

Decent work expressing universal values and respecting cultural diversity: propositions for intervention

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Abstract

Decent work is a comprehensive concept expressing people's aspirations for their working lives. This concept has had great legitimacy since it was proposed by the International Labour Organization, the United Nations agency for labour issues, which is the well-established institutional world forum for cooperation. Furthermore, decent work has joined various research subjects in labour-related disciplines, gaining a central role as a research subject and intervention compass. This paper aims to discuss the consequences of societies' cultural complexity for decent work intervention. After highlighting previous research subjects in labour-related disciplines that are closely related to the decent work dimensions, the consequences of cultural complexity for intervention are pointed out. The tension between universal human values, cultural diversity and culture as an evolving social phenomenon is the trigger for proposing a balance expressed in several propositions concerning culture-sensitive intervention in decent work.

Keywords: Decent Work; cultural differences; Decent Work Questionnaire; intervention

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Trabalho digno expressando valores universais e respeitando diversidade cultural: Proposições para a intervenção

Resumo

Trabalho digno é um conceito abrangente que expressa as aspirações das pessoas para a sua vida profissional. Este conceito tem tido elevada legitimidade na medida em que foi proposto pela Organização Internacional do Trabalho, a agência da Organização das Nações Unidas para as questões laborais, que é o fórum mundial institucional mais bem estabelecido para a cooperação. Além disso, o trabalho digno agregou diversos temas de investigação das várias disciplinas que abordam as questões laborais, assumindo assim um papel central como objeto de investigação e como bússola orientadora para a intervenção nesta área. Este artigo visa discutir as consequências para a intervenção sobre trabalho digno da complexidade cultural nas sociedades atuais. Após realçar questões de investigação prévias que têm sido tratadas nas disciplinas ligadas aos assuntos laborais e que se encontram próximas das dimensões do trabalho digno, as consequências da complexidade cultural são trazidas para a discussão. É proposto um equilíbrio entre valores humanos universais, diversidade cultural e cultura como um fenómeno social evolutivo, equilíbrio esse expresso em várias proposições sobre intervenção em trabalho digno culturalmente sensível.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho Digno; diferenças culturais; Questionário de Trabalho Digno; intervenção

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to discuss cultural issues related to intervention in decent work and presents subsequent propositions. Firstly, the strength of the decent work concept is pointed out through its legitimacy and its integrative characteristic. Secondly, cultural differences regarding the various dimensions of decent work are shown through previous research. Cultural complexity is approached through multiple cultural anchors and the evolving nature of culture, which make it difficult to find a balance between the universal values behind the decent work concept and the diverse expressions of those values in each specific culture. Nevertheless, some propositions for culture-sensitive intervention focused on improving labour conditions to achieve decent work as much as possible are presented.

Legitimacy of the concept

The concept of *Decent Work* was coined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999 in an attempt to express in the labour field the principles and values behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the United Nations (1948). The origin of this concept goes back to the efforts made to avoid war through promoting social justice, first with the Treaty of Versailles and the International Labour Organization foundation in 1919. That idea was reinforced in 1946 through the ILO constitution amendments (Ferraro, dos Santos, Pais, & Mónico, 2016). Several landmarks show a path of improvement in the way Decent Work has become explicit and included in formal statements regarding aspects that should guide labour issues worldwide.

The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Values at Work in 1998 and the United Nations Global Compact in 1999 should be highlighted. Afterwards, Decent Work was configured in four strategic objectives in 1999 by Juan Somavia (at that time, the ILO Director General), and was included in 2015 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The United Nations' repeated inclusion of Decent Work in formal documents such as declarations, treaties and others demonstrates the legitimacy of the concept, since that institution has been the world forum for the coordination of nations. The ILO, being the United Nations agency for labour issues, has that legitimacy and brings it to the Decent Work concept. Therefore, we can consider this concept as the broad expression of people's aspirations for their working lives. No other concept in the field can be claimed to have that statute. Moreover, Decent Work meets potentially core universal human needs, namely survival, connectedness and self-determination (Blustein, Kenny, Di Fabio, & Guichard, 2019).

