



**Future Skills Centre**  
**Centre des Compétences futures**

FEBRUARY 2023

# QUALITY OF WORK

Literature Review



**purpose**



The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

Purpose Co is a strategy, solution design and capacity-building firm specialized in designing and implementing workforce solutions that advance sustainable outcomes for people and businesses. Purpose Co works with partners to co-design solutions and build the capacity of workforce systems to address the specific needs of job seekers, workers, employers and practitioners with a focus on increasing equity, inclusion and economic prosperity.

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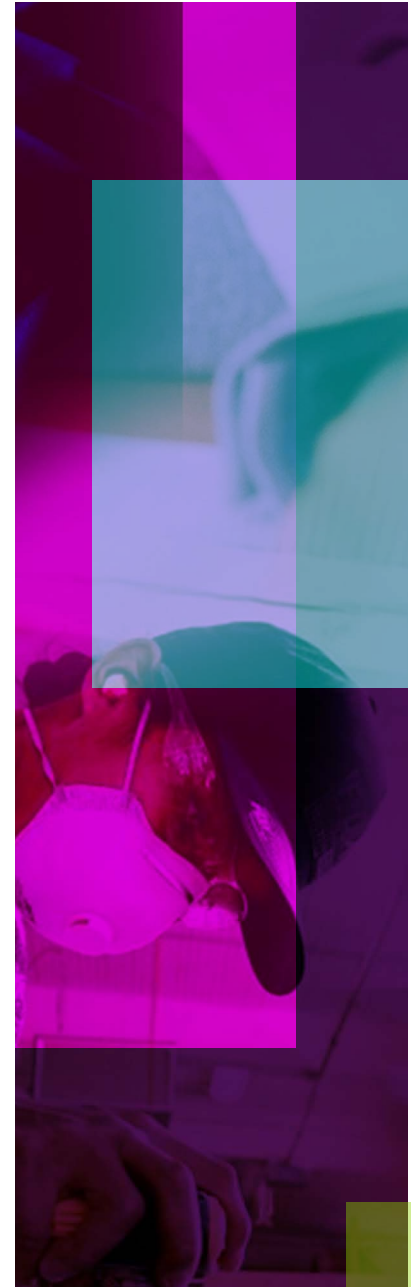
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## Key takeaways

We're exploring in depth the concept of Quality of Work. This literature review is the first in a series of reports on the topic. Here are some highlights:

- No single, accepted definition exists for Quality of Work.
- Quality of Work is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing the various factors that impact the overall well-being of employees
- The concept can cover many aspects of employee well-being, including finding voice, purpose and connection with work, opportunities for advancement and access to training, safe and supportive work environments, job security, in addition to a living wage, healthcare benefits, and secure and predictable work hours.
- Workforce development programs and stakeholders can raise the standard and bolster Quality of Work by supporting fair labour practices and safe work environments.
- Quality of work is an important driver of labour force participation, worker motivation and engagement, productivity and retention. Therefore, quality of work should be a priority not just for policy but also for education, training, workforce intermediaries and leaders in business, community, and economic development.

This report explores the concept by reviewing research, definitions, frameworks and indexes to and by presenting case studies from various organizations and a consolidated summary.

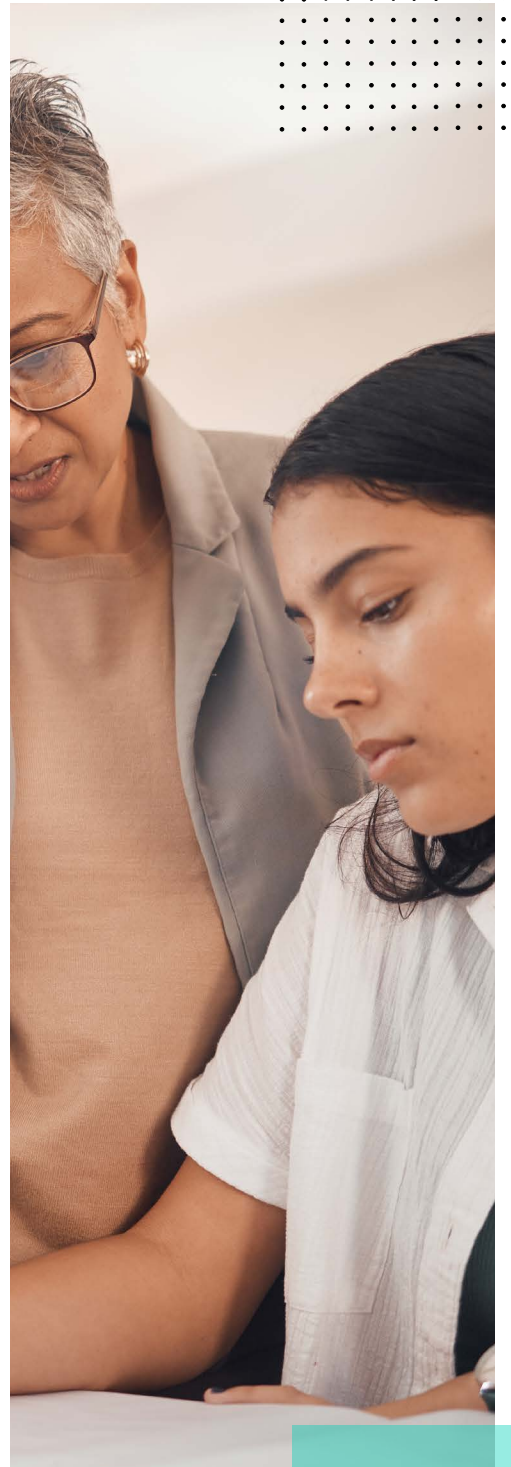




# Introduction

The relationship between well-functioning economies and communities is important to stakeholders at the global, national, local, and individual levels. Traditionally, conversations have focused on standardized economic indicators such as GDP and employment rates that measure the size of the economy and the participation of the workforce. Within the traditional economic paradigm, the majority of the focus has been on job creation and employment participation, rather than the quality of work. However, essential to an analysis of how well a society is doing with respect to jobs and the economy is the question of how work is impacting the quality of individuals' lives and their economic and social well-being. Studies show that quality work that includes sufficient levels of earnings, labour market security, and a positive working environment is strongly related to an individual's quality of life and is an important driver of economic growth and performance.<sup>1</sup> Similar to many countries, the Canadian economy is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and adapting to the shared challenges and opportunities related to evolving skill needs, transitioning work arrangements, and changing labour force demographics.

