

Using Latent Transition Analysis to Explore Changes in Decent Work Across Time

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This study explored longitudinal trajectories of decent work profiles guided by core propositions from psychology of working theory. Data were collected from 419 working adults in the United States at three time points over a 6-month period. We examined decent work trajectories using latent transition analysis considering two key covariates (work volition and career adaptability) and while accounting for other variables such as ethnicity, education, and income level. The analysis identified five latent decent work profiles: *only safety*, *low health care*, *indecent work*, *average*, and *decent work*. Notably, the *indecent* and *decent work* profiles were the most stable, while the *only safety* and *low health care* profiles were more likely to change with time. The influence of work volition and career adaptability on transition probabilities was found to partially align with the hypotheses of psychology of working theory. Findings indicated that, within psychology of working theory, these psychological mediators may operate through varied mechanisms to influence both the attainment and maintenance of decent work across time. Implications for future research, practical applications, and theoretical developments are discussed.

Public Significance Statement

This is the first study to investigate how various forms of decent work either change or remain consistent over time. Participants on either extreme of possible environments—decent work or indecent work—were most likely to remain in those environments. A sense of choice in one's career and readiness for career choice were partially helpful in maintaining or moving toward more decent working environments.

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Recent global changes, including the COVID-19 pandemic, advances in technology, the rise of green technologies, and significant political influences, have underscored the importance of quality employment and job stability in the world of work (Allan & Blustein, 2022; Nicola et al., 2020). Decent work—a concept introduced by the International Labour Organization (1999) and expanded in psychology of working theory (PWT; Duffy et al., 2016)—well captures this need. In PWT, decent work is defined as employment characterized by five components that include safe working conditions, balanced work hours, organizational and alignment with family/social values alignment, fair pay, and accessible health care (Duffy et al., 2017). The International

Labour Organization emphasized the essentiality of “securing decent work for all” for a sustainable future, and PWT lays out specific, empirically testable variables that are believed to predict decent work attainment access across time. Initial longitudinal studies testing PWT propositions have demonstrated that those with more privileged identities (i.e., less experiences of marginalization and economic constraints) and who have greater adaptability and choice in the world of work (i.e., career adaptability and work volition) are more likely to attain decent work (Duffy et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020).

However, one aspect of PWT that has yet to be examined concerns the stability of people's work decency across time and the

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factors that contribute to stability or change. For example, if someone perceives their work environment as having all five components of decent work at one time point, is it likely they will feel the same 3 or 6 months later? Additionally, if someone perceives their work as indecent but has a high level of work volition or career adaptability, will they be more likely to transition to a more decent environment 3 or 6 months later? In the present study, we address these questions by utilizing longitudinal survey data from a sample of workers residing in the United States. Using latent transition analysis (LTA), we first examine naturally occurring profiles using the five components of decent work as indicators. Next, we investigate the stability of these profiles across time at the participant level by examining any transitions that occur over a 6-month period. The 6-month timeframe was chosen as it is long enough to explore transitions that may occur in one's work and short enough to reduce participant attrition. Finally, we explore whether two core PWT psychological constructs—work volition and career adaptability—may affect decent work stability or transition. It is hoped that the results of this study may be helpful to scholars and practitioners interested in the evolving way people experience their work environments.

PWT

PWT (Duffy et al., 2016) was developed as a framework for understanding how people gain access to decent work and how decent work impacts work and well-being outcomes. PWT grew out of research in vocational psychology (Blustein et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2019), which focused on the work experiences of individuals with less access and choice in their lives, often due to having limited financial resources or having experienced marginalization due to one's identities. Duffy et al. (2016) suggested that these latter two factors—economic constraints and marginalization experiences—are the primary structural drivers that limit access to decent work across time. That is, throughout one's lifespan, the more individuals feel economically constrained and marginalized, the less likely they would be able to attain decent work. The authors also proposed that two psychological mediating constructs (work volition and career adaptability) may partially explain why being constrained or marginalized limits decent work access (Duffy, Choi, et al., 2024). Specifically, those with economic constraints and marginalization experiences have less chance of attaining decent work because their perceived ability to choose desired jobs (work volition) and their resources to adapt in the work of work (career adaptability) may be limited. These two mediators are noteworthy because they are proposed to be more amenable to individual intervention compared to the factors contributing to marginalization (Duffy et al., 2020).

PWT suggests that when decent work is secured, it will lead to both work-related and general well-being, primarily due to people's needs being met through the workplace (Duffy et al., 2017). Specifically, the theory proposes that decent work helps one meet their needs for survival (biological needs, such as food, shelter, and health care), social contribution (helping others with your work), and self-determination (performing work that is autonomous, with competence, and which is relationally connecting). To date, hundreds of empirical studies have drawn on PWT to examine its key propositions, with results mainly supporting the theory. Across a wide range of diverse groups of working adults, economic constraints and marginalization experiences negatively predicted

decent work attainment, often mediated primarily by work volition and career adaptability. Additionally, decent work attainment strongly predicts all three types of need satisfaction, which in turn predicts higher levels of work-related well-being and mental and physical health (Duffy, Choi, et al., 2024; Raque et al., 2024; Tokar et al., 2024).

Although a handful of recent studies have begun to also confirm the relations of these constructs across time (Allan et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2021), the majority have primarily relied on cross-sectional data. Thus, a notable gap in the decent work literature concerns the relative stability of the decent work across time. For example, Blustein et al. (2016) emphasized the necessity for a deeper investigation into the factors that contribute to not only the initial securement of decent work but also the stability of decent work and the transitions that may occur over time. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how decent work is secured and maintained, it is imperative to adopt a longitudinal perspective that allows for a more detailed exploration of the temporal aspects of securing decent work, including the role that individual psychological factors play in securing decent work across time (Duffy, Choi, et al., 2024).

