

A Conceptual Review on the Quality of Work Life

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ABSTRACT

Many factors determine the meaning of Quality of Work Life (QWL), one of which is work environment. QWL consists of opportunities for active involvement in group working arrangements or problem solving that are of mutual benefit to employees or employers, based on labor management cooperation. The present study reviews the meaning of QWL, analyses dimensions of QWL, practices of QWL, techniques for improving QWL and judgment methods of QWL in an organization. The characteristics of QWL include health and well-being, job security, job satisfaction, competence development and the balance between work and non-work life.

Key words: *Quality of Work Life, Job satisfaction, work life and non-work life balance, career development, Job involvement.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality of work life has its roots in the theories of Maslow, Herzberg and McGregor. The needs for fulfillment as that of Abraham Maslow's motivational theory of needs hierarchy are comparable with those of the factors of QWL. Basic needs like monetary benefits come first, with good working conditions following. Later comes career planning, growth and development of human capabilities to satisfy. Maslow's esteem needs are comparable with opportunity to use and develop human capabilities. Lastly challenging work is advocated by Walton to satisfy self actualization need in need hierarchy. QWL concerns itself with satisfying both hygiene factors and motivators as identified by Herzberg to improve the work life of employees. The assumptions of McGregor can be divided into two sets i.e., those under, 'Theory X' and

those under 'Theory Y' gave realization of changing attitudes values and work culture of employees. QWL assumes that all employees basically belong to 'Theory Y'. Thus, it is evident that the QWL has had its origin in these theories of motivation.

Human resources play a very important role in success of an organization and thus, management of human resource assumes importance. Many aspects affect the management of human resources. One such aspect is Quality of Work Life (QWL). It is a philosophy, a set of principles, which holds that people are the most important resource in the organization as they are trustworthy, responsible and capable of making valuable contribution and they should be treated with dignity and respect. The elements that are relevant to an individual's quality of work life include the task, the physical work environment, social environment within the organization, administrative system and relationship between life on and off the job. QWL consists of opportunities for active involvement in group working arrangements or problem solving that are of mutual benefit to employees or employers, based on labor management cooperation. People also conceive of QWL as a set of methods, such as autonomous work groups, job enrichment, and high involvement aimed at boosting the satisfaction and productivity of workers. It requires employee commitment to the organization and an environment in which this commitment can flourish. Thus, QWL is a comprehensive construct that includes an individual's job related well-being and the extent to which work experiences are rewarding, fulfilling and devoid of stress and other negative personal consequences.

1.1 Origin of Quality of Work Life

Legislation enacted in early 20th century to protect

employees from job-injury and to eliminate hazardous working conditions, followed by the unionization movement in the 1930 and 1940s were the initial steps. Emphasis was given to job security, due to process at the work place and economic gains for the workers. The 1950s and the 1960s saw the development of different theories by psychologists proposing a “positive relationship between morale and productivity”, and the possibility that improved human relations would lead to the enhancement of both. Attempts at reform to acquire equal employment opportunity and job enrichment schemes also were introduced. Finally, in the 1970s the ideal of QWL was conceived which, according to Walton, is broader than these earlier developments and is something that must include ‘the values that were at the heart of these earlier reform movements’ and ‘human needs and aspirations’. The theories of motivation and leadership provided a sound base for the concept of QWL. If the lower-order needs are satisfied, people seek satisfaction for the higher-order needs. QWL activity gained importance between 1969 and 1974, when a broad group of researchers, scholars, union leaders and government personnel development interest in how to improve the quality of an individual through on-the-job experience. The United States department of health, education and welfare sponsored a study on this issue, which led to the publication of work in America. Simultaneously, the pressure of inflation promoted the US Government to address some of these issues. Accordingly, a Federal Productivity Commission was established. This commission sponsored several labor management QWL experiments which were jointly conducted by the University of Michigan quality of work programme and the newly-evolved National Quality of Work Centre.

