

Justifying Working Conditions and Labour Demands in Spain: Orders of Worth

La justificación de las condiciones de trabajo y demandas laborales en España: órdenes de valor

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Article received: 12, March, 2022
Revision request: 16, April, 2022
Article accepted: 25, February, 2023

González Martínez, Rocío, González González, José María and Francés-Gómez, Pedro (2023). Justifying Working Conditions and Labour Demands in Spain: Orders of Worth. *Recerca. Revista de Pensament i Anàlisi*, 28(2), pp. 1-34.
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/recerca.6522>

Abstract

In this article, the dominant legitimating discursive strategies around the ever-increasing labour demands and ever-declining standards of safety and well-being at work in Spain are analysed through the lens of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) view of the transformation of capitalism. A qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews is used. Results show that the justificatory arguments most commonly put forward by managers and experts are the logic of supply and demand, and values related to flexibility, resilience and adaptability to change. In contrast, the stability and protection established in the twentieth century are widely cherished values, particularly among union representatives and some human resources specialists. We found that discourse practices map two specific legitimating categories (market values and a projects orientation), and one critical category (Civic World), but the critical category has no practical impact, as the predominant feeling is resignation. Our research describes the common attitudes to legitimacy in the job market and points to a deep discontent in some of its key agents.

Keywords: Critical HRM, Critical Management, Boltanski, Spanish Job Market, Legitimacy.

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Resumen

En este artículo se analizan, bajo la lente de la crítica de Boltanski y Thevenot (2006) sobre la transformación del capitalismo, las estrategias de legitimación que dominan los discursos sobre las siempre crecientes demandas laborales y las cada vez más precarias condiciones de trabajo en España. Para la investigación se usó una metodología cualitativa a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas. Como resultado, se puede afirmar que los argumentos justificadores más utilizados son los relacionados con la lógica de oferta y demanda, así como con los valores de flexibilidad, resiliencia y adaptabilidad al cambio, sobre todo por parte de directivos y expertos. Entretanto, los valores de estabilidad y protección característicos del siglo XX son los más apreciados por sindicalistas y técnicos en RR. HH. Encontramos que las prácticas discursivas se corresponden con dos categorías legitimadoras —los valores del mercado y la orientación a proyectos— y una categoría crítica —el mundo cívico— que, sin embargo, carece de eficacia práctica, siendo el sentimiento más generalizado el de resignación. Con esta investigación se describen empíricamente las actitudes comunes sobre la legitimidad en el mercado de trabajo y queda patente un profundo descontento en algunos de sus agentes principales.

Palabras clave: gestión crítica de RR. HH., gestión crítica, Boltanski, legitimidad, mercado de trabajo en España.

INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis unleashed in 2008 lasted in Spain until after 2015, causing a visible impact in the trend of working conditions and the duality of the labour market (OECD, 2018; INE, 2018; Miguélez et al., 2015; De Beer, 2012; López Andreu, 2017; Muñoz-Rodríguez & Santos, 2017). While the economic situation improved somewhat between 2015 and 2019, the recovery did not reach working conditions, and the health situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic compounded a context of extreme stress in the workplace, gloomy expectations of young people seeking their first job and perplexity among employers, human resources managers and labour experts.

Why the relative improvement in macro-economic data did not translate into better working conditions between 2015 and 2019 –even the social debate over the loss of workers’ protection seemed muzzled– calls for an explanation. It was clear to us that an array of legitimising discourses had taken over the prevailing narratives around labour and the relationship between employees, employers, public authorities and society. The theoretical framework developed by Boltanski and co-authors proved to be extremely clarifying when analysing these discourses. According to our data, the dominant discourse on

labour demands and working conditions is based on ‘inevitability’: it has prevailed as a legitimating discourse among the ruling and technical class; it is embraced with varying degrees of scepticism and resignation, but it is well established. Meanwhile, this discourse is interpreted as imposed, ideological and propagandist by the people closest to the situation of workers and those who best know the reality of the labour situation.

With this empirical research on what is probably one of the most stressed labour markets in developed countries (Jaumotte, 2011), we show how the two orders of worth that compel workers to self-exploitation and resigned acceptance of precariousness and poor working conditions prevail among the main actors in the job market. A second contribution of the study is the revelation that the order of the Civic World is indeed present, but in the form of nostalgia, with no practical effect or hope.

To the best of our knowledge, Boltanski’s framework has not previously been applied to the discourse of participants in the job market. Our conclusions shed light on the structure of justification around the job market, warn of a hidden restlessness in key agents, and contribute elements for the future construction of theory and policy design.

The paper is organised as follows: the first section describes and justifies our theoretical framework and focus, and briefly refers to the Spanish labour market; section two describes our method; section three presents the results; section four discusses and concludes.

1. FRAMEWORK

Capitalism has the ability to reinvent itself and impose economic conditions that systematically hamper the claims for safer, more humane and more respectful forms of work (Ekbia & Nardi, 2019). Critics of mainstream economics argue that it would take a full new set of values to overcome the tendency of capitalism to maintain forms of work that harm people and society (Branco, 2019). In this vein, Boltanski and Chiapello (2002), building on previous work by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), analysed how the discourse of management education and management science is deployed as a form of justification. Their approach is briefly summarised here to show it is an appropriate framework for an inquiry into the discourses around labour demands. This section will also include a few notes on the Spanish labour market to clarify how this theoretical framework is pertinent to our particular context.

1.1 Legitimacy as Justification

Legitimacy can be defined as follows:

A generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995: 574).

It is a multilevel social process that extends from perceptions of a legitimacy object by evaluators to their judgments about it and eventually to their actions based on that judgment, which in turn produce macrolevel effects on the object (Suddaby, Bitektine & Haack, 2017: 468).

Legitimizing a certain institutional and economic realm has the power to shape that realm. Legitimacy is gained through a process whereby stakeholders engage their organisation or system in public debate. In these public debates, the discourse plays a key role in creating, earning, maintaining and repairing legitimacy (Habermas, 1975; Patriotta, Gond & Schultz, 2011; Suchman, 1995).