Decent Work Profiles: Importance of a Person-Centered Approach

When the concept of decent work was initially developed for empirical testing, it was conceptualized as a latent construct composed of five underlying observable factors. As a latent variable, it was designed to capture the multifaceted nature of decent work, reflecting aspects that are not directly measurable but can be assessed through related, observable dimensions (Duffy et al., 2016, 2017). Most studies to date have measured decent work in this fashion and used either a total score across all five factors or subscale scores to compare to other hypothesized variables. However, using this latent variable approach based on five factors may hinder our understanding of the potentially heterogeneous formulation of decent work (Kim et al., 2021). Namely, the five factors of decent work may not uniformly flow in one direction or another (e.g., either decent work or indecent work), and it is possible that at the individual level large groups of people could be high or low on some factors and not others (e.g., high on safety and health care but low on compensation and time for rest). One way to address this potentiality is by creating latent profiles based on these subfactors of decent work—otherwise known as a person-centered approach—which can shed light on the possible unique interconnectedness of the five decent work dimensions (Spurk et al., 2020).

A small group of studies have used this approach in studying decent work. For example, Kim et al. (2021) used latent profile analysis (LPA) to construct decent work profiles based on data from over 2,000 U.S. working adults. Results did indeed demonstrate a high level of heterogeneity among the five subfactors, with five distinct profiles with varying level of decent work subfactors identified. These included a profile that had all high scores on five factors, one with all low scores on five subfactors, a profile that was average on all five factors, a profile that was low only on health care access, and a profile that was high only on safety and health care access. Overall, the results indicated that decent work was not simply a bimodal construct with all subfactors going in the same direction. Moreover, a key finding from their study was the role of

work volition as a significant factor distinguishing these profiles; participants higher in work volition were more likely to have decent work profile.

Blustein et al. (2020; Blustein, Allan, et al., 2023) also each adopted a person-centered approach to assessing decent work and included a precarious work scale in their analysis to offer a broader perspective of work conditions. Like Kim et al. (2021), Blustein et al. (2020; Blustein, Allan, et al., 2023) found decent and indecent profiles along with other unique profiles (two and three additional profiles, respectively), which tended to center on the presence or absence of health care access. Finally, Duffy, Gerdel, et al. (2024) recently did a similar study to Blustein's where they included the five decent work factors along with a meaningful work factor, attempting to determine whether some people may experience work as decent but not meaningful and vice versa. Here again, two profiles emerged on the extreme (e.g., highly decent and meaningful or indecent and unmeaningful) along with five other unique profiles. The findings from these four studies underscore the advantages of utilizing a person-centered approach to assess a multidimensional concept like decent work, where people's experiences with their work environment may not be uniformly positive or negative but nuanced.

We expanded these previous studies that have used cross-sectional data by taking on a longitudinal approach. LTA is an analytical tool that combines looking at data in a person-centered way while also seeing how profile groups shift across time (Nylund-Gibson et al., 2023). LTA is a specialized form of analysis that falls under the broader umbrella of latent variable modeling (Velicer et al., 1996). It is particularly designed to assess changes in latent statuses or profiles over time (Park et al., 2024), but it has never been used to understand changes in decent work. However, scholars from organizational psychology and occupational health (Bujacz et al., 2018; Morin et al., 2018) have recommended this approach as a useful method for understanding work environments and have demonstrated how work environment profiles can shift across time (Bujacz et al., 2018). Overall, LTA serves as a tool for researchers to construct latent profiles, examine stability of latent profiles across time, and showcase the potential progression of individuals as they transition through different profiles or remain stable in one profile over a set time (Gillet et al., 2017).

The Present Study

In the present study, we utilize LTA to examine stability of decent work profiles across time. Specifically, we use foundational principles from PWT (Duffy et al., 2016) and expand on existing empirical findings, focusing on (a) identifying naturally occurring decent work profiles at different time points, (b) examining potential profile transitions (e.g., maintaining consistent profiles, transitioning to more decent work environments, and shifting to less decent conditions), and (c) investigating if theoretically informed variables (work volition and career adaptability) may affect profile transition. Although a few previous studies have used LPA to capture naturally occurring profiles of decent work, we still considered this study largely exploratory in nature and, thus, have not specified formal hypothesis. However, based on these prior studies (Blustein et al., 2020; Blustein, Allan, et al., 2023; Duffy, Gerdel, et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2021), we expect that multiple profiles of decent work will be

identified including those with all high and all low scores on the five subfactors.

We also generally expect that most individuals will remain in stable work conditions due to the short-term timeframe of the study, reflecting the relative stability of work environments and individual circumstances over a 6-month period. However, for those who do experience transitions, it seems that changes will be more likely to occur in a positive direction as individuals typically strive for better working conditions. This assumption is based on the idea that people are generally motivated to improve their work situations and seek environments that offer greater safety, better pay, and improved work-life balance. The exploration of these transition dynamics is crucial as it provides insights into the fluidity and resilience of decent work profiles over time, helping to identify factors that contribute to positive changes in work environments. Moreover, we examine the influence of work volition and career adaptability on profile transitions. As dynamic and malleable aspects of the PWT model, higher levels of these constructs may facilitate movement toward more favorable work conditions. Thus, individuals with greater work volition and career adaptability may be more likely to transition into more decent work. However, given the novelty of this research, these predictions are speculative.

Method

Procedure

This study was approved by the institutional review board of the authors' institution. Data were collected from February 2021 to September 2021, with the first wave in February, the second in May, and the third in August, each lasting roughly a month. We used Mechanical Turk, an online platform offering compensation for task completion. Previous studies have confirmed that Mechanical Turk is a valid and reliable source for collecting data in psychological research (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016). Eligible participants were those aged 18 and above, residing in the United States, and currently employed. Participants who completed the initial survey received subsequent surveys at 3-month intervals via their provided email addresses. Participants were compensated \$.50 for the first wave and \$1.00 for the second and third waves.