While the Canadian labour market has signalled a healthy recovery from the initial impacts of the pandemic, many sectors and employers continue to struggle with labour shortages. According to Statistics Canada, in March of 2022, job vacancies increased by more than one-third in accommodation and food services and retail trade.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the Canadian Survey on Business Conditions conducted in the second quarter of 2022 highlighted that two-fifths of employers identified recruiting skilled workers as a constant challenge.<sup>3</sup> A quarter identified retaining skilled workers as a major obstacle. These challenges were more pronounced for employers in accommodation and food services, construction, and manufacturing. In the United States, the effects of the pandemic and the ongoing labour shortage resulted in rapid nominal wage growth. Workers' hourly pay increased by 4.8% over the past year in 2021. The most significant increases were seen in traditionally low-paying jobs in the retail, hospitality, and transportation sectors.<sup>4</sup> The notion of jobs has long been tied to wages, but characteristics of quality work go far beyond wages and financial compensation. Factors such as health and supplemental benefits (paid vacation/sick pay, retirement savings, etc.), workplace safety, flexible scheduling, skills development, advancement and growth opportunities, and worker autonomy directly impact retention and worker satisfaction. More recently, organizations that advocate for quality of work (referred to as job quality) as part of poverty reduction



# Quality work can be transformative for individuals and their families in raising their living standards, improving workplace productivity, and promoting social inclusion

and inclusive workforce and economic development strategies have placed greater importance on the role of worker voice, or the ability of workers to have their needs heard by their employer, and ultimately have an impact on decisions pertaining to their work and the organization.<sup>5</sup> Both in the global and Canadian context, labour market data indicates that youth and marginalized groups (including racialized workers, newcomers, women, and people with disabilities) continue to be overrepresented in roles and industries that often feature low and stagnant wages, unpredictable schedules, poor working conditions, and lacking basic health and medical benefits.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Quality work can be transformative for individuals and their families in raising their living standards, improving workplace productivity, and promoting social inclusion.<sup>9</sup> However, not all jobs are created equal. Part-time work and newer work arrangements such as gig contracts might facilitate better work-life balance for some but can exclude or disadvantage those who require greater security, consistent earnings, and access to the health and supplemental benefits that most contract gig work lacks. While many workforce development programs focus on building skills and connecting workers to in-demand jobs, many systemic problems remain with the types of jobs in the market and the conditions of people disproportionately affected by low-quality work. Although wages in many traditionally low-paying roles have increased over the last two years, largely due to labour shortages and rising

costs of living, there remains a shortage of quality worker opportunities, which impacts the most marginalized workers.<sup>10,11</sup> Workforce development actors have a unique opportunity to play a strategic role in collaborating with employers and policymakers to enhance quality work. Even though traditional, demand-driven workforce programs that target and prioritize good quality jobs to build pathways for low-income and marginalized people play a critical role in addressing many existing labour market inequalities, they do not address or impact the prevalence of low-quality work. Less explored are the strategies and approaches workforce intermediaries can undertake to raise the floor on low-quality work. The dialogue around quality of work within workforce development is crucial to aid our understanding and plan for appropriate actions needed to enable and facilitate change and support economic and social well-being through work. This literature review aims to develop a shared understanding of quality of work factors and how workforce development actors can play a more active role in advancing the quality of work. To facilitate this, the report includes the following components:

- A review of what constitutes Quality of work based on existing research and definitions
- A consolidated framework that describes the multi-dimensional factors that contribute to quality work
- Examples of case studies to advance quality of work in the context of workforce development



# Methodology

This literature review includes a synthesis of definitions, frameworks, and case study examples from academia, workforce funders, and other institutions involved in social policy, workforce, and economic development. In addition to searching online sources and research databases for articles on quality of work and associated key terms, the content was selectively sourced from prominent actors involved in advocating for quality of work. The definitions and frameworks used in this report highlight the existing research on the topic and attempt to aggregate content from multiple sources to present a more comprehensive picture of the quality of work and its characteristics. The final part of the review involved reviewing ongoing programs and initiatives promoting quality of work to present summarized case studies that highlight the initiative’s objective, stakeholders, characteristics, and outcomes.

# Understanding quality of work

There has been a renewed interest in research and policy that focuses on quality of work to address economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and stable employment. Canada’s 2022 budget stresses the importance of ‘good jobs’ and proposes investments in social support systems (e.g., childcare, workers benefit, employment insurance sickness benefits) and education and training connections, and raises in the minimum wage and mandatory sick leaves.<sup>12</sup> It is a timely issue linked to the individual, family, business, and national well-being. Many organizations have attempted to define and operationalize what constitutes quality of work. As a result, there are many terms, such as quality of work, job quality, decent work, meaningful jobs, quality of working life, and fair work, that cover a variety of factors and approaches. There is no consensus on a quality of work definition, and many of the terms identified above are often used interchangeably, and in many cases, there is significant overlap in how they are defined and understood. As outlined in the chart below, all of the definitions explored go beyond wages and include factors such as social environments, flexibility, skill development, safety and inclusion as defining characteristics of quality work. As noted earlier, quality of work can generate increased worker satisfaction, improve work productivity, and promote economic mobility and social inclusion on a community level. On the other hand, poor quality work is associated with poverty, health risks, high turnover, and even withdrawal from the labour market.<sup>13</sup>

The dialogue around quality of work within workforce development is crucial to aid our understanding and plan for appropriate actions needed to enable and facilitate change and support economic and social well-being through work.



**TABLE 1.**

<b>Definitions of quality of work and associated terms</b>	
<b>Source</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Aspen Institute</b>	A quality job means one’s work is valued and respected and meaningfully contributes to the goals of the organization. It encompasses having a voice in one’s workplace and the opportunity to shape one’s work life, as well as having accessible opportunities to learn and grow. Quality work affords an individual the opportunity to save, to build the security and confidence that allows one to plan for the future, and to participate in the life of and see oneself as a valued member of a community.
<b>California Workforce Development Board</b>	Quality jobs provide family-sustaining wages, health benefits, a pension, worker advancement opportunities, and collective worker input and are stable, predictable, safe and free of discrimination. Quality jobs have the potential to transform workers’ lives and create resilient, thriving firms and communities and a more just and equitable economy.
<b>Good Jobs Institute</b>	A good job needs to meet people’s basic needs and offer conditions for engagement and motivation.
<b>International Labour Organization (ILO)</b>	Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.
<b>Brooking’s Institution</b>	Brooking’s Institution classifies quality work under the social indicator of the ESG <sup>14</sup> framework and highlights the following major indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job Quality - Ability to earn a living wage and healthcare benefits</li> <li>• Economic Mobility – High rates of retention and both internal and external promotion</li> <li>• Job Equity – Racial and gender equity in job transitions and at the top of the ladder</li> </ul>
<b>U.S. Department of Commerce</b>	High-Quality Jobs: All members of the workforce are respected and valued as important to an organization’s success. The organization’s policies, practices, and environment ensure high levels of well-being, compensation, empowerment, and growth. Leaders create systems to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace.