Our study assumes that justifications of the Spanish labour market are fundamental in that they fulfil an ideological role (Alonso & Fernández, 2018): they emphasise ideas that act as cosmetic instruments to cover up a situation of domination (Hansen, 2017; Alonso & Fernández, 2018). Privileged actors are thus able to legitimate certain political programmes (Boltanski, 2014). In the case of the labour market in Spain, this involves neoliberal policies (Fernández, 2007; Alonso & Fernández, 2018).

Ideological discourse used in the pursuit of legitimacy (Béland & Cox, 2010) implies that ideas are shared and accepted to the extent that they are taken for granted. They become ‘shared beliefs’ (Béland & Cox, 2010), acting as institutional models that ‘dictate’ and “tell agents which institutions to construct” (Blyth, 2002: 40, 43). Taken-for-granted ideas thus do not demand much reflexivity from either the actors invoking them or from those to whom the discourses are addressed, the latter even contributing voluntarily to their very exercise (Boltanski, 2014). Thus, to achieve such willing collaboration, the discourses must be perceived and understood as fulfilling three dimensions or requirements of legitimation as distinguished by Boltanski and Chiapello (2002): stimulation, security and justice.

Faced with a society that Boltanski defines as “increasingly unequal”, the development of those discourses must be constant (Patriotta, Gond & Schultz, 2011). They are increasingly more necessary and diverse. There is no single

legitimation discourse. Different discourses coexist amid any line of social tension or dispute, which implies that they all require their own legitimation (Hansen, 2017).

Boltanski's model is based on this view of parallel legitimacy discourses (Lewis, Anderson, Lyonette, Payne & Wood, 2017). We adopt this model to explore the job market in Spain because the multiplicity of actors and interests involved clearly points to the coexistence of diverse discourses (managerial, entrepreneurial, trade unionists, public officers, etc.). Note that Boltanski and co-authors treat individuals as subjects placed in a situation in which they must face uncertainty and ambiguity (Jagd, 2011), social tension and dispute (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). This is a fairly accurate description of the Spanish labour market.

Alluding to the justification model of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), and to the model of cities of Boltanski and Chiapello (2002), we will include the plurality of legitimating discourses used by various key socio-professional agents (Blokker, 2011).

Recall that Boltanski (2014) contends that both the structures and their actions are subject, in formal terms, to a set of justification or legitimation demands. These justifications may involve positive affirmations or statements, but they can also be critical of viewpoints opposed to the context analysed, that is, legitimating one's own discourse through the de-legitimation of the opposing one (Thévenot, Moody & Lafaye, 2000). These justification models, with their characteristic orders of worth, may help us conceptualise and understand the demands of the Spanish labour market, as well as recognise the plurality of justifications which grant legitimacy to precarious working conditions or criticise them (Pecoraro & Uusitalo, 2014).

The orders, or 'worlds' of justification are not bound to particular social domains such as institutions, individuals or groups, but they coexist in the same social space (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 151). Our study therefore addresses discourses as instruments mobilised to justify or criticise the demands of the labour market in Spain as they evolved after the deep economic crisis of 2008. The criteria or values adduced for the justification, consequently, equip individuals with the means to analyse, criticise and/or evaluate these demands.

Although this theoretical framework (the so-called Boltanski model) has been used as an analytical tool in countless fields of social reality, it has been underutilised in the processes of justification, critique and attempts to produce commitments in organisations (Jagd, 2011). In recent years, studies have drawn on Boltanski's models in the critical analysis of contentious and con-

troversial topics such as globalisation (Ylä-Anttila, 2016; Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016); business management (Richards, Zellweger, & Gond, 2017); local issues such as the socio-cultural symbolism surrounding the fishing of Baltic salmon (Ignatius & Haapasaari, 2018); open access publishing (Bacevic & Muellerleile, 2018) and moral issues related to copyrights (Edwards, Klein, Lee, Moss & Philip, 2015); climate change (Nyberg & Wright, 2012); social welfare in child care (Autto & Törrönen, 2017); urban development (Holden & Scerri, 2015); nuclear energy (Patriotta, Gond & Schultz, 2011); private health insurance (Lehtonen & Liukko, 2010); or the multiple rough edges around the organisation of the Olympic Games (Giulianotti & Langseth, 2016). This study is the first one, to our knowledge, to apply the framework to the legitimating and critical discourses around the demands of labour markets.

1.2 Worlds of Justification: Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) develop a comprehensive theoretical framework to explain how individuals justify their actions in order to gain the respect of the others in situations of public dispute.

Legitimate justifications are always in relation to a ‘common good’ which can be assumed to be shared. Six principles or orders of common good are proposed, each of which is governed by evaluative criteria or “senses of justice” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 213). These “senses of justice” must follow a series of rules and principles to be accepted by other actors in a dispute.

The six orders of worth proposed by the authors are: civic, industrial, domestic, market, inspiration, and ‘fame’ (see Table 1):

Each order of worth offers a different basis for justification and involves a different mode of evaluating what is good for a common humanity in terms of market worth, or efficient technique and method, for instance (Thévenot, Moody & Lafaye, 2000: 236).

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) assume pluralistic world views, referred to as ‘cities’, ‘worlds’ or, as we choose to say here, ‘orders of worth’. They argue that individuals have cognitive flexibility to deliberately choose among all existing orders of worth to construct justifying arguments.

Subsequently, Boltanski and Chiapello (2002) identified a seventh order which they called the ‘Projective City’ (Table 2). It is an example of how capitalism absorbs the energy of its own critics. In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*,

they argue that Western capitalism is characterised by the capacity to absorb and utilise different types of critiques directed at it (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002: 163-164): “it is the critique which has the responsibility of finding justifications, which in turn are taken over by capitalism and absorbed by its ‘spirit’” (Basauré, 2011: 368).

These common worlds or ‘cities’ constitute legitimate forms of the common good which provide universal principles of both coherence and justice (Patriotta, Gond & Schultz, 2011).

In the table below (Table 1), we present the evaluative criteria in each of those worlds. It also includes the superior principle order of worth of each of the worlds and the type of characteristics on which it is based.

The basis for Boltanski and Thévenot’s taxonomy of orders of worth comes from three different sources. First, they investigated the kinds of argument that are present empirically in everyday disputes. Second, they utilise classical political philosophy in order to map the grammar in each world and to frame the types of argument found in everyday disputes. The third source is management texts and business publications, which the authors use to specify the objects, subjects and relations within each world.

