the totality of work experience. Jahoda's theory stems from the research on individual experience of unemployment and seems to miss some positive aspects of work that help individuals to perfect and master the environment that surrounds them. In fact, Jahoda explicitly admits that her theory of latent functions does not capture all the aspects of job quality (Jahoda, 1981). SDT, on the other hand, seems overly psychological in its nature and not concerned with important, mundane job aspects such as meeting survival needs and obtaining basic human safety. Finally, research on PWT seems to be largely focused on groups that are marginalised on the labour market, and reintroduces previously dismissed ideas into work psychology. For example, the sharp distinction between decent and meaningful work parallels Herzberg's (1966) differentiation between hygienics and motivators that has been scientifically refuted. Moreover, the introduction of decent work as a prerequisite for meaningful work reminds of the scientifically unsupported assumptions of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs that lower order needs should be met before higher order needs appear.

Building on the mentioned theoretical approaches, but also other theoretical approaches to work motivation such as Maslow's (1954)/Alderfer's (1969) need theories, Hackman's and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model, Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001), organisational justice research (Adams, 1965; Colquitt, 2001), or recent research on the importance of job meaning (Lysova et al., 2019; Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009) and the importance of psychological safety in organisations (Edmondson, 2019), we propose a heuristic model of job quality that consists of six dimensions (Safety, Upgrading, Purpose, Empowerment, Relationship and Balance) that can be abbreviated into the acronym SUPERB and that tries to be more encompassing than the earlier described job quality models.

First, following PWT assumptions about decent work but also Maslow's and Alderfer's lower order needs and justice research (e.g., Adams, 1965), jobs should grant people *Safety*. In our view, Safety should encompass both economic and psychological dimensions. Workers should not only earn sufficient income to maintain a decent standard of living but also expe-

rience interpersonal safety in the workplace, ensuring they are treated with dignity and equity. Second, work should provide opportunities for *Upgrading*, i.e., continuous psychological growth that is ingrained in human nature (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Bandura, 2001). Third, in their jobs workers need to see *Purpose* and meaning of their work activities. These needs follow from our social evolution (Lysova et al., 2019) and/or are a way of constructively coping with our mortality (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009). Fourth, people at work need *Empowerment*, want to be responsible for the processes and outcomes in their jobs, feel self-determined, and dislike being micro-managed. Fifth, as hypersocial animals people seek meaningful *Relationships* with peers (Maslow, 1954; Alderfer, 1969; Ryan & Deci, 2017), subordinates and supervisors. Finally, workers seek *Balance* between their working role and the other roles they have in other social entities such as family or community. Though this aspect of job in similar forms was present in the mentioned models (e.g., time structure in Jahoda's model), it appears to be gaining increased prominence among younger workers (Twenge, 2023). According to our heuristic model, the more someone's job is aligned with SUPERB dimensions, the more likely it is that (s)he will be productive and satisfied at their job.

### **Earlier research on quality of working life in Croatia**

Several papers explored the quality of working life (QWL) in Croatia from a psychological perspective. Maslić Seršić et al. (2005) explored the importance and attainability of nine job factors deducted from work values research that capture both extrinsic (e. g., satisfactory earnings, job safety) and intrinsic (e.g., opportunities for advancement/growth, participation in decision making) job aspects using a large convenience sample of Croatian workers recruited by psychology students between 1993 and 2004. The study showed that Croatian employees perceived low attainability of most job aspects, indicating a persistent lack of opportunities to fulfil work-related needs. Šverko and Galić (2009) extended the same research programme by adding additional data collected between 2005 and 2008 to the original convenience sample and by collecting data using a representative sample of Croatian workers recruited by a market research agency. The results of this study showed that the improvement in the Croatian economy that occurred during that long period was reflected in the improvement of extrinsic aspects of job quality such as pay satisfaction, pay fairness and working conditions. However, intrinsic job aspects, such as participation in decision-making and opportunities for advancement and growth, remained unsatisfactory.

Galić and Plećaš (2012) explored how the quality of working life changed during the Great Recession again using a combination of convenience and representative sample. Measuring QWL with the same instrument as Maslić Seršić et al. (2005) and Šverko and Galić (2009), they showed that QWL declined during the recession (i.e., between 2008 and 2011), especially for lower educated workers and especially for extrinsic job aspects. Finally, in the last two studies Šverko and Galić (2014), and Galić et al. (2019) explored QWL in Croatia using datasets obtained in the 5th (2010) and 6th (2015) European Working Conditions Study (EWCS). In those two studies, the authors developed their heuristic model consisting of the four dimensions of QWL (economic security, social relations at work, meaningfulness of work and autonomy/participation), and identified indicator questions in the EWCS survey. Their results showed that despite strong workplace social relations, Croatian workers experience lower economic security and work autonomy, reflecting broader socio-economic challenges in post-socialist economies. While data from the 2010 EWCS survey indicated that Croatian workers lagged behind their Western European counterparts, the 2015 survey revealed that this gap extended to other EU member states, with the situation being particularly precarious among older workers.

