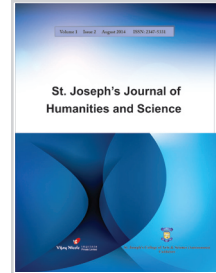




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Quality of Work Life of Employees: Emerging Dimensions

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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. This article 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 dimensions of QWL include health and well-being, job security, job satisfaction, competence development and the balance work and non-work life.

Keywords: Quality of Work Life, Job satisfaction, Work life and Non work life balance, career development, Job involvement.

Introduction

Human resources play a very important role in success of an organization and thus management of human resources. One such aspect is quality work life [QWL]. It is a philosophy, a set of principles which holds that people are the most important resources in the organization as 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 system and relationship between life on and off the job.

QWL means "the degree to which members of a work organization are able to satisfy important personal needs through their experience in the organization." QWL has gained deserved prominence in the

organizational behavior as an indicator of the overall human experience in the work place. It plays a key role in any organization and has an effect on the people, their work performance and self development; it basically refers to relationship between the employees and ecosystem in which he works. It focuses on creating a working environment where employees work co-operatively and achieve results collectively.

Meaning and Concept of QWL

The term quality of work life has different meanings for different people; some consider it industrial democracy or code termination 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

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workers interpret it as more equitable sharing of profits, job security and healthy and human working condition. Others view it as improving social relationship at work place through outcomes, workgroups. Finally some others take a broader view of changing the entire organization climate by humanizing work, individualizing organizations and changing the structural and managerial system. QWL 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 labor management co-operatives to solve the problems of improving organizational performance and employee satisfaction.

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:

1. Increase in education level and consequently job aspirations of employees;
2. Association of workers;
3. Significance of human resource management;
4. Widespread industrial unrest;
5. Growing of knowledge in human behavior, etc.

Objectives of QWL

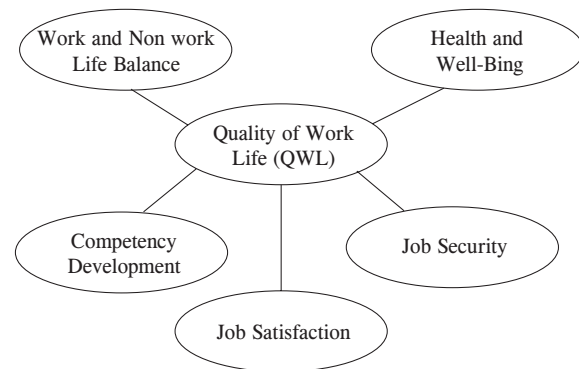
The results, reported from a number of qualities of work life improvement programmes, have some common characteristics. These are:

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.

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 work with non-work life. Each of the dimensions of QWL from the perspectives of employees is briefly discussed below.



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) 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 Lacovides, Fountoulakis and kaprins (2003)⁷ 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. 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 which is well documented in psychosomatic studies.

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 outsource.

Job Satisfaction

Later, cognitive and behavioral components were added to this definition. The cognitive aspect represents an employee's belief about his job situation. This means an employee may believe that his or her job is interesting, stimulating, or otherwise. The behavioral component represents an employee's behavioral tendencies toward his or her job. The action of attending work regularly, working hard and intending to stay in the organization for long period of time shows the positive behavior which indicates job satisfaction. In contrast, negative behavioral 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 their expectations to be extremely important for 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 level of satisfaction.

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.

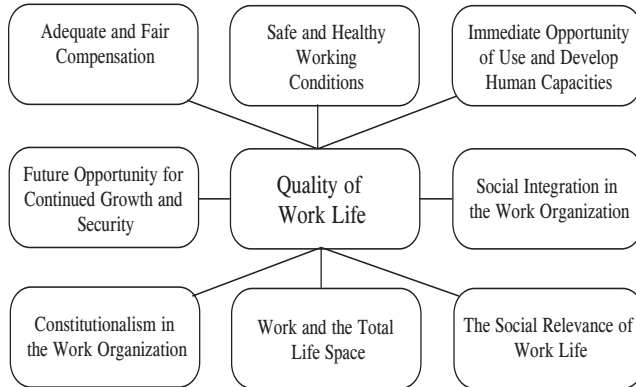
Learning opportunities and skill discretion have also proven to have a positive effect on job satisfaction and reduced job stress that will lead to better QWL. The opportunity to develop and the use of skills are associated with learning mechanisms. This applies especially when the job requires employees to deploy cognitive skills. 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.

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. 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.

Practices of QWL

Quality of working life though came into circulation in 1970s became popular only in 90s and an organization realized 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 proposes an ideal quality of work life programme will include practices in eight major areas as discussed below;



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 labor, and there should be internal consistency among salaries of employees.

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.

Immediate Opportunity of Use and Develop Human Capacities

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

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.

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 kinds of religion, races, crafts, and designations must be treated equally on a social platform. In other words, it creates egalitarian environment.

Constitutionalism in the Work Organization

This is related to organizational norms that affect the freedom of an individual employee. Efforts must be made to make sure that 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.

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.

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.

Techniques for Improving Quality of Work Life

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 organizations, and government etc, in improving the quality of work life. Some of them are:

1. Job Redesign
2. Career Development
3. Autonomy
4. Flexible Work Schedules
5. Participative Management
6. Job Security
7. Administrative Justice.
8. QWL and Management Role

QWL and Judgment Methods

The following indices may be used to judge the quality of work life in an organization:

Job Satisfaction

It implies the worker's satisfaction with the environment of his job environment consisting of nature of work, quality of supervision, pay, coworkers, opportunities for promotion, etc. Job satisfaction is related to job involvement and people involved in job are satisfied with their jobs and vice versa.

Sense of Competence

It refers to the feeling of confidence that an individual has in his own competence. Sense of competence and job involvement reinforce each other. When an individual acquires a greater sense of competence he becomes more and more active in work activities. When he feels more competent he becomes more involved in job and becomes better motivated.

Job Performance

When an individual's job involvement, job satisfaction and sense of competence increase, there is a rise in job performance.

Productivity

When the level of job performance increases the output per unit of input goes up. Thus, match between job characteristics and productivity traits of employees generally result in higher productivity.

Conclusion

Quality of Work Life (QWL) is a comprehensive phenomenon 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. 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; widespread industrial unrest; growing of knowledge in human behavior, 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 taken responsibility such as employers, workers, professional organizations, government and managers, leading to quality circles, management by objectives, suggestion system and other forms of employees' participation in management that 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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