In this research, the arguments that make up everyday discourse will be used to explore the clusters of values that dominate the legitimating communication around labour demands. We rely on Richards et al.’s thesis:

Organisational actors may feel compelled to mobilise the worlds that they find appropriate to justify their actions or behaviours when they face disputes or conflicts or when their moral legitimacy is threatened (Richards, Zellweger & Gond, 2017: 11).

These worlds are products of a plural society that can change over time and vary depending on the cultural context (Autto & Törrönen, 2017; Holden & Scerri, 2015; Nyberg & Wright, 2012).

Table 1
Common worlds: Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)

	Market	Industrial	Civic	Domestic	Inspired	Opinion
Mode of evaluation (worth)	Price, cost	Technical efficiency	Collective welfare	Esteem, reputation	Grace singularity creativeness	Renown, fame
Test ^b	Market competitiveness	Competence, reliability, planning	Equality and solidarity	Trustworthiness	Passion, enthusiasm	Popularity, audience, recognition
Form of relevant proof	Monetary	Measurable: criteria, statistics	Formal, official	Oral, exemplary, personally warranted	Emotional involvement & expression	Semiotic
Qualified objects	Freely circulating market good or service	Infrastructure, project, technical object, method, plan	Rules and regulations, fundamental rights, welfare policies	Patrimony, locale, heritage	Emotionally invested body or item: the sublime	Sign, media
Qualified human beings	Customer, consumer, merchant, seller	Engineer, professional, expert	Equal citizens, solidarity unions	Authority	Creative being	Celebrity
Time formation	Short-term, flexibility	Long-term planned future	Perennial	Customary past	Eschatological, revolutionary, visionary moment	Vogue, trend
Space formation	Globalization	Cartesian space	Detachment	Local, proximal anchoring	Presence	Communication network

Table 2
Projective City: Boltanski and Chiapello (2002)

	Superior principle	Mode of evaluation	Subjects	Arguments	Qualified objects	Basic relation
Projective city	Activity Temporality	Connect Coordinate	Manager Coach	Connect	Projects Alliances	Network Connectivity

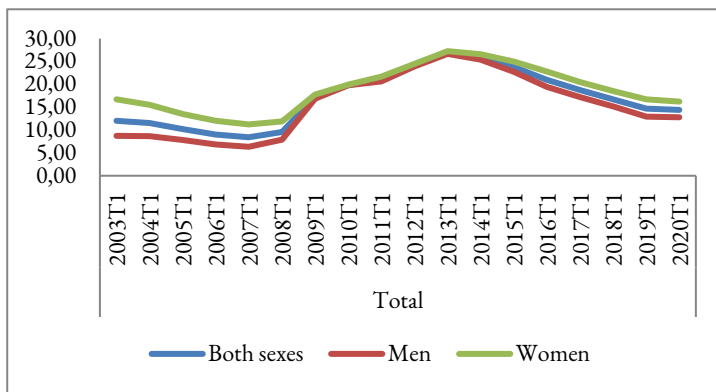
In what follows, we describe and analyse the discourses of different socio-professional agents. The focus is on discourses that show the subjects' understanding of how the current demands of the labour market and the degradation of working conditions in Spain are legitimated.

1.3 The Spanish Labour Market

It is worth pausing for a moment to appreciate the relevance of the case of the Spanish labour market in the context of developed countries. Spain was one of the fastest growing European economies in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, that economic growth came to an abrupt halt with the financial crisis of 2008. Since then, employment rates have been declining drastically as a result of layoffs and business closures (Graph 1). In 2018, Spain was the country with the highest number of workers in poverty in the European Union and seventh highest in the world (Graph 2). This was due not only to high unem-

ployment, but to widespread temporality, loss of purchasing power and, consequently, a growth in social inequality. This, in turn, brings about the tendency to accept increasingly lower salaries and worse working conditions –for example longer hours, less insurance coverage, fake part-time jobs, etc.– in an attempt to retain employment (Barroso, 2017; Borriello, 2017; Suárez Corujo, 2014; López Andreu, 2017; OIT, 2012) (see Table 3).