The term “Quality of Work Life” has appeared in Research Journals and press in USA only in 1970’s. The term quality of work life was introduced by Louis Davis. The first International QWL conference was held in Toronto in 1972. The international council

for quality of work life was established in 1972. From 1980 onwards QWL was increasingly placed on employee- centered productivity programs. In the mid 1990s till today faced with challenges of economize and corporate restructuring, QWL is reemerging where employees are seeking out more meaning where rising educational levels and occupational aspirations in today’s slow economic growth and reduced opportunities for advancement, naturally, there are rising concerns for QWL and for career and personal life planning. In India, QWL offers a value frame and the social technology of organizational change leading to task effectiveness of micro-entities through utilization and unfolding of human potential. Some evidence of the rising tide interest in the quality of work life issue is the fact that the second International Conference on quality of work life held in Toronto in 1981 attracted 1,500 participations. The 200 unionist and 750 management people combined out-numbered the, academicians, consultants and government officials in attendance. Quality is no more a specialized word but has become a necessary and a must work for the best survival. In this era, Quality of human inputs is the greatest asset to any organization. Maintaining the quality of such human inputs raises farm maintaining the quality of work life perfectly. A perfect quality of work life would help the organization. Rise in the quality of work life would help employees’ well being thereby the well being of the whole organization. This is an attempt to capitalize the human assets of the organization.

1.2 Meaning and Concept of QWL

The term ‘quality of work life (QWL)’ has different meanings of different peoples, some consider it industrial democracy or codetermination with increased employee participation in the decision making process. For others, particularly managers and administrators, the term denotes improvement in the psychological aspects of work to improve productivity. Unions and workers interpret it as more equitable sharing of profits, job security and healthy and humane working conditions. Others view it as

improving social relationships at workplace through autonomous workgroups. Finally, others take a broader view of changing the entire organizational climate by humanizing work, individualizing organizations and changing the structural and managerial systems.

In general terms, QWL, refers to the favorableness or unfavorable-ness of a job environment for people⁶. It refers to the quality of relationship between employees and the total working environment. According to Harrison, QWL is the degree to which work in an organization contributes to material and psychological well-being of its members. One expert defines quality of working life as “a process of joint decision making, collaboration and building mutual respect between management and employees”. It is concerned with increasing labour management cooperatives to solve the problems of improving organizational performance and employee satisfaction. According to the American Society of Training and Development, it is “a process of work organization which enables its members at all levels to actively participate in shaping the organization’s environment, methods and outcomes. This value based process is aimed towards meeting the twin goals of enhanced effectiveness of organization and improved quality of life at work for employees.

Broadly the definition of quality of work life involves four major parts: safe work environment, occupational health care, suitable working time and appropriate salary the safe work environment provides the basis for the person to enjoy working. The work should not pose a health hazard for the person. The employer and employee, aware of their risks and rights, could achieve a lot in their mutually beneficial dialogue the working time has been established by the state according to legislation. The standard limits on overtime, rest days, and public holidays etc. have also been stipulated. The appropriate salary is agreed upon by the employee and the employer and fixed by the Pay Commission. The Government also establishes

the rate of minimum wage; the employer should not pay less than that to the employee.

The concept of QWL is based on the assumption that a job is more than just a job. It is the center of a person’s life. In recent years there has been increasing concern for QWL due to several factors: Increase in education level and consequently job aspirations of employees;

1. Association of workers;
2. Significance of human resource management;
3. Widespread industrial unrest;
4. Growing of knowledge in human behaviour, etc.

2. Dimensions of Quality of Work Life

The dimensions of QWL are health and well-being, job security, job satisfaction, competence development and the balance between works with non-work life. Each of the dimensions of QWL from the perspectives of employees is briefly discussed below.

2.1 Health and well-being

Health and well-being of QWL refer to physical and psychological aspects of an individual in any working environment. Asakura and Fujigaki (1993)⁷ examined the direct and indirect effect of computerization on workers’ health and well-being. Their results were similar to the study of Iacovides, Fountoulakis and Kaprins (2003)⁸ that higher job demand leads to higher strain work environment, hence; it affects their health and well-being. An unstrained work environment ensures good health and psychological conditions which enable the employees to perform job and non-work related functions without inhibitions. Thus, it leads to an un-stressful work environment providing comfortable work life. There are many definitions of stress as it is deemed as a subjective phenomenon of QWL. Chan et al. (2000)⁹ defines stress as a response to the perceived relationship between the demands on individuals and the ability to adjust to their work environment.

Carayon, Smith and Haims (2001)¹⁰ revealed that stress arises in the process of interaction between a person and the work environment that threatens the individual's physical, psychological and physiological homeostasis. Physical illness and psychological disorders increase when pressure at work increases. Stress causes problems to the muscular system and circulation thus, increasing the risk of myocardial infarction which is well documented in psychosomatic studies.

