

## Decent work in the UK: Context, conceptualization, and assessment

### 1. Introduction

Access to decent work is an important goal for policymakers and for individuals navigating their working lives. Decent work is a career goal for individuals, for employers who may wish to be seen to provide decent work for their employees and for policy makers for whom it has become an aim of employment policy. Decent work forms part of the United Nations sustainable development goals and the International Labor Organisation's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda. Decent Work has also been on the UK policy agenda for the current government as a result of the Taylor Review published in 2017.

While macro-level indicators have been well developed to monitor access to decent work there have been few studies which attempt to understand decent work at the individual level. As a result, our studies explore the measurement and definition of decent work in the UK. Study 1 investigates whether the Decent Work Scale (DWS) is a valid measure for use in the UK. Study 2 uses a qualitative approach to further understand what decent work means to working people in the UK and explore the implications of this for the approach to the measurement of decent work presented in the DWS.

#### 1.1 The Psychology of Working Theory

Work is central to our identity and the organization of daily life. The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) suggests that access to decent work fulfils three basic human needs: (1) survival needs, (2) social connection needs and (3) self-determination needs. The PWT acknowledges that access to decent work may be constrained or enabled as a result of both psychological factors (e.g. work volition and career adaptability) of the individual and contextual factors (e.g. economic uncertainty and social marginalization) present in society. Duffy et al. (2016) created the DWS as measurement tool to understand decent work at the

individual level. The PWT is a model which supports the investigation of individuals' experience of their working lives (Duffy, Allan, Blustein, England, Autin, Douglass, Ferreira, & Santos, 2016).

The PWT is an epistemologically pluralist investigation into the psychology of working. It draws on the notion of *homo faber* (working man) (Arendt, 1958), making the argument that work is integral to humanity and to human thriving. Work is, as Gini (2013) argues, 'a fundamental part of our humanity' (p.xii) albeit one which is often experienced in the current political economy in a degraded and alienated way. Access to decent work as part of the PWT is theorized to fulfil three fundamental human needs: (1) the need for survival and power; (2) the need for social connection; and (3) the need for self-determination (Duffy et al., 2016).

A measurement tool for decent work has been drawn from the work of the International Labour Organisation (1999, 2018) and integrated to form a central part of the PWT (Duffy et al., 2016). Duffy et al. (2016) defined five components of decent work: (1) interpersonally and physically safe working environments; (2) hours that allow for adequate free time and rest; (3) organisational values aligned to individual and family values; (4) adequate compensation; and (5) access to adequate healthcare. To date the DWS has been validated on both a North American and Turkish sample (Duffy et al., 2016; Isik, Kozan & Isik, 2018). These studies inform our research on the DWS in the UK. We hypothesise that similar to Duffy et al., 2016 and Isik et al., 2018, data from the UK sample will fit a bifactor model where items correspond to a single common factor (decent work) while also controlling for the multidimensionality of the five components listed above. In addition, we hypothesise that decent work will also significantly predict measures of job satisfaction, access to meaningful work and whether one intends to withdraw from their present job in order to extend evidence of the PWT (Duffy et al., 2016).

## 1.2 The UK Context

The UK is a developed capitalist country which is usually seen as having a ‘liberal market economy’ although Howell (2007) argues that it has many features which transcend this definition. The UK labour market is defined by high levels of employment, relatively weak structures for collective bargaining, sustained growth in self-employment, an increase in precarity, falling wages and a bifurcation in pay and conditions between high skill and low skill workers in the economy combined with a shrinking demand for intermediate skills (the so-called ‘hour-glass labour market’) (UKCES, 2014). It is also characterised by concerns about its ability to emerge from ‘the great recession’, low productivity, skills supply and skills alignment (Coulter, 2016). Over the course of the twentieth century – and like many other developed countries - the UK labour market has shifted from being one dominated by agriculture, extractive and manufacturing industries to one where employment is dominated by the service and knowledge sectors (Bell, 1973; ONS, 2015). These sectors now account for 53% of employment (ONS, 2018). The growth of public sector employment has also been an important long-term shift but has been reversed since the recession through both a policy of austerity and through some privatisation and reclassification of formerly publicly run industries (ONS, 2018).