## **THIS RESEARCH**

---

In this paper we report results of the two studies where we tested QWL in Croatia using the SUPERB heuristic model on representative samples of Croatian workers during 2023 and 2024. In addition to obtaining information about job quality levels, we wanted to test to what extent job quality conceptualised with the SUPERB model was related to important outcomes such as job satisfaction, work engagement, intention to quit, and well-being.

## **STUDY 1**

---

In Study 1 we explored job quality levels as conceptualised with the SUPERB model and their relationship with job satisfaction, job engagement and intention to quit.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

In total, 501 respondents participated in the study. The only condition for participating in the study was that they were fully or partially employed. Within the sample 49.1% were female with a mean age of 43.15 ( $SD = 12.37$ ). Regarding education,

49% had some form of tertiary education, whereas 50% reported that they had secondary education (1% refused to respond to the education question).

### **Instrument**

*SUPERB dimensions of job quality.* SUPERB dimensions of job quality were measured with 14 items designed especially for this study to capture the six job quality dimensions and were modelled after similar instruments such as Gallup's well-known Q12 survey (Harter et al., 2002). The items were statements that describe the job/workplace situation and the participants' task was to rate the extent to which they agree with them by using a 5-point response scale, from 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree. With the exception of Purpose and Relationship dimensions that were measured with three items, the other four dimensions were measured with two items. All items of the SUPERB questionnaire are given in Table 2.

*Job satisfaction (JS).* Job satisfaction was measured with one item that captures general satisfaction with one's job "All things considered, I am satisfied with my job."

*Job engagement (JE).* Job engagement was captured with three items taken from the Houle et al. (2022) scale. A sample item is "I exert my full effort to my job".

*Turnover intentions (TI).* TI were captured with three statements assessing the current search for a job outside of the employing organisation (item 1), intention to search for another job in the following 12 months (item 2), intention to move out of Croatia in the following 12 months (item 3). The three items were combined to create a general turnover intention index.

The task of the participants on JS, JE and TI items was to rate their agreement using the same 5-point response scale as for the SUPERB items.

### **Procedure**

Our first study was conducted in late August and September 2023 with the assistance of a local market research agency. The study utilised the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) methodology, with participants recruited from the agency's panel of 16,000 individuals to ensure a demographically representative sample of Croatian citizens in terms of age, gender, regional representation and settlement size. To maintain data quality, the agency applied rigorous quality control measures, such as removing responses with low variability (e.g., participants who consistently selected the same response option) and filtering out responses with unrealistically short completion times.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between Study 1 variables are given in Table 1.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Safety	3.25	0.96	(0.63)									
2 Upgrading	3.22	1.08	0.68**	(0.79)								
3 Purpose	3.53	0.86	0.61**	0.68**	(0.71)							
4 Empowerment	3.05	1.06	0.59**	0.66**	0.50**	(0.65)						
5 Relationship	3.53	0.88	0.65**	0.66**	0.64**	0.50**	(0.73)					
6 Balance	3.44	0.95	0.38**	0.29**	0.25**	0.29**	0.40**	(0.62)				
7 SUPERB (total)	3.33	0.75	0.84**	0.86**	0.78**	0.78**	0.82**	0.56**	(0.90)			
8 Job satisfaction	3.60	1.02	0.61**	0.59**	0.57**	0.47**	0.64**	0.43**	0.71**	-		
9 Job engagement	3.96	0.73	0.36**	0.46**	0.54**	0.30**	0.52**	0.23**	0.51**	0.53**	(0.75)	
10 Turnover intentions	2.30	1.14	-0.28**	-0.24**	-0.28**	-0.11*	-0.36**	-0.36**	-0.34**	-0.43**	-0.32**	(0.84)

**TABLE 1**  
Descriptive statistics  
and intercorrelations  
between Study 1 key  
variables

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; Cronbach  $\alpha$  given in the parentheses.

