Quality of Work Life - A primer

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of quality of work life (QWL) and its effect on employee well-being and organizational outcomes. It provides a comprehensive review of the literature on QWL, examining various theoretical frameworks, measurement instruments, and empirical studies. The paper discusses the key components of QWL, like job satisfaction, career development, work-life balance, and organizational support. It also explores the factors influencing QWL, such as job characteristics, leadership, and organizational culture. Moreover, the paper examines the relationship between QWL and employee outcomes, including job performance, turnover intentions, and overall satisfaction. Additionally, it discusses the role of QWL in improving competitiveness and organizational effectiveness.

This comprehensive paper delves into the multifaceted concept of quality of work life (QWL) and its far-reaching implications for employee well-being and organizational outcomes. Through an extensive review of the literature, this study examines various theoretical frameworks, measurement instruments, and empirical findings related to QWL. It elucidates the fundamental components of QWL, encompassing aspects such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, career development, and organizational support. Furthermore, this paper investigates the influential factors that shape QWL, including job characteristics, leadership styles, and organizational culture, shedding light on their impact on employee experiences and perceptions.

The paper explores the intricate relationship between QWL and employee outcomes, encompassing variables such as job performance, turnover intentions, and overall job satisfaction. It suggests that a positive QWL is associated with enhanced job performance, reduced turnover intentions, and increased employee satisfaction. Additionally, this paper underscores the significance of QWL in fostering organizational effectiveness and competitiveness, as organizations that prioritize QWL tend to experience higher levels of employee engagement, productivity, and innovation.

This study emphasizes the importance of cultivating a work environment that prioritizes QWL, recognizing its profound influence on employee well-being and organizational success. It underscores the need for organizations to adopt strategies and practices that promote a positive work environment, such as flexible work arrangements, supportive leadership, and opportunities for career development. Finally, this paper highlights the need for further research to deepen our understanding of QWL and its implications, particularly in relation to emerging trends such as remote work, technology advancements, and changing employee expectations.

The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of promoting a positive work environment that prioritizes employee well-being

Keywords: Quality of working life, Workload, Engagement, Job satisfaction, Career development, Stress, Work-life balance.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a scenario where employees are satisfied and motivated in their work, with reduced absenteeism and reduced turnover. Such engagement would lead to higher productivity, and enhanced organizational performance. This idyllic workplace is not just a figment of imagination; it can become a reality through the pursuit of quality of work life (QWL). QWL encompasses various facets of the work environment that contribute to employee well-being and satisfaction, ultimately influencing their overall quality of life.

In today's fast-paced and demanding business landscape, organizations are continuously seeking ways to optimize their performance and gain a competitive edge. They are increasingly recognizing the importance of prioritizing concept of Quality of Work Life (QWL) as a means to attract and retain top talent, foster a positive work culture, and achieve sustainable success. QWL encompasses various dimensions of the work environment that affect employees' physical, psychological, and social well-being. It focuses on creating a supportive and enriching workplace that enables employees to thrive, both personally and professionally in determining employee satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being.

However, achieving a high level of QWL is not merely a matter of offering attractive benefits or amenities. It requires a holistic approach that addresses the diverse needs and aspirations of employees, while aligning with organizational goals and objectives.

Consider this striking statistics: Worldwide, 44% of employees said they experienced a lot of stress (Gallup's Analysis 2022). The American Institute of Stress, (2022) estimates job stress cost approximately \$300 billion for USA and \$1 trillion globally in lost productivity. This alarming figure underscores the detrimental impact that poor QWL can have on both individuals and organizations. It highlights the urgent need for organizations to invest in initiatives that enhance QWL and create an environment where employees can thrive.

Now let us look at the anecdotal evidence that further highlights the significance of QWL. Take the case of Sarah, a talented marketing professional who was consistently burning the midnight oil, juggling multiple projects, and sacrificing personal time to meet demanding deadlines. As the pressure mounted, Sarah's motivation waned, her creativity diminished, and her overall job satisfaction plummeted. Eventually, Sarah decided to seek employment elsewhere, leaving her employer grappling with the consequences of high turnover and the loss of a valuable team member. This anecdote serves as a poignant reminder of how neglecting QWL can lead to negative outcomes for both individuals and organizations.

In light of these compelling statistics and real-life experiences, the purpose of this paper is to delve into the concept of QWL and its profound implications for employee well-being and organizational outcomes.

Let us examine existing literature, theoretical frameworks, measurement instruments, and empirical studies, to shed light on the key components of QWL, the factors influencing it, the relationship between QWL and employee outcomes, and the role of QWL in enhancing organizational effectiveness. Ultimately, this paper aims to inspire organizations and researchers alike to prioritize QWL as a critical factor in creating a thriving, sustainable, and successful work environment.

We spent significant part of our lives in the workspace. On an average, a normal human