During the initial survey, there were 1,494 respondents. After excluding 183 for not currently working and 80 due to failed attention and quality checks, 1,231 participants remained. In the second survey, of the 752 respondents, 45 were excluded for unemployment and 60 for not passing the attention checks, leaving 647 participants. For the third survey, out of 746 respondents, 41 were excluded for not being employed and 51 for failing attention checks, resulting in 654 participants. For the purpose of analysis, we focused on participants who completed all surveys at three time points. We opted for listwise deletion after confirming no significant differences between the full sample and those with complete responses in terms of income, $t(1, 581) = -0.58, p = .561$; gender, $F(1, 4) = 1.792, p = .252$; race, $F(1, 8) = 0.869, p = .379$; sexual orientation, $F(1, 8) = 0.644, p = .445$; and educational level, $F(1, 8) = 2.29, p = .169$.

Participants

Our final sample comprised 419 U.S. working adults with an average age of 41.65 years ($SD = 12.05$), of which 197 (47.02%)

identified as male, 212 (50.60%) as female, one (0.24%) as transgender, and nine (1.43%) as a gender not listed. In terms of sexual orientation, 16 (3.82%) identified as asexual, 27 (6.44%) as bisexual, eight (1.91%) as gay, 358 (85.44%) as heterosexual, five (1.19%) as lesbian, three (0.72%) as pansexual, one (0.24%) as queer, and one (0.24%) as questioning. Regarding ethnic identity, 30 (7.16%) participants identified as African/African American/Black, two (0.48%) as American Indian/Native American/First Nation, one (0.24%) as Arab American/Middle Eastern, 31 (7.40%) as Asian/Asian American, three (0.72%) as Asian Indian, 14 (3.34%) as Hispanic/Latina/o American, 317 (75.66%) as White/European American, and 19 (4.53%) as multiracial.

Educational attainment varied, with three (0.72%) reporting some high school education, 19 (4.53%) holding a high school diploma, 13 (3.10%) having attended trade/vocational school, 67 (15.99%) attending some college, 226 (53.94%) holding a college degree, and 91 (21.72%) holding a professional degree. Household income levels were diverse: 36 (8.59%) reported earning less than \$25,000 annually, 109 (26.01%) between \$25,000 to \$50,000, 104 (24.82%) between \$51,000 to \$75,000, 73 (17.42%) between \$76,000 to \$100,000, 31 (7.40%) between \$101,000 to \$125,000, 26 (6.21%) between \$126,000 to \$150,000, 14 (3.34%) between \$151,000 to \$175,000, seven (1.67%) between \$176,000 to \$200,000, and 19 (4.53%) earning over \$201,000.

Measures

Decent Work

Decent work was evaluated using the 15-item Decent Work Scale, developed by Duffy et al. (2017). The Decent Work Scale identifies five critical dimensions, each reflecting various aspects of decent work: safe working conditions, adequate health care access, sufficient compensation, reasonable working hours that permit adequate rest and leisure, and organizational values that align with familial and societal norms. Each element of decent work was represented by a subcategory comprising three questions. Examples of items include: “At work, I feel safe from emotional or verbal abuse of any kind” and “My organization’s values align with my family values.” Participants responded to items using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. This scale demonstrated good convergent and discriminant validity, with each subscale correlating with related concepts but not with other subscales in the decent work framework (Duffy et al., 2017). Additionally, the Decent Work Scale effectively predicted outcome variables such as job satisfaction, work meaning, and withdrawal intentions (Duffy et al., 2017). In previous research, this scale demonstrated reliable constructs, evidenced by its internal consistency reliability for safe working conditions ($\alpha = .79$), access to health care ($\alpha = .97$), adequate compensation ($\alpha = .94$), free time and rest ($\alpha = .92$), and complementary values ($\alpha = .86$; Duffy, Gerdel, et al., 2024). In this study, internal consistency reliability for these scales across three waves ranged as follows: Safe Working Conditions (.81–.84), Access to Health Care (.97–.97), Adequate Compensation (.95–.97), Free Time and Rest (.93–.93), and Complementary Values (.95–.96). A higher score indicated a more favorable perception of one’s job as being decent. To construct the latent profiles, the mean values of each indicator were used.

Work Volition

The four-question general volition subcategory of the Work Volition Scale (Duffy et al., 2012) was utilized to assess work volition. This decision is based on the rationale that other subscales in the Work Volition Scale pertain to marginalized experiences. Example items include, “I’ve been able to choose the jobs I have wanted.” Responses were recorded using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. During its preliminary development, this subcategory demonstrated solid internal consistency and revealed expected correlations with factors such as job satisfaction, work control orientation, and core self-assessments. Subsequent research has indicated a notable relationship between volition and decent work (Duffy et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022). Prior studies using this scale demonstrated its reliability, indicated by a Cronbach’s α coefficient of .90 (Duffy et al., 2022). In the present study, the estimated internal consistency of scale scores at Time (T) 1 was .90.

Career Adaptability

The Career Futures Inventory (Rottinghaus et al., 2005) was utilized to gauge participants’ perceived career adaptability, specifically employing its three-question career adaptability subcategory. Participants responded to items using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. An example item is “I can adapt to change in my career plans.” In the study by Perez et al. (2023), the Career Adaptability scale demonstrated reliable internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$). In the current investigation, the estimated internal consistency reliability of scale scores at T1 was .93.

Transparency and Openness

In the following sections, we report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study, and we follow Journal Article Reporting Standards (Kazak, 2018). All data, analysis code, and research materials are available by contacting the corresponding author. Data were cleaned, preprocessed, analyzed, and visualized using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998/2017), R (R Core Team, 2023), and Python (Van Rossum & Drake, 1995). This study’s design and its analysis were not preregistered.

Data Analytic Strategy

LTA was used to investigate the securement and transition of decent work profiles over a 6-month period and to probe the effect of work volition and career adaptability at T1 on the probability of latent profile membership across time. A three-step LTA was used to analyze a model with three time points and covariates, offering a more rigorous approach than standard LTA (Nylund-Gibson et al., 2014). This method is divided into three phases.

In the preliminary phase, LPA was utilized across all time points to ascertain the optimal number of profiles per time point. The fitness of the models was assessed and compared using the sample size-adjusted Bayesian information criterion (SABIC), the entropy index, and the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT). SABIC, calculated via maximum likelihood estimation, serves as a model fit index, with lower values denoting a superior fit (Sen & Bradshaw, 2017).