Justification of the use of the Decent Work concept also comes from being an expression of the Human Rights Declaration in the labour field. If human rights are values, it is not necessary to demonstrate that other positive outcomes arise from applying them. If we continue to seek empirical evidence that applying human rights as expressed in the Decent Work concept brings other positive outcomes to justify its relevance, we should be aware that our values are those outcomes instead of Decent Work values *per se*. Therefore, the first consequence is that empirical research on Decent Work looking for positive outcomes of putting the concept into practice, although relevant, does not match the cornerstone of the concept. That research is useful to reinforce understanding of its nomological network but not to justify dissemination of the concept. Concerning intervention projects in favour of Decent Work, the legitimacy of the concept also gives the same legitimacy to those projects as long as they comply with other requirements, as presented below.

The various components of the Decent Work concept were described in several public documents. The detailed description of the corresponding content was synthesized in the 10+1 substantive elements according to experts' perspectives. In the field of work, organizational and personnel psychology, Ferraro, Pais, dos Santos and Moreira (2018) presented the most comprehensive operationalization of the concept. Their model expresses the configuration of workers' perception of Decent Work, based on the substantive elements defined by the ILO. The resulting model of seven dimensions has been extensively obtained in diverse samples and countries (Ferraro et al., 2018) reinforcing the idea that Decent work is a robust concept when measured through workers' perception. Despite the novelty of the concept as a whole, its components have long research traditions in the wider field of labour-related sciences.

Decent Work: Integrating research

Decent Work was defined as “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” (International Labour Organization, 2019a). That definition was expanded to include all types of discrimination, not only gender-centred, according to some measures of the substantive element named “equal opportunity and treatment in employment” (International Labour Organization, 2008). As mentioned above, how workers perceive Decent Work is organized in seven dimensions, covering the full range of substantive elements of the concept (Ferraro et al., 2018).

The first dimension of the Ferraro et al. (2018) model, labelled “principles and values at work”, measures to what extent workplace comply with values such as interactional justice, procedural justice, dignity, participation, freedom, non-discrimination, and trust. Several literature reviews of the corresponding content were found, such as discrimination (Campos-Serna, Ronda-Pérez, Artazcoz, Moen, & Benavides, 2013; Ghumman, Ryan, Barclay, & Markel, 2013), organizational justice (Chang & Dubinsky, 2005), dignity in the workplace (Parandeh, Khaghanizade, Mohammadi, & Mokhtari-Nouri, 2016), trust among workers and managers (Østergaard, 2015), and participation (Bolden, 2011). Overall, these reviews confirm the relevance of “principles and values at work” for workers and for the quality of the work they do. Moreover, the values expressed in this dimension are worthy by themselves, since they are in tune with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Concerning “working time and workload” (second dimension), Ferraro et al. (2018) defined this as being focused on working time, workload, work-life balance and pace of work. Some literature reviews are found in databases on workload (Arts, Kerkstra, van der Zee, & Abu-Saad, 2001; Neill, 2011), work-life balance (Bagtasos, 2011), and shift work (Dall, Ball, Recio-Saucedo, & Griffiths, 2016). The research related to these topics has a long history and shows, on the one hand, concern for workers’ health, and, on the other, the effort to optimize workers’ contribution to organizational goals.

The third dimension of the model, labelled “fulfilling and productive work”, has content related to innovation and intrinsic work motivation, which has also been the subject of literature reviews (e.g., Seeck & Diehl, 2017). Other subjects within the content of this dimension are satisfaction and recognition (Zeb, Rehman, Saeed, & Ullah, 2014), meaningful work (Bendassolli, Coelho-Lima, de Araujo Pinheiro, & de Siqueira Gê, 2015; Chalofsky, 2003) and commitment (Gilbert, Holdsworth, & Kyle, 2017), to name but a few. Ferraro, Pais, Moreira and dos Santos (2017) have shown the strong correlation between this Decent Work dimension and autonomous forms of work motivation, namely identified and intrinsic work motivation types as defined (and measured) by Self-determination theory (Gagné et al., 2015). Fulfilling and productive work is a valuable concept since it joins the positive aspects of work for workers and positive organizational results.

The fourth dimension, labelled “meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship”, is related to benefits and earnings perceived as fair and sufficient to be a full citizen in society. Although the way this concept is configured within the broader concept of Decent Work is distinct and new, related contents have been the subject of literature reviews, as is the case of compensation (Nazir, Shah, & Zaman, 2014), health programmes for low-wage workers (Stiehl et al, 2018), salary in higher education (Park, 2012), and pay for performance (de Bruin, Baan, & Struijs, 2011). The main idea of this dimension is to consider remuneration as a source of freedom for workers and their families through which they can play a full role as citizens. Therefore, although a long research tradition exists regarding compensation, salary, wages and related concepts, the configuration of this third dimension brings some novelty to the field.