There are some sources that go beyond the definition and describe quality of work in terms of disaggregated indicators or dimensions. As noted in the language used in the definitions above, the key factors that influence or define the quality of work have remained relatively consistent over the years. However, different actors frame quality of work to align with their respective mandates and goals. For example, the California Workforce Development Board, which aims to enable upward mobility, refers to quality jobs as having the potential to transform lives and create a just and equitable economy. Comparatively, ILO, which has a mission to promote social justice and has developed internationally recognized human and labour rights and standards, highlights the presence of fair income and freedom of people to express their concerns and organize and participate in decision-making. Despite variation in terms and context, it is evident that quality of work encompasses a wide range of factors beyond monetary compensation that are increasingly recognized as essential to the well-being of individuals, firms, communities and economies.

While research in the Canadian context on the topic is limited, a study<sup>15</sup> from the Canadian Labour Congress and Queen’s University in 1998 took early steps to define the dimensions that influence the quality of work or work quality. The report highlighted that while “good work” is defined mainly by pay levels, other dimensions of the work may be more critical from the workers’ perspective. The report stated that prospects for promotion and learning are particularly important to younger workers. Furthermore, employees may prefer lower-paid work over higher-paid work if it provides greater security, more acceptable hours, and better working conditions.

Quoting research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Measures of Job Satisfaction: What Makes a Good Job*<sup>16</sup>, the study noted that:

- *Job security, having an interesting job, opportunities for advancement and being allowed to work independently* ranked well ahead of high pay.
- *Non-monetary characteristics of work* were twice as important as earnings.
- *Access to training, low risk of job loss, and work characteristics* (e.g. non-repetitiveness and autonomy) rank particularly highly and in that order.

An analysis of multiple quality of work definitions and frameworks by Statistics Canada<sup>17</sup>, the Brookings Institution<sup>18</sup>, Eurofound<sup>19</sup>, OECD<sup>20</sup>, National Fund for Workforce Solutions<sup>21</sup>, Urban Institute’s Review Guide of Definitions and Evidence<sup>22</sup>, Gallup<sup>23</sup>, and Aspen Institute<sup>24</sup> examined for this review strengthens and reaffirms these concepts. The factors contributing to the quality of work described further below are not just rooted in academia but also validated by real-world research. A survey of more than 6,600 workers in the U.S conducted by Gallup<sup>25</sup> affirmed that factors such as income and employment benefits, career advancement opportunities, control over their working lives, and job security are important to workers. There are many additional surveys at global, national, and regional levels that offer similar conclusions.<sup>26</sup>

Across all the sources examined, it is consistently recognized that quality of work is a multi-dimensional



concept. As illustrated in the definitions above, even though there are commonalities, there is also variance in how different organizations define and categorize the dimensions of quality of work. So far, no one framework captures all the elements of quality work. It is also common for the relevance and importance of different dimensions to reflect their environment. For example, near the start of the pandemic, Statistics Canada, in early 2020, noted uncertainty in hours, lack of paid sick leave, and lack of autonomy and control in their jobs were the major themes impacting the quality of work. Additionally, according to the Survey on Employment and Skills in 2020<sup>27</sup>, there was a widespread jump in concerns about job security for themselves or family members. The survey also indicated a decline in the perceptions of mental health among all major racial identity groups.

## Quality of work frameworks

Indicators of quality of work fall into two broad categories- objective and subjective.<sup>28</sup> The subjective approach focuses on the extent to which work meets the individual's preferences. On the other hand, the objective approach looks at the objective, generalizable features of work that impact individual well-being, such as wage levels. To capture the multi-dimensional nature of quality of work, this review attempts to bring together both objective and subjective indicators of quality work from multiple sources into a singular framework.

Brookings Institution, for example, classifies quality work under the social indicator of the ESG framework and highlights the following major indicators:

- **Job Quality** - Ability to earn a living wage and healthcare benefits
- **Economic Mobility** – High rates of retention and both internal and external promotion
- **Job Equity** – Racial and gender equity in job transitions and at the top of the ladder

Additionally, studies from Statistics Canada<sup>29</sup> and Great Place to Work<sup>30</sup> highlight factors such as predictable pay, predictable hours, autonomy and control, trust, and physiological safety as contributing to the quality of work. The table below highlights additional examples of quality of work frameworks from multiple sources.



**TABLE 2.**

<b>Examples of Quality of Work Frameworks</b>					
	<b>Pay, benefits, and other rewards</b>	<b>Skills, prospects, and employment security</b>	<b>Work characteristics and conditions</b>	<b>Safety, representation, voice, environment, and rights</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>UNECE, 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income and benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills development and training</li> <li>Employment security and social protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working hours</li> <li>Balancing work and non-work life</li> <li>Workplace conditions and motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safety and ethics</li> </ul>	
<b>EC Laeken Job Quality Index, 2001</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lifelong learning and career development</li> <li>Flexibility and security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work organization and work-life balance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and safety at work</li> <li>Diversity and non-discrimination</li> <li>Social dialogue and workers' involvement</li> <li>Gender equality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intrinsic job quality</li> <li>Overall economic performance and productivity</li> <li>Inclusion and access to the labour market</li> </ul>
<b>ILO, 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate earnings and productive work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment opportunities</li> <li>Stability and security of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unacceptable work</li> <li>Decent hours</li> <li>Combining work and family life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fair treatment in employment</li> <li>Safe work environment</li> <li>Social protection</li> <li>Social dialogue and workplace relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic and social context of decent work</li> </ul>
<b>Eurofound, 2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Earnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills and discretion</li> <li>Prospects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work intensity</li> <li>Working time quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social environment</li> <li>Physical environment</li> </ul>	
<b>Canadian Labour Congress, 1989</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pay</li> <li>Benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hours of work</li> <li>Schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human/Social/Work environment</li> <li>Physical well-being</li> </ul>	