The entropy index, with values ranging between 0 and 1, indicates the precision of categorization, wherein higher scores denote better model fit (Celeux & Soromenho, 1996). BLRT evaluates the likelihood ratio between models with k latent profiles versus those with $k - 1$ (Dziak et al., 2014). A nonsignificant BLRT implies that the model with $k - 1$ profiles fits better with the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). After confirming the optimal number of profiles, measurement invariance was assessed using chi-square difference tests on loglikelihood values from each model, following Satorra and Bentler (2010) guidelines. measurement invariance is essential for maintaining consistent classifications of latent profile indicators over time, enhancing interpretability and reliability (Rinne et al., 2017).

In the second step, the LTA model without covariates was conducted to estimate transition probabilities. This involves calculating the likelihood that individuals in one latent profile at Time N will move to the same or different profile at Time $N + 1$. These transition probabilities were used in the last phase of the analysis. Last, the LTA model was estimated with covariates, aiming to probe the impact of work volition and career adaptability on the odds ratios of transition probability while controlling other possible confounding variables. This study accounts for ethnicity, gender, education, age, and income as confounders. This approach is based on PWT's theory that economic constraints and social marginalization influence job opportunities (Duffy et al., 2016) as supported by studies examining the effects of gender (Autin et al., 2022), family background (Whiston & Keller, 2004), educational levels (Hitka et al., 2021), age (Viviani et al., 2021), and financial resources (Bagdadli et al., 2021) on career development. Ethnicity and gender identity were dummy coded while education level was treated as an ordinal variable. Regarding income, the raw income data were standardized in the analysis. Age was used as a continuous variable in the analysis.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables. The skewness (-1.53 to -0.63) and kurtosis (-0.89 to 2.39) values suggest that the variables follow a normal distribution. Subsequent analyses utilizing univariate growth curve models were performed across decent work indicators to explore temporal changes. None of the five decent work indicators exhibited a significant linear decline or incline ($S_{\text{safety}} = 0.005, p = .832$; $S_{\text{health care}} = -0.046, p = .16$; $S_{\text{compensation}} = -0.02, p = .47$; $S_{\text{rest}} = 0.05, p = .10$; $S_{\text{values}} = 0.03, p = .37$). However, significant variation in the intercept was observed in the baseline of the decent work indicators within this population, which suggests meaningful dispersion and potentially leads to insightful profile analysis ($V_{\text{safety}} = 0.87, p < .001$; $V_{\text{health care}} = 2.90, p < .001$; $V_{\text{compensation}} = 2.35, p < .001$; $V_{\text{rest}} = 1.62, p < .001$; $V_{\text{values}} = 1.69, p < .001$). To address the concern that variations in career adaptability and work volition over time might undermine the rationale for using each variable's initial values as covariates, we executed univariate growth curve models for both variables. The results indicated that work volition and career adaptability remained stable across the time span ($S_{\text{work volition}} = -0.01, p = .91$; $S_{\text{career adaptability}} = 0.06, p = .46$).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the Decent Work Subscales and Covariates

Studied variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Time 1: Safety	—																
2. Time 1: Health care	.23	—															
3. Time 1: Compensation	.44	.45	—														
4. Time 1: Rest	.49	.18	.44	—													
5. Time 1: Values	.53	.31	.61	.50	—												
6. Time 2: Safety	.69	.13	.39	.39	.26	—											
7. Time 2: Health care	.21	.76	.45	.19	.26	.22	—										
8. Time 2: Compensation	.40	.33	.79	.42	.53	.48	.44	—									
9. Time 2: Rest	.37	.12	.38	.72	.37	.44	.23	.46	—								
10. Time 2: Values	.49	.24	.54	.44	.75	.53	.30	.60	.51	—							
11. Time 3: Safety	.69	.17	.45	.42	.47	.70	.18	.41	.37	.50	—						
12. Time 3: Health care	.21	.78	.45	.17	.24	.20	.82	.40	.18	.27	.26	—					
13. Time 3: Compensation	.37	.33	.77	.40	.52	.43	.41	.79	.41	.56	.50	.46	—				
14. Time 3: Rest	.39	.13	.40	.69	.41	.40	.20	.39	.74	.47	.46	.22	.45	—			
15. Time 3: Values	.46	.19	.51	.44	.72	.44	.20	.49	.42	.77	.58	.25	.59	.50	—		
16. Volition T1	.38	.32	.45	.35	.43	.30	.27	.44	.27	.33	.40	.31	.41	.31	.37	—	
17. Adaptability T1	.40	.29	.34	.26	.39	.29	.27	.30	.21	.32	.38	.23	.26	.20	.30	.55	—
<i>M</i>	5.99	4.79	4.97	5.19	5.09	6.03	4.83	4.98	5.30	5.18	6.00	4.71	4.93	5.29	5.14	19.15	16.64
<i>SD</i>	1.18	2.04	1.66	1.52	1.52	1.08	1.98	1.76	1.46	1.49	1.09	2.05	1.76	1.47	1.53	6.25	3.78
<i>N</i>	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419	419

Note. All correlations significant at $p < .05$. T = time.

LPA

LPA identified the optimal profile numbers for each time point (see Table 2). At T1, the model fit improved with an increasing number of classes, with entropy suggesting five profiles as optimal. At T2, both SABIC and BLRT indicated good fits with five and six profiles. At T3, similar to T2, five and six profiles exhibited good fits. Overall, the analysis revealed that five profiles were the most fitting for the data at T1 while T2 and T3 indicated that five or six profiles were fitting to the data. However, the analysis exploring a six-profile solution revealed potential limitations: Some profiles manifested insufficient sample sizes, which could hinder the robustness and reliability of subsequent analyses (Lubke & Neale, 2006). It has also been reported that maintaining the same number of profiles at each time point is beneficial for interpreting the results (Collins & Lanza, 2010). This approach ensures the possibility of measurement invariance across all time points, thereby securing interpretability by maintaining consistent profiles over time. Based on these rationales, we decided to proceed with further analysis using five decent work profiles. We ensured a consistent number of profiles across all time points, which allowed us to carry out a measurement invariance test. The results confirmed measurement invariance, $\chi^2(50) = 55.63, p = .76$, indicating that comparisons of the latent constructs across different times are valid and reliable.