Graph 1
National unemployment rate in men, women and both sexes from 2003-2020

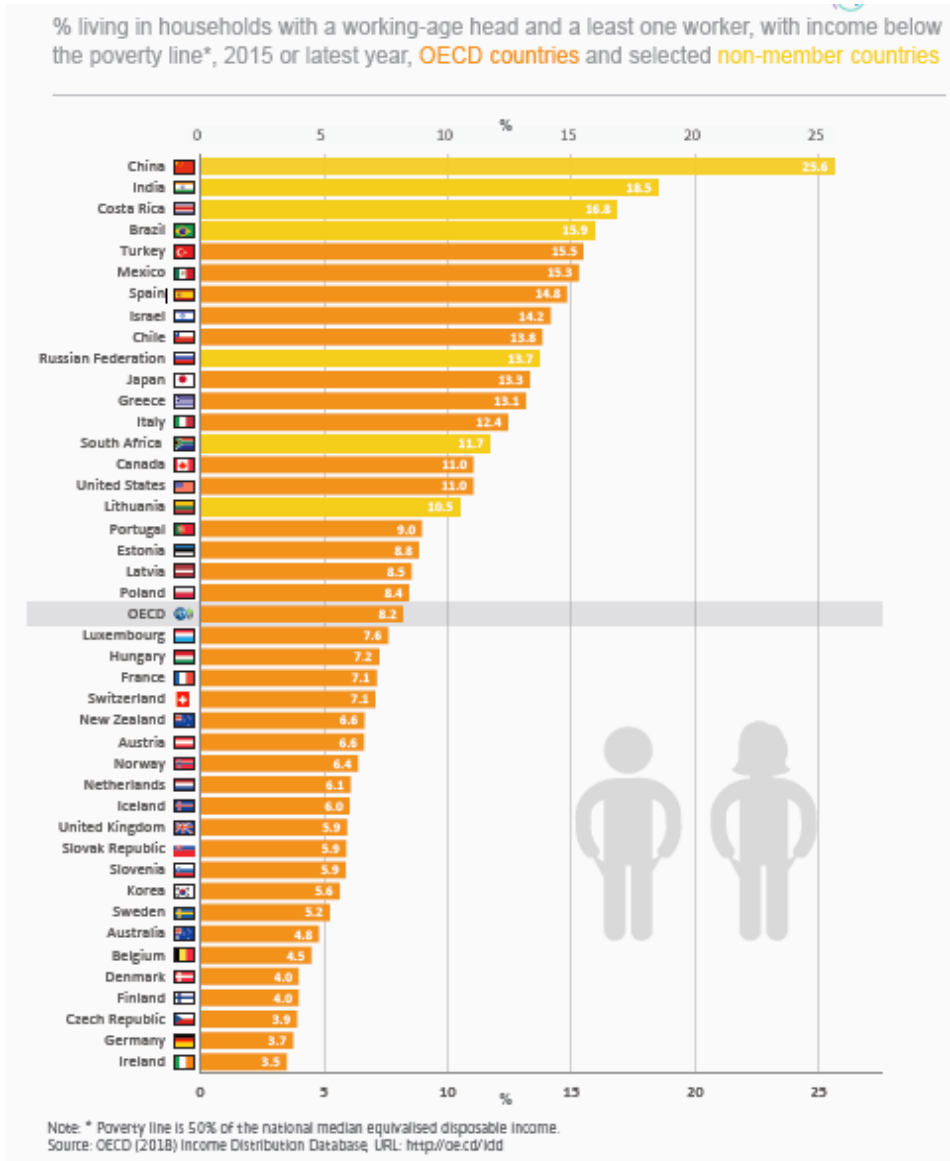


Source: National Statistics Institute. Economically Active Population Survey, 1st Quarter 2020.

Table 3
Changes in Spanish Labour Market (2008-2016)
*Men and women from 15 to 64 years of age

		Unemployment rate		Temporary jobs (percentage)		Part-Time Jobs (percentage)		Annual hours per worker (average)	
2008	2016	2008	2016	2008	2016	2008	2016	2008	2016
65.3	47.60	11.4	18.63	29.1	26.1	10.9	14.1	1647	1695

Graph 2
Working, but still in poverty



Source: OCDE (2018) <http://www.oecd.org/social/ministerial/Compare-your-country.pdf>

Regrettably, the situation brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic has only increased unemployment and aggravated the rates of precariousness, instability, insecurity and uncertainty in the labour market, despite legislative measures and EU support during lockdowns.

Within this extreme context of uncertainty, limited job opportunities and high labour demands, the justificatory ideology that seeks to legitimate and maintain the commitment to the system and thus appease social unrest must be particularly powerful. Our exploration reveals that this is exactly the case.

It is worth noting that this situation prompted the left-leaning government coalition installed after the 2019 general election to modify basic labour legislation. As examples, Royal Decree 32/2021, (December 28, 2021) attempts to curb temporary and other forms of precarious contracts; and Law 19/2021 (December 20, 2021) allows workers under a certain income threshold to claim the unconditional subsidy provided under the national minimum income scheme (*ingreso mínimo vital*, IMV), thus alleviating the situation of the working poor. At the time of writing it is too early to assess the effects of this legislation.

2. METHODOLOGY

We used a qualitative methodology to capture the complexity, dynamism and subjectivity inherent to the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). We conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with the following agents (see appendix 1 for details):

- Company managers in charge of HR and CSR;
- Labour experts from business associations and public organisations like universities;
- HR and CSR consultants;
- Trade unionists;
- HR specialists;
- Politicians.

The balanced combination of three methodological criteria characteristic of qualitative research conditioned both the number and type of participants and the information-gathering process. We sought a typological representation rather than a numerical or statistical representation so as to capture all

the socio-demographic heterogeneity, discursive variability and diversity of profiles or strategies that the social group studied may present; second, saturation or redundancy criteria determined the completion of the interviews and; third, accessibility or availability conditioned access to a greater or lesser number of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Control measures were implemented to ensure the thoroughness of the analyses and conclusions. These included the coding, categorising and independent interpretation of the results by the research team members, who subsequently shared and agreed on each criterion used and decision adopted. Each step taken in the research was described and justified as specifically and clearly as possible.

We obtained the sample from the professional social network LinkedIn. Other research participants were identified using the snowball technique. Most of the responses were obtained individually and in-person; only three of the interviews were conducted online through Google Meet. Information was kept confidential at all times.

The interviews were prepared as a script based on the aims of the study and the theoretical framework. They were conducted over a 12-month period and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. They were digitally recorded, fully transcribed and incorporated into the NVivo 11 software (Mac version) where both the statements (see Table 4) and the responses were coded. The coding was structured in accordance with the orders of worth described by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). A list of semantic descriptors was developed based on the analysis carried out by Patriotta, Gond and Schultz (2011). The analytical descriptors were refined through the ongoing comparative analysis and discussion among the researchers.

Table 4
Semantic descriptors of the seven orders of worth and their recurrences
in the coded interviews

Common Worlds Semantic markers used for linking positions to “common worlds” during the coding process. The terms in <i>italics</i> are additions by Patriotta, Gond and Schultz (2011) to the list of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).	
Civic	Collectives, collective will, equality, common objectives, participation, rights, obligations, solidarity, mobilisation, individualism, cooperation, <i>socialisation, political interests</i> , approbation, <i>political negotiation, legality, public interest, suing</i> .

Industrial	Efficiency, performance, profitability, production, future, functional, predictability, reliability, motivation, work energy, professional, experts, specialists, need, adapt, analyse, effectiveness, degree of efficiency, analysis, report, proof.
Domestic	Tradition, culture, generation, hierarchy, leader, loyalty, trust, superior, informed, leaders, family, responsibility, authority, subordination, honour, shame, cooperation, celebrations, duty, task, <i>dialogue, seriousness, information, common sense within organisation.</i>
Market	Competition, competitiveness, supply, demand, rivalry, saleable, interest, market, wealth, profit, result, management, cost, expense, <i>costs, profit maximisation, success</i> , payment, wages, price, saving, competitors, customer, buyer, salesman, independent worker, employee (worker), <i>investor, supplier</i> , buy, get, sell, economically, business, <i>cheap, expensive, economical efficiency.</i>
Inspired	Creation, creativity, passion, enthusiasm, dream, fantasy, spirit, feeling, <i>genius, fascination</i>
Fame	Public opinion, media, public, audience, public attention, reputation, desire to be recognised, <i>public debate, boycott, public pressure, public legitimating</i> , opinion leader, journalist, <i>communication strategy, recognition</i> , influence, propaganda, promotion
Projects (not on the list)	<i>Connectivity, network, temporal, value, activity, manager, coach, connect, values</i>

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the model of Patriotta, Gond and Schultz (2011) and Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)

With the help of this list of descriptors, expressions in the interviews were systematically coded. Each expression was taken as a ‘unit of meaning’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 56), that is, a phrase linked to a clear idea. When a phrase referred to multiple worlds, it was assigned more than one code.