## Examples of Quality of Work Frameworks

	Pay, benefits, and other rewards	Skills, prospects, and employment security	Work characteristics and conditions	Safety, representation, voice, environment, and rights	Other
<b>Statistics Canada, 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income and benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills and discretion</li> <li>Prospects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work intensity</li> <li>Working-time quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social environment</li> </ul>	
<b>Urban Institute's Review Guide, 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pay</li> <li>Benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-the-job skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business culture and job design</li> </ul>	
<b>Gallup, 2022</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of pay</li> <li>Stable and predictable pay</li> <li>Employee benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career advancement opportunities</li> <li>Job Security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stable and predictable hours</li> <li>Control over hours/location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoying day-to-day</li> <li>Sense of purpose and dignity</li> <li>Power to change things</li> </ul>	

Source: OECD<sup>31</sup>, Gallup<sup>32</sup>, Statistics Canada<sup>33</sup>, Eurofound<sup>34</sup>, Urban Institute's Review Guide of Definitions and Evidence<sup>35</sup>

The proposed framework included in this report, thus, has been designed to capture key factors from multiple quality of work frameworks presented in Table 2, and some additional ones such as the Brookings Institution<sup>36</sup>, National Fund for Workforce Solutions<sup>37</sup>, Urban Institute's Review Guide of Definitions and Evidence<sup>38</sup>. The various quality of work frameworks used by different actors do not exclusively cover all properties of work and individual well-being. For example, some look at labour market conditions, such as inclusion and access to the labour market, and some even look at organizational contexts, such as gender equality. Since quality of work is defined around work-related experiences and well-being from the perspective of an individual, this review excludes extraneous characteristics and prioritizes shared themes across different frameworks. The resulting consolidated framework identifies six themes for quality of work: income and benefits; skills and prospects; working conditions; safety and rights; and social environment.





**TABLE 3.**

<b>Quality of Work Themes</b>	
Main Themes	Definition
Income and benefits	<p>The primary element of quality work is compensation. A good compensation level is sufficient to cover basic living expenses, (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, recreation etc.) is stable and predictable, and provides opportunities to build wealth/assets.</p> <p>Benefits include compensation available to employees as part of their earnings package and enable a healthy and stable life. Key examples are health insurance, paid sick and vacation time, family/medical leave, an adequate retirement savings plan, disability insurance, life insurance, and educational assistance.</p>
Skills and prospects	<p>Skills encompass learning and development opportunities often tied to personal or professional growth. Examples are general skill development and avenues for training geared toward the job or leadership development, promotion, and advancement. Tied to this is the concept of prospects, which can be defined as the potential for future continuity in a job and the possibility of career progression.</p>
Working conditions	<p>Working conditions entail non-economic aspects of jobs, including the nature and content of the work performed, and working time-arrangement elements such as scheduling, breaks, and flexibility. Additionally, critical to this component are factors such as having adequate resources and support to ensure success in the working environment and having input into decision-making.</p>
Safety and rights	<p>Essential to the work environment is ensuring workers have the right to a healthy and safe working environment with preventative measures to protect them from injury and harm. This theme also includes psychological safety or having an environment that is inclusive, free from discrimination and harassment, and welcoming of workers' concerns and ideas for improvement. Additionally, a core tenet of rights is the right to representation, so workers may negotiate terms of their employment through representation.</p>
Social environment	<p>Social environment and culture refer to aspects of the interaction between workers and the workplace that set the tone for how work is accomplished, how the organization operates, and how people engage with their work and working environment.</p>

The framework presented below in Table 4 also makes it easy to define and understand the different objective and subjective indicators that constitute quality of work. Including objective and subjective indicators is more nuanced than frameworks that prefer one or the other since a consideration of both perspectives accurately reflects worker experiences and reality. Knox et al. (2015) developed a descriptive classification proposing that a view of work that is objectively and subjectively good can be categorized as ‘fulfilling good work,’ and that which is subjectively lacking but objectively good can be categorized as ‘unfulfilling good work.’<sup>39</sup> Supporting evidence from published literature is provided next to each sub-component in the consolidated quality of work framework to highlight the relevance and connections of individual sub-components to individual well-being. In addition to being a reference point for understanding what constitutes quality of work, it can be used to identify the factors relevant in different workforce development contexts.

While the framework can be an important tool to support strategy and planning, some limitations and challenges still exist. It can often be challenging to pinpoint whether quality of work should be assessed by considering all of its sub-components or whether specific dimensions or needs should be prioritized. Furthermore, it can be difficult to assign weight or importance to different sub-components. For example, the value and meaning of worker voice and autonomy can be dynamic and may change with time and context. The primary limitation of the framework is that it cannot be used as a measurement tool. While measuring objective aspects such as wages and benefits is easy, other elements like autonomy and worker voice are not as discrete. Different institutions have made efforts to develop quality of work indexes (e.g., European Trade Union Institute job quality index, European Union (EU) employment committee index) that measure the quality of work, but further work needs to be done to create an operational framework that is comprehensive and can apply to multiple contexts and be used flexibly.



**TABLE 4.**

Quality of Work Framework		
Main Theme	Sub-Components	Description
Income and benefits	Hourly wage / Level of pay	Work provides predictable and a liveable wage
	Benefits	Work offers a range of social supports that increase economic security, improve health, and promote work-life balance among workers (e.g., medical benefits, paid vacation, voluntary and involuntary leaves, retirement plans, disability insurance)
	Wealth-building opportunities	Enable workers to build the assets they need to manage emergencies and achieve long-term financial security (e.g., profit-sharing, savings plan, financial literacy, loan and credit building opportunities, housing and mortgage contributions)
Skills and prospects	Training	Opportunities for formal or informal training or gaining work experience to develop knowledge, skills, and advance their careers
	Job security and stability	Secure job and with a low probability of job loss
	Career prospects	Opportunities for learning and career advancement
Working conditions	Work intensity	Workload is often manageable within working hours
	Work schedule and hours	Work schedule is reliable and there are predictable working hours
	Work flexibility	The ability to influence work hours and manage personal matters if needed
	Managerial support	Support and input from managers on work-related tasks, performance, and training and advancement opportunities
	Resources	Having adequate equipment and facilities to carry out work-related activities
	Worker voice and autonomy	Opportunities to change or influence aspects of the job and provide input into work-related decision-making
Safety and rights	Freedom from discrimination	Workplace is free of discrimination based on citizenship, race, ethnicity, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and justice involvement
	Equity and fairness	Workplace processes and programs are impartial, fair and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual
	Psychological safety	There is a feeling of safety and trust in the workplace. Workers can safely ask questions, seek feedback, report mistakes and problems, or make suggestions without fearing negative consequences.
	Physical safety	Workplace promotes and protects overall worker safety. E.g., limits exposure to harmful elements and places provisions to prevent immediate or long-term injury. Additionally, there is no verbal, sexual, or physical violence at work.
	Right to representation	Workers have the right to collective bargaining and representation
Social environment	Belongingness	Workers feel valued through positive social connections and freedom to reflect one's authentic self
	Meaningfulness	Workers have a perception of an authentic connection with their work, often leading to feelings of pride and achievement
	Recognition	Avenues of acknowledgement of positive behaviour, performance, effort, and accomplishment