2.2 Job security

A dramatic change of workforce in contemporary work environment has revealed a significant amount of organization change (Watson *et al.*, 2003)¹¹. Organization change such as downsizing, rightsizing and outsourcing have adversely affected employees' loyalty, morale, motivation and perceived job security. Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (1996)¹² highlighted that job security is the most controversial issue in contemporary work environment. Job security, the central aspect of QWL represents strength of the organizations to provide permanent and stable employment regardless of the changes in work environment. Hence, providing a sense of security is important especially in the work environment where many facets of jobs can be outsourced.

2.3 Job Satisfaction

Later, cognitive and behavioural components were added to this definition. The cognitive aspect represents an employee's belief about his job or job situation. This means an employee may believe that his or her job is interesting, stimulating, or otherwise. The behavioural component represents an employee's behavioural tendencies toward his or her job. The action of attending work regularly, working hard and intending to stay in the organisation for long period of time shows the positive behaviour which indicates job satisfaction. In contrast, negative behavioural outcomes reveal dissatisfaction in job. Job satisfaction

of an employee differs in meaning and importance in relations to the facets of work. Some may feel pay and fringe benefits that meet his expectations to be extremely important; another, it may be essential to have a job that provides an opportunity for challenging assignment. The results of previous studies indicate that many different aspects of the job, such as pay, promotions, supervision, fringe benefits, one's co-workers support, and excessive working hours (Watson *et al.*, 2003) are associated with levels of satisfaction.

2.4 Competency Development

Growth in skills and knowledge is an important aspect of competency development that enhances QWL. Therefore competency development is operationalized as the nature of the job that provides opportunities and stimulates growth in skills and knowledge either for career or organizational development. Career development opportunity will provide essential training that will help the individual employees to equip with the new skills to spearhead in their career. Most contemporary organizations do not limit themselves to just training an employee for a job, but they go beyond to furnish them with a support system that encourages workplace learning.

Learning opportunities and skill discretion have also proven to have a positive effect on job satisfaction and reduced job stress that will lead to better QWL. The opportunity to develop and the use of skills are associated with learning mechanisms. This applies especially when the job requires employees to deploy cognitive skills. With respect to learning, greater autonomy on job enhances the acquisition and utilization of knowledge whilst greater participation is held to promote cognitive growth via increased knowledge transfer among employees (Scully, Kirkpatrick and Locke 1995)¹³. Such a job environment expands knowledge base, leads to a better understanding of how the job is related to other organizational practices and a greater ability to solve problems. In such a situation, employees gain

the cognitive and behavioural repertoire to predict, control or cope with uncertain demands thus reducing the likelihood of poor QWL. In contrast, high job demands with inadequate control reduce the ability and opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge and thus enforce negative attitudes and anxiety which deteriorate QWL.

2.5 Work and non-work life balance

A major component of QWL, which is important for both the employees and the employers, is the relationship between work and home life. In an increasing competitive environment, it is difficult to separate home and work life. Employees today are more likely to express a strong desire to have a harmonious balance among career, family life and leisure activities. This has been suggested at the international level the need for national policies in many countries.

An ILO convention that was adopted in 1981, states that it is necessary for organizations to help employees to balance their work and non-work demands (Lewis, 1997)¹⁴. Reducing the level of spillover may help to reduce the perceived stress and psychological stress and assist to maintain some amount of balance between the two environments (Aminah, 2002)¹⁵.

The existing low level of organizational support with increase in work-life conflict provides the risk of lower QWL. Organizations need to provide alternative means of employment practices to eliminate the pressure of spillover without influencing the career progression. The balance is important particularly among the employees in order to nurture and develop the sustainable human resource practices in the work environment. Therefore, balance between work and non-work life is suggested as one of the measures of QWL.