3. RESULTS: JUSTIFYING SUBJECT OPINIONS IN RELATION TO “WORLDS OF JUSTIFICATION”

We now report the findings directly derived from the interviews. In what follows, we let our informants speak for themselves. Excerpts from the transcripts of the interviews were translated into English, while the data extracted from NVivo are kept in Spanish, the working language of the interviews and coding.

First, we asked our participants what is generally required or demanded from a worker or job applicant. After obtaining the responses, we configured a discursive matrix represented via a tag cloud, Figure 1.

Figure 1
Tag cloud of the current labour demands in Spain



Source: Prepared by the authors with NVivo 11 (Mac version)

Main words in the cloud: flexibility, training/education, skills, values, experience, knowledge, qualifications.

A first observation is that entrepreneurs and human resource managers tend to require more education and skill sets such as flexibility, adaptability and communication, teamwork, versatility and creativity, among others. As a result, these professional qualities are becoming essential elements in certain jobs:

Organisations need to be more flexible, more competitive, they have to operate in more globalised markets and with different cultures, and they have to work more in a team. So, it is necessary to adapt to that globalisation and have people with a great ability to adapt and with a very high level of commitment. EE15

I have a queue of people at the door who have the same qualifications. I lay out the conditions that I please, and to justify it, I also demand that you be creative, have social skills, all those things. EE22

Do what I say, obey me in everything I tell you, be creative, be empathetic with the company, and so on, because otherwise I have 500 people waiting at the door. SE33

In short, it is no longer enough to have some increasingly demanding professional expertise. Rather, individuals must also voluntarily accept involvement with their organisation that goes beyond what is strictly work-related, entailing a personal effort and commitment. This is mainly denounced by trade unionists.

We then move to the question of how these extraordinary demands are justified. We found that each interest group tends to appeal to different orders of worth.

The most widely used legitimating arguments were: Market World, Civic World and Projective City (Figure 2).

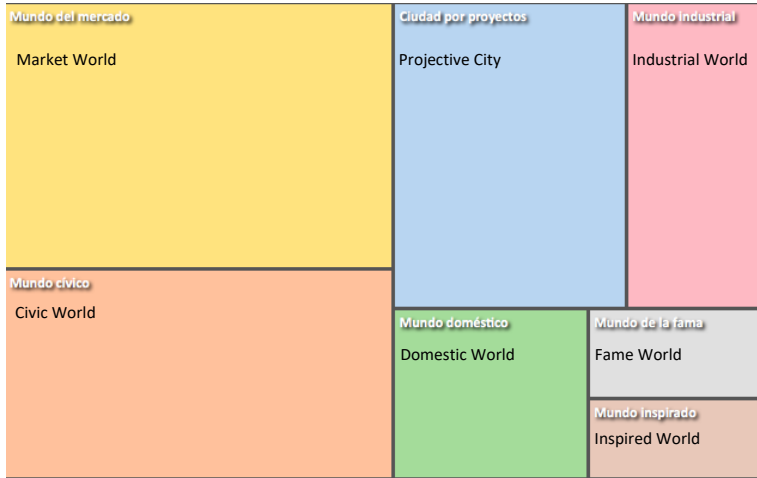
Table 5 depicts the most commonly cited arguments by interest group using a greyscale ranging from dark grey (most cited) to white with a diagonal line (least cited). The table shows at a glance how those three argument types stand out above the rest. Figure 2 presents a treemap where, considering all the participants as a single social group, the prevalence of these three worlds is highlighted by size.

Table 5
Most cited orders of worth in the labour market in Spain

	Politicians	Managers	Consultants	Experts	Unions	Hu. Re. Tec.
Projective City	2	3	9	7	4	16
Civic World	1	3	2	16	11	14
Fame World	0	2	0	0	5	2
Market World	1	18	3	16	7	15
Domestic World	2	2	5	5	2	3
Industrial World	2	2	2	4	7	7
Inspired World	0	3	2	3	0	0

Source: Prepared by the authors with NVivo 11 (Mac version)

Figure 2
Treemap of the orders of worth most cited by all participants



Source: Prepared by the authors with NVivo 11 (Mac version)

Faced with the evidence of high labour demands (Figure 1) and the aforementioned degradation of working conditions (point 1.3.), the principle of supply and demand, and competitiveness (Market World), are invoked as somewhat inevitable by entrepreneurs and human resource managers. The Marxist thesis of the reserve army of labour appears to be confirmed: in this case, it is a well trained post-industrial army, but whose conditions, as we shall see, resemble those of the industrial proletariat:

The thing is that, ultimately, the law of supply and demand is also observed in the world of work. I'll give you an example; in selection, what's going on? [...] I post an ad on Info-jobs and I have to take it down three hours later because I have 400 candidates. [...] What's happening these days? Well, since there's so much demand, you ask the market for something, a profile "X", with some characteristics "X", and you have 100. [...] Today, whatever you ask for in the market, unfortunately, you have it. [...] All decisions made by the company, including those made by Human Resources, are aimed at achieving better results, greater profit. Getting better results is all of that: being more competitive, being leaders, overtaking your competitor to do so. MRRHHEo8

Let's not forget that we are a global market, there is supply and demand. There is such a big gap between supply and demand that, like any other market, prices, in this case wages, fall. PEo2

In this argumentative rhetoric, mainly present in the discourse of businesspeople, money, price, cost and commercial issues are the primary determinants of the socio-professional relations, beyond any other logic that may influence decision-making processes.