# Quality of work case studies

## Quality of work strategies and levers

It is increasingly recognized that improving the quality of work is beneficial to businesses, society, and the broader economy. For this reason, promoting and advancing quality work should be a prime objective of any workforce development actor that seeks to address poverty and support sustained economic and social well-being. Improving social and economic outcomes for individuals, especially populations more likely to be engaged in precarious or poor quality work, requires critical analysis and targeted efforts to address the challenges and advance opportunities in the current landscape of work. Often, workforce development actors, including employers, workforce intermediaries (unions, workforce boards, industry associations), other non-profit organizations (employment service providers, workers centres and community-based organizations), policymakers and funders have an opportunity to use their location within the system, strategic influence, resources, and capacity to build solutions, advance policy and disrupt systems that improve the quality of work for thousands of people. The following examples demonstrate how workforce development actors can enhance quality of work at the level of a system, industry, and workplace. In many of the examples below, the interventions are part of a sector-based workforce approach or strategy or are led by an entity working on behalf of a group of employers and workers. In some cases, these strategies are led at the individual firm level. Similar to the framework above, the examples below demonstrate how strategies and solutions that advance quality of work often include and address multiple dimensions of work quality.

### [Allied Up](#)

**Themes:** *income and benefits, working conditions, skills and prospects, safety and rights*

AlliedUP is a worker-owned cooperative focused on supplying allied healthcare professionals to hospitals and healthcare systems. AlliedUp is a one-of-a-kind unionized staffing agency that is worker-centered and owned. AlliedUp grew from the desire of a large California union, SEIU-UHW, to radically re-envision healthcare staffing to create better outcomes for workers, patients, and communities, building on the union's education and training programs for both members and non-members. The organization also aims to provide value-rich jobs in under-resourced communities to assist with overcoming workforce inequalities across race, gender, age and sexual orientation.

*"I am so grateful to be on the AlliedUP team," said David Ngo, a registered nurse at MedSurge. "It's a refreshing, new approach to working in healthcare, and the caring culture really sold me. Because of the union-scale pay, full benefits, education, and an online support community, I have referred several of my travel-nurse friends who are joining the team too."*

AlliedUP partners with healthcare education providers nationwide and is aiming to become the "go to" employer for new graduates. The entity fosters a culture of support through mentorship, and secure healthcare benefits, with access to affordable education programs to ensure that its members can build upon their existing skills and increase their earning potential. The entity, which operates as a worker-owner model, offers

- union-scale pay and medical benefits
- flexibility to choose a work arrangement that fits best for them (full-time positions, short- or long-term assignments, or on-call shifts)



- paid opportunities for professional development and advancement;
- access to resources required for meeting professional and organizational goals; and,
- guidance, and feedback from peers

The entity, thus, offers a support community and ecosystem of services including mentorship, education, financial stability and wealth-building opportunities.

**Outcome:** The cooperative launched in 2021, and is on track to place nearly 1,000 new workers this year, and recruit another 3,000 by the end of 2023.

## Ontario Electrical League and Support Ontario Youth

**Themes:** *skills and prospects*

The Ontario Electrical League (OEL) is a non-profit, members-based organization that represents electrical contractors in Ontario. The OEL’s role is to represent, communicate, educate and promote Ontario’s electrical industry through meetings, training programs, government relations initiatives and more.

To build a talent pipeline and future workforce of electricians, the OEL supported the development of a charity, Support Ontario Youth (SOY), which has the mandate to fill the high demand for apprentices and support them throughout their apprenticeship journey.

OEL promotes apprenticeship to its business members, and SOY provides support to apprentices and companies to develop the next generation of electricians. SOY acts as a one-stop shop for employers and provides any support they need when hiring and training an apprentice. They take care of the recruiting, apprenticeship registration, paperwork and screening for apprentices and assist employers with training and coaching for supervisors to improve on-the-job training. They also ensure that apprentices receive the necessary experience and hours to complete their apprenticeship and have adequate financial and professional support.

**Outcome:** SOY has registered 296 apprentices, awarded 64 scholarships and onboarded 194 employers across multiple industries.

## Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, Inc (PHI)

**Themes:** *income and benefits, skills and prospects, working conditions*

As a leading authority on the direct care workforce, PHI promotes quality direct-care jobs as the foundation for quality care. The entity firmly believes that caring, committed relationships between direct care workers and their clients are at the heart of quality care. Those relationships work best when direct care workers receive high-quality training, living wages, and respect for the central role they play. PHI, thus,

- offers a range of training and consulting services to attract quality people, achieve cost efficiencies, and reduce turnover
- works with executive leaders, supervisors, and front-line staff to create fundamentally new systems of care that honor the relationship between workers and clients
- designs entry-level and advanced training programs and curricula for direct care workers that improve educational and employment outcomes, as well as job satisfaction

**Example:** PHI worked with the Independence Care System (ICS)—a nonprofit organization offering managed long-term care plans for more than 6,500 older adults and people with disabilities in New York City— to develop the Care Connections project, which created the Care Connections Senior Aide (CCSA). As part of the program, they also developed a telehealth program using customized software on mobile devices to facilitate communication about changes in a client’s condition between home care workers and clinical supervisors (as well as a timely response).

**Outcome:**

Workers in the new CCSA role were impacted as follows:

- Annual salary with benefits (increased earnings by 60% compared to entry-level positions)
- Improvements in job satisfaction and greater inclusion in care teams
- Improvements in relationships with clients and families
- Improvements in communication with managers

**Patient outcome:**

- 8% drop in emergency department visits

The pilot Care Connections project demonstrated that creating an advanced role for home care workers can improve care quality and outcomes, while also benefiting the senior aides and the family members and home care workers they support.