The level of employment in the UK is at an all-time high (Taylor, Marsh, Nicol and Broadbent, 2017). While other European countries have seen growing levels of unemployment following the recession, the UK has continued to steadily increase the number of people employed. However, there has been criticism that the increase in the quantity of employment has been made possible by a decrease in its quality. Taylor et al. report growing precarity and uncertainty in the labour market with an increase in zero-hour contracts, a lack

of worker's rights in the 'gig economy' and economic uncertainty following the EU referendum. These concerns make a focus on decent work highly relevant in the context of current working life in the UK.

The concept of decent work has recently been discussed overtly by the Taylor Review (2017) which was commissioned by the UK government. This review sought to explore a growth in precarity and ensure that '*all work in the UK economy should be fair and decent with realistic scope for development and fulfilment*' (p. 6). While the review is ultimately in favour of a flexible labour market with limited regulation, it points to several policy issues that the government must tackle to support job security and decent work.

In this paper we will be assessing the validity of the DWS in the context of the UK. In our second study we reflect on the five components that comprise the DWS and to consider what current issues in the UK are relevant to each of these components. The five components are summarised as: (1) interpersonally and physically safe working environments; (2) hours that allow for adequate free time and rest; (3) organisational values aligned to individual and family values; (4) adequate compensation; and (5) access to adequate healthcare.

*Interpersonally and physically safe working environments.* The UK has a developed regulatory framework for managing the physical, environmental and psychological aspects of working environments (Health and Safety Executive (HSE), n.d.). This framework places responsibility on employers for ensuring safety, protects workers so they can report hazardous issues and oversees the enforcement of the system through an inspectorate.

Despite protections, workers continue to be at risk while on the job. While death at work continues to decline, 137 workers were killed at the workplace in 2016/2017 the largest proportions of which were in construction and agricultural industries (HSE, 2017a). In white collar industries ill health persists with stress related illnesses and musculoskeletal disorders

in service and knowledge industries prevalent (HSE, 2017b; HSE 2017c). Approximately 20 million working days were lost to these two conditions.

The Trades Unions Congress' (TUC) (2016) research on workplace health and safety found that the five most common hazards reported by union safety representatives were stress, bullying/harassment, overwork, back strains and long hours at work. While most employers conduct risk assessments and safety audits, around half of union safety reps found the quality of these risk assessments to be inadequate. They also reported that inspection was rare, with around half saying that their organisation had never been inspected by an external agency.

*Free time and rest.* Recent studies have reported a positive attitude of British workers in relation to work-life balance (BIS, 2012). The average annual leave for a British worker is currently 25 days, excluding public holidays; however, nearly 25% of workers fail to take their full quota of annual leave. According to the UK's Office of National Statistics (2015), the amount of free time/leisure (involving activities outside of paid work, commuting to work, study or caring responsibilities) individuals have in the UK is quite diverse. Following previous observations on the tendency for a work/life imbalance to be over-represented in higher managerial positions (McGinnity & Calvert, 2009; Ford & Collinson, 2011), ONS (2015) reports the lowest level of free time/rest is available in those in full-time employment and a reduction of 20% in daily free time/leisure for those in skilled trades, managers or professionals than those from other occupational classifications. These results and previous literature support the recent BIS (2012) findings that over-time and, in particular, unpaid over-time was more common in high-paying and managerial positions, thus echoing the TUC's findings (reported above) on overwork and long hours. On a comparative European level, the amount of free time and rest individuals have in the UK currently reflects the

European Union average (Eurofound, 2017) and is slightly higher than the average amount of hours available each day for free time and rest reported by the OECD (2009).

*Adequate compensation.* With the relative exception of the Asian economies, most post-industrial nations were significantly affected by the 2007/2008 financial crisis. The UK reaction to the financial crash was to cut wages rather than cutting employment (Bell and Blanchflower, 2010; Blundell et al., 2014). Research from NatCen (2011) reported that the key strategies employed by UK industry included freezing/cutting wages, postponing expansion, reducing training expenditure, freezing recruitment and increasing current employee workload responsibilities. The same research presented an overall fall in employees' sense of job security. There remains a post-recession trend for employees to have wages frozen or cut while being responsible for more work. D'Arcy (2017) highlights that such frozen wages have not been accompanied by static prices which has led to an overall pay-squeeze and falling standards of living. What is more the brunt of this pay squeeze is being born by young people who have been locked out of good paying jobs (Clarke & D'Arcy, 2018).