Look, you have to pay for people to live, to live well, so that money isn't a worry, but if you pay them more, it's costing you money. MRRHHEo3

Companies offer more precarious contracts because they want to save money, make much more at the expense of, well, they know there is a large supply of people. TE37

As is clear from these comments from workers and trade unionists, the superior principle is competitiveness (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; De Cock & Nyberg, 2016; Nyberg & Wright, 2012), where wealth and maximum profit is pursued. In other words, it is the competition between individuals (demand) who want scarce goods (Jagd, 2001), like employment (supply), that determines what is happening. This releases the pressure on employees and employers alike. Competitiveness is the argument levelled against any questioning (Nyberg & Wright, 2012).

In this business-oriented argumentative logic, for example, the justification for austerity policies, or the increase of requirements, also thrives on appeals to external restrictions that may take different forms, including international markets and investors, that is, the existence of a world of global competition (Borriello, 2017).

A company has to be profitable, it's obviously not an NGO. [...] You have to be competitive because the market demands it, but I'm not sure that lessons have been learnt in that field and that companies want to be sustainably competitive. EE19

Right now there are very small companies competing with very large international companies, as the markets became globalised. [...] small companies are forced to compete with that. So, the way they have to compete is by requiring their workers to be able to cover equally extensive hours and with poor working conditions. [...] Even if they [small companies] are based where labour laws are respected, they're competing with companies that are in countries where labour rights are not respected, ok? [...] Spain has become much more competitive insofar as it has greatly reduced costs, wage costs in particular have been reduced greatly with this crisis due to the strong competitiveness. TE42

In the Market World that presides over business, the agent will see profit as a key determinant of success (Patriotta, Gond & Schultz., 2011), and profit-

able businesses establish the moral guide by which they must be governed. Successful organisations determine right and wrong: they establish the free market as the key institution (Holden & Scerri, 2015).

In short, this discourse on the rationale for the high labour demands and poor contractual conditions does not conceal its vision of competitiveness and maximum profit. Rather, it poses it as the most consistent and ethical way to respond to the needs of the market; therefore, businesspeople and managers serving in corporations big and small are the greatest supporters of such a discourse.

The consequences of establishing the Market World as an employers' legitimating argument leads to the Civic World being the second most cited order as a form of critical reaction by employees and trade unionists. For Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the Civic World is rooted in the general will, which can lead to a social movement of collective action when a social dispute arises. It implies the pursuit of the common good (Patriotta, Gond & Schultz, 2011) and is read and argued in terms of solidarity, equality and collective well-being (Holden & Scerri, 2015; Jagd, 2011).

The values of the Civic World are most widely invoked by labour experts, union representatives and workers. These socio-labour agents make a critical appraisal of the situation based on the loss of collective rights. But this loss is itself justified. They allude to the fact that, faced with the stringent requirements and competitiveness of the labour market, solidarity and collective struggle gives way to egoistic individualism:

...Nowadays, for me my mortgage and my kids' clothes and putting food on the table every day are much more important than complaining about my job situation. [...] What people want is to get out of their personal crisis, not the social crisis. [...] There is no such social awareness, a collective action. [...] I'm going to do everything right so I don't get sacked. [...] We've become more individualistic, [...] the circumstances require it... EE14

People only look at their own problem, they don't gather up problems that are collective and which are resolved collectively and are union problems. [...] Well, at the collective level, there's no fight. There's some individual fighting, each one looking at their own particular situation. Workers are disunited, they're not organised. SE25

Thus, from the side of the workers comes the admission that there has been a loss of strength in the collective fight, and with it, a loss of labour rights. Interestingly, our informant EE18 talks about the lack of collective awakening:

Really this whole discourse of a slow drip, of neoconservatism, of neoliberalism, of everything that discourse implies, of a way of doing things, and of consumption practices and of global change; it's really having an effect on the demand for collective rights. And I don't think it's just a question of individualism; rather, around the world, but specifically in Spain, a disaffection also occurs, a disinterest by the public. [...] No one is satisfied with working hard and earning little. The thing is that the discourse that you'll find most is, "It is what it is". There's no collective awakening. EE18

That awareness of the collective struggle for the rights of workers has been lost [...] I don't think that people have that awareness. Only when the problem is right on top of them, then they do, then they jump, but I do think that awareness of the worker, of coming together, has been lost [...] It's also a matter of necessity, they [lower income people] are [just] surviving. MRSCo6

We must not forget that this order of worth (the Civic World) reflects civil rights, solidarity and equality: "Equality or solidarity is often the guiding logic underlying the modes of engagement" (Thévenot, Moody & Lafaye, 2000: 246). The worthy objects are rights and welfare policies and the worthy subjects are the citizens themselves (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

In short, many of our participants, especially workers and trade unionists, report the loss of civic values when they state that Spanish society, in the face of the current labour situation, has become more individualistic because ultimately, "there is no choice"; solidarity and collective struggle are relegated to the background.

In line with rising individualism, Boltanski and Chiapello (2002) argue that a new order of justification began to appear in the eighties and nineties to alleviate the social critique of successive waves of labour reforms aimed at maintaining economic growth in the context of deindustrialisation, as well as the rise of entrepreneurial freedom and values like authenticity and creativity. This is the order of what they call 'the network' or 'Projective City' (Holden & Scerri, 2015).

This order of justification is measured in relation to the principle of activity, temporality and mobility. The activity is aimed at generating temporary projects or integration into them (Basauré, 2011). This activity is manifested in not being exclusively subject to a single job, but to a myriad of all kinds of projects that may be carried out and which, hypothetically, must be developed successively, the project constituting, within this logic, a transient arrangement.

From the point of view of executives, businesspeople and human resource managers, the project is associated with abstract values of the person, their

versatility, personal ideals, flexibility, and with their ability to create connections and collaborations, in other words, a network (Fernández, 2007; Muñoz-Rodríguez & Santos, 2017).

When I'm considering what kind of person has to work in an organisation, in this case, in mine, I'm looking at, in addition to the skills for the position, [...] I'm looking for people who want to work on the project, who identify with it, who have values that match those that we want to have in our organisation. [...] You have to have, let's say, [...] an enthusiasm for participating and contributing in a project that may be somewhat uncertain. [...] You might be here today but tomorrow you have the opportunity to be somewhere else and to keep moving from one place to another and not think "I'm in this company until I retire", [which] is the mentality we have. CRSCE11

People have to think: What do I have to do to be necessary to someone? To add value? That should be worked on in schools [...] Young people should be trained to be innovative, creative, to be curious, to always add value, to be connected. MRSCo6

I see [project-based working] as a positive thing because it also helps flexibility and the output of the working time. [...] I think it's positive because you learn a ton. Every company is a world, every type of job is different and that's enriching, understandably, and also improves the productivity of that person. PEO2

When we asked the interviewees if they are seeing a change in the profiles demanded by the Spanish market, the trade unionists and the labour experts not only identify an increase in the search for well-educated workers with social skills (Figure 1) (Market World), but a new, highly dynamic labour system defined as 'project-based working', with an involvement that goes beyond timetables and geographical locations and which requires a high level of commitment (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002).