## Building Skills Partnership (BSP)

**Themes:** *social environment, skills and prospects*

Building Skills Partnership programs improve the quality of life of property service workers in low-wage industries, as well as their families and communities, by increasing their access to education, leadership, and career advancement. A joint effort between SEIU–USWW and major commercial buildings and janitorial companies, BSP specializes in designing workforce development approaches for immigrant workers. Most of the workers BSP serves are from Latin America (95 percent), 70 percent are women, fewer than 30 percent are formally educated beyond the sixth grade, and many are monolingual Spanish speakers.

BSP created a Green Janitor Education Training Program (GJEP) in which janitors gain a sense of responsibility for how sustainability practices help mitigate climate change, while employers gain a trained workforce that helps meet local and state climate standards. GJEP is now an industry-best practice and has been incorporated into initiatives to meet LEED sustainability standards for buildings.

From 2013 to 2016, 76 percent of GJEP buildings saw a decrease in energy and water usage. In addition, by sharing green practices with their families, friends, and neighbours, GJEP janitors are magnifying the program’s impact by creating



healthier and more resilient communities. Through this program, janitors earn a seat at the sustainability table alongside building owners and managers, empowering them to actively participate in a greener future. Prior to this program, the janitors, who are at the forefront of building operations, did not necessarily understand why certain sustainable procedures or materials were required, or the impact they, as janitors, could have on energy reduction and water consumption—and ultimately, human health—through their work. The program exemplifies social equity, where everyone participates in the management and maintenance of a building. BSP was one of the first recognized High Road Training Partnerships in California.

**Outcome:**

- 76% of GJEP buildings saw a decrease in energy and water usage.
- 80% of participants actively implement green practices both at work and at home.

This program empowered janitors to actively participate in the work they do. GJEP is now an industry best practice and has been incorporated into several sustainability initiatives.

## The Training Partnership

**Themes:** *income and benefits, skills and prospects, social environment*

The Training Partnership was formed by **SEIU Healthcare 775NW** and a group of long-term care employers with the goal of training and developing professional long-term care workers to deliver high-quality care and support to older adults and people with disabilities. It aims to train and empower long-term care workers, bring respect and dignity to the profession, and, in turn, improve the quality of care for community members and their families.

With its understanding of how improved economic stability can enhance worker performance and its dual focus on improving jobs and providing advancement opportunities, the Training Partnership also exemplifies the emerging Raise the Floor and Build Ladders strategy. Training offerings include basic training and certification prep for new home care aides, continuing education, advanced training through the first Registered Apprenticeship program in the US for home care aides, and nurse delegation training. The Training Partnership wants home care aides to envision futures in the industry and so is developing new career pathway options designed to improve the job and retain good workers. It also offers numerous other supports for workers and employers including peer mentors, a navigator pilot program, a call centre, a quarterly magazine and other communications, a customer service team for workers and employers, and a centralized data repository providing secured access to training records and certification status.



**Outcome:** The Partnership has trained more than 45,000 workers and is the largest provider of certified home care workers in Washington. It also has brought to the system much innovation and reform, from the development of a well-organized instructor network and the creation of the cutting-edge Registered Apprenticeship program, to exploring additional career advancement opportunities in a relatively flat occupation. It has helped educate and empower home care aides to do their jobs better and has provided mechanisms for them to connect with peers and overcome the inherent isolation of the job.

## Providing Consulting Support - IMEC's Genesis Program

**Themes:** *skills and prospects, income and benefits*

The Genesis program was started in 2014 by the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center (IMEC), in which IMEC works as a third-party consultant for small- and medium-sized manufacturing firms in the Chicago region to improve their business success and work quality. Genesis focuses on improving firm operations by helping to implement solutions in three categories:

### **People**

- Conducting employee engagement surveys
- Investing in training for frontline staff
- Investing in training for frontline supervisors
- Developing and communicating internal career pathways
- Reviewing compensation practices (e.g., salaries and performance bonuses) and benefits by position and tenure
- Developing job descriptions

### **Process**

- Implementing quality assurance and review procedures
- Organizing workspace to facilitate more efficient production workflow
- Conducting production job tracking to determine ways to lower production costs
- Identifying bottlenecks to the production process and problem-solving to develop potential solutions

### **Product**

- Working on new product development
- Developing marketing plans
- Improving pricing, cost estimating, and bidding strategies
- Working on ways to increase profitability

**Outcome:** According to the Aspen Institute's evaluation of the Genesis program, both firms and workers benefited immensely. For companies, the benefits included production efficiencies, improved adherence to quality standards, improved customer retention, and increased profitability and growth. Workers saw improved job stability and security, safer operating procedures, clearer job descriptions and advancement pathways, and, in some cases, improved wages and benefits.

- Annual earnings at Genesis companies increased by 12%, pushing those companies' average wages from 78% to 84% of the industry average.
- The share of workers making less than \$30,000 fell from 34% to 26%. Among the most actively involved companies, turnover fell from 5.8% to 3.3%.

## Providing Tax Credits - Iowa High-Quality Jobs (HQJ) Program

**Themes:** *income and benefits*

The HQJ program provides qualifying businesses (that provide a certain level of qualifying wage and medical benefits package) assistance to offset some of the costs incurred to locate, expand or modernize an Iowa facility. This flexible program includes loans, forgivable loans, tax credits, exemptions and refunds.



The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) offers this program to promote growth in businesses which employ lowans *in jobs defined as high-quality by state statute*. The HQJ program was enacted in the tax year 2005. The program was established to promote business investment and employment in Iowa. IEDA works with businesses interested in making capital investments in Iowa with the intent of either creating or retaining high-quality jobs to determine whether those businesses could qualify for benefits under HQJ. If approved, IEDA signs a contract with the business and monitors the agreement over five years to ensure contract terms and conditions are met.

The HQJ program provides several tax incentives and direct financial assistance, including a non-refundable Investment Tax Credit, a Sales and Use Tax refund of taxes paid during construction, a Supplemental Research Activities Tax Credit, and forgivable loans offered by IEDA. Awards made under the High-Quality Jobs Program were capped at \$130 million per year between 2012 and 2016, but that cap has been lowered to \$105 million during fiscal years 2017 through 2021. Between 2011 and 2021, 1,062 projects were approved for \$496.6 million in incentives under the High Quality Jobs Program. Those awarded projects had promised investment of \$67.6 billion, 34,742 new jobs, and 17,279 retained jobs in Iowa.

Economic analysis suggests that industries of HQJ projects in counties with awards experienced an estimated 97 percent increase in employment (about 603 jobs) over a decade, compared to that in the control group of comparable counties without HQJ awards. The HQJ project is estimated to raise the annual employment growth rate of HQJ cities by an average of more than two percentage points. The average wage income earned in an HQJ city is estimated to increase by an average of more than three percentage points as a result of the HQJ project.