*Organisational values aligned to family and individual values.* Both personal and organisational values drive both priorities and actions (Christensen, 2001; Zhang & Austin, 2006). Where such values are aligned they can have the effect of increasing employee engagement and linking individuals more strongly to their organisation. Schuh et al. (2016) argue that it is equally important to attend to value misalignment and to note not just where employees are aligned with their employer, but also where they are actively misaligned. Where the fit between employer and employee values is weak the employee is more likely to (1) express dissatisfaction with the workplace; (2) determine to try and change the values of their employer or (3) resign from their job (Hoffman, 1993). There is limited research which

specifically explores value fit in UK organisations. This is one of the areas that the decent work research agenda in the UK could contribute more to.

*Access to healthcare.* In the UK there is a strong relationship between being economically active and health (BMA, 2017). There is a near mirror image between those employed (particularly in full-time work) and low levels of serious illness including heart attacks and certain forms of cancer (Dorling, 2013). However, unlike other OECD countries such as the United States where access to healthcare is often provided by employment, the UK provides universal healthcare through the National Health Service. In addition to the NHS some employers offer private health insurance as an overall package of benefits. The use of such ‘self pay’ routes remains limited but has increased over recent years and are often utilised when wait times for NHS procedures are considered too long (Campbell, 2017). However, such self-pay routes are supplementary to universal healthcare rather than offering a full alternative to them. Such a contrast between UK and US health provision is significant in thinking about how decent work is understood and measured in the two countries.

### **1.3 Aims**

This study explores the validity of the DWS for measuring decent work in the UK and examines what additional concepts might be important for people in the UK’s conception of decent work. The DWS was first validated with a North American sample. We hypothesise that the DWS will be valid in the UK and that it will predict job satisfaction, work meaning and withdrawal intentions.

Our hypotheses were developed to determine model fit to the survey, predictive validity and to test the findings of the initial study. We developed two main hypotheses to guide the validation of the model. We then developed sub-hypotheses to deepen our enquiry.

These hypotheses were directly based from the findings of the original Duffy et al. (2017) study.

- Hypothesis 1. A bi-factor model will be the best fit for the DWS.
  - Hypothesis 1a. The bi-factor model will not vary based on gender, income or social class.
- Hypothesis 2. The DWS will have significant predictive validity.
  - Hypothesis 2a. Decent work will significantly predict dependent variables of job satisfaction, work meaning and withdrawal intentions.
  - Hypothesis 2b. The adequate compensation and complementary values subscale will significantly predict all three dependent variables of job satisfaction, work meaning and withdrawal intentions.

Study 1 was in part a replication of Duffy et al. (2017) which aims to explore the validity of the DWS in the context of the UK. This study used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), invariance testing and regression modelling to examine the factor structure and predictive validity of the DWS.

Study 2 builds on the revalidation of the DWS through a qualitative approach to understand how workers in the UK define decent work in their own words. It explores how UK residents articulate decent work and identifies additional components, beyond those contained in the DWS, which are important within the UK national context.

### **3. Study 1 – Validating the DWS for the UK context**

#### **3.1 Method**

**Participants.** Three hundred and fifty-seven (357) individuals took part in the mixed mode survey. The cleaned sample consisted of 294 completed responses with an average age of 41 (SD=12.11). Most respondents identified as female (n=203, 69.5%) while 30% of the



sample identified as male (n=88) and one respondent identified as other. The sample contained a larger proportion of females than the UK average (ONS, 2016).

Over half (54.8%) were employed full time, 33.8% were employed part time, 2.8% were self-employed full time, 1.7% were self-employed part time and 6.8% classified their employment status as other. Two respondents (0.7%) chose not to disclose this information. The sample has a slightly larger proportion (88.6%) of those in work classed as employees (engaged in full or part time work) than the population estimate of 85% (ONS, 2018). The sample has a lower proportion of people in work who were self-employed (4.5%) than the national average of 14.7% (ONS, 2018).

**Procedure.** We used purposive sampling procedures to recruit participants. Participants were recruited through social networks and social media, namely Twitter and Facebook. We recruited by asking potential participants to engage in research which aimed to “learn more about access to decent work in the UK.” When potential participants clicked on the link they received further information about the research aims as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria.

