

GLOBAL RECESSION AND QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT IN SPAIN: ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE OF SOCIAL AGENTS¹

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present some of the results of our research into the *quality of employment* in Spain, in particular the study of the quality discourses of trade unions and employers. In the current context of a worldwide financial recession, job losses, and a shrinking job market, the *quality of employment* is integral to promoting and improving production competitiveness as a way to overcome the recession. The study of discursive strategies on the quality of employment in Spain acknowledges the importance of quality, and its influence on the economy, and on society as a whole. Trade unions use the quality discourse as a reason to review and reinvent their current role, and instead of only focusing their main concerns and paradigms on the defence of workers' interests, they consolidate their criticism of a reprehensible Spanish employer class. Employers' discourse, on the other hand, is aimed at highlighting the market's production purpose, and sustaining their privileged position in labour management, whilst disassociating and distancing themselves from the employment decisions they make. In general, the *quality of employment* discourse represents an outlet for union action, which is otherwise thwarted by market globalisation and deregulation. At the same time, it is a way to connect and combine new discourses, e.g. on conservation, responsible consumers, etc. Employers claim that workers in Spain lack the training needed for quality employment, but they do not accept any responsibility for this inadequacy. Instead, they use it as an excuse for the current low-quality jobs, and maintenance of the status quo until training deficiencies are corrected.

1. PRESENTATION

The term quality has often been used as a referent by the most diverse social agents in recent years. This universal use has coincided with applying quality to a wide range of goods, activities and institutions, including employment. Although there are numerous references to the quality of employment by stakeholders in the job market, qualitative approaches are much less frequent.

This study of the quality of employment discourse in Spain is part of and benefits from research with a far broader scope (with quantitative and qualitative methodologies) on the subject in question³, although the way in which quality is addressed here has a different focus,

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shifting from output to consumption. The reason for this study is to discover the opinion of the social agents involved on the quality of employment, and to address the discursive use these agents make of quality to refer to the current job market situation in Spain. This study has a qualitative focus consisting of discussion groups used to obtain discursive information, which was then analysed from a sociological perspective. Two groups were formed, with very special characteristics and requirements as far as the design and choice of their members were concerned. For the design, only two social agents, employers and trade unions, were taken into account, since, due to their central importance today and in the past, they could provide *opposing and more diverse* opinions on the subject of the quality of employment in Spain. The complication lay in the fact that the groups formed consisted of *authorised representatives* of the two agents mentioned, and, in addition, the members did not hold especially preferential or important institutional positions which could excessively politicise (rationalise) the topic of debate.

Consequently, the design of the first group was based on union representatives who had actively participated in collective bargaining and the signing of sector agreements, including at least one from each of the most representative sectors in the workers' collective: construction, services (health, hotel trade, banking, commerce) and industry (pharmacy). At the same time, this group was representative of the two most important and relevant union organisations in Spain: UGT and CCOO. The representative group of employers, on the other hand, was designed with representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises, and of large companies belonging to various sectors, such as agriculture and livestock, services, and industry. Both groups were formed in the third quarter of 2008, at a time when the worldwide economic recession, which began at the end of 2007, was still biting, and its influence on the Spanish job market situation and on the discourses arising in the discussion groups must be taken into consideration.

As detailed in the following section, the sociological analysis of the discourses takes the conceptualisations made on the subject of quality as a theoretical interpretative referent based on the sociology of consumption, and the role and influence which mass consumption has on the understanding of social relations and the capitalist market. This is because the quality discourse occupies a central position in current consumption policies, in the same way as consumption is now a part of the production of new inequalities, especially those which affect the job market.

Lastly, with reference to the methodology used and its influence and/or impact on the study subject, the so-called qualitative focus establishes a manner in which to address and produce the observation of quality in employment. To the extent to which the quality label includes, and is synonymous with evaluating and recognising quality, its observation and evaluation already reinforces a way to understand quality and its assessment role of employment. Whilst quantitative methodology, especially surveys, strengthen the idea of quality as a closed evaluation procedure, only and exclusively focused on the employment *product*, qualitative methodology reinforces it as an open *process* demonstrating diverse aspects of employment and relations which could be taken into account. For this reason, qualitative methodology, like quantitative methodology, is not just a manner in which to address the subject of quality empirically, it also makes it possible for quality to be expressed in different and even contrary

terms, depending on the focus adopted. In this regard, Salais (2006) is very critical of the “indicator policy” which the European Employment Strategy (EES) has become. Although public policies have nothing to do with managerial policies⁴, identical methodologies⁵ are being applied, i.e. the measurement of achievements using quantifiable objectives, statistical indicators (COM, 2002), and the proliferation of “good practices”⁶. Consequently, political decisions seem purely technical and neutral, and another way of managing to depoliticise traditionally conflictive relations between capital and work, as occurs with the already popular concept of *flexicurity* (Keune and Serrano, 2010).

3. THE QUALITY OF THE *EMPLOYMENT PRODUCT*: A THEORETICAL INTERPRETATIVE PLAN BASED ON CONSUMPTION

Having considered the characteristics of the emergence of the quality of employment as a central issue in employment policies in Europe and Spain, covered in detail in Prieto et al (2009), the various changes that have turned employment into a product capable of being valued in terms of quality will now be addressed in a global manner. The first and important change is connected with the shift in the focus of attention from work quality to employment quality, or, in other words, the scope of its circulation: the job market. The second transformation, connected with the previous one, includes quality changing being applied to production (manufacture) to the market (consumption).

Quality in employment can be analysed from various perspectives which have focused their interest on the labour activity connected with conflicts generated in the production process. The most recognised traditional theoretical approaches include some of the main focuses on the roles of work in the modern company⁷. In these theories quality is understood as job quality (quality of “working conditions”), and they are a first and essential foundation on which to base the current concerns for quality in employment. As D. Gallie (2007) points out, this approach to quality, understood as a reaction to the inhuman conditions which a scientific organisation of work imposed, was eclipsed by the crisis of the Fordist production model. It reappeared again (at the end of the 1990s and beginning of 2000) as a result of the importance acquired by a job market that was becoming more and more deregulated by the neoliberal

⁴ In actual fact, the implementation of these policies relies on a managerial rhetoric whose effectiveness is based more on strong ideological associations, which legitimate certain business practices, than on the proposal of specific measures for business success. See Fernández (2007).

⁵ Such as the famous *management by objectives* (Boltansky and Chiapello, 2000) applied in the EU (COM, 2002), but with some differences, such as the non-existence of negative consequences when the objectives set are not reached.

⁶ Producing *good practice guides* is recommended by the various social intervention organisations. UNESCO does this for working with immigrants (Bendixsen and Guchteneire, 2004), and for *project evaluation* as quality and effectiveness control criteria.