The fifth dimension, labelled “social protection”, refers to social protection resulting from the condition as a worker, concerning possible illness or unemployment, and future retirement. This dimension includes the worker’s family within social protection mechanisms. The various components of the social protection dimension, despite being studied mainly in other disciplines (e.g., law and economics), were also studied widely and literature reviews have been published in the field of work, organizational and personnel psychology (Burke & Maramaldi,

2016; Zhang, Bartram, McNeil, & Dowling, 2015). The main concern relates to the design of mechanisms able to join together the worker's social protection and organizational competitiveness. The related concept of flexicurity has been examined in some studies too (e.g., Sultana, 2013).

The sixth dimension, named "opportunities", focuses on alternative jobs available, allowing a worker to have a choice, as well as professional progress. That progress means both prospects to improve remuneration and professional development (as an employee or entrepreneur). Several literature reviews were undertaken and are available in databases. The content of this dimension is negatively related to unemployment, which often represents a lack of opportunities (Reneflot & Evensen, 2014). Other authors carried out literature reviews on topics related to professional development, such as career development (Barto, Lambert, & Brott, 2015) and entrepreneurship (Cadar & Badulescu, 2015). This dimension is fundamental in a developmental conception of human nature.

Finally, the seventh dimension of "health and safety" focuses on health protection, safety and the comfort of the work context and environment. It is a well-established research subject expressed, among others in Huet (2015), Laberge and Ledoux (2011), and Leitão and Greiner (2016). This dimension depends on the state of the art of scientific knowledge and technology, which allows workers to be protected from dangerous jobs and unsafe environments, on the one hand, and appropriate management of the work context, on the other.

Taken together, those literature reviews cover at least a major part of all seven dimensions of the Ferraro et al. (2018) model and demonstrate the vitality of research on the components of Decent Work. The novelty is the fact that this concept joins dispersed research subjects around a coherent idea. This integrative power of Decent Work makes it a core concept of the field allowing it to be used as an anchor for research and practice worldwide. The advantage of having an integrative concept is, on the one hand, its contribution to building a comprehensive view and understanding of the related phenomena. On the other hand, the practical implications of being integrative help in designing cross-effective human resource policies and strategies, as well as public policy able to include wide, harmonized processes instead of partial and competing solutions. Therefore, Decent Work intervention projects are much more powerful and relevant as they pay attention to the various dimensions of the concept instead of ignoring some of them. That does not mean that interventions of a narrower scope can be discarded, but where possible they can be replaced by interventions with a broader scope.

Intervention is understood here as a complex or simple intentional action aiming to manage a problem (preventing or dealing with it, as described by Beehr, 2019), or improving a condition even if it is not a problem. Within the

subject of this paper, intervention refers to Decent Work issues. That action can be made at the individual, team, organizational, inter-organizational or societal level. Moreover, the aim of the action is defined and scheduled, and resources are allocated, despite those elements sometimes being fuzzy and incorporated in a wider plan of change. Intervention can be the definition of public policy, inter-organizational and organizational projects, or even individual counselling, mentoring, coaching or other structured action of intentional development (as defined by dos Santos and Pais, 2015). For example, organizational intervention projects aimed at stress reduction include changes in the job or work role, as well as replacing managers (Pignata, Boyd, Winefield, & Provis, 2017). Concerning public policy intervention, Dammert, de Hoop, Mvukiyehe and Rosati (2018) synthesize the effect of public policy on decreasing child labour. They found, for instance, that public policy programmes addressing child labour are effective when the vulnerability of households is reduced.

In summary, the legitimacy of the Decent Work concept as argued above and its integrative characteristic of joining disperse research topics reveal the strength of this concept for both research and practice, and, therefore, intervention. Since it is claimed to be a concept applicable worldwide, cultural diversity must be considered in terms of what should be the same cross-culturally and what should be adapted to each specific culture. Cultural diversity is the issue addressed in the present paper, specifically concerning intervention in Decent Work.