First, the internal consistencies for the SUPERB dimensions ranged between 0.63 and 0.79 with reliability of the total score being 0.87. Though relatively low, Carmines and Zeller (1979) asserted that in exploratory research alpha values above 0.60 may be considered satisfactory. With the exception of the job satisfaction measure where we used one item measure due to the construct's salience and clarity (Wanous et al., 1997), the other two criterion variables (JE and TI) had satisfactory reliabilities.

Second, an insight into current Croatian QWL levels can be obtained if one looks into descriptive statistics of the six SUPERB dimensions and the total score. In an ideal job, all estimates should be close to the maximum on the five-point scale used. As can be seen from Table 1, average estimates for the SUPERB dimension range from 3.05 for Empowerment to 3.53 for Relationships that indicate moderate satisfaction of key psychological needs. A deeper insight into deviation from the ideal can be obtained if we check the percentage of individuals who agree (i.e., give responses 4 and 5) with the positive items and disagree with the one negative item (i.e., give responses 1 and 2). The three lowest rated items were "I can decide for myself how and when I will perform work tasks." (37.5%, Empowerment), "My job offers me good opportunities for professional development." (41.0%, Upgrading), and "I can make important decisions at my job." (41.6%, Empowerment). Very close to them is the item "My income enables me to live a decent life." (41.9%, Safety). At the same time, the top-rated items with agreement over 60% were: "I have a high-quality relationship with my boss." (66.5%, Relationships), "I have good friends at work." (64.1%, Relationships), "I find my work very meaningful." (63.1%, Purpose), and "I have a good balance between my work duties and free time." (60.2%, Balance).

Dimension	Item statement	Study 1 (2023 %)	Study 2 (2024, %)
Safety	My income enables me to live a decent life. <sup>1</sup>	41.9	44.8
	In my organisation, employees are treated fairly and justly. <sup>1</sup>	49.5	52.2
Upgrading	My job offers me good opportunities for professional development. <sup>1</sup>	41.0	36.7
	I have the ability to express creativity at work. <sup>1</sup>	47.7	47.9
Purpose	I find my work very meaningful. <sup>1</sup>	63.0	64.0
	The results of my work significantly affect the lives of other people. <sup>1</sup>	47.6	51.2
	The goals of the organisation I work for are consistent with my values. <sup>1</sup>	57.7	54.7
Empowerment	I can decide for myself how and when I will perform work tasks. <sup>1</sup>	37.5	35.6
	I can make important decisions at my job. <sup>1</sup>	41.6	39.2
Relationships	I have good friends at work. <sup>1</sup>	64.1	60.6
	I feel emotionally attached to the organisation where I work. <sup>1</sup>	47.9	46.4
	I have a high-quality relationship with my boss.	66.5	61.0
Balance	The demands of my job interfere with my private and family life. <sup>2</sup>	46.2	41.9
	I have a good balance between my work duties and free time. <sup>1</sup>	60.5	58.3

**TABLE 2**  
Items of the SUPERB questionnaire and percentage of participants that agree with them in Study 1 and Study 2

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> Percentage of participants giving estimates 4 ("agree") and 5 ("completely agree");

<sup>2</sup> Negatively oriented item, percentage of respondents disagreeing with the item by giving responses 1 ("completely disagree") and 2 ("disagree") is shown.

Moderate satisfaction of key psychological needs at work reflects also on moderate job satisfaction and job engagement levels, and somewhat lower turnover intentions. Here we would like to stress the percentage of individuals agreeing with turnover intentions items (i.e., giving responses 4 and 5), with 20.8% agreeing with the statement that they are currently searching for another job, 29.1% intending to do so in the following 12 months, and 13.9% intending to move out of Croatia.

Finally, the SUPERB dimensions correlated moderately among themselves (range 0.25 to 0.68) with the Balance dimension showing somewhat lower correlations with other SUPERB components. The correlations between SUPERB components and criteria were significant for the criterion variables job satisfaction (0.43 to 0.63), job engagement (0.23 to 0.54) and turnover intentions (-0.11 to -0.36). The total SUPERB score correlated 0.71, 0.51 and -0.36 with job satisfaction, job engagement, and turnover intentions, respectively.

In order to test how important the notion of job quality is (i.e., alignment of job characteristics with employees' psychological needs), we performed hierarchical regression analyses where the total score on SUPERB was a predictor while we controlled for age, gender, level of education and pay level, the variables that were shown to be important determinants of job quality (e.g., Šverko & Galić, 2009; Galić et al., 2019).