In addition, undergraduate students, working with the project as research interns, were trained to collect data and administer the survey with their personal and professional networks. The 40 paper-based surveys collected by the research interns were entered as part of the overall dataset. All paper-based surveys were self-administered to increase their alignment to those delivered online and reduce mode-based measurement error. The combination of data collection modes (online and onsite) is well established, useful in reducing costs and enhancing response rates (Hooley, Marriott, & Wellens, 2012). While there can be limited measurement impacts associated with different modes, particularly with complex question types and sensitive topics these can be reduced where survey instruments

are carefully designed and implemented (Atkeson, Adams, & Alvarez, 2018; De Leeuw, 2005). It would be interesting to look at mode effect on the DWS in future research, but this is beyond the scope of the present paper.

**Instruments.** *Demographics.* Demographic characteristics including age, gender, qualification level, employment status household income and social class were collected. These were collected as single items: “What is your age?”, “What is your gender?”, “What is the highest qualification that you hold?”, “What is your employment status?” and “What is your average yearly household income? Please include income from your spouse/partner as well.” Social class was measured using several measures including the Macarthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). This measure presents respondents with a picture of a ladder with ten rungs where they tick where they are in relation to the top of the ladder (10 or ‘best off’) or the bottom of the ladder (1 or ‘worst off’). Another subjective class measure simply asked the question, “What is your social class?” where respondents could choose “lower class,” “working class,” “middle class,” or “upper class.”

*Decent Work Scale (DWS).* The DWS is a 15 item instrument with five factors using a 7 point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. While the scale did not have to be translated, some parts of the scale were adapted to fit the UK context. For the access to healthcare subscale, the following changes were made to the scale: “I get better healthcare benefits from my job than what is provided by universal healthcare”, “I have a better healthcare plan at work than what is provided by universal healthcare”, and “My employer provides more acceptable options for healthcare than what is available with universal healthcare.” Table 1 details the changes from the original scale to the revised scale.

[Table 1]

These changes were driven by the fact that public single payer healthcare (the National Health Service (NHS)) is available in the UK and the fact that some employers offer additional private health care as a part of an overall package of benefits. The internal consistency for the total DWS score was  $\alpha = .85$

*Job Satisfaction Scale.* The 5 item Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS) was used to measure respondent satisfaction with the job they currently hold (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). Several studies have found that the JSS has valid psychometric properties (Judge, Hulin & Dalal, 2009). Respondents were asked to tick their level of agreement using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency of the JSS for the present study was  $\alpha = .88$ .

*Withdrawal intentions.* Blau's (1985) 3 item measure on career commitment was used to indicate a respondent's intention to leave or withdraw from their current occupation. It is a valid measure which has previously been used to measure career commitment nurses, medical technologists and bank tellers (Jones, Zanko, & Kriflik, 2006). This measure used a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency of the withdrawal intentions scale for the present study was  $\alpha = .90$ .

*Work as meaning.* The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) was used to measure respondents' level of meaning they associate with their work (Steger et al., 2012). It has been found to be a valid and reliable measure. It is also used in the literature previously to measuring meaningful work in the context of the PWT (Allan et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2017). It is a 10-item instrument which uses a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The scale contains three factors which load onto one higher order factor. For this study we used the WAMI total score. The WAMI had an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .94$  for the present study.

### 3.2 Results

**Preliminary analysis.** We did not include cases where an entire scale was missing from the analysis (Duffy et al., 2017). This resulted in the removal of 63 cases with 294 cases left in the sample. Twenty-seven (27) cases had missing data from at least one of the four instruments. This represented less than 1% of the total dataset. Mean substitution was used due to the low level of missing data and the reliability of the scales (Parent, 2013). Variables were also inspected for outliers and normality. Three of the five subscales (complementary values, free time and rest, and adequate compensation) all had absolute values of skewness and kurtosis under one. Access to healthcare had skewness of up to 1.21. Safe working conditions had some negative skew (-1.58) and was kurtotic (2.20). There were also several extreme scores for one safe working conditions item. Two outliers were removed which improved the subscale where skew was -1.46 and kurtosis was 1.61. Subscale two and four had skewness and kurtosis absolute values under one. Table 2 details the correlations between the total scale and subscales

[Table 2]

**Hypothesis 1. Model Testing.** We used SPSS AMOS 24 in order to conduct CFA on the DWS. We fitted three models: a correlational model where the five subscales were allowed to be correlated; a higher-order model with a general decent work factor subsuming the five subscale factors; and a bifactor model where all 15 items loaded onto a general decent work factor as well as five uncorrelated factors. We used the following indicators of fit: chi-square, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). CFI and TLI are considered acceptable above .90 (Kline, 2011) while RMSEA is considered acceptable at .08 and excellent at .06. A

significant chi-square can indicate a poorly fitting model but this indicator is unreliable with large sample sizes.