Cultural diversity meeting universal values

Culture has been conceptualized by several authors as values, assumptions, norms and practices shared by people belonging to a social group or category, organization or community (regardless of its dimension) providing references which configure ways of perceiving, feeling, understanding, sensemaking, expecting and behaving. Some of those components are more internal and enduring and others more peripheral and changeable (e.g., Gomes, 1994; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Schein, 1996). Cultures can be related to occupations (Schein, 1996), organizations (Gomes, 1994), nations (Hofstede et al., 2010) and to other social categories. Cultures help in describing, explaining and intervening in social phenomena since they are always present in people's daily life (Gomes, 1994). Decent Work, as a social phenomenon, is also the result of specific common aspects among cultures. Since it is grounded on universal and shared values, it is expected to be expressed through equivalent actions within different cultures. However, diverse cultural backgrounds may determine different ways of expressing those universal values.

Ferraro, Pais and dos Santos (2015) pointed out that some Decent Work aspects are universal while others are culturally specific. That means Decent Work is expected to show common cross-cultural aspects and at the same time different ways of being expressed according to each specific culture. For instance, Hofstede (1984) argues that the quality of life depends on several cultural dimensions. Likewise, the way Decent Work dimensions such as “fulfilling and productive work”, “opportunities”, “principles and values at work”, and others, are put into practice worldwide might vary.

Looking at the first Decent Work dimension of the Ferraro et al. (2018) model, how workers perceive “fundamental principles and values at work” is expected to depend on power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010). The same objective condition will be perceived in a lower power distance culture as a deficit in principles and values at work while in a higher power distance culture it can be considered acceptable. For example, asymmetric treatment between leader and subordinate can be viewed as respectful by the subordinate in a high power distance culture but disrespectful in a low power distance culture. Also, Yang, Kitchen and Bacouel-Jentjens (2017) argue that a leader’s humour has a stronger relationship-building role in leadership in the US than in China. Other cultural dimensions can be relevant for cultural variation in interpreting clues from events as acceptable or not, and, consequently, as higher or lower deficit in the Decent Work dimension mentioned. Intervention projects aiming to improve fundamental principles and values at work must consider both the universal values expressed in the dimension and the variation in how those values are expressed cross-culturally.

The second dimension (working time and workload) is also culturally sensitive. Johnson and Widyanti (2011) found differences between Indonesian and Dutch workers in evaluating mental workload. Moreover, the figures released by the International Labour Organization (2019b) show that in 2017 the mean weekly hours actually worked per employed person range from 32 in the Netherlands to 49 in Qatar. This type of difference is expected to correspond to different perceptions regarding the same objective working time since the comparison terms vary greatly, expressing cultural differences and diverse economic conditions. Interventions aiming to improve this Decent Work dimension must consider the cultural context where the intervention will be undertaken and the minimum standards required for a healthy life, after overcoming possible economic constraints.

The third Decent Work dimension (fulfilling and productive work) also depends on cultural aspects. Furnham and Rajamanickam (1992) found differences between the UK and India regarding the “protestant work ethic”. Similarly, other authors argue that there are cultural differences concerning the meaning of work (e.g., Bendassolli, 2017; Sharma, 2015). Strauch (2010) found a cultural

influence on team performance, which leads to the expectation that the perception of having productive work will vary accordingly. Therefore, we can expect the same objective condition to be perceived differently by people from different cultures, determining in part to what extent that condition is perceived as meeting Decent Work standards. Intervention focused on improving the quality of work to reach appropriate fulfilling and productive work must consider the cultural differences that determine the effectiveness of such interventions and should be respected.

Regarding the fourth dimension, “meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship”, once again cultural differences influence the standard of living and consequently what is considered the required resources to enjoy an acceptable standard of living. Mamman, Sulaiman and Fadel (1996) found cultural differences in preferences concerning payment for work. Wang (2014) found differences in cultural citizenship between China and Taiwan. The differences among cultures in how citizenship is understood are evident in learning a new way of understanding it, as described by Ginieniewicz (2008) concerning migrants in Canada. If conceptions of citizenship are different among cultures and the standard of living too (as shown in the Human Development Index (e.g., UNDP, 2017)), a variation in the subjective perception of the appropriateness of remuneration for exercising citizenship can be expected. One important challenge for research and intervention is to discriminate cultural differences in citizenship and earnings that must be accepted from those that should be fought against.