## Managed by Q

**Themes:** *income and benefits, skills and prospects, working conditions, social environment*

In April 2014, Managed by Q launched in New York. Q, as the company is called, is an office cleaning company that also provides maintenance and office-supplies services. When launching, the founders focused on cleaning services. The plan was that once customers got a taste of Q's high-quality cleaning service, they would come back to Q for its other services.

*"I've never worked for a company like this. You're going to have to kick me out of Q because I'm never leaving. On my day off, I wear my Q jacket."*

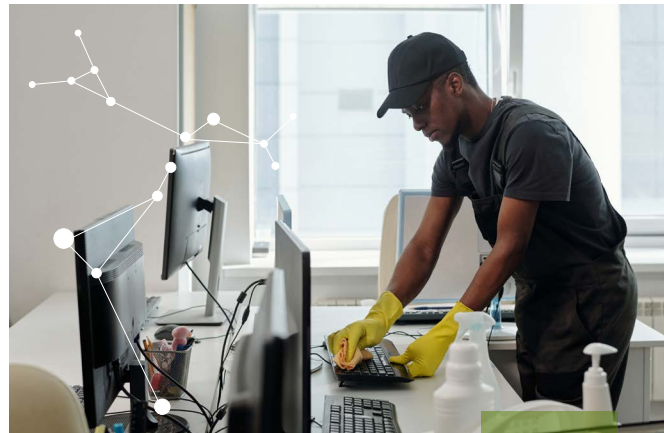
**Pay and benefits.** The firm believed that paying employees more than the industry average and investing in them could help Q succeed by reducing turnover costs and increasing customer retention. Cleaning operators earned \$12.50/hour and got a \$.25 raise every six months. All operators were paid for travel time between jobs. Those working at least 30 hours a week received free health insurance, 40 hours of vacation, a 401(k) plan, and workers' compensation. In 2015, Q implemented a bonus plan that would amount to 15% of operator pay and that would depend on several metrics, including on-time performance, customer satisfaction, supervisor feedback, and operator referrals.

**Training.** Q's training sessions started with a three-hour session at Q's office on how to clean "the Q way" and download and use the Q dashboard on the iPad and the operator app. Operators then received their uniforms and IDs. Hands-on training began within a few days: two three-hour sessions on Q's cleaning procedures with a mentor.

**Job Design.** Cleaning operators were typically assigned several accounts, visiting each a few times a week. A typical customer used 50-60 hours of cleaning per month. Q tried to schedule the same operator to the same account unless the customer requested otherwise. When a cleaning operator went to a site, they checked in

with the iPad, which listed the required tasks. Operators were expected to do the work following Q's standardized cleaning procedures. They were encouraged to finish all the tasks even if they took longer than expected.

Through the operator app, operators could inform Q of problems they saw or suggestions for improvement. They were also encouraged to identify maintenance issues. Cleaning operators were also in charge of reordering and restocking cleaning and office supplies. When they finished their tasks, they checked them off on their operator app or the office iPad. Sometimes, they wrote notes to the office manager.



*“We want helpers and handymen to always feel like they have a person that is watching out for them, that they can always reach out to versus calling in to a help centre or submitting a support request. We want to reinforce that they are part of a team. If they are having a serious issue and they don't know what to do, I will pull someone else and I'll send them over to that job site, no additional charge to the customer, paying both people for the time, but knowing that, ultimately, the end result of this person learning how to do the job by seeing someone else doing it and actually completing the job is much better for the customer. And it's better for the team, psychologically. Nobody wants to be left alone on a job site not knowing what to do.”*

**Autonomy.** Operators were encouraged to do whatever it took to deliver great service. Leadership noted that

*“We're never going to tell a customer that we're cheapest, but we will provide the best quality. I think it's a dangerous thing for a service company to start a race to the bottom.”*

**Q Culture.** The original core value of transparency is a big part of being Q. Transparency set Q apart in the janitorial and maintenance space and made it easier for the company to spot problems and continuously improve. Customers were asked to provide continual feedback on their operators and any other Q services so that the company could keep improving. Q employees were encouraged to communicate what was working and what wasn't through the operator app, emails to their managers, and monthly surveys. When an operator suggested an idea to HQ, it was passed on to the appropriate process owner. Someone at HQ would get back to the operator, who would then know that he or she had been heard. Q management, in turn, shared information with its operators.

**Community.** Another big part of being Q is the feeling of belonging to an inclusive company which valued the contributions of every operator and where operators know they cannot do their jobs alone. Q's office space had a lounge for everybody to use. When on-call cleaners did not have an assignment, they spent time at the office. Others were welcome to stop by any time. As an employee says, “Walking into Q's office is like walking into Cheers. Everybody knows your name.”

## Aecon

**Themes:** *income and benefits, skills and prospects, working conditions, social environment*

Aecon is a Canadian leader in construction and infrastructure development, providing services to private and public-sector clients. Aecon instituted a value-added program for employees that comes in the form of both financial and non-financial rewards designed to recruit, develop, retain, recognize and motivate the best and the brightest in our industry

Additionally, as part of its diversity, equity and inclusion DEI commitment, Aecon formed a successful joint venture between Six Nations of the Grand River Development Corporation and Aecon. Aecon-Six Nations (A6N) is majority owned by the Six Nations and operates across Ontario.



Value-added program features include:

- 100% employer-paid health and dental premiums
- Employer matched Defined Contribution Pension Plan (DCPP) for full and part-time workers
- Employee Share Purchase Program (purchase stock through automatic payroll deductions and part employer matching)
- Tuition reimbursement
- Wellness benefits and initiatives

Aecon is consistently recognized as one of the best employers in Canada.

## Mud Bay's Good Jobs Vision (GJV)

**Themes:** *income and benefits, skills and prospects, working conditions, social environment*

Mud Bay, a privately-held pet store chain based in Olympia, Washington, implemented a good jobs strategy by offering better wages and benefits and seeking to recoup the costs by increasing sales growth and lowering other expenses.

*"I will stay with this company as long as I possibly can. They still have things to work on, but they're actually trying."*

**Background.** In 2014, Mud Bay's sales performance was strong, but the company was falling short of the executive team's aspirations to make the company a great place to work. Staff turnover was 48%—relatively low for retail but high at a company where expertise was so valued. In the spring of 2014, the firm's executive team decided to invest in higher pay and better benefits to attract and retain the right people. They also identified five specific "strategies" Mud Bay would employ to realize its vision: (1) invest in staff, (2) deliver more by offering less at everyday low prices, (3) standardize processes and empower staff through continuous improvement, (4) improve effectiveness by cross-training and operating with slack, and (5) partner with organizations that contribute to the well-being of animals.