*Correlational Model.* The correlational model had a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(80) = 124.76$ ,  $p = <.001$ , CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .04.

*Higher order model.* The higher order model indicators showed a slightly worse fit than the correlational model,  $\chi^2(85) = 150.66$ ,  $p = .000$ , CFI = .98, TLI = .98 and RMSEA = .05. The change in CFI was .007 less than the threshold of .01 suggesting the models were not significantly different (Cheun & Rensvold, 2002).

*Bifactor model (hypothesis 1).* The Bifactor model was a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(79) = 98.67$ ,  $p > .05$ , CFI = .99, TLI = .99 and RMSEA = .03. It was significantly different in relationship to the higher order model ( $\Delta\text{CFI} = .014$ ) but not with the correlational model ( $\Delta\text{CFI} = .007$ ).

[Figure 1]

**Hypothesis 1a. Invariance Testing.** Invariance tests were conducted on the bi-factor model. Previous studies have found the bi-factor model to be the best fit for the data (Duffy et al., 2017; Isik et al., 2018). Although there were moderate positive correlations between some subscales there was no evidence of strong correlations higher than 0.70. The correlations found among subscales were similar to those in the original Duffy et al. (2017) study therefore we conducted invariance tests using the bi-factor model.

We conducted both configural and metric invariance tests on each of the three variables. For configural invariance we are testing whether the constructs are measuring the same thing across defined groups (Bialosiewicz, Murphy, & Berry, 2013). The metric invariance models hold all factor loadings constant to determine whether there is difference between each group. If the configural model has a significantly worse fit than the metric

model then factor loadings may vary in size between the two groups. If this is the case, it suggests that for different defined groups the constructs may have different meanings (Bialosiewicz et al., 2013).

Indicators of fit for both invariance models must be acceptable in line with the model testing section. In addition, in order to determine whether the model fit significantly changes in terms of the two invariance tests we test according to a change in CFI of at least 0.01. We are looking for no significant difference across the two models in order to support that the factor structure does not vary across the three characteristics.

We used the following variables for the invariance tests: gender, income and subjective social class. We created categorical variables for each, with only two categories per group. For gender we conducted invariance tests on men and women. For income we created a dichotomous variable for those with household income above £52,000 and those with household income lower than £52,000. The basic Office for National Statistics (ONS) income classification cut point is at £52,000. Earnings above this are classified as ‘higher incomes’ which served as a useful point to dichotomise the data. For social class we split two categories based upon the mean response (5.26) of the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Duffy et al, 2017).

*Gender.* The configural model for gender had a good fit,  $\chi^2(159)=206.52$   $p < .001$ , CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .03. Fit was not significantly different for the metric invariance model where  $\chi^2(189)=268.92$   $p < .001$ , CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .04 with a  $\Delta$ CFI = .007.

*Income.* The configural model for income had a good fit,  $\chi^2(159)=168.077$   $p > .001$ , CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .01. Fit was not significantly different for the metric

invariance model where  $\chi^2(174)=192.96$   $p > .001$ , CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .02 with a  $\Delta$ CFI = .002.

*Class.* The configural model for class had a good fit,  $\chi^2(159)=195.46$   $p > .001$ , CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .03. Fit was not significantly different for the metric invariance model where  $\chi^2(174)=209.71$   $p > .001$ , CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .03 with a  $\Delta$ CFI = .002.

**Hypothesis 2. Predictive validity.** In order to determine the predictive validity of the DWS subscales we conducted three hierarchical regressions on the dependent variables of job satisfaction, work as meaning and withdrawal intentions (see Table 3). The decent work subscales accounted for 41% of the variance in job satisfaction, 28% of the variance in work as meaning and 20% of the variance in withdrawal intentions (*hypothesis 2a*). Multiple factors of decent work were significantly associated ( $p < .05$ ) with job satisfaction including safe working conditions, adequate compensation and complementary values while controlling for other factors of decent work. Safe working conditions and complementary values were significantly associated with work as meaning controlling for other factors of decent work. Finally, adequate compensation and complementary values were significantly associated with withdrawal intentions while controlling for other factors of decent work (*hypothesis 2b*). Neither the access to healthcare subscale nor the free time and rest subscale were significant predictors for the three outcome variables.