	Criterion:					
	job satisfaction		job engagement		turnover intentions	
	Block 1	Block 2	Block 1	Block 2	Block 1	Block 2
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Gender <sup>1</sup>	0.03	0.01	0.18**	0.17**	-0.16**	-0.15**
Age (in years)	0.10*	0.05	0.12*	0.09*	-0.30**	-0.28**
Education level <sup>2</sup>	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	-0.07	0.01	0.02
Pay level <sup>3</sup>	0.15**	0.02	0.13**	0.04	-0.19**	-0.14**
SUPERB Total score		0.72**		0.52**		-0.30**
$R^2$	0.03**	0.52**	0.05**	0.31**	0.15**	0.23**
$\Delta R^2$	0.03**	0.49**	0.05**	0.26**	0.15**	0.08**

**TABLE 3**  
Summary of hierarchical regression analyses testing the SUPERB's total score importance for the three criteria over and above biographical variables in Study 1

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> 1 = male, 2 = female;  
<sup>2</sup> 1 = no formal education, ..., unfinished elementary school, 4 = tertiary education;  
<sup>3</sup> 1 = individual income below 2000 Kunas / 265,12 Euros, ..., 8 = individual income above 8000 Kunas / 1060 Euros;  
 \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses showed that job quality indicated with the SUPERB index explains job satisfaction, job engagement and turnover intentions over and above gender, age, and pay levels. In the case of job satisfaction and job engagement, the effect of SUPERB largely surpasses the one of biographic variables while the reverse is true for turnover intentions. The effect size in the case of job satisfaction and job engagement was relatively large with 49% and 26% of the variance in job satisfaction and job engagement being explained by the SUPERB total score. The SUPERB's effect on turnover intention index was lower (8% of variance) but still significant.

## STUDY 2

We conducted Study 2 exactly one year after Study 1. With the second study we wanted to replicate the Study 1 findings. We believe that this was important considering that some of the SUPERB scales had mediocre internal reliabilities so our results could partially reflect random variations and not systematic effects of job quality. Second, in addition to replicating the effects we observed in Study 1, we wanted to extend the nomological network of the SUPERB heuristic model by exploring its relationship with an additional important variable – subjective well-being.

## Method

### Participants and procedure

The procedure of data collection was identical to that one of Study 1, and the data were collected with the help of the same market research agency. A sample of 500 respondents repre-

sentative of the population of Croatian workers in terms of gender, age, settlement size and regional representation participated in the study. The mean age of participants was 45.37 ( $SD = 12.60$ ), and 49.1% of participants were female. Regarding education, 52.6% had some form of tertiary education whereas 46.5% completed secondary education or lower. One third of the Study 2 sample (179 or 35.8%) participated also in Study 1.

### Instruments

SUPERB dimensions, job satisfaction, job engagement, and turnover intentions were measured with the same scales as in Study 1.

Subjective well-being was measured with the WHO-5 scale (Topp et al., 2015). The participants' task was to reflect how they felt over the last two weeks and report their agreement with the five positive worded statements such as "I have felt cheerful and in good spirits." or "I have felt active and vigorous." using the response scale from 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree.

The study was conducted at the end of August and beginning of September 2024.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between Study 2 variables are given in Table 4.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Safety	3.27	0.93	(0.57)										
2 Upgrading	3.18	1.03	0.69**	(0.76)									
3 Purpose	3.53	0.85	0.60**	0.71**	(0.76)								
4 Empowerment	2.98	1.07	0.53**	0.63**	0.47**	(0.68)							
5 Relationship	3.51	0.86	0.68**	0.65**	0.64**	0.46**	(0.74)						
6 Balance	3.43	0.93	0.34**	0.23**	0.20**	0.16**	0.28**	(0.49)					
7 SUPERB (total)	3.32	0.71	0.84**	0.87**	0.79**	0.74**	0.81**	0.48**	(0.89)				
8 Job satisfaction	3.56	1.02	0.66**	0.60**	0.61**	0.41**	0.67**	0.43**	0.74**	-			
9 Job engagement	3.93	0.77	0.43**	0.47**	0.60**	0.23**	0.56**	0.19**	0.54**	0.57**	(0.83)		
10 Turnover intentions	2.26	1.10	-0.34**	-0.26**	-0.30**	-0.08	-0.35**	-0.34**	-0.36**	-0.49**	-0.34**	(0.84)	
11 Well-being	3.39	0.85	0.38**	0.38**	0.45**	0.28**	0.41**	0.36**	0.49**	0.49**	0.40**	-0.19**	(0.92)

TABLE 4  
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between Study 2 key variables

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; Cronbach  $\alpha$  given in the parentheses.