We're heading towards the gig economy [...], work on demand, zero-hour contracts or, now the name, finally, more than debatable and highly debated of "collaborative economy". All of these conceal a new work relationship that doesn't look like a work relationship, project-based working. EE17

Today you work here with this salary, today you work there, today [...] you have to go to Canada or you have to fend for yourself by constantly changing conditions and the rest. [...] That's what they want, freedom to hire without an attachment. [...] Depending on what the project requires. SE26

The job isn't what it used to be; how our parents started working at 16 and retired at the same company. So, now you have to like, be working a lot by projects, by programmes,

and in each project, in each programme, a series of different things is required of you and you have to be very fast in learning everything [...] In your job it's you who has to be training yourself, it's almost [always] you who has to be totally aware about training yourself and about opening a bigger and bigger field, because the more you know and the more of an expert you are, the more options you have to change jobs, or rather, to change projects. [...] If I have a 10-month project, when I'm in month 8, I'm already like, as they say, having an anxiety attack. [...] This issue with projects influences you in everything. [...] It's going to give us mental health problems. TE44

Stable, regular work, what we knew as regular, has disappeared. [...] A project can last two, three years, but it can last five or six months. So, yeah, that adaptability, that mobility, is required. [...] The workday is 24 hours long. You have to respond because everything is digitalised and connected. TE45

Despite the fact that this order –the Projective City– refers to semantic descriptors related to creativity, innovation and enthusiasm, characteristic of the Inspired World (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), these descriptors hardly appear in our study (see Table 5), which reveals a certain contradiction. It shows that, while project-based working is discussed as a new work relationship, it lacks content beyond the extreme demands of personal involvement with and responsibility towards the project and explicit renunciations of social-professional certainties, securities and coverage. This is denounced by trade unionists and employees.

Projective City illustrates those new forms of work which arise as a consequence of the increasing precariousness of the job market, and which revolve around temporality, flexibility, adaptability, self-control and mobility (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). This leads to an increasingly unstable, constantly moving labour market, which prompts complaints and critiques from workers and trade unionists.

In this sense, the transition from the salary society to a deregulated society brings about a significant change in the world of work, going from

... a situation in which it was common to obtain a job for life (mutual loyalty between companies and worker), to another situation characterized by the permanent need for preparation, on the part of the worker, to be “employable” and increase their chances of remaining in a quality job (employability for life) (Alonso, Fernández & Nyssen, 2009: 57).

And it is this point, the concept of employability, that lies at the epicentre of the strategic redefinition of employment and lifelong learning policies.

Thus, the responsibility of governments is limited to policies of a facilitating nature, such as promoting the entrepreneurial spirit or, failing that, recycling, thus institutionalising a model in accordance with the principles of the Anglo-American world's workfare state, which does not understand social cohesion or social protection (Veloso-Larraz, 2010).

Despite this general trend, it is true that recent legislative measures (see above, point 1.3.) are intended to reduce some of these endemic problems in the labour market. Increasing the minimum professional wage, guaranteeing the IMV, or the latest labour reform to promote indefinite contracts over temporary contracts are all measures aimed at combating the perceived and real precariousness and uncertainty. They come at the cost of stern opposition from key market actors like corporate representatives and their political allies, and only after significant compromises and concessions. These measures and the debates leading to them are a clear example of how the labour market is a complex discursive space with deep ideological struggles and conflicts.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis suggests that in the justifications that make up the explanatory discourses on the labour market situation in Spain, the Market World and Projective City dominate. This implies, on the one hand, that the legitimacy of the labour demands and current working conditions in Spain are assumed to be based on the laws of the market (supply and demand, trade, competitiveness, etc.) and not on those that, a priori, may be assumed to be more closely related to the logical principles that should govern labour, that is, the semantics of the Industrial World or the Domestic World. The degradation of working conditions is justified in terms of flexibility, temporality or adaptability; in other words, project-based working (Projective City). These new concepts have come to replace the ideas of efficiency, discipline, predictability and long-term.

Another discursive thread present in the workers' and trade unionists' discourses we analysed is the Civic World. However, this is not used in terms of legitimation, but of critique, that is, as a desire in the face of a loss of collective interest in favour of the triumph of individualism. Here, the arguments are made from an absolute alienation of the workers, with an attitude of submission and compliance with these rules of the game as the only possibility: "...there is no alternative...".

The logic of the Market World dominates, but with a resistance, especially on the part of labour experts, union representatives and workers. For their part, business managers accept it, sometimes unenthusiastically. The law of supply and demand is imposed as a scientific, technocratic and effective/efficient regulator of the competitive labour market and, moreover, external to people. It presents itself as free from political interest and subjectivity and aligned with the common good and social material progress.

The trade unionists' discourse evidences a fragmentation of the collective struggle, so that each worker has his/her own needs, interests and objectives, as well as the freedom to achieve them. Workers are frequently depicted as solely responsible for their own present and future situation (individualisation and psychologisation of social problems).

In the justificatory business discourses of the Market World and Projective City, there is a strong component of 'inevitability' or 'submission' to social and economic forces beyond the control of the agents (workers and trade unionists). Nevertheless, it can be discerned that, while managers and consultants seem to adhere to the arguments of the Market World and projects, respectively, they are cited by trade unionists and labour experts to critique them and decry their dominance.

This reflects the lack of any concerted critique representing an alternative, particularly from the workers' side. For example, no reference is made to basic income, guaranteed and universalised forms of socio-professional integration, supranational labour frameworks, or ways of life based on the 'liberation of labour' as a result of technology. The success of neoliberal policies and the management discourse, which seek to convince modern society that there is no other alternative beyond what they promulgate, become clear. This notion is internalised by the working class. Despite the fact that managerial justificatory discourses generate resistance, they are embraced and no alternative proposals are heard.