Concerning “social protection” systems for the unemployed, Ouweneel (2002) found significant differences across 42 countries. Comparing the country profiles, there are great differences in social security systems (International Social Security Association, 2019). Considering the cultural dimensions of Hofstede et al. (2010), we can expect that in long term cultures compared to short term ones, there will be more concern about preparing for the future. Furthermore, high versus low uncertainty avoidance cultures can be expected to be more sensitive to the weaknesses of social security systems. Finally, highly individualistic cultures, compared to collectivist ones, create different expectations of social protection systems. Interventions aiming to improve the social security dimension can consider the flexibility required to design different solutions that match the specificity of each culture.

“Opportunities”, another dimension of Decent Work, refers to developmental opportunities for workers, alternative jobs allowing them to choose, as well as their perception regarding the possibility of creating their own business. Studying 84 nations in a literature review, Dheer (2017) found a moderating role of individualism-collectivism on the relationships between education, corruption and political freedom, on the one hand, and entrepreneurial activity, on the other hand. The author

found individualism positively moderates the effect of political freedom, and the effect of education, but the moderation regarding the effect of corruption is negative. Paul, Hermel and Srivastava (2017) carried out a comparative study of Japan, USA, France and India, regarding entrepreneurial intentions. They found support for the idea that variation in entrepreneurial intentions is determined by the joint effect of personality traits and country culture. The “opportunities” dimension also has to do with economic vigour and the alternative jobs workers can find in the labour market, which varies across countries and cultures. Therefore, intervention projects that target improvement of the “opportunities” dimension of Decent Work, whether at the societal or organizational level, should be sensitive to the cultural context. In some cultures, entrepreneurship is more anchored on entrepreneurs’ individual initiative, while in others it is more dependent on collective initiatives. Moreover, in some cultures, the link between employee and employer seems to be more family-type while in others more market-type (Hofstede et al., 2010). Those differences determine different expectations of career development and the balance of responsibility for this between employer and employee.

Regarding “health and safety”, Cottini and Lucifora (2013) found that mental health and working conditions vary across countries (and cultures). Likewise, the data released on safety and health at work by the International Labour Organization (2019c) show great differences among countries. Those differences make it obvious that the comparison terms of workers from different countries vary greatly when assessing health and safety in their work. Furthermore, following cultural dimensions as defined by Hofstede et al. (2010), higher uncertainty avoidance cultures can be more sensitive to weak health and safety conditions at work than lower ones. Since the health and safety dimension is sensitive to stress-inducing contexts, it is expected that the same objective conditions will be perceived as different regarding health and safety. Therefore, even in this dimension, the distinction between objective conditions and subjective perception is important, since divergences are expected and require different types of interventions. Intervention projects in this dimension have to balance the objective conditions required to reach health and safety work environments considering the state of the art of technological and scientific advancements, and the subjective perception of those conditions requiring culturally effective ways of communicating with people about them.

To sum up, cultural diversity is found in all seven Decent Work dimensions, and interventions to promote Decent Work must be sensitive to this, designing projects that combine respect for universal values and suit the specificities of that culture. Furthermore, it is critical to consider both objective and subjective measures. The objective indexes may have the appearance of hard data, but they hide its subjective meaning within a specific cultural context.

Decent Work: integrating cultural complexity

Although cultural differences must be considered, we are aware that more and more paradoxical issues related to cultural identity have arisen in recent decades. Nowadays, people have a global context enabling and eliciting a global identity and global citizenship. That phenomenon has been highlighted previously (e.g., Jimenez, Lerch, & Bromley, 2017; Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013) and is a core concern of public policy worldwide as defined by international fora such as the United Nations. We can mention, for example, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which states the importance of global citizenship in the 4.7 goal (United Nations, 2015). At the same time, we witness today the demand to respect cultural diversity (e.g., Lozano & Escrich, 2017). That diversity is often viewed as a social asset, as a value on its own where mutual respect is the norm, as expressed in the discussion on this issue by Bennett (2016), and Franěk (2017). Cultural diversity expands the repertoire of responses available in society as a whole, enabling human beings to adapt to unpredictable conditions and contributing to an enriched expression of human nature. We also witness today the extreme expression of national identities and the claim for the right to keep and even strengthen regional or local cultural traditions.