⁷ In opposition to neoclassical theories, with a rational bureaucratic view of business (Weber, 1992), productivist in character, maximised by the Taylorist and Fordist current, is a view of work focused on the job situation and its influence on the development of productivity. The School of Human Relations can recognise the importance of a job with compensatory elements to counteract the organisational structure with effects that alienate workers, already manifesting the Marxist approach. This is consistent with what the systemic approach (socio-technical approach) also demonstrated, in its own way, thus proving the need to design jobs which take into account more content and more worker participation in the processes.

policies of the 1980s and 1990s. In view of this important change, quality in employment shifted its focus from production (work-centred) to the job market (employment-centred). If quality in the Fordist period highlighted a certain adaptation of the worker to the production process, in the post-Fordist model it was the market which determined the quality of the production process and of the economic system as a whole (Alonso, 2005). The increasing competitiveness which the post-Fordist model has led to demonstrates this importance of the *market* to the full extent of its complexity, and, especially, the importance *quality* acquires as a theoretical and practical mediation to consider conflicts (maladjustments) between supply and demand in the job market.

On the other hand, the subject of quality has a common denominator, which is the evaluation of its legitimising role (sanctioning and standardising) of acceptable products or services (satisfactory) in fields as diverse as education, health, justice, communication, personal relations, research, etc. It is important to note that the same *quality* concept, and its application are found in the industrial sector. Firstly, it is connected with the idea of product and process control, then with management (quality guarantee), and lastly with system (total quality). However, the development of the quality issue has also spread from production to the market. Quality is now understood as an attribute resulting from customer or consumer expectations or satisfaction rather than control during production (Russell, 2000). This new shift in the generic concept of quality is not circumstantial, nor does it contradict the particular concept of quality in employment. The predominance of the market and customerization are two sides of the same coin. Consequently, the particularity of attributing quality to employment (or to any activity) is because it connects and concentrates the production and consumption areas in the same term. If employment refers to the area of work and its product (with more or less quality), quality of employment refers to the resulting supply of work (available jobs or “positions”) and their consumption by a specific active population or production sector.

It is precisely in the consumption plane where supply and demand cross over, which, as Bourdieu (1988) points out, is adjusted in the conflict of two relatively autonomous, yet, at the same time, interdependent logics. The discursive analysis of the quality of employment takes place in this disputed field of action, and it is understood that the increasing and generic recurrence to quality, currently so widespread and practised, is a symptom and result of the prolonged crisis affecting a weakened Fordist production / consumption model. This production model⁸ allowed for the controlled integration of worker wage claims via the regulatory mechanisms of a welfare state, as well as an indirect salary arising from social rights acquired by every citizen (Alonso, 2005).

In this first context, the idea of quality splits into two necessary, but contrary aspects. On the one hand, the concept of quality is centred on criticism of a post-Fordist production model characterised by strong deregulation of the markets, thus restructuring the Fordist production model and its affinity for Keynesian social balance. The result of this split for quality has been the acknowledgement of increasing market fragmentation and diversification, especially the job market. Quality, therefore, is the result of a change from standardised consumption to “consumption without norms” (Alonso, 2005: 68), consumption which changes from moulds

⁸ A change that also affects employment policies, which went from being components of economic growth to being subordinated to economic growth. A new model of economic growth emerges, which is characterised by market autonomy. Policies of demand become policies of supply (Bilbao, 1999:305).

to modulations (Deleuze, 1996), from security to insecurity to *risks* (Beck, 1998; Zinn, 2008) adopted individually or collectively, and a product of an increasing deregulation in each and every one of the areas of social and economic life. Faced with the circumstances of the post-Fordist economic system, and the gradual disappearance, or ineffectiveness, of state regulatory mechanisms, a *lack of quality* gives rise to “*defensive consumerism*” (Alonso, 2005:74), which combats and integrates to *restore and maintain the security lost* due to non-inclusive risk policies, which result from the crisis in the welfare state.

Furthermore, the concept of quality also follows the contrary route of acritical functionality in view of changes in the post-Fordist production model. In this regard, quality is a consubstantial part of these changes and of the impacts they have, especially for the market and the new post-modern consumer. In contrast to defensive guilty and guilt-making consumerism, a model of *qualified consumption* arose, whose purpose is higher quality consumption safe from the multiple uncertainties (Zinn, 2006) of the economic and production system. Consumption generated from confidence as a new way to alleviate the increasing lack of security in the system in general.

This is how quality understood as a guarantee (*quality assurance*) has acquired strategic importance *as a new regulating instrument*, a replacement for the diminished regulating role of the welfare state, since the management of trust via quality presupposes several questions of especial importance for attribution:

- Favouring the consumer over the producer. Quality has shifted from being understood as synonymous with the control of variations (maladjustments) in processes and products to variations in clients / consumers (making them loyal).
- Placing special importance on the subject of information and communication as an instrument to be controlled and of control, converted into a basic mechanism to generate confidence.
- Establishing clear and precise mechanisms of recognition and evaluation, which make standardisation and comparison of measurements possible.

In this regard, the discourse of quality in employment for the Spanish case does not deviate from the succinctly described theoretical outline. Quality employment is sometimes understood as the result of an inevitable customerization of the job market, and other times as the synthesis of a broad process of producing and integrating various factors. The strategic use made of every concept is inseparable from the situation of the agents involved in a framework of action immersed in deep and complex economic and social transformations. In this context, worsened by the worldwide financial recession, quality is returned to as a tool which is the basis not only of a specific way of delimiting and defining our current understanding of quality employment, but also a form (the *quality form*) of tackling and adapting this employment to the interests and conflicts arising in a society and a job market like the Spanish one. This theoretical and analytical delimitation and distinction lead to the results presented, which keep the part that refers to the quality of employment discourse and its definition by trade unions and employers separate from the part that focuses on discovering the discursive strategies these social agents put into practice when they refer to the discourse of quality of employment.

4. THE DISCOURSE OF SPANISH EMPLOYERS AND TRADE UNIONS ON THE QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT

Firstly, there is a presentation of the varying significance these groups attach to the quality of employment, and then an analysis of the differing comparative assessments by employers and trade unions in connection with the three referents mentioned: contents, agents and contexts of the quality of employment.

Quality is understood in the groups as an *assessment* or *judgement* which is made about *something*. The quality of this something (multiplicity of subjects) is rated good or bad, and the gradients in between. Quality is also understood as something positive and desirable (in itself), whilst *bad* quality *does not have any* or *lacks* quality. Quality, therefore, is an attribute resulting from assessing and rating an already given product *positively*. What is evaluated, how and why are issues which the groups deal with and produce from their respective discursive positions. The groups divided the quality of employment into four areas: quality as *certification*, as *control*, as *testing* and as *sampling*.