We can identify three clearly distinguishable groups: managers, consultants and trade unionists. Managers, for the most part, invoke the Market World, consultants invoke Projective City and unions refer to the Civic World.

Labour and HR experts have a more global, balanced view based almost equally on the three orders of worth. They therefore might more fully represent the dominant discourses of legitimation, and at the same time they are more sophisticated and critical.

We have also witnessed a decline in the Industrial World. Industrial values are mentioned only by trade unionists and HR specialists. Moreover, we had anticipated that values of the Domestic World (hierarchy, loyalty, family, trust, authority) would be present in these discourses. However, despite the family-oriented and domestic culture of southern Europe, this is not the case. Boltanski (2014) noted that the Domestic World has shown a declining trend in recent years.

All of this confirms that the dominant market-based discourse regarding labour demands and working conditions, reinforced with the idea of inevitability, has prevailed as a legitimating discourse among the ruling and technical class. It is embraced with varying degrees of scepticism and resignation, but is well established. Meanwhile, it is interpreted as an imposed, ideological and propagandist discourse by the people closest to the situation of workers and those who best know the labour reality. But these agents (trade unionists and workers) are unable to articulate an alternative discourse. They simply allude, as an aspiration, to the Civic World representing the ideals of social construction typical of industrial society and mass society: class solidarity, union of workers, defence of social rights, etc., but without sufficient sway to bring about any change.

In summary, this field work has exemplified again how key participants in a crucially tense and conflicting social debate and practice tend to draw on a limited number of moral principles (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016) that assuage this tension by justifying the position and expectations of the less powerful parties.

In the particular case of the Spanish labour market, the qualitative data collected here may lead us to some conclusions. While the market-based and project-/network-based discourses are clearly dominant and effective in muzzling critique and assuaging potential tensions, there is also a high dose of scepticism. Most actors are aware of the ideological nature of the discourse and its somewhat weak foundations, but accept it anyway. Few of our informants take pride in or shamelessly embrace the ideals of the market. However, there is a disturbing lack of critical imagination and political impulse. This invites future research and theoretical reflection.

As for public policy, it needs to grapple with the reality captured by this research, which is one of unsolved conflict. How the contradictions we observed will evolve is difficult to anticipate. Actors in the job market situate themselves under the normative shadow of economic and market values, while they are for the most part aware of the ideological nature of the discourses

reflecting these values. They miss the civic values of collective struggle and working-class solidarity, but they feel unable to recover them in the face of increasing individualism imposed by the gig economy. It seems that public policy needs to be more attentive to the perceptions of workers and key actors in the job market. While public policy is generally based on simple goals (full employment, sustainable growth, decent salaries) and macro-economic analysis, actual perceptions among actors in the job market are more nuanced and complex than they seem at first glance. Our informants sceptically accept the logic of the market, but they are well aware of the corrosive character of this logic and all that is lost in this umpteenth transformation of capitalism.

Acknowledgements: This research was funded by Grant BES-2015-073179 and Grants FFI2014-56391-P and FFI2017-87953-R from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, National Plan of Scientific and Technical Research and Innovation.

The authors wish to thank Daniel Ozarow for helpful suggestions and support at an early stage of this research. Suggestions from reviewers for RECERCA improved the final version of the article and are gratefully acknowledged.

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Appendix 1. Details of participant interviewees

Social Agent	Organisation	Role/Position	Sex
Politician	PSOE –Socialist Party	Labour Relations Manager	Male
Academic / Labour Experts	Business Association	Labour Relations Manager	Male
Managers	Service Company	HR Manager	Male
Managers	Service Company	Sustainability Manager	Male
Consultants	CSR Consultancy	CEO	Male
Consultants	HR Consultancy	Manager	Male
Academic / Labour Experts	Labour Inspection	Provincial Director	Female
Academic / Labour Experts	Labour Inspection	Head of Service	Male
Academic / Labour Experts	Labour Inspection	Head of Service	Male
Academic / Labour Experts	University	Academic	Male
Academic / Labour Experts	University	Academic	Male
Academic / Labour Experts	University	Academic	Male

Academic / Labour Experts	Business School	Director of Master's Degree in HR	Male
Unions	UGT	General Secretary	Male
Unions	SAT	Union delegate	Male
Unions	CCOO	Union delegate	Female
Unions	SAT	Union delegate	Male
Unions	CCOO	Union delegate	Female
Unions	CCOO	Union delegate	Female
Unions	CCOO	Union delegate	Male
Unions	CCOO	Union delegate	Female
Unions	CCOO	Union delegate	Male
Unions	CCOO	Union delegate	Male
Politician	Ciudadanos	Representative. Mem- ber of Parliament and expert	Male
Consultants	CSR	Consultant	Male
Consultants	HR	Consultant	Male
Consultants	HR	Consultant	Male
HR Department	Chamber of Commerce	HR Specialist	Female

HR Department	Outsourcing Company	HR Specialist	Male
HR Department	Temporary Employment Company	HR Specialist	Male
HR Department	Temporary Employment Company	HR Specialist	Male
HR Department	Company Support	HR Specialist	Male
HR Department	Company Support	HR Specialist	Female
HR Department	Employment Agency	HR Specialist	Female
HR Department	Employment Agency	HR Specialist	Female
HR Department	Career Planning Service	HR Specialist	Female
HR Department	Career Planning Service	HR Specialist	Female
HR Department	Service Company	HR Specialist	Male
HR Department	Risk Management Service	Labour Risk Management Specialist	Male

Excerpts from the interview transcripts used in the main text are identified using the following codes: Consultants: CRSCE; Experts: EE; Human Resources Managers: MRRHHE; CSR Managers: MRSC; Politicians: PE; Union Members: SE; Experts (including corporate, public officials, etc.): TE.

To have an idea of the position of informants in the field, five of our informants held CEO or managing director positions in all types of companies —large multi-national corporations, large national cooperative companies, service companies, food industry companies— as well as directors of public services; among the politicians, one is member of parliament, and the union representatives include people in leading roles at regional and provincial levels (Secretary general). The academics include heads of department and directors of relevant degrees. While most of the informants come from Andalucía, where the researchers are based, they represent local, regional, national and even international organisations (such as ILO representatives in Spain) and all ranks within them.