Profiles of Decent Work

The five profiles were estimated by the measurement invariance of the decent work profiles. Four profiles were consistent with the profiles found in earlier latent profile research (Kim et al., 2021), and their names have been adopted from that study. The one exception is a unique profile named *safety only*. Members in this group perceived their work environment as safe, but they had limited health care access and insufficient compensation. The *low health care* profile describes participants with moderate levels on most indicators but low on health care access. The *indecent work* profile showed the lowest levels of decent work across the board. The *average* profile depicted typical levels of decent work conditions. Last, the *decent*

work profile stood out with high levels across all factors of decent work (see Supplemental Table S1 for the descriptive statistics for each profile).

Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of profiles of our sample at each time point (see Supplemental Table S2 for the proportional statistics). The *decent work* profile consistently accounted for the largest proportion across all time points (ranging from 48.30% to 51.10%), followed by the *average* profile (ranging from 20.90% to 22.80%). The proportions of *only safety* and *low health care* ranged from 9.70% to 11.30% and from 6.00% to 6.90%, respectively. The time-profile interaction unveils a unique pattern. From T1 to T3, the distribution of each profile remained relatively stable across time, with the exception of the *indecent work* profile, which exhibits a slight increase (from 11.00% to 11.90%). This suggests that individuals initially classified under profiles other than *indecent work* may have experienced a decline in their working conditions as time progressed.

Baseline Characteristics of Latent Profiles

An analysis of variance was conducted to examine the characteristics of each profile at the baseline (T1), analyzing the variance in age, work volition, career adaptability, education, and income level. At T1, the five profiles exhibited differences in education level, income range, work volition, and career adaptability but not in age, $F(4, 414) = 2.73, p < .05$; $F(4, 414) = 7.61, p < .001$; $F(4, 414) = 16.41, p < .001$; $F(4, 414) = 11.34, p < .001$; $F(4, 414) = 1.71, p = .15$, respectively.

Subsequent post hoc analysis utilized Tukey's pairwise comparison to identify groups that displayed significant differences in each baseline characteristic. Regarding education level, the *decent work* ($M = 6.00, SD = 1.00$) profile possessed a higher level than the *indecent work* ($M = 5.59, SD = 1.10$) profile ($p < .05$), with other group comparisons not being significant. Concerning the yearly household income range, the *decent work* ($M = 4.00, SD = 2.10$) group showed higher income than both the *indecent work* ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.60, p < .001$) and *only safety* ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.50, p < .01$) groups. In terms of work volition, the *decent work* ($M = 21.50$,

Table 2
Latent Profile Analysis Results for Each Time Point

Time point	Number of profile	Log likelihood	SABIC	Entropy	BLRT p
T1	2	-3648.12	7342.06	.85	<.001
	3	-3570.70	7204.43	.84	<.001
	4	-3511.58	7103.37	.88	<.001
	5	-3451.90	7001.17	.90	<.001
	6	-3414.80	6944.18	.88	<.001
	T2	2	-3589.93	7225.70	.84
3		-3514.97	7092.95	.84	<.001
4		-3446.56	6973.34	.88	<.001
5		-3412.95	6923.29	.88	<.001
6		-3375.83	6866.25	.89	<.001
T3		2	-3626.21	7298.25	.83
	3	-3552.21	7167.44	.80	<.001
	4	-3502.22	7084.65	.84	<.001
	5	-3448.76	6994.92	.86	<.001
	6	-3396.42	6907.42	.87	<.001

Note. SABIC = sample size-adjusted Bayesian information criterion; BLRT = Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test; T = time.

$SD = 5.40$) profile ranked highest, followed by *average* ($M = 18.70$, $SD = 5.50$) ($p < .01$) while *indecent work* ($M = 15.10$, $SD = 7.10$, $p < .001$) and *low health care* ($M = 14.90$, $SD = 6.80$, $p < .001$) were the lowest; *only safety* ($M = 17.7$, $SD = 6.4$) was significantly lower than *decent work* ($M = 21.2$, $SD = 5.4$, $p < .01$) but did not demonstrate significant differences compared to other groups. Regarding career adaptability, the *decent work* ($M = 17.8$, $SD = 3.0$) profile scored significantly higher than *only safety* ($M = 16.0$, $SD = 3.8$, $p < .05$), *indecent work* ($M = 15.2$, $SD = 4.8$, $p < .001$), and *average* ($M = 15.3$, $SD = 3.8$, $p < .001$) while no significant differences were noted among other groups (refer to [Supplemental Table S3](#) for detailed descriptive statistics).