As internal consistencies are considered, Cronbach's alphas are similar to Study 1 variables. However, it should be noted that for the Safety and Balance dimensions of SUPERB they are slightly lower and below Carmines and Zeller's (1979) 0.60 threshold (0.57 and 0.49, respectively). All other variables, including the SUPERB total score, had satisfactory internal consistencies.

As might be seen by comparing Tables 1 and 4, the average values on the SUPERB dimensions and the job attitudes variables were similar, which is expected considering the relatively short time frame within which the two studies took place. Once again, the findings present a relatively unfavourable impression of the quality of working life in Croatia, with the degree of concern varying across different SUPERB dimensions. The dimensions of Purpose, Relationships, and Balance were more favourably rated than the dimensions Safety, Upgrading and Empowerment, which were far from the ideal standard. The three lowest rated items, with the percentage of respondents agreeing with them being 35.6%, 36.7% and 39.2%, were "I can decide for myself how and when I will perform work tasks." (Empowerment), "My job offers me good opportunities for professional development" (Upgrading), and "I can make important decisions at my work" (Empowerment). Analogously, top rated items were "I find my work very meaningful." (Purpose, 64%), "I have a high-quality relationship with my boss." (Relationships, 61%), and "I have good friends at work." (60%, Relationships). Very close to the 60.6% agreement threshold is the item "I have a good balance between my work duties and free time." (Balance, 58.3%). So, the highest and lowest rated items in both our studies were identical though their order somewhat changed, probably due to random variation.

Regarding the criterion variables, they were also very similar to Study 1 values and indicated moderate levels of general job satisfaction/job engagement, and somewhat lower levels of turnover intentions. It is worth noting that we again observed a significant portion of the labour market in search of another job or intending to search/move out of Croatia. If responses 4 and 5 are used as the criteria, the percentage of participants who were seeking a new job at the time was 24%, who intended to do so in the following 12 months 28.8%, and who intend to move out of Croatia in the 12 months following the study 9.3%. Finally, in Study 2 the average result on the well-being scale indicated moderate levels of subjective well-being. The fact that the percentage of respondents agreeing with the five positively oriented items ranged between 38.1% for "I woke up feeling fresh and rested." and 57.1% "My daily life has been filled with things that interest me." suggest that the participants did not give socially desirable responses.

The pattern of the correlations among SUPERB variables, and their relationship with job satisfaction, job engagement, and turnover intentions remained similar to the one in Study 1. Perhaps the only difference that stands out is the fact that the relationship between Empowerment and turnover intentions was non-significant. The most interesting portion of the correlation matrix in Study 2 is the pattern of correlations of

the well-being variable, which showed positive correlations with all the SUPERB dimensions (range between 0.38 for empowerment and 0.45 for purpose) and the SUPERB total score. Moreover, subjective well-being positively correlated with job satisfaction and work engagement and negatively with turnover dimensions.

In this study we also tested if SUPERB adds to the prediction of the criterion variables (job satisfaction, job engagement, turnover intentions and well-being) over and above biographic variables (gender, age, education, and personal income).

	Criterion:							
	job satisfaction		job engagement		turnover intentions		well-being	
	Block 1	Block 2	Block 1	Block 2	Block 1	Block 2	Block 1	Block 2
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Gender <sup>1</sup>	-0.08	0.05	0.13*	-0.12*	-0.19**	-0.18**	-0.13*	-0.14**
Age	0.15**	0.08*	0.14**	0.08	-0.29**	-0.25**	0.12*	0.07
Education level <sup>2</sup>	0.01	-0.04	-0.04	-0.08	-0.05	-0.08	0.07	0.03
Pay level <sup>3</sup>	0.09	0.02	0.03	-0.03	-0.16**	-0.13**	0.01	-0.05
SUPERB Total score		0.72**		0.55**		-0.33**		0.50**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03*	0.53**	0.02*	0.31**	0.10**	0.20**	0.04**	0.29**
$\Delta R^2$	0.03*	0.50**	0.02*	0.29**	0.10**	0.10**	0.04**	0.25**

TABLE 5  
Summary of hierarchical regression analyses testing the SUPERB's total score importance for the four criteria over and above biographical variables in Study 2

Note. <sup>1</sup> 1 = male, 2 = female;

<sup>2</sup> 1 = no formal education, ..., unfinished elementary school, 4 = tertiary education;

<sup>3</sup> 1 = individual income below 2000 Kunas / 265,12 Euros, ..., 8 = individual income above 8000 Kunas / 1060 Euros;

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

As might be seen from Table 5, the SUPERB total score explains all four criteria over and above the key biographic variables that were shown to be related to job quality. In the case of three variables (job satisfaction, job engagement, and general well-being), the extent to which a job satisfies important psychological needs is much more strongly related to each criterion than the biographic variables. Again, the effect sizes are reasonably strong, ranging between 25% (subjective well-being) and 50% (job satisfaction) of the explained variance. Only in the case of turnover intentions, biographic variables are equally predictive as the SUPERB total score (10% of variance each).