As far as *certification* is concerned, quality is understood as the validation of the product depending on the presence or absence of certain qualities or attributes. These are specific aspects which can be established objectively: for example, the worker's level of education, the salary level, the type of contract, etc. The purpose of the judgement is to verify the presence or the absence of qualities, stating whether the quality of the item to be recorded is good or bad as a result. In addition, another essential task of this certification is to highlight that the evaluator is competent in the matter in question.

Quality as *control* is the result of understanding quality as a supervision of the process or development involved in the product. Whilst employers place more emphasis on certification, trade unions are more inclined towards control. It is understood that the quality of employment cannot be reduced to, nor does it only apply to product qualities, but to everything that is involved in qualifying it. This is the reason why control especially refers to the scope of particular conditions or circumstances which make it possible to judge a certain quality of employment. In this respect, quality allows us to discover the formation process, deficiencies or errors, difficulties or problems the evaluated product has. As if it were a front door, the product is a connection with aspects or circumstances which give rise to or can generate a certain quality of employment.

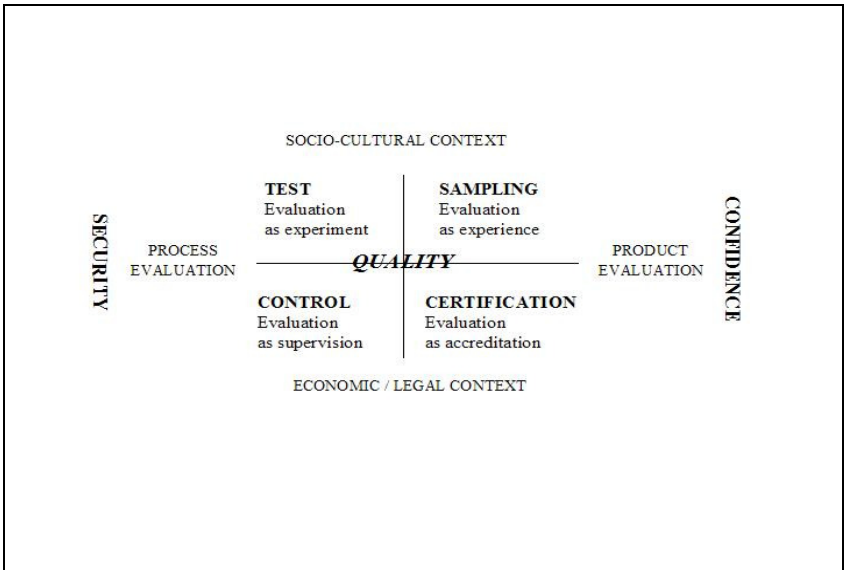
Quality is often also understood as a *test* or *experiment* seeking certain results with which to judge employment. In this case, the product is compared (tested) in diverse contexts or circumstances to discover the quality offered. This use was in evidence when the quality of employment was viewed in terms of "*wages that cannot be lived on*" or "*training that does not match the tasks to be performed*", etc.

Lastly, quality as *sampling* needs to be mentioned. A use of quality as experience in which the product forms part of particular or subjective appreciations. In this case, quality is a non-transferable and personal part of direct experiences with the product. The quality of employment becomes a question of tastes which depend on individual circumstances and experiences. For example, the same job or working condition acquires one quality label or

another depending on the type of worker or employer and the personal situation they find themselves in, etc.

Taking these four areas into account, the quality of employment is either in the product related to employment (set of properties or attributes of employment: salary amount, level of security, type of contract, etc.) or in prior socio-economic relations embarked upon by the agents who intervene in establishing the quality of the employment product (compliance with collective bargaining, asserting rights, complying with sentences, union or employer concessions, etc.). Both ways of addressing quality also refer to the economic and legal, and the social and cultural spheres. In other words, the quality of employment refers to business and to everything that directly or indirectly surrounds or interacts with it.

Table 1: Four areas of quality in the job market



As shown in Table 1, the organisation of the four areas of quality in employment demonstrates that understanding this quality as *control* means focusing interest on the relations economic and social agents create around issues related mainly to the job market, the country’s economic situation, taxes, the operation of the various organisations, etc. In contrast, quality understood as *certification* focuses interest expressly on outcomes or products derived from companies’ economic activity, and especially the labour activity (productivity, type of contracts, salaries, training, security, etc.).

In the top horizontal part, on the other hand, quality refers to situations connected directly or indirectly with the world of work and economy. Personal or family experiences, immigration, housing, health or consumption are issues which the groups take into account to refer to product quality, or the relations that occur via these products with other social and cultural areas, for example, the man’s low salary is connected with guilt and laziness, and the woman’s low salary with acceptance of social standardisation: “A man does not even entertain the idea of having a job earning €500. Generally, the first thought that goes through one’s head is that he’s lazy. For a woman, €500 is perfectly normal.” (UG).

In some cases, quality is seen as *sampling*, i.e. specific work aspects are judged and rated on the basis of other similar situations in which workers or employers find better or worse results. For example, changing jobs, or the employer introducing immigrant labour. Other times, these aspects of work can be *tested* for coherence or suitability with other areas, such as consumption, health, education, family, etc.

Both groups refer to the quality of employment in different ways, although the value they attribute to it differs. Quality acquires the value of responsibility and unmasking (are things what they appear to be?) in *control* and *testing*. The objective is to uncover the trick, deceit and/or lie. In contrast, quality assumes the value of management and organisation in *certification* and *sampling*, and demonstrates the part which can be disposed of as it is not suitable or of interest in attaining quality. Nevertheless, in either of these two assessments (responsibility / management), the quality of employment in Spain is considered negatively by both the union group and the employer group, although for the first, bad quality is historic and alarming in the current situation, whilst for the second, it depends on the country's economic and social circumstances, and the lack of foresight and reforms in the Spanish job market.

The groups rate the quality of employment differently based on three referents (contents, agents, and contexts) and which are shown synthetically in Table 2.

1) With reference to the *contents* or *product* that can be identified or connected with the quality of employment, neither of the groups have a clear referent. Sometimes, it is defined by the type of work, other times by the training required, the hours, or salary, etc. They assume, however, that the contents this product refers to are clearly deficient and have to be improved. This involves recognising the inconsistency and weakening of the product on which to judge the quality of employment.