LTA

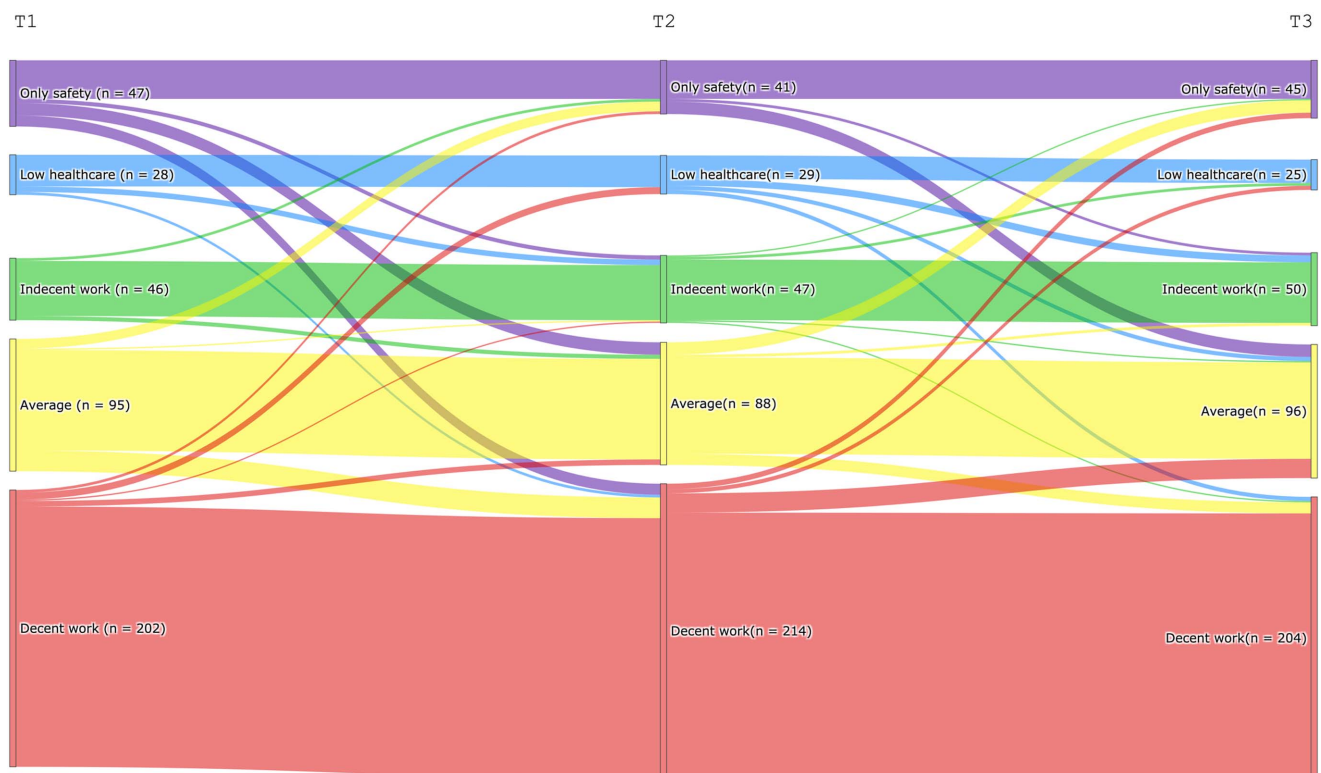
Figure 1 illustrates the results of the LTA for decent work profiles across time points. The results indicate that, although most profiles tended to remain consistent across the three time points, transitions that do occur generally shift toward more favorable working environments. Both the *indecent work* and *decent work* profiles exhibited the highest stability among the five profiles at both T1 to T2 and T2 to T3 transitions. Specifically, the *indecent work* profile had retention probabilities of 87.30% from T1 to T2 and 86.30% from T2 to T3 while the *decent work* profile demonstrated even higher stabilities with 93.90% and 89.70%, respectively. This

indicates that individuals in these profiles were most likely to retain their status over time. Those in the *decent work* profile were more apt to maintain their favorable conditions whereas individuals in the *indecent work* profile faced challenges transitioning out of these less favorable conditions.

Conversely, profiles such as *only safety* at T1 and *low health care* at T2 showed relatively lower stability, with securement probabilities of 60.60% and 66.10%, respectively. For instance, individuals in the *only safety* profile at T1 were likely to transition to the *average* or *decent work* profiles at T2, with probabilities of 18.50% and 16.60%, respectively. Similarly, individuals in the *low health care* profile at T2 were observed to transition to the *indecent work* or *average* profiles at T3, with transitions occurring at rates of 15.40% and 11.90%, respectively.

Furthermore, there appears to be a general tendency for transitions toward more decent work environments as evidenced by the transition probabilities within each profile. For example, within the *only safety* profile at T1, the most notable transitions at the next time point are toward *average* (18.50%) and *decent work* (16.60%), suggesting a common inclination among individuals to seek better employment conditions. However, there are notable exceptions such as the *low health care* profile, which showed more transitions to *indecent work* rather than to *average* or *decent work* at the subsequent time point. This pattern may reflect structural barriers, constraints, and the perpetuating effects of marginalization within indecent work

Figure 1
Sankey Diagram of Decent Work Profiles' Transition



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

environments, highlighting the complexity and variability in job profile transitions over time (see Supplemental Table S4 for probabilities of all transitions).

Effect of Work Volition and Career Adaptability on Latent Transition Probabilities

Work volition and career adaptability were integrated into the LTA model to assess their influence on decent work profiles, after controlling for age, education, income, and ethnicity. Table 3 presents the odds ratio regarding the influence of work volition and career adaptability on transition probabilities. The analysis partially supported that higher work volition increases the likelihood of achieving decent work. Specifically, the findings reveal that individuals in the *only safety* profile who exhibited higher levels of work volition tended to transition into the *decent work* profile in T3 ($OR = 1.30, p < .05$). However, it is important to note that some significant results do not conform to the assumptions of PWT. For instance, individuals within the *indecent work* profile in T1 were less likely to transition to a *decent work* profile with higher work volition ($OR = 0.50, p < .05$), even though it is anticipated they would be more likely to do so.

The analysis partially supported that career adaptability influences the likelihood of career transitions. For instance, working adults within the *indecent work* profile in T2 demonstrated a transition consistent with PWT prediction. They were more likely to shift to the *average* profile ($OR = 1.90, p < .05$). Furthermore, those within the *average* profile in T2 who possessed higher career adaptability were less inclined to transition to the *indecent work* profile ($OR = .050, p < .05$), a pattern also predicted by PWT. However, there are results that deviate from the PWT propositions. For example, individuals within the *indecent work* profile in T1 were less likely to shift to the *decent work* profile even when they had higher career adaptability ($OR = 0.10, p < .05$).

Discussion

In the present study, we employed LTA to investigate the stability of decent work profiles across three time points, the transition of

profiles across individuals, and the influence of an individual's work volition and career adaptability at T1 on the transition of profiles at T2 and T3. In the following sections, we discuss our results with attention to (a) profile construction, (b) the transition of decent work profiles, and (c) the potential role of volition and adaptability in these transitions.