## DISCUSSION

The aim of our research was twofold. First, we wanted to extend the two decades long psychology research programme on the quality of working life in Croatia and take a measure of the situation in the first half of the 2020s, several years after

the last paper on the issue was published (Galić et al., 2019). Second, considering that the quality of working life in a society depends on the quality of individual jobs (i.e., their potential to satisfy important human needs), we proposed a new conceptual framework to capture job quality. In its essence, the SUPERB model of job quality is a heuristic model that aims to provide a structured representation of the major work motivation theories to guide research and practical applications on job quality in a more encompassing manner.

Regarding our first goal to take stock of the quality of working life, our findings replicate and extend those obtained in earlier studies. In terms of the SUPERB model, Croatian workplaces fare relatively well on the dimensions of Relationships, Balance, and Purpose. Workers in Croatia frequently have good/high-quality relationships at work, generally balance their jobs well with other aspects of their life, and mostly see purpose in their jobs. The safety aspects of jobs are only moderately favourable, while the Empowerment and Upgrading dimensions of job quality remained mostly unsatisfactory as they were in earlier studies (e.g., Šverko & Galić, 2009, 2014).

However, if one dives in more detail into the components that are estimated most favourably, the picture that is revealed is a bit more complex. For example, though a large majority of workers in both studies report high levels of satisfaction about their relationships with their peers and superiors, less than half agrees with the Relationship statement that they are emotionally attached to the organisation they work for (45.9% in Study 1 and 46.4% in Study 2). There is also significant space for improvement on the generally favourably rated dimensions of Balance and Purpose with a significant proportion of individuals experiencing interference between work and private life and not seeing purpose in their jobs. In fact, the proportion of our respondents that think their job is not meaningful (37% in Study 1 and 36% in Study 2) is roughly the same as the one that was observed in the UK and incited the anthropologist David Graeber (2018) to write his well-known book "Bullshit Jobs" about jobs that feel meaningless or useless but workers need to pretend that they matter in order to keep them.

In sum, based on the findings from our two studies we can estimate the quality of working life in Croatia to be mediocre. The rest of our findings indicate that this fact might have significant ramifications. In our studies we observed and replicated that job quality, as captured with our SUPERB model, is important for several outcomes. The results of regression analyses indicate that the SUPERB total score explains job satisfaction, job engagement, turnover intentions, and well-being

even when gender, age, level of education, and personal income are controlled for. With the exception of turnover intentions which more (Study 1) or equally (Study 2) depend on the individual life situation, job quality was a much more important determinant of the listed outcomes.

Our research has important practical implications both for national and organisational human resources management practices. Organisations should insist more on practices that improve job quality, i.e., make jobs more aligned with the psychological needs of employees. Our studies indicate that there was significant room for improvement on all SUPERB dimensions, but the interventions should be first directed towards the Empowerment and Upgrading dimensions of the SUPERB model. For example, human resources management interventions should be targeted towards increasing employees' decision latitude, improving participation in decision making or allowing flexible work arrangements (all focused towards increased employees' empowerment). Moreover, based on our findings, there is need in Croatian organisations to enable employees' upgrading or growth through practices such as regular feedback procedures or continuous development of work-related skills.

Our studies have limitations that could have significantly influenced our conclusions. We will mention a few that seem most salient. Our SUPERB model of job quality is by no means comprehensive. We built it with the Goldilocks principle in mind by trying to identify just about the right number of job quality dimensions. We proposed more dimensions than the models described in the introduction in order to be more encompassing, but we decided not to include too many because this would make the model difficult to comprehend and use in both research and practical purposes. Future studies should test if we have succeeded in our endeavour, or Jahoda's latent benefits measures (Batinic et al., 2010) or the decent work scale (Duffy et al., 2017) have better explanatory power in predicting important outcomes. Relatedly, though our SUPERB measures are a significant improvement in comparison to the one-item scales that were used in the mentioned studies on the quality of working life in Croatia by Maslić Seršić et al. (2005), Šverko and Galić (2009) or Galić and Plečaš (2012), the SUPERB questionnaire should be improved. Due to the need to keep our survey as short as possible to be able to test it on national samples of participants, we were forced to use scales containing only two or three items. This seems especially to be the problem for the Safety and Balance scales that should be the subject of conceptual (i.e., do they capture items that are too heterogeneous?) and/or psychometric consideration (e.g., how to improve the scales' reliability?). However, it should be noted