This inconsistency manifests itself equally in both groups, although in the union sample it is the result of understanding the product diachronically, such as transformations which are operating continuously in the employment and social sphere. On the one hand, the contents follow a trajectory that has been transforming them over time with improvements and delays, even changing their very notion of quality. Aspects once considered a part of quality employment are later considered as insufficient or bad quality as a result of the transformations that have occurred. Besides, the quality of the contents seems to improve in other aspects (suitable weekly hours, training, work and family life balance, etc.), but at the same time it deteriorates in others (all these improvements in exchange for low salaries), creating the sensation of immobilism and of an unfinished or half-finished product: "*The years have gone by and now they tell us they're not going to give us any more pay rises because there's a recession as well, and we have seen that they haven't improved at all in any of these aspects.*" (UG).

Whilst for the union group the inconsistency of the quality employment product cuts across time, for the employer group, the product lacks consistency due to apparently synchronous reasons related to the pressure of competing in an increasingly competitive job market. Consequently, the metaphor this group uses to refer to what the employer looks for in the market as a "quality employment" product is "*a backpack*" or container, which every worker takes with him, and which he must go about filling to obtain quality employment: "*people need to be made aware of the fact that they have to improve, i.e. the backpack effect, I mean I have to improve my curriculum vitae.*" (EG).

Training, a good attitude to work, initiative, and responsibility are contents which could be in the container, but they automatically mean quality of employment. With regard to quality, employers are not concerned about the contents the worker should have in his backpack. In the group's words, quality employment needs the worker's "*aptitudes and attitudes*", but which aptitudes or attitudes, and how many are necessary is a question that concerns the job the worker wishes to perform, thus establishing a proportional and fair correspondence between what the worker has with what the employer or market offers him. Employment quality decreases the fewer contents in the backpack there are, and vice versa, which is why there are differing employment qualities for the performance of the same job.

With respect to the weakening of the product connected with the quality of employment, the groups seem to refer to a process of loss of value and contents for different reasons connected with their circulation or putting into practice. In the case of the union group, the deterioration occurs when the quality which all jobs should have is economically taken advantage of by the agents intervening in their production. In other words, for any product, the contents that the quality of employment may include are decimated and reduced to a minimum until quality is totally absent. Consequently, the union group understands that the judgement of the quality of employment goes beyond the business sectors or particular contents of each company or employment relationship. The result of including this quality in the job market means that the same product goes on to form part of monetary gains. This is how the subcontracting phenomenon is understood. To the extent to which the quality of employment has a value and this value translates into money, subcontracting increases the accumulated profits to the detriment and degradation of the quality of employment offered.

Although this weakening of the product is obvious for the employer group, it is referred to very differently. For them, the product initially has assumed quality which could be improved (not lost) to maintain the level of competition in the market. These improvements refer to both the financial side (investment costs in training) and the institutional or administrative side (grants and incentives). As a result, it is difficult to improve the quality of employment because there is not enough information and/or rigid administrative and management formalisms prevent a small and medium-sized business owner from taking into consideration certain demands and resources (grants for training, financial incentives, technical advice, etc.). Misinformation, the fears Spanish small and medium-sized enterprise owners have, as well as the difficulties connected with the management of improvements for employment are the factors which result in only a large company having sufficient capacity and resources to take advantage of and incorporate the benefits of more quality.

In short, the employer discourse recognises that incorporating quality into employment is already connected with workers and their "backpacks", and, in the worst of the scenarios, employers should not prevent their possible improvement, and, instead, promote constant professional updating to be more competitive. An apparently progressive view (open to change) of the product which the union group understands in conservative terms (maintaining the status quo) so that the quality of employment, considered as an absolute value, does not lose part of its unity. Whilst for the former (employers) improvements are positive, in that they add new and more contents which make it possible to value the quality of employment, for the latter (trade unionists), improving means not losing what one already has, i.e. it must be interpreted as resistance to removing anything from something that by definition already has and expresses quality.

2) With reference to the **agents** mentioned in the various discourses analysed, the first striking aspect is their diversity and the multiple relations which the groups point out to refer to their influence on the quality of employment. The actions of consumers or the local administration, employers, trade unions, family or trainers, etc., are judged, and, at the same time, they judge the quality of existing employment. For example, for the union group, consumers are criticised as an external reason to justify the low-quality of employment, but these same consumers consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly judge the quality of the service which affects employment conditions. In this regard, it is the agents' actions which determine and influence a certain quality of the employment product. These actions aim to sustain, produce or evaluate the quality of employment.

a) Sustaining the quality of employment

Sometimes, the groups talk of agents who act in collusion with other agents or issues which directly or indirectly affect employment. This refers to a wide range of particular actions which contribute to maintaining a certain status quo. The agents can be in or outside the company, such as consumers, although they refer above all to those agents who are in contexts other than employment ones, or in a situation of only examining and *not acting* as a result. In the case of justice it is obvious: for both trade unions and employers, and for different reasons, legislation that is not adhered to (or whose compliance goes against normal practices) is essentially an action that sustains low-quality employment.

b) Producing the quality of employment

Out of the majority of the agents mentioned by the groups, only some actions play a direct role in producing quality. These actually concentrate all the agents' influence, although their role is very limited or specific on occasions, focusing on aspects such as training, work and hiring. For the union group, it is mainly the trade unions and employers who perform actions aimed at producing quality, and for the latter (employers) it is mainly the trainers in general and workers who are responsible for there being quality jobs.

c) Evaluating the quality of employment

Lastly, there is a series of reflexive actions whose objective is to point out or refer to the quality of employment for evaluation purposes. Both the trade unions and the employers perceive themselves as competent to perform this type of action, although other agents are mentioned, such as the various administrations or judges, who also decide and apply employment regulations to the practice in companies. It is striking that although it is the worker who the job is ultimately aimed at, his evaluation actions are not actually considered by the groups. There is no mention of the worker's actions to consider or recognise quality jobs. This silence could indicate that the worker is slightly incompetent for reasons that could have something to do with his "lack of judgement" or situation of dependence and immediacy when confronted with a job market that makes urgent demands with no time for any consultation or reflection. Nevertheless, and despite this symptomatic lack, the evaluation actions pointed out acquire a commitment to inform, when not denouncing or claiming, by replacing or representing the voices of other agents involved (trade unions, administration).

Depending on the actions referred to, the groups judge agents as having *good or bad* quality. Those considered good include agents whose actions contribute variously to *providing rather than removing* quality in employment. In contrast, bad agents are those who practise actions

aimed at *removing rather than providing* quality. Obviously, the same agent can be attributed with good or bad quality depending on his actions and the judges who evaluate them.