Heterogeneity of Decent Work

We anticipated identifying multiple distinct profiles as per the findings of earlier studies on decent work profiles (Blustein et al., 2020; Blustein, Allan, et al., 2023; Duffy, Gerdel, et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2021). True to our expectations, we identified five decent work profiles: (a) *only safety*, (b) *low health care*, (c) *indecent work*, (d) *average*, and (e) *decent work* that were stable across the three time points. Although the *indecent work* profile paralleled the proportions found in the study by Kim et al. (2021), the distribution within the other profiles somewhat varied. For example, a novel discovery in our study was the *only safety* profile, characterized by moderately safe working conditions coupled with minimal health care access and lower-to-average benefits in terms of compensation, leisure, and value alignment with the job. This profile may have emerged in our data due to unique macrolevel changes, such as a global pandemic, during which companies increased their support for employee health insurance and related benefits (Bundorf et al., 2021). This is particularly intriguing because it underscores the complexity within work environments that may not fit neatly into existing classifications and points to the evolving nature of what constitutes decent work.

Another notable finding was related to income level. Specifically, despite similar household incomes across most profiles, the perceptions of compensation adequacy varied significantly. This lends weight to the notion that the definition of decent work may be influenced by a confluence of societal contexts, working conditions, and individual needs as argued by Blustein, Lysova, et al. (2023). Future research could gain insights by exploring the diverse factors that shape individuals' perceptions of their compensation, both objectively and subjectively. For instance, individuals engaged in the gig economy or precarious work environments may perceive

Table 3
Effect of Work Volition and Career Adaptability on Transition Odds Ratio

Class	Only safety	Low health care	Indecent work	Average	Decent work
T2 latent profile					
T1 latent profile					
Only safety	1.0	2.1 (0.7)	1.8 (9.5)	0.9 (1.2)	0.8 (1.2)
Low health care	0.5 (1.4)	1.0	0.8 (13.3)	0.4 (1.7)	0.4 (1.7)
Indecent work	0.6 (0.1)	1.2 (0.1)	1.0	0.5 (0.1)	0.5 (0.1)
Average	1.2 (0.8)	2.5 (0.6)	2.1 (7.9)	1.0	0.9 (1.0)
Decent work	1.3 (0.8)	2.7 (0.6)	2.2 (7.8)	1.1 (1.0)	1.0
T3 latent profile					
T2 latent profile					
Only safety	1.0	7.4 (3.3)	0.9 (0.4)	1.2 (0.7)	1.3 (0.6)
Low health care	0.1 (0.3)	1.0	0.1 (0.1)	0.2 (0.2)	0.2 (0.2)
Indecent work	1.1 (2.6)	7.9 (8.4)	1.0	1.2 (1.9)	1.4 (1.6)
Average	0.9 (2.3)	6.4 (4.4)	0.8 (0.5)	1.0	1.2 (0.8)
Decent work	0.7 (1.6)	5.5 (5.2)	0.7 (0.6)	0.9 (1.2)	1.0

Note. Transition probabilities represented in bold font are those that hold significant 95% confidence intervals. Numbers in parentheses indicate the influence of career adaptability on transition probability odds ratio. T = time.

their compensation as less favorable compared to those in stable and secure jobs, potentially due to occupational vulnerabilities (Bajwa et al., 2018). This perception could stem from the inherently insecure and short-term nature of their employment, leading them to believe that their compensation is inferior to that of individuals in more stable employment settings, even if their actual income levels are comparable.

Securement and Transition of Decent Work Profiles

The use of LTA in our study, focusing on five distinct decent work profiles, provided novel insights into how individuals transition across profiles over time. Those with *indecent work* and *decent work* profiles in T1 were most likely to remain in the same profiles across T2 and T3. Conversely, those with *only safety* and *low health care* profiles in T1 showed higher fluidity. This suggests that the initial profile classification may serve as an indicator of one's likelihood to access the *decent work* profile. For example, individuals within the *indecent work* profile have a maximum probability of only 2.3% to transition to the *decent work* profile as per our findings. In contrast, those in an *average* profile have a higher likelihood, approximately 10%, of moving to *decent work* within a 6-month period. The results may indicate the perpetuation of work decency among workers. However, it should be noted that more than 70% of participants hold a college degree, which may have overly amplified the size of the decent work population, leading to fewer transitions overall. Some individuals did move into better work environments (i.e., more decent work) across the period of our study. More specifically, transitions occurred in both directions (i.e., better and worse), but most of these transitions involved individuals going from less desirable to more desirable work environments. Perhaps this is most evident in a sizable minority of individuals with the *only safety* profile moving to either the *average* or *decent work* profile groups across time.

Our results contribute to the understanding of PWT, particularly in relation to the attainment and maintenance of decent work. On the one hand, these findings may buoy cross-sectional research efforts on decent work, suggesting the measurement of how one feels about their work environment is mainly stable over a 6-month period. On the other hand, the findings suggest the need for much longer time lags to capture changes in work environment of greater scale as longitudinal research on decent work expands.

Effects of Work Volition and Career Adaptability

The baseline characteristics of the work profiles lend support to the central tenets of PWT, affirming the significant role of work volition and career adaptability in securing decent work—a finding that is consistent with Kim et al. (2021). This study also demonstrates that participants in the *decent work* profile exhibited the highest levels of work volition, surpassing those with *average* and *indecent work* profiles. A novel contribution of our study is the finding of the initial differences in career adaptability across various decent work profiles. We found that individuals within the *decent work* profile had higher levels of career adaptability compared to those in *only safety*, *indecent work*, and *average* profiles, thereby supporting the notion that career adaptability serves as a predictor of decent work within the framework of PWT (Duffy et al., 2016).

Our findings from covariate analyses with LTA, however, offered mixed support for the theoretically implied work volition and career adaptability's impact on transition probabilities. For instance, work volition was a notable predictor explaining the transitions from the *only safety* profile to the *decent work* profile in at T2, career adaptability facilitated the transition from *indecent work* (T2) to *average work* (T3), and career adaptability minimized the transition from *average work* (T2) to *indecent work* (T3). However, in other cases, the covariate effects did not significantly support the PWT propositions regarding work volition or career adaptability (e.g., individuals with high volition within the *indecent work* profile at T1 were less likely to transition to a *decent work* at T2).