that similar problems were also observed in other studies of job quality using short scales on nationally representative samples. For example, Paul and Batinic (2010) reported the internal consistencies of time structure and collective purpose scales from Jahoda's latent function model to be 0.54 and 0.51 on a representative sample of German population. Moreover, our SUPERB model is normative (i.e., it assumes that satisfaction of all needs is equally important for all groups of workers), which implies that the proposed humanisation of work stemming from its principles should be equally valid for anyone. Still, we need to explore the possibility that not all people seek the humanisation of work equally, considering that some studies indicate that it is more needed by more skilled and more educated workers (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Jahoda, 1981). Finally, the samples used in our two studies are representative in terms of key characteristics such as age, gender, and region. Therefore, our findings are more generalisable than those based on convenience samples. However, a fully representative sample remains an unattainable ideal. Our sample does not capture all aspects of the Croatian working population (e.g., in terms of education and employment sector), which imposes limitations on the drawn conclusions.

## CONCLUSION

---

Our results suggest that the quality of working life in Croatia is far from being superb, and its mediocre levels, like in similar studies (e.g., Baranik et al., 2022), reflect our level of socio-economic development. Using our newly proposed SUPERB model, our findings suggest that, in addition to improving Safety levels happening through wage growth during recent years, employers and policy makers should take care of other important aspects such as Upgrading and Empowerment that seem especially challenging in current Croatian jobs. To attract, retain, and motivate employees to perform well, jobs should align with their psychological needs, succinctly captured by the acronym SUPERB.

## REFERENCES

---

- Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 267–299). Academic Press. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60108-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60108-2)
- Aitken, J. A., Cannon, J. A., Kaplan, S. A., & Kim, H. (2024). The benefits of work: A meta-analysis of the latent deprivation and agency restriction models. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 39(4), 821–847. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-024-09999-x>
- Alderfer, C. P. (1969). An empirical test of a new theory of human needs. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 4(2), 142–175. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(69\)90004-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(69)90004-X)

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>

Baranik, L. E., Wright, N., & Smith, R. W. (2022). Desired and obtained work values across 37 countries: A psychology of working theory perspective. *International Journal of Manpower*, 43(6), 1338–1351. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-12-2020-0555>

Batinic, B., Selenko, E., Stiglbauer, B., & Paul, K. I. (2010). Are workers in high-status jobs healthier than others? Assessing Jahoda's latent benefits of employment in two working populations. *Work & Stress*, 24(1), 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678371003703859>

Blustein, D. L., Lysova, E. I., & Duffy, R. D. (2023). Understanding decent work and meaningful work. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 10, 289–314. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031921-024847>

Carmines, E. G., & Zeller, R. A. (1979). *Reliability and validity assessment*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412985642>

Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 386–400. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386>

Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory in work organizations: The state of a science. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4(1), 19–43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113108>

Duffy, R. D., Allan, B. A., Autin, K. L., & Bott, E. M. (2017). The development and initial validation of the Decent Work Scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 60(2), 290–302. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000191>

Duffy, R. D., Blustein, D. L., Diemer, M. A., & Autin, K. L. (2016). The psychology of working theory. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 63(2), 127–148. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000140>

Edmondson, A. C. (2019). *The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth*. Wiley.

Galić, Z., & Plečaš, M. (2012). Quality of working life during recession: The case of Croatia. *Croatian Economic Survey*, 14(1), 5–41.

Galić, Z., Parmač Kovačić, M., & Vehovec, M. (2019). Quality of working life among 50+ employees across the EU: A double jeopardy for Croatian older workers. *Društvena istraživanja*, 28(1), 69–88. <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.28.1.04>

Graeber, D. (2018). *Bullshit jobs: A theory*. Simon & Schuster.

Grant, A. M., & Wade-Benzoni, K. A. (2009). The hot and cool of death awareness at work: Mortality cues, aging, and self-protective and prosocial motivations. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(4), 600–622. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2009.44882929>

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16(2), 250–279. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(76\)90016-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7)

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement,

and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(2), 268–279. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.2.268>

Herzberg, F. (1966). *Work and the nature of man*. World Publishing Company.