For example, for the union group, the Spanish employer is an agent whose actions are mainly aimed at producing the quality of employment by hiring and working conditions. The difference lies in the fact that the employer considered to be of quality does not stretch his egotism to the limit: *“to the point of not caring about people or the future of the company”*. This type of employer is also mentioned by the employer group, who they refer to as the employer seeking a quick buck: *“it’s the quick-buck culture, there are business owners who are insatiable”*. The bad practices of a speculative business owner without any scruples or social conscience oppose the practices of a responsible business owner of quality who bases his actions on building up his company and looking after it.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, for this union group, the quality of employment is affected by the bad quality of business owners, and also by the quality of other agents whose actions sustain or justify the results of business decisions which “remove quality”. These agents are, firstly, the same workers who betray their union role (employers’ trade unionism) or simply, as mentioned above, they are not interested in or do not have the judgement capacity to be informed about the significance of quality employment (immigrants, unqualified workers, young people looking for their first job, women who join the job market for the first time, etc.).

Workers’ “bad quality” paradoxically not only impacts on those whose work lacks quality, but also on all the other workers, whose actions to “maintain quality” in their respective jobs or companies are thus limited due to inertia or contagion.

Along these lines, the same citizens are also considered as bad quality agents for helping to maintain the deterioration of the employment with their actions. By means of consumption that lacks solidarity, or simply due to the support families provide members with jobs that lack quality, low-quality employers' actions are reinforced, and this, together with the rest of the agents sustaining bad quality, contributes to generating a scenario without hope for quality agents (especially workers' trade unions), whose role is reduced to stating the resulting lack of quality.

In contrast, the employer group especially denounces workers’ bad quality, although not as a reproach as the trade unions do (as it sustains the lack of quality). For them, workers are the main agent whose concerns do not necessarily include improving quality. In this regard, workers’ quality is revealed in the voluntary initiatives and actions which they themselves put into practice to train and perform their job with full guarantees. The quality of the employment lessens to the extent to which these actions are delegated or insolvent. For this reason, the employer group talks about trainers as the especially necessary set of agents, but who, in turn, lack the necessary quality for their job of improving workers. Although employers think that training helps to infuse employment with quality, in actual fact its effects are not discernible, and it only affects the company as a burden (administrative paperwork, reorganisation of staff tasks, external audit of the company, etc.).

To sum up, both groups agree on the need to improve the agents involved in the quality of employment in Spain, although this improvement and its purpose is different for each group. For the trade unions, above all, the agents need to be regenerated, and this also includes regaining the responsibility they delegate, or avoid, as opposed to other agents who make an effort to maintain quality jobs. As already mentioned, this especially concerns the regeneration of unscrupulous employers and lazy and/or perverse workers (who betray workers’ interests), as well as society as a whole, which allows this to happen and

impassively watches the overall deterioration of the quality of employment. In the case of employers, this moralistic burden is omitted and replaced by the restoration which every salaried worker necessarily requires in market conditions. A restoration (called “*repair*” by the employer group to refer to training grants and subsidies for unemployed workers, thus demonstrating employers’ receptiveness to measures aimed at *flexicurity*) which implicitly highlights workers’ bad quality and the burden this places on the employer in terms of training and suitability of jobs. In other words, if workers cannot find a quality job, this is not due to there being none available or to employers refusing to paint them as such, but rather because this quality job has some requirements which the agents involved (workers, trainers and administrations) fail to meet, or meet unsatisfactorily.

3) The **contexts** the groups refer to when speaking about the quality of employment are mainly financial and business, although specific references are made to the cultural and social context of employers or workers from Spain (or other countries) due to their involvement in the job market and employment relationships in the companies, business sector or economy in the country (or countries worldwide).

The analysis of the contexts connected to the quality of employment involves job market referents which are internal and external, global and local, sectoral and intrasectoral, etc. With regard to time, these contexts are subject to the capitalist economic cycle of market expansion and contraction, prosperity and scarcity, “boom years” and “lean years”, etc. When both opinions meet they generate complex scenarios which can make it easier or more difficult to obtain the quality of employment. For example, for both groups the current scenario of worldwide recession is not at all conducive to quality. For the trade unionist, this is because supply in the job market is shrinking, and because there is a significant reserve of manpower which benefits companies’ financial interests. For employers, this is because competition in the market is intensifying, and increasing productivity has become their major concern and argument instead of the quality of the work offered. In any case, as was to be expected, as these situations or contexts are common, they have various interpretations and impacts.

As already mentioned, the trade unionists base their understanding of the quality of employment on an attribute with full value: only bad quality employment has no or not enough quality. In this respect, the major concerns in the union discourse focus on the decline in quality, and not on its growth, as expressed in the employer discourse. Different reactions are, therefore, observed in apparently identical contexts. For the union group, the various contexts commented on are perceived as a threat, as they could involve a decrease or deterioration in the quality of employment: “*when we sit down at the bargaining table, we have all this, European regulations which transfer... some directives to be transferred, and, at the same time they put pressure on you and say: ‘Watch out for China! Ok?’*” (UG).

Global scenarios, in which foreign companies offer cheaper and more affordable labour, the presence of business sectors in which working conditions are worse, migratory flows from economically depressed countries, etc., are contexts in which the evident risk of a reduction in the quality of employment is mentioned. However, this risk is not considered inevitable in all the scenarios. Especially in the case of unexpected and acquired contexts, such as the worldwide recession, a resigned attitude resulting from misfortune or a general change which affects everyone, but no one in particular, is quickly refocused and referred to other scenarios or previous contexts (in the near past) when the situation was not as equally unfavourable for all. This is the type of complaint made by the union group referring to those times when, for example, business owners lived off the fat of the land, but now tread cautiously, or when trade unions waive rights or claims in consideration of circumstances, but business owners do not respond in a similar fashion: “*where is the money from that boom in the construction sector,*

for example (...) where is it now?... when the sector needs a bit of propping up by the business owners... well what have we here (...) An extremely precarious situation.” (UG).

In these cases, quality of employment contexts not only take into account connections between scenarios, but also the requirement for these scenarios to provide us with a better understanding of the quality of employment. For example, a comparison between the European and the Spanish context highlights the difficulties and risks involved in maintaining standardised quality of employment based on regulations accepted by all the countries in the Union. For that reason, the group does not accept comparisons between the quality of employment in Spain and other countries in Europe which are far more advanced and aware of the subject (*“we talk about flexibility, but it isn’t the same.”* UG).