[Table 3]

## 4. Study 2 – Exploring decent work in the UK

### 4.1 Method

**Participants.** One hundred twenty-four respondents (124) began the survey. Ninety-nine (99) respondents completed the qualitative question. Two respondents were deleted from

the analysis due to a lack of meaningful data. A total of 97 responses were analysed. Most (72%) respondents were female. The average age of respondents was 43 years with a standard deviation of 8.55 years. The largest proportion of respondents (73%) were on permanent contracts while 10% of respondents were on fixed term contracts and 9% were self-employed. Approximately 8% had other working arrangements.

**Procedure.** We devised a short, open-ended survey to collect data about thoughts on decent work in the UK. We recruited an opportunity sample of participants in October 2018 via social media outlets particularly Twitter and Facebook. Our tweets asked potential UK participants to “have their say on decent work” or to tell us “what decent work meant to them.” Potential participants clicked on a link which detailed the research and engaged them in an informed consent process.

We used content analysis techniques to code the qualitative data (Krippendorff, 2004). We adopted the two models of analysis suggested by Angrosino (2007), beginning with *descriptive analysis* – essentially breaking down the data into themes to appreciate patterns before moving on to *theoretical analysis*, employing theory to make sense of these themes or regularities. To ensure the reliability of the coding an intercoder agreement approach was taken (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, Pedersen, 2013). Two researchers coded samples of the data separately then worked together to create a shared codebook. The full dataset was then coded by both researchers and any areas where disagreement was found were discussed until a consensus was found.

**Instruments.** We developed a short survey which collected demographic information of our participants. Our main question was this: *Decent work is employment that meets the minimum acceptable standards for a ‘good life’. What components do you feel a job needs to*



*have to be considered 'decent' or 'acceptable'?* The question was open-ended to allow for participants to write and reflect on what they understand as decent work.

## 4.2 Results

There were fourteen (14) meta concepts that emerged from the analysis. Each meta concept had up to four concepts labelled as part of the meta concepts. Table 4 details the meta concepts, their related concepts and the frequency in which they occurred in the data.

[Table 4]

Respondent definitions of decent work largely reflected the domains of the DWS. Four out of five domains from the DWS were well represented in the qualitative data. Responses related to adequate compensation were mentioned 78 times, hours that allow for free time and rest were mentioned 52 times, physically and interpersonally safe working conditions were mentioned 34 times and organizational values that complement family and social values were mentioned 28 times. In contrast access to health care was least likely to be mentioned in the qualitative data (n=2). In both instances this was related to access to sick pay rather than healthcare explicitly.

Our sample had a varied understanding of what decent work meant to them. In addition to concepts which mapped onto the DWS, additional concepts were found. The first component, Control over Working Life, appeared in 25 of the 97 definitions from respondents. This component included concepts of autonomy, influence at work and union representation. One participant articulated that decent work meant individuals have, “some control over the place and circumstances in which I work.”

The Career Development category appeared in 19 of the 97 definitions from respondents. This category included a discussion of the need for work to provide an opportunity for career progression and training. One participant suggested that decent work

meant individuals have, “good opportunities to move forward; progress in both skills and levels of responsibility.”

Job Satisfaction was a decent work category that appeared 16 times in the data but was often presented in conjunction with other domains. One participant wrote, “decent work I think is, which you enjoy and earn enough to fulfil your everyday needs and some money to save. Another respondent stated decent work means, job satisfaction in knowing that what you do makes a difference to someone or something.”

Effective Management was another category associated with decent work. Fifteen participants wrote that for them securing decent work included working within good management structures as well as having a clearly defined role. One participant reported that decent work meant having “strong and clear leadership.” Another participant suggested that decent work meant having “support at work when requested or needed.”

Good Match for Abilities appeared fourteen times in the data. This component included participant reporting that they wanted work that was “doable... linked to area of interest, values and skill set,” had “good skill utilisation [in the workplace]” and which offered the “chance to use gained qualifications.” This sense of the alignment between the capabilities of the individual and the requirements of the job is an important aspect to note as it highlights the fact that different people may find the same or similar jobs to be variable in their decency.