Therefore, interventions to promote Decent Work must consider the tension between the idea of a global cultural identity anchored on global citizenship and on universal values, the idea of respect for cultural diversity, and the perspective that cultural diversity is an asset of society that should be preserved or even reinforced. The balance between those trends can be reached by bringing together superordinate values and diverse ways of expressing them. The possible ways of combining them deserve reflection, continuous discussion and negotiation among those closely involved in specific contexts and the distal stakeholders who are gatekeepers of universal human rights and values. This kind of problem should therefore involve all human beings since it touches the inner meaning of common life.

That reflection becomes more complex when considering unavoidable cultural evolution (e.g., Greenfield, 2009, 2015; Zeng & Greenfield, 2015). Although traditionally culture is viewed as an enduring characteristic, today high cultural interaction and fast technological and scientific evolution cause great turbulence in institutions and require strong intercultural competence (Sandell & Tupy, 2015). Cultures are evolving aspects of human groups, organizations, communities and societies, and, therefore, intervention projects to promote Decent Work must be sensitive to that change over time.

Furthermore, cultural anchors have changed greatly over the last decades, mainly as the result of technological development, allowing people to connect worldwide

in real time and fostering social ties with others, regardless of the geographical distance involved. Fast social development has also led to intergenerational cultural conflicts (Liu, Liang, Nguyen, & Melo, 2019). Within that context, people keep communicating with others from their early developmental path and build identities based on mixed effects, whether from those with whom they live or with whom they communicate significantly and join for leisure or work. The traditional anchors of culture – family, school, work and everyday social interaction – have expanded. Other cultural sources have been added to the context in which people grow and geographical constraints no longer play the only crucial role. Consequently, interventions to promote decent work must consider the complex patterns of multiple cultural identity anchors and the evolving nature of culture.

Social comparison processes concerning the use of others as a comparison term for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954) can play a role in evaluating decent work conditions. People tend to compare with others whether upward or downward in ranking dimensions (Gerber, Wheeler, & Suls, 2018). Comparisons are made of contents beyond those originally proposed by Festinger, i.e., abilities and opinions, and include life satisfaction, standard of living, wages, opportunities and others (Kruglanski & Mayselless, 1990). Social comparison is expected to be upstream in the process of forming subjective perceptions of Decent Work: when anyone is asked to what extent they have decent work conditions, their subjective perception is the result, among other determinants, of comparison with others. The comparison is made especially with others who are psychologically close, meaning people from the same culture. Therefore, subjective perception is influenced by the person's standard of living (and work conditions) compared to others within a specific economic and social context. The International Labour Organization recognized the importance of that economic and social context in Decent Work and included it as the 11th substantive element. The increase in social interactions, as described above, fostered by technological evolution has brought complexity to social comparison processes. Consequently, the subjective perception of Decent Work increasingly concerns a complex network with which the worker relates, which is no longer limited to a geographical criterion. Intervention in Decent Work must preferably include objective and subjective measures, and consider the complexity described here regarding cultural phenomena.

CONCLUSION

Decent Work is a concept grounded on a proposal by the International Labour Organization, able to respond to universal human needs, and expressing people's

aspirations for their working lives. This gives great legitimacy to the concept and contributes to the legitimacy of intervention projects to establish Decent Work worldwide. The strength of the concept also comes from being integrative concerning many research traditions in labour-related sciences. Therefore, Decent Work intervention projects are much more powerful and relevant as they pay attention to the various dimensions of the concept instead of only some of them.

While the concept is based on universal values and expresses Human Rights at work, cultural diversity implies a variation in how those values are put into practice. Consequently, interventions aiming to improve the different dimensions of Decent Work must consider both the universal values expressed in the specific dimensions and the differences in how those values are put into practice cross-culturally. Being culturally sensitive means paying attention to cultural specificities that are decisive for the effectiveness of the intervention and in tune with the universal values behind the concept. Furthermore, evidence-based standards related to some Decent Work dimensions, namely those focused on wages, social security, and health and safety at work, must consider the minimum standards required for a healthy life regardless of cultural specificities and extant economic constraints. Moreover, culture has become an increasingly complex phenomenon no longer limited to geographical proximity. Multiple anchors of culture and its evolving nature must be considered in designing and implementing intervention projects aiming to disseminate Decent Work across the globe.

The appropriate combination of objective and subjective measures and indicators can provide a more accurate portrayal of Decent Work conditions in a specific group at a specific time. That portrayal is the departure point for effective intervention in pursuing culturally sensitive Decent Work.

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