As far as trade unions are concerned, the quality of employment does not deteriorate in the same way (and with the same intensity) in those European countries as in Spain, which means that the standards or comparisons are actually more a problem of well-understood minimums than maximums or comparables to be attained. In this respect, the analysis of the latter could lead to the conclusion that this concerns a negative evaluation of the deterioration of quality rather than a positive one. This is the case of *flexicurity*, a feature of quality which cannot be evaluated by itself, since it depends on the contextual and instrumental use permitted in each country, and a certain business culture:

“Spanish employers are not like Scandinavians, nor the workers (...) In Spain it is going to be a disaster, because the Spanish employer is not as responsible as the Scandinavian one. And, therefore, naturally, if dismissal is easier for him, he is not going to make a tool out of it to turn his company into a competitive one with quality style and training.” (UG).

For the employer group, the contexts of quality change and are understood on the basis of the company’s needs, and the requirement to attain acceptable quality for the circumstances, conditions and time referred to. In contrast to the union group, past scenarios are not revisited or linked to talk about the quality of employment. Instead, the situations or contexts they most discuss are located in the most immediate present and future. As a result, their greatest problem comes from those circumstances in which the quality of employment and the performance of the business activity cannot happily coexist. Intersectoral relations, especially with the public sector (and also the large enterprise) become demarcations and problematic contexts because they serve as contextual referents of quality for the job market as a whole: *“In our company those who leave go to work for the Administration. Whoever doesn’t go to work for the Administration is stupid.”* (EG). The strong referent of public employment in Spain becomes part of the scenario for the employer discourse, in which the worker’s quality is blocked or hindered by expectations of productivity or training, which do not match the requirements of the market and the Spanish enterprise.

In short, contexts connected with free competition, and the availability of trained and competitive human resources are connected with the growth of the quality of employment in Spain. But for the same reason, given existing difficulties, specific scenarios of this type are not mentioned in the group. Instead, they highlight employers’ versatility in the multiplicity of contexts or adverse circumstances which directly or indirectly affect employment.

“A business owner is a bit like water, if you don’t give him a solution, he’ll find the hole he can escape through, because that’s why he’s a business owner. He takes risks, otherwise, with all due respect, he would be employed by a savings bank.” (EG).

As a result of the above, the contexts in which the quality of employment becomes evident are especially realistic and supposedly threatening for the union group, since the specific job market situation in Spain has not demonstrated anything other than the tendency to decrease the quality of employment as long as political, social and financial conditions have allowed this to happen. In contrast, for employers, the quality of employment appears in forecasts, in which the quality of employment plays a key role in the company's development and survival, and adverse contexts full of difficulties require some acceptance and imagination to be overcome. As a result, quality employment is hidden or buried under contexts preventing it from emerging.

Table 2: Compared assessments on the quality of employment

QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT	TRADE UNIONS	EMPLOYERS
<i>CONTENTS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diachronic product (with history): subject to past conditions. -Inconsistency and weakening (loss of qualities) of the employment product over time. -Inclusion of quality in the employment product so that it can be taken advantage of financially in the job market: subcontracting, exploitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Synchronous product (no history): subject to the conditions at the time. -Inconsistency and insufficiency (lack of qualities) of the employment product with its forecast over time. -Extraction of quality based on the employment product so that it can be assessed in the job market: adjustment between jobs and workers, competitiveness.
<i>AGENTS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good quality agents connected with actions that DO NOT REMOVE quality from employment. - Need to regenerate the quality of degenerate or corrupted agents. - Direct agents on whom the improvement of quality depends: trade unions and employers. -Inclusion and responsible involvement of new agents in the production of the quality of employment: consumers, immigrants, the media, administration, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good quality agents connected with actions that PROVIDE employment with quality. - Need to restore (repair) the quality of defective or damaged agents. - Direct agents on whom the improvement of quality depends: trainers and workers. - Responsible involvement of training in the various administrations and large enterprise.
<i>CONTEXTS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restoration of past and current (realistic) and threatening contexts for the quality of employment. - Singularisation of contextual effects for quality based on the various situations recognised and links between scenarios. - Rejection of standards or common frameworks on the basis of which qualities are compared and equated. - Regularisation of the quality of employment regardless of contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptation and planning of potential (imaginary) and adverse contexts for the quality of employment. - Standardisation of contextual effects for quality based on the market and free competition. - Rejection of contexts in which one certain quality of employment is referred to: public employment and the large enterprise. - Liberalisation and adaptation of the quality of employment to the possibility of diverse contexts.

5. DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL AGENTS ON THE QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT

A brief interpretation of the interests and conflicts in the discourse on the quality of employment in Spain is set forth below based on the discourses put forward and the issues analysed for each group.

Firstly, the subject of quality is a discursive production that is widely shared and used in various social, political and economic spheres. The particular characteristic of the discourse on the quality of employment is that it is a product, which, in turn, creates other products that

can supposedly be evaluated from a quality point of view. The quality of the product or service provided is completely different from the quality of the employment capable of producing that product or service. It is obvious that the latter quality encompasses and says far more than the former. However, the important aspect is that it immediately connects and weakens product and employment, as if both terms actually meant the same and were reversible.

If quality (of employment or any other product) links the first stage, production, with the final stage, consumption, and makes them equal, it is because the discourse of quality is an add-on in the change from the capitalism of production to the capitalism of consumption, in which clientelism and user satisfaction is the return the product and its (financial, political or social) sale obtain in the market.

The protection and extensive exploitation of national markets has shifted to the intensive exploitation and global opening of the world market, and, in the case of employment and the job market, the transformation process has not been very different (Alonso, 2005). After the current neoliberal policies and the consolidation of a capitalist consumption-based economy, the deregulation of the job market has continued, and it has been customerized to the point of altering union interests and strategies.

Having said this, the discourse of the quality of employment, and of quality in general, can be interpreted as an effect of the profound transformations that have occurred in western capitalist economies. In this context, the traditional evaluation (and devaluation) of processes and resources changes to an evaluation of diverse products or results, and they are evaluated by some qualities or standards which reflect users' or consumers' acceptance and satisfaction. In this respect, evaluation becomes more distant, and, therefore, there is more objectivity and neutrality in the quality discourse. Reducing and simplifying the resources and processes to a final specific result, as well as making use of external competent arbitration, are central issues on which the entire quality discourse is currently based.

With regard to employment in Spain, the quality discourse uncovers some relevant issues implicit in the previous paragraphs which are explored below (Table 3). Firstly, in the union discourse, it appears that trade unions' involvement in employment management, is diminishing, and, above all, that they are powerless in a liberalising context which favours the employer class and new emerging markets (more competitive, fragmented and diversified, etc.). Speaking about the quality of employment in Spain involves centring the discourse around the need to maintain (not lose) existing quality, which, as far as trade unions are concerned, is also a responsibility which is especially difficult to assume in the current recession and with a certain employer culture that is not very receptive or reluctant to include the loss of good jobs among their main concerns.