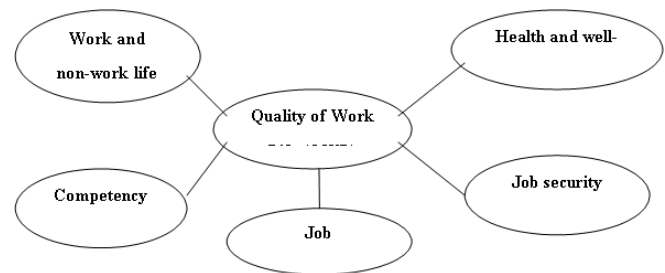


Figure 1: A Paradigm Showing the Constructs of QWL

3.Objectives of QWL

The main objectives of the QWL programmes are to:

1. improve employee satisfaction;
2. improve physical and psychological health of employees which creates positive feelings;
3. enhance productivity of employees;
4. reinforce workplace learning;
5. improved management of the on-going change and transition; and build the image of the company as best in recruitment, retention, and in general motivation of employees.

3.1 Characteristics of QWL Improvement Programmes

The results, reported from a number of quality of work life improvement programmes, have some common characteristics. These are:

1. Persistent commitment from management to the open non-defensive modus operandi of sincerely inviting collaborative inputs from the workforce regarding problem identification and suggestions for improving any aspect of the organization or the policies, practices and structure of work with incentives provided for such participation.
2. Invited involvement of members of tasks groups in recommending resolution of identified problem.
3. Training of supervisors to prepare them to function effectively in a less authoritative style.
4. Implementation of practicable suggestion and explanations for rejected ideas.

5. Feedback and recognition for good results achieved.
6. Selection of personnel who can be motivated under appropriate conditions to strive for excellence in task performance.
7. Evaluation and analysis of results, including failures, leading to renewed effort towards continual improvement in modus operandi.

3.2 Eight Practices of QWL

Quality of working life though came into circulation in 1970s became popular only in 90s and organizations realised its potential to enhance the productivity in the new century. This works as a comprehensive model to those employers who want to ensure quality in working life of their employees.

Walton (1973)¹⁶ propose an ideal quality of work life programme will include practices in eight major areas as discussed below:

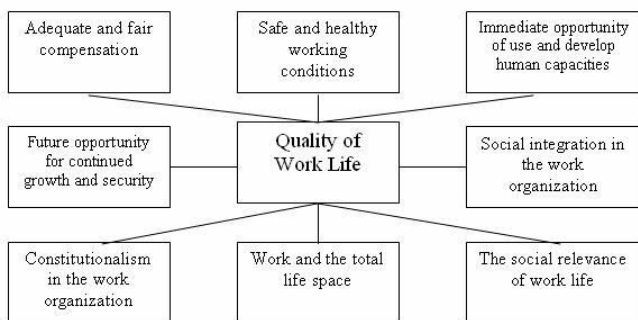


Figure 2: Shows the Practices of QWL

3.3 Adequate and fair compensation

This is fundamental to QWL. Human beings work for livelihood. Therefore success of rest of the initiatives depends upon fulfillment of this. However, important here is that compensation offered must be adequate implying it must be proportionate to labour, and there should be internal consistency among salaries of employees.

3.3.1 Safe and healthy working conditions

Unsafe and hazardous working conditions cause problems to both employers and employees. There may be little advantage to the employer in short-term but in medium and long-terms, it adversely affects the productivity. Therefore, adequate investment must be made to ensure safe and healthy working conditions.

3.3.2 Immediate opportunity of use and develop human capacities

The works have become routine, meaningless and too specialized, depriving the employees of fulfillment satisfaction. Therefore, efforts should be made to increase the autonomy, perspective and exposure to multiple skills.

3.3.3 Future opportunity for continued growth and security

This is related to career aspects of employees. Meaningful career paths must be laid down and career mapping of employees is to be followed. The provisions of advancement opportunities play a central role in QWL.

3.3.4 Social integration in the work organization

Relationships between and among the employees is an indicator of healthy work organization. Therefore, opportunities must be provided for formal and informal interactions. All kind of classes religions, races, crafts, and designations must be treated equally on a social platform. In other words, it creates egalitarian environment.

3.3.5 Constitutionalism in the work organization

This is related to organizational norms that affect the freedom of an individual employee. Efforts must be made to see right norms are formed in the organization. It means norms that accommodate the privacy of an individual employee, freedom of speech, equity and freedom to dissent on some aspects.

3.3.6 Work and the total life space

Employees should not be allowed to continuously

exert themselves. The continuous hard work causes psychological and physical strains. Therefore, there has to be a balance between personal and professional life. Organization must create proper work offs to enrich the life of employees.