Houle, S. A., Rich, B. L., Comeau, C. A., Blais, A.-R., & Morin, A. J. S. (2022). The Job Engagement Scale: Development and validation of a short form in English and French. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 37(5), 1103–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-021-09782-z>

Jahoda, M. (1981). Work, employment, and unemployment: Values, theories, and approaches in social research. *American Psychologist*, 36(2), 184–191. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.36.2.184>

Lysova, E. I., Allan, B. A., Dik, B. J., Duffy, R. D., & Steger, M. F. (2019). Fostering meaningful work in organizations: A multi-level review and integration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 110, 374–389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.07.004>

Maslić Seršić, D., Šverko, B., & Galešić, Z. (2005). Radne vrijednosti i stavovi prema poslu u Hrvatskoj: Što se promijenilo u odnosu na 1985. godinu? [Work values and attitudes towards work in Croatia: What has changed since 1985?]. *Društvena istraživanja*, 14(4–5), 707–728.

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. Harper & Row.

Paul, K. I., & Batinic, B. (2010). The need for work: Jahoda's latent functions of employment in a representative sample of the German population. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31(1), 45–64. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.622>

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press. <https://doi.org/10.1521/978.14625/28806>

Schwartz, B. (2015). *Why we work*. TED Books.

Šverko, B., & Galić, Z. (2009). Kvaliteta rada u Hrvatskoj: subjektivne procjene tijekom posljednjih 15 godina. [Quality of working life in Croatia: Subjective ratings during the last 15 years]. In V. Frančević & V. Puljiz (Eds.), *Rad u Hrvatskoj: Pred izazovima budućnosti* [Work in Croatia: In front of the challenges of the future] (pp. 197–223). Centar za razvoj demokracije "Miko Tripalo" i Pravni fakultet.

Šverko, B. & Galić, Z. (2014). The perceived quality of working life in Croatia and the European Union. *Društvena istraživanja*, 23(4), 557–575. <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.23.4.01>

Topp, C. W., Østergaard, S. D., Søndergaard, S., & Bech, P. (2015). The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: A systematic review of the literature. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 84(3), 167–176. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000376585>

Twenge, J. M. (2023). *Generations: The real differences between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents – and what they mean for America's future*. Atria Books. <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF12-23Twenge>

Wanous, J. P., Reichers, A. E., & Hudy, M. J. (1997). Overall job satisfaction: How good are single-item measures? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82(2), 247–252. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.82.2.247>

## Kvaliteta radnoga života u Hrvatskoj u 2020-ima: predstavljanje SUPERB modela kvalitete poslova

Zvonimir GALIĆ  
Odsjek za psihologiju, Filozofski fakultet u Zagrebu,  
Zagreb, Hrvatska

Ova studija istražuje kvalitetu radnoga života u Hrvatskoj rabeći dva nacionalno reprezentativna uzorka radnika te predstavlja SUPERB model kvalitete poslova. Ovaj heuristički okvir integrira ključne teorije radne motivacije i identificira šest temeljnih dimenzija kvalitete poslova: Sigurnost, Rast i razvoj, Svrha, Osnaživanje, Odnosi i Ravnoteža. Rezultati dviju studija provedenih 2023. i 2024. godine upućuju na općenito umjereno nisku razinu kvalitete poslova, uz značajne nedostatke u osnaživanju zaposlenika i mogućnostima za rast i razvoj karijere u hrvatskim radnim okruženjima. Važno je istaknuti da je kvaliteta posla, mjerena SUPERB modelom, predviđala zadovoljstvo poslom, radnu angažiranost, namjere napuštanja posla te opću subjektivnu dobrobit, čak i kada su uzeti u obzir biografski čimbenici, dodatno naglašavajući važnost kvalitete posla. Rezultati upućuju na potrebu za intervencijama na radnom mjestu koje će poticati autonomiju i razvoj vještina. Unapređenjem kvalitete poslova Hrvatska bi mogla učinkovitije zadržati svoju radnu snagu, smanjiti namjere za odlazak te poboljšati opću dobrobit građana, što bi pridonijelo dugoročnim ishodima na tržištu rada i društvenoj stabilnosti.

Ključne riječi: kvaliteta radnoga života, kvaliteta posla, SUPERB model kvalitete poslova, zadovoljstvo poslom, radna angažiranost, namjere napuštanja posla



Međunarodna licenca / International License:  
Imenovanje-Nekomercijalno / Attribution-NonCommercial