The consequence of this initial approach is to be able to combine the protection of quality with its restoration. On the one hand, the union discourse understands that its role is to prevent existing quality from being further reduced (especially in those sectors more punished by precariousness, low salaries, lack of protection, etc.). But, on the other, it also tries to regenerate employment where this has deteriorated. These objectives, completely absorbed into the union discourse, contradict a powerless union practice that is reduced to evaluating and certifying the (bad) quality of existing employment.

Trade unions come up against difficulties and contradictions in the bargaining and creation process of quality employment in Spain. These include a reassessment of quality used for *certifying* purposes in terms of *control* of the conditions in which the jobs take place and adapting them to various standards of living by means of *tests*.

On the one hand, the discourse of the quality of employment distances trade unions from employment problems, but, on the other, it is how they justify their powerlessness and lack of real resources to solve them. This “exclusion” from the sphere of employment management also involves blaming all the agents who directly or indirectly form part of the process which generates employment without quality, and which to a large extent justifies and explains the trade unions’ loss of importance and influence compared with employers’ actions. Employers, workers, administrations and citizens in general contribute in various ways to creating and sustaining low-quality employment in Spain, thus increasing the radius of action of the job market and union claims in companies.

This discursive line, which is very close rhetorically to the conservation discourse, is aware of the difficulties trade unions currently have. The issue of informing the general public and making them responsible presupposes, on the one hand, connecting union action with raising the awareness of all the agents who take part in the deterioration and/or overall restoration of the quality of employment, and, at the same time, it describes a more complex and broad scenario demonstrating the effects of the various interactions that come into play in the improvement of employment.

On the other hand, it links the idea of quality with the *ideal of a quality job* (a type or model of desirable but real quality employment) which tries to adapt to (identify with) the supposed expectations of society as a whole and current legal requirements. In this respect, and unlike the employer discourse, which refers to an *ideal* and unattainable type of quality, the union employment quality model tries to be consistent and realistic as it follows a specific referent connected with other social discourses (the conquest of certain social rights, the standard of living attained by society, the defence of democratic principles, etc.).

As a whole, the quality of employment discourse is for trade unions a bridge or outlet for a supposedly union position that is blocked and/or burdened by market globalisation, the absence of regulating policies, difficulties for members, etc. At the same time, this outlet is the way in for new discourses to connect and combine, and, even though they are not strictly speaking union discourses, they can adapt and manage to play an important role in configuring a more sensitive unionism (more commercial or *sellable* with regard to quality) adjusted to the increasing segmentation of the job market and employment relationships. This outlet and inlet is more pressing as the Spanish situation is perceived as worse than in other countries or regions in the world. The quality discourse, therefore, contains the need for trade unions to adapt to the new prevailing reality (constant loss of the quality of employment and the lack of a more convincing union response) and the new competences these should acquire to address more global actions consistent with the current job market.

In this respect, the discourse which the group of union representatives has generated can be interpreted as a last resort (a salutary lesson capable of promoting criticisms and the abandonment of sterile union positions), or as a promising support to value the job market and employment from a more social and comprehensive point of view. In any event, this interpretation is very different from the one attributed to employers, whose discourse on quality starts by testing the central role they have in employment management and their particular opinion.

If the union discourse is receptive and resents no longer being present in the management of quality employment (demonstrating an inability to deal with the various difficulties standing in its way), the Spanish employer discourse is at first unwilling and evasive, since it cannot deny the bad quality and direct references (especially in the union discourse) to their responsibility

as the producer of low-quality jobs. In this respect, the purpose of the quality discourse is mainly defensive for Spanish employers in which they:

- Deny their management role, disassociating themselves from the centre of the actions and/or decisions that have implicitly or explicitly resulted in a situation of bad quality in employment.

“I think there needs to be a campaign to make workers aware that, regardless of whether the company sends them on courses or not, training is their backpack, their curriculum vitae, their assets, not the employer’s assets, but the worker’s assets. (...) They are the ones who need to improve.” (EG).

- Justify the refusal to raise the quality of employment at the same time as they relate that refusal to the importance productivity has in a financial and social context that is increasingly competitive and globalised.

With regard to the first point, the quality discourse makes it possible for employers to replace and externalise their employment producing (management) role by a certifying function on the basis of which they issue judgements on the quality required for a specific job. The evaluating role leads them to establish their discourse around the training required to perform the jobs, and the latter’s adjustment to the level of training workers in Spain have.

As far as employers are concerned, employment can be quality in reference to the training the employer considers necessary to perform the job correctly. In this respect, it could be said that employers have no objections to promoting quality employment, and that their aim is to promote this type of employment, since this is what supposed productivity and adaptation to an increasingly competitive and demanding global market depend on.

According to the employers, the training quality of workers in Spain in no way seems to meet the quality employment training standards required by the Spanish market, which highlights a deficiency employers do not see themselves as responsible for, except to the extent to which they accredit (objectively certify) the corresponding unsuitability and its effects (defects) on the country’s and the company’s economy.

Furthermore, the possibility of viewing employment management in terms of evaluation and matching it to workers’ training allows employers to justify the prevailing situation and maintain it until the training deficiencies are overcome. Obviously, the reasons are connected with the need to consolidate workers’ training, but also with the assumption that training, and the fact that it has not adapted to quality jobs, must be the stimulus to obtain them. That is why employers’ quality discourse directly attacks the public sector and government-owned corporations, as a reaction to business activity that not only serves as an inappropriate referent for all workers, but which also ignores this stimulus and its benefits to incentivise productivity, and, therefore, competition in the market.

Obviously, the symptomatic side of employers’ quality discourse is that it leads to a paradoxical *acceptable situation* of permanent dissatisfaction with the existing quality of employment and workers’ level of training. In other words, for employers, quality can improve (grow) compared with an *ideal* referent which combines an indefinite number of necessary qualities to do a good job, and which cannot be specified or established as definitive since they depend on the market and on the increasing productivity every economic company pursues. Furthermore, a worker’s training quality cannot nor should it be close to employers’ ideal, because the latter would lose the guarantee of productivity deposited in deficient and/or inappropriate job market training.

Government-owned corporations, whose hiring process includes an objective test which must be passed to become a public sector employee, proves the possible correspondence between a certain ideal quality of employment, and subsequent worker training and capacity. The employer discourse sees a risk of non-productivity in this correspondence, since if the worker finds a quality job, there is no objective reason to continue encouraging him.

Behind this apparent *failing* in workers’ training and capacities, promoted and sustained in turn by an unattainable ideal of quality, is the incentive stimulating and supporting the search for more productivity and better employment, which leaves a trail of bad jobs and declining situations in its wake, and demonstrates, once and for all, the lack of competitiveness in the job market in Spain.