Selected takeaways from these strategies are as follows:

**Pay and benefits.** In August 2014, Mud Bay began to raise hourly wages twice a year in \$.50 increments in addition to yearly wage increases tied to annual performance reviews (an average of \$0.50). From 2014 to 2017, the average hourly wage of most hourly staff had increased from \$11.50 to \$15.00. Mud Bay increased the percentage of medical insurance-eligible "Muddies" (firm's employees) by reducing the number of part-time positions. Instead, creating "shared key holder" positions that allowed Muddies to work at multiple

stores and redistributing the hours of Muddies who left the company to existing employees first before hiring anyone new. To increase the percentage of eligible Muddies who signed up for medical insurance, Mud Bay increased its contribution percentage and switched to plans with lower deductibles and copays. In 2017, Mud Bay introduced an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), giving Muddies and their families free counselling on personal issues such as finances and mental health.

**Staff Ownership.** In 2015, Mud Bay established an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) that granted ownership stakes annually to every Muddy who had worked more than 1,000 hours. Muddies were 20% vested after two years and fully vested after six.

**Staff Empowerment.** To ensure Mud Bay carried the right products, Mud Bay gave store staff a greater voice in product selection. Historically, product introductions and withdrawals were managed by a four-person home office category team. Stores' involvement was limited to emailing category teams with questions or comments on products. In 2015, Mud Bay created "Category Expert Teams," made up mostly of store managers and staff, to advise category managers on which products to add and which to eliminate.

**Flexible Schedules.** In 2017, Mud Bay improved the way it asked staff for input into store schedules, enabling Muddies to indicate not only the hours they were available to work but also those they preferred.

**Standardized Hiring and Advancement Processes.** Managers found their ownership of hiring empowering, but the unstandardized process was inefficient and sloppy: many applicants never heard back after submitting an application. In 2017, Mud Bay hired a Chief People Officer, who, among other things, would work on strengthening recruiting efforts, standardizing hiring practices and developing clearer career paths, articulating what skills were required for each position and offering position-specific training.

**Training.** Beginning in 2015, the training of new staff members evolved from a day-long classroom session to a self-guided, video-based "first-year journey," supplemented with on-the-job practice and feedback from more tenured Muddies. When they had free time at work, new staff were expected to watch short videos on dog and cat health, nutrition, and products. More senior staff could watch new videos to stay up to date on the latest products and health news. In 2016, the firm launched a "District Manager in Training" program, which involved ride-a-longs and one-on-one coaching with existing district managers for select store managers. In 2017, Mud Bay began teaching its company approach to leadership to every Muddy who had supervisory responsibilities. The program consisted of seven all-day workshops, delivered once per month for seven months to cross-functional leadership cohorts composed of ten to fifteen Muddies.

**Outcome.** Overall, company leaders felt that a stronger and more stable workforce was enabling them to execute changes more easily and would enable them to offer more services to customers in the future. From 2014 to 2017, the percentage of employees working at least 30 hours increased from 69% to 82% and the average wage of an hourly store employee increased from \$12.12 to \$15.06. Those changes translated into an average annual earnings increase of approximately \$3,800 for non-managerial employees. According to the leadership, "If we didn't raise wages to the point where we take pay off the table, we wouldn't be able to do any of the good things we wanted to do." Store staff turnover decreased from 48% to 31%, and Mud Bay staff went from owning none of the company to owning 4.8% of it.







## Coworker

**Themes:** *income and benefits, social environment*

Coworker is the leading global, peer-based workplace organizing platform designed to support workers of all kinds to spark true change. The organization deploys digital tools, data, and strategies in service of helping people improve their work lives. The company invests to host and promote workplace petition campaigns, prototyping fresh ideas for wielding influence in companies and industries. The entity also supports the leadership and vision of working people to imagine, design, and create a collective future. Coworker.org has been involved in the following projects:

- Assisting drag performers in San Francisco who are campaigning to get clubs to pay, at a minimum, a \$40 flat booking fee to all performers
- Partnering with media organizations to gather information from workers at companies like Starbucks, Apple, and American Airlines about third-party benefits administrators and their impact on workers forced to interface with them to access benefits like workers' comp.
- Partnering with a financial institution to launch a mutual aid fund to support workers in the tech industry engaged in workplace organizing

Leveraging the Coworker platform, employees at Starbucks have been able to expand paid parental leave to barista dads and adoptive parents, update its scheduling technology to prevent people from having to work back-to-back closing and opening shifts, allow employees to have visible tattoos and dyed hair, and placed safe-needle disposal receptacles in bathrooms after baristas spoke out. A subsequent victory led the company to suspend its “happy hour” promotion, reducing the volume of customers in stores. Most recently, the company committed to a \$15 starting wage for all employees after years of employee activism on wage-related issues.

# Conclusion

This review highlights the various terms, definitions, and dimensions by which quality of work is shaped and defined by different organizations and institutions. In reviewing the literature, it became clear that while there are some differences in how quality of work is framed and communicated or how its multi-dimensional aspects are prioritized, it is also evident that there are more commonalities across these examples. Quality of work addresses human needs and aspirations beyond monetary compensation. It extends even beyond professional aspects such as job security, training opportunities, and career pathways to aspects such as workers' finding voice, meaning, purpose, and connection with the work and the environment in which they spend a major part of their time and energy. Further, quality work's importance to individual, economic, and societal well-being is proven through theories from various academic fields and real-world research and behaviour. Job vacancies and labour shortages in sectors that traditionally fare poorly in terms of the quality of work and phenomena like 'the great resignation' can be traced to dissatisfaction with the type of jobs and environment being offered. Quality of work is an important driver of labour force participation, worker motivation and engagement, productivity and retention. Therefore, quality of work should be a priority not just for policy but also for education, training, workforce intermediaries and leaders in business, community, and economic development.

Some of the case studies in this review show how different actors have advanced quality of work solutions through traditional and innovative methods with positive results. However, more research must be undertaken to highlight proven supports and practices that can address quality of work challenges for various populations and sectors. Good data is also needed to design and implement policies and practices that can advance quality of work. Unfortunately, most of the labour market indicators used today, such as the employment ratio and the unemployment rate, still focus on the number and not the quality of jobs. A greater level of national and global collaboration is required to form consensus and develop standardized indicators to measure and assess quality of work at the local, regional, and national levels.



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