Access to Work-related Benefits also appeared fourteen times in the data. This component included benefits such as access to pensions and paid holiday leave. One participant suggested that decent work meant having, “good terms and conditions - holidays/special leave, sick pay, pension scheme.”

The next category was Recognition and Status coded twelve times in the data. One participant suggested that decent work means, “being appreciated by your boss.”

Job Security was coded eleven times in the data. One participant summed up how decent work was also job security; “your work is predictable and stable enough that you can plan on the basis of expected income. This last point is vital - zero hours contracts are fine, but they have to be reliable enough.”

The last category of decent work (outside of the five core constructs) was Positive Social Aspects of Work. This appeared in ten responses. This component included creating and maintaining good professional relationships as well as an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues. One participant stated that decent work meant the “chance to network and share good practise.” Another respondent suggested that decent work was an environment where “the people you work with [are] pleasant and helpful to their colleagues.”

## **5. Discussion**

This section brings together the results from both studies and discusses them in relation to the future of the Decent Work Scale in the UK.

### **5.1 Applicability of the DWS to the UK**

Study 1 tested the applicability of the DWS on a sample drawn from the UK. We articulated three hypotheses based on the PWT and the initial validation study (Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2017). This study supports the DWS as a valid psychometric measure of decent work in the UK. In terms of the first hypothesis, a CFA found that while the bi-factor model was the best fit to the data it was not significantly different to the correlational model. While this supports evidence that the DWS represents a bifactor model it does also suggest that a correlational model may also fit the data effectively. Through both configural and metric invariance testing we found that the DWS bi-factor model did not differ significantly between gender, income and social class.

### **5.2 Predictive validity of the DWS**

For hypothesis 2 we tested whether there was evidence of predictive validity for the DWS. At least one or more subscales significantly predicted job satisfaction, work as meaning and withdrawal intentions. Consistent with Duffy et al. (2017) the complementary values subscale was a unique predictor for all three dependent variables; however adequate compensation significantly predicted only two of three dependent variables. This is in contrast to Duffy et al. (2017) where adequate compensation significantly predicted all three dependent variables. As a cross cultural measure complementary values may be the most important component of decent work. Access to healthcare and access to free time and rest did not predict the three dependent variables. As the UK has a single payer system of healthcare it may be that most of the sample did not receive or use benefits in excess of those available in the NHS. This subscale should be further considered for its appropriateness as it is tested in countries with universal healthcare systems and cultures with universal healthcare systems alongside private healthcare systems. This finding was also borne out by Study 2 which suggested that people from the UK did not typically include access to healthcare when defining decent work.

The free time and rest subscale did not predict the three dependent variables. This may be due in part to worker protections available in the UK despite increased precarious working. This was a surprising finding which should be researched further especially in the light of study 2 where over half of respondents spontaneously included this component in their definitions of decent work.

### **5.3 Future development of the DWS in the UK**

Study 2 broadly supported the findings of study 1, and suggested that the DWS was a valid and relevant measure for the UK. It raises an important question about the relevance of the access to healthcare component. It will be important to test this further and to consider

whether these items could be dropped when using the instrument in the UK (and potentially in other countries where access to healthcare is not directly linked to work).

Study 2 also identified nine addition concepts which could potentially be included in a UK measure of decent work (control over working life, career development, job satisfaction, effective management, good match for abilities, access to work related benefits, recognition and status, job security and social aspects of work). Watson, Duarte and Glavin (2011) make a distinction between attending to cultural validity (does a particular instrument remain valid when used in a different cultural context to the one in which it was originated) and attending to cultural specificity (does an instrument recognise the concepts that are culturally important and meaningful). Study 1 demonstrates that the DWS has validity in the UK, but study 2 raises some questions about whether it is sufficiently attending to cultural specificity.

Many of the concepts identified by study 2 can be measured by existing instruments, although not necessarily by instruments that have been validated in the UK. For example, the Job Satisfaction Scale (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998) used in this study could be used to measure job satisfaction or the Organisational Constraints Scale (Spector & Jex, 1998) could be used to measure the control over life theme. However, there are other areas such as access to work related benefits where no existing measurements can be identified and where cultural specificity is likely to be paramount. Further development of the DWS which seeks to increase the cultural specificity of the instrument in a UK context will therefore need to consider what additional concepts it would be useful to bring into the instrument, how these concepts interact with those within the existing instrument and how this can be achieved while ensuring that the scale remains parsimonious and usable.