3.3.7 The social relevance of work life

Employees must be given the perspective of how his/her work in the organization helps the society. This is essential to build relevance of the employee's existence to the society he/she lives in.

3.4 Quality of Work Life and Techniques for Improving

The concept of quality of work life has been operationalised through various systems such as job enrichment, workers' participation in management, organization development, quality circles, employee welfare, etc. While some of these schemes have been successful in improving the quality of work life, others are still to show results. The quality of work life movement is of recent origin and has a long way to go. Individuals as well as organized efforts are required to improve the quality of work life for millions of workers in the country.

In 1981 the National Productivity Council organized a national seminar on quality of work life. The seminar made several suggestions and pointed out the responsibilities of different groups' such as employees, unions and workers, professional organisations, and government etc. in improving the quality of work life.

Some of the techniques used to improve QWL of an average worker in India are given below:

3.5 Job Redesign

Narrow jobs need to be combined into large units of accomplishment. Jobs should be redesigned to enrich them; Job enrichment helps to satisfy higher order needs by providing interesting, stimulating and challenging work.

3.5.1 Career Development

Opportunity for career advancement and growth personality improves commitment. Career planning, counseling second careers, etc, help to meet expectations of achievement-oriented employees

3.5.2 Autonomous

Work Groups: In an autonomous work groups, employees are given the freedom of decision making. In such a group the workers themselves plan, coordinate and control their activities. The group as a whole is accountable for success or failure. It is also called a self-managed work team.

3.5.3 Flexible Work Schedules

Flexible working hours (flex- time), staggered hours, reduced work week, job sharing, part-time employment and other types of alternative work schedules provide freedom to employee in scheduling their work.

3.5.4 Participative Management

Employees want to participate in deciding matters which affect their lives. Therefore, quality circles, management by objectives, suggestion system and other forms of employees' participation in management help to improve QWL.

3.5.5 Job Security

Adequate security of job is a high priority of employees and should be provided.

3.5.6 Administrative Justice

The principles of justice, fair and quality should be applied in disciplinary procedure, grievance procedures, promotions, transfers, work assignment, leave, etc.

3.6 QWL and Management's role

Management has to play a very significant role in improving quality of life of employees. Management must strive to make the quality of employees work life

as satisfying as possible. At the moment employees are challenged as never before to balance work and personal responsibilities. Therefore the management should continually addresses these challenges by utilising personnel flexibilities and establishing programs that help employees meet their work and personal obligations.

The steps that should be taken by the management are:

- Establishing appropriate, reasonable and enforced work rules: Work rules can help to create and maintain an orderly atmosphere that is pleasant to work in where employees can work effectively work rules can help improve quality of work life by:
 - Creating an atmosphere where employees are treated with dignity and respect
 - Helping to ensure that employees conduct themselves in a professional and safe manner
 - Encouraging open communication between employees
 - Ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and that they follow the same rules.
 - Develop and implement a flexible work policy and procedure
 - Provide training to managers and supervisors on how to respond effectively to work life issues
 - Provide resiliency and personal accountability training for staff
 - Invest in organization-specific quality of work life programs in eldercare, childcare, diversity, etc.
 - Encourage participative work teams to reinforce an environment of trust and help employees to work more effectively and efficiently in order to accomplish organisation mission.
 - Provide employees assistance through the Employee Assistance Pro ram (EAP), a free, confidential counseling and referral service to resolve personal problems.
 - Actively support employee health and wellness.

CONCLUSION

The QWL has been increasing several factors. These include increase in education level and consequently job aspirations of employees; association of workers; significance of human resource management; wide spread industrial unrest; growing of knowledge in human behaviour, and the like. The elements of QWL comprise of health and well-being, job security, job satisfaction, competence development and the balance between works with non-work life. In this context, for improving the QWL different groups have been taken responsibility such as employers, workers, professional organisations, government, and managers.

Quality of Work Life (QWL) is a comprehensive construct that includes an individual's job related well-being and the extent to which work experiences are rewarding, fulfilling and devoid of stress and other negative personal consequences. Therefore, quality circles, management by objectives, suggestion system and other forms of employees' participation in management help to improve QWL in the industry circles. Techniques to improve quality of work life include job redesign, career development, flexible work schedules, job security and the like. If any organization properly adopts these techniques, the QWL will certainly be improved to the desired levels

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