These outcomes provide valuable insights into the application of PWT and the dynamics of decent work trajectories. The baseline characteristics of each profile indicated notable differences in work volition and career adaptability, suggesting that these psychological factors may be more critical at initial achievement of decent work than in maintaining or advancing within one's career. Akin to the general stability of profiles across time, the stability of work volition and career adaptability's effects also suggests that (if they exist) they might be challenging to discern over shorter periods. Consequently, these findings point to the need for comprehensive and extended longitudinal studies to explore these dynamics further. For instance, macrolevel socioeconomic changes may serve as more significant variables in attaining decent work at certain time points, regardless of the levels of work volition and career adaptability. Nonetheless, in some cases, work volition and career adaptability can vary over short-term and long-term periods, underscoring the possibility that they represent malleable variables to help promote decent work.

Overall Conclusions

In summarizing the findings of our study, several key insights emerge concerning the nature of decent work profiles and their progression. First, our results provide solid evidence for the existence of four stable work profiles that are stable across time: *low health care*, *indecent work*, *average*, and *decent work*. Additionally, we identified a new profile not observed in previous research named *only safety*. Second, an intriguing discovery was that some individuals had profiles where perceived compensation adequacy was lower than expected given their actual income levels, underscoring the influence of societal context, working conditions, and individual strategies in shaping perceptions of work decency as discussed by Blustein, Lysova, et al. (2023). Third, the analysis of transitions highlighted the considerable stability of both the *indecent* and *decent work* profiles, indicating the challenges faced by individuals in shifting from indecent to decent work environments. Finally, our study's LTA, incorporating covariates, makes a significant contribution to the ongoing research on PWT. It reveals that although work volition and career adaptability are crucial factors in initially achieving decent work, their long-term influence on maintaining or transitioning to decent work appears to be limited. This suggests the necessity to investigate additional factors that might play a role in the dynamics of decent work overtime. These insights emphasize the importance of further longitudinal studies using the PWT framework to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to decent work attainment and retention.

Practical Implications

A number of practical implications may be drawn from this study's findings. As highlighted by Blustein, Lysova, et al. (2023), an individual's perception of work decency is influenced by various external and internal factors, including societal and contextual influences, as well as personal values and perspectives. Consequently, in psychological interventions and counseling contexts, it is beneficial to consider clients' individual interpretations and experiences of their work environment. This approach involves analyzing clients' narratives to gain a deeper understanding of their specific situations and the underlying reasons for their perspectives as suggested by Savickas et al. (2009). Therefore, in psychological counseling, it is important to recognize that individuals who meet the criteria for "decent work" may still experience high levels of stress, pressure, role ambiguity, and burnout. These issues can spill over and become significant mental health challenges. Psychologists should provide counseling that addresses these mental health challenges, ensuring that clients receive support for the stress and pressures associated with their work environments. This comprehensive approach helps address not only the immediate concerns but also the long-term mental health and well-being of individuals.

In terms of career counseling, the findings underscore the importance of initial job placement within decent work profiles given the relative stability and infrequency of transitions between these profiles. This result highlights the critical need for concerted efforts to assist underrepresented groups in attaining decent work from the outset. Ensuring that these individuals secure positions characterized by fair pay, safe working conditions, and equitable opportunities not only aligns with the tenets of social justice but also sets a foundation for long-term job security and satisfaction. Career counselors play a vital role in helping people find jobs and understand how jobs are structured in the United States, educating them about what constitutes *decent work* for working adults. Many workers, especially emerging adults and immigrants, may lack knowledge about what a "better" job is and how to find one and what is needed to secure more decent work.

Furthermore, the findings of this study have significant implications for social justice advocacy. The identification of stable decent work profiles and the factors influencing transitions between these profiles highlight the need for systemic changes to promote equity in the workplace. Specifically, marginalized populations often face barriers to accessing decent work, even when they are equally educated and competent compared to privileged groups (Chetty et al., 2020). Therefore, policymakers and organizations must address these systemic barriers by implementing fair hiring practices, ensuring equitable pay, and creating inclusive work environments that support the needs of all workers.

Limitations

This study, while offering valuable insights, is subject to several limitations which may highlight directions for future research. First, the participant group was predominantly White, more than 70% of participants had a college degree, and their median income exceeded the median household income of U.S. working adults (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). This demographic skew reflects broader disparities in internet access and the availability of individuals to participate in online surveys (Dolcini et al., 2021). Moreover, aligning with the

original theory proposed by Duffy et al. (2016), which states that decent work is contingent upon the endorsement of all five components, our findings revealed that nearly half of our sample reported experiencing decent work, while only 11% indicated experiencing indecent work (scoring below average on all components). This raises concerns about the study's generalizability to a broader population. Although this research is pioneering as the first longitudinal study to explore the transitions of decent work profiles among working adults, future research should aim to include a more diverse range of participants, encompassing varying levels of privilege and resource access.

Second, the 6-month duration of this study was sufficient to observe changes in decent work from an intrapersonal perspective. However, to fully understand the influence of larger societal systems on individuals' transitions to decent work, a longer timeframe is necessary. Future studies should consider extending the duration to over a year, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the trajectories of individuals' work environment transitions. This extended timeline would provide deeper insight into how macrolevel factors shape personal work experiences and career paths. Furthermore, this approach may benefit from collecting occupational information at each time point. Although these data were not collected repeatedly in this study, future research could investigate whether changes in occupations influence transitions to decent work profiles over time. Third, although the sample and subsample sizes in each profile were adequate for conducting LPA and LTA (Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018), a larger sample size could provide a more definitive understanding of how psychological factors influence transition probabilities. Future research with expanded sample sizes would be beneficial in elucidating the diverse mechanisms by which psychological factors affect the transitions and attainment of decent work profiles. Last, it is noteworthy that in the present study, we used Work Volition and Career Adaptability scales at the first wave due to methodological fit. However, in future studies, psychological mediators at each time point can be examined using different methodological approaches, such as a cross-lagged panel model. This approach would provide more detailed and nuanced insights into the interactions between variables over time.

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