In this respect, it is not contradictory that the objective of the employer discourse on quality is to increase this quality whilst simultaneously alienating and destroying it. Given that the quality of employment is a demand for productivity in the employer discourse, the immediate consequence is that bad quality can be justified as a desirable starting point to achieve good jobs and reform the workers and institutions which regulate the market.

In short, the quality of employment discourse in Spain does not ignore its importance and its influence on the economy, and on society as a whole. Based on this broadly shared point, the trade unions use the quality discourse as a reason to examine and reconstruct their current role, extending their main concerns and paradigms from those which defend workers’ interests to those which consolidate their criticism of a reprehensible Spanish employer class. For this reason, quality is expressed in the union discourse in exclusive terms of loss and not of gain, as it is in the employer discourse, which is used by employers for mainly production purposes aimed at maintaining their privileged position in the management of employment, and for improving the image they portray to society.

Table 3. Discursive features of the quality of employment in Spain

TRADE UNIONS	EMPLOYERS
Blaming / conservation discourse	Defensive / economic discourse
Aimed at denouncing and claiming the lost quality of employment	Aimed at justifying the situation of the lack of quality of employment and promoting its improvement
Realistic discourse: centred on an <i>ideal</i> of employment <i>quality</i>	Fictitious discourse: centred on an <i>ideal quality</i> of employment
With universal scope, referring to all of society and rights attained	With local scope, referring to the company itself and the rules of the free market

6. CONCLUSION: QUALITY AND QUALITIES OF EMPLOYMENT

The use of the term quality to refer to employment has placed a series of new ideas and very important transformations on the table. Employment has become yet another market product whose value will be determined by the demand seeking and consuming this employment, i.e. the job market is analysed by a strict clientelist viewpoint. Furthermore, adopting the *quality form* to address the job market and its management has profound political, social and economic implications. This is quite a change, which originates with the post-Fordist model and the emergence of quality, or, to be more precise, *qualities*.

In the previous Fordist system, production process control aimed to minimise the risks of causing occupational diseases and accidents, job losses, etc. Consequently, the quality of employment (as an absolute) was connected with *working conditions* and *employment conditions*, guaranteed by a welfare state whose purpose was to generate *security*. In contrast, in the post-Fordist context, the increasingly deregulated markets (whether job markets or not) will need to be given *confidence* to decrease *uncertainty*, by resorting to the “quality guarantee” provided by the various agencies responsible for supervising the quality processes (meta-quality) by means of an external, standardised and objective evaluation. These agencies order reality (employment) into several levels and degrees of quality (*qualities*), but of the process rather than of the product, valued in the only way possible, by customer satisfaction.

For employers, the clientelist viewpoint means that the entire job market is potentially a customer of the jobs offered, and its aim is to mobilise the workforce as far as possible and independently of the market’s limitations and structural determinants (training, skills, availability, etc.). Market expansion and intensification are two objectives employers attain using quality as a mechanism of job market segmentation and diversification, and suitably tailoring the adjustment between supply and demand: different employment qualities apply to workers’ varying level of training.

Trade unions respond to this extensive and intensive exploitation of the markets by rejecting the diversification and growing segmentation of the quality of employment, since they understand that this deteriorates jobs in general. They become substitutes or imitations of the employment product in absolute terms. Consequently, the union discourse aims to *restore* lost jobs with the use of quality, trying to cancel out the increasing deterioration and reduction of the product. It is, therefore, not strange that the union discourse is linked with the conservation discourse, not only because they share common ground in seeking to return to the origin (natural world), to the original jobs without any cutbacks, but also because the quality of employment affects workers, as well as other product or service consumers. A low-quality job results in low-quality service, and the general public, present in both the conservation and union discourses, has become involved in an attempt to *make society take responsibility*.

The claim for a job with rights (decent work⁹) is the idea of employment which trade unions are trying to revive. A decent job that *can be lived on*, i.e. it satisfies the worker’s socially conditioned *requirements* which are met by the need for a job with certain quality requisites or dimensions. As far as employers are concerned, they will include these dimensions to suitably stimulate demand for jobs, and, as occurs with other products, this demand needs to be kept permanently unsatisfied.

In the union discourse, stability, salary, work and family life balance, training and health are the most relevant dimensions for valuing the quality of employment. Attaining a positive rating in all of them is only possible because there is a framework of rights, which

⁹ There has been a great deal of discussion about how close the strategic plan of *decent work* of the ILO (1999) is to *quality in employment* of the EEA (COM, 2001). Some analyses have purported to seeing some similarity between both programmes (Rubery and Grimsahw, 2001; Barbier and Schylla, 2004). For others, however, there is a huge gap between both approaches (Prieto et al., 2009). In this paper, we maintain that the union approach to quality would be close to the idea of decent work, and, therefore, far removed from the employer and European Commission approach.

presupposes an implicit sixth dimension of quality, which is employment with rights. The dimensions mentioned cannot be renounced, and all of them must occur simultaneously to recognise that a job has quality. A stable job, but which is not enough to live on, because another job is needed, does not make it possible to be independent or to form a family, nor is it a quality job. A good salary, but only for a certain period of time, *is not enough to live on* either. If a worker has all the above, but no work and family life balance, and he is forced to choose between his professional and personal life, or if no training is allowed in the job to ensure the required stability, salary, etc., then it is not a quality job either.

In contrast to the *quality* referred to by trade unions, employers talk about *qualities*. This is the case because for the former, the dimensions allow no room for reductions, the concept of quality is absolute (there is or there is not quality), whilst for the employers, the dimensions allow for gradients. Security, yes, but there are *many securities*, diverse salaries, different training levels, etc.

As far as employers are concerned, the system of dimensions which quality represents for them does not match the system of dimensions which decent work includes for trade unions, because this would mean that the motivation the employer class gives to the various qualities of employment would disappear. Nevertheless, the fact that they do not match does not mean that there are no connections between them. As mentioned above, the employers' system of quality dimensions takes the union system as a reference, since, following on from the clientelist logic, the product offered must meet the expectations of the potential demand.

Out of all the dimensions of a quality job, training awakens a special interest in employers because it allows them to structure and justify the segmentation of employment qualities and the corresponding allocation of available jobs. This route also dilutes any conflict between employers and workers, as everyone can have a job, but the quality will be very varied. However, regardless of the level of training, trade unions believe that workers should be able to *restore* the decency and absolutes (no reductions or gradients) of their job, i.e. have decent work. Nevertheless, this job runs the risk of being repossessed by the employer discourse, if this has not already occurred, as another side to the increasing segmentation of the qualities the market displays: as a high-quality employment product unattainable for the vast majority of the market.

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