#### **5.4 Limitations**

This study has a number of limitations. The DWS is a self-report tool which could be affected by social desirability bias (Duffy et al, 2017). In addition, the sample was constructed using purposive snowball sampling rather than a random sampling method which may decrease the representativeness of this sample to the UK population. While the sample was broadly similar to the working population in the UK it was limited by recruitment largely through researcher social media networks. This means that the sample is largely “white collar,” professional and middle class. There is a need to conduct future research with rigorous sampling frames and to conduct research on more diverse samples in general.

With respect to Study 2 the survey method generated a broad range of data which helped to inform our understanding about UK conceptions of decent work. However, the data was often suggestive of bigger issues and it was impossible to ask follow-up questions. As part of further enquiries into decent work in the UK it would be valuable to include deeper qualitative methods to allow for the generation of richer data and the further exploration of some of the issues identified by this study.

It is important to note that due to the low sample size ( $n=294$ ) the multiple groups testing may be underpowered. This may explain the failure to find group differences in the configural and metric invariance models. In the future invariance models should be run with larger sample sizes.

### **5.5 Usefulness of the DWS in the UK**

Decent work has been recognised as a human right (ILO, 1999). However, challenges to labour market structures and working life, increases in inequality and the rise of precarious work have created threats to decent work (Blustein et al., 2018). As we have argued these issues are relevant to the UK and merit further investigation. This study provides evidence that the DWS is a valid scale for use in such an investigation in the UK. While there are some

similarities between the UK and the USA in terms of the lived experience of work the labour markets and the policy and cultural context are distinct. There may be scope for further iterations of the scale or complementary scale development in order to fully measure the cultural specificity of working lives in the UK.

In order to further develop and test the scale in the UK it would be important for researchers to test the relationship between decent work with measures of subjective wellbeing such as life satisfaction. This is an important proposition of the PWT and is considered an outcome of securing decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). Components that can be operationalised at the individual level such as access to professional development opportunities and experience of transparent workplace structures (among others) could be developed and tested alongside the DWS.

As scholarship moves forward, further research into the PWT within the UK context should be undertaken. Other variables which have been tested in the US and serve as theoretical moderators or mediators to decent work such as proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support, work volition and career adaptability could be modelled in order to test the theories central to PWT (see Allan, Tebbe, Bouchard, & Duffy, 2018; Douglass, Velez, Conlin Duffy, & England, 2017; Tokar & Kaut, 2018). As the UK continues to enjoy high levels of employment it provides an opportunity to further test moderator variable such as economic conditions within the PWT model.

Another important area for investigation is the relationship between the ILO's measurement of decent work as an objective measure of labour market conditions and decent work as a psychological construct as measured by the DWS. Is it possible for someone to be working in objectively indecent conditions but still to feel that they have decent work? Such tensions have important political consequences and open up more critical investigations about

how consent and acquiescence is brought about in systems where workers often face inequality and oppression.

Substantively the validation of the DWS in the UK opens the possibility of looking at the different psychologies of working of different groups within the country. For example, it would be interesting to use the scale to investigate substantive differences in decent work between different groups in the UK this might include examination of gender, class, income, sector and geographical factors amongst some other issues. In the light of the Taylor review it would also be interesting to quantify decent work in relation to those in gig and precarious work as opposed to those in more stable forms of work.

Finally, the use of the DWS within career interventions could be usefully explored. There has been a growing movement to consider how career development interventions could be used to foster critical consciousness and support social justice (Hooley, Sultana & Thompson, 2018). The DWS has the potential to serve as a useful reflective tool within career development interventions helping educators and counsellors to open up questions about the decency of work and to move discussion of these issues beyond an individual frame. Because the concept of decent work is rooted in an analysis of objective labour market conditions and a political attempt to place some limits around oppression, the measurement and reflection on individuals experience of decent work has the potential to be empowering.

This article argues that the DWS offers a useful tool which can be deployed in a UK context. We have made several suggestions of ways in which the scale might be iterated and improved, but it is also important to assert that it adds a useful tool to the toolbox of UK based career researchers and career practitioners. It is hoped that researchers will make use of it and continue the tools development in the future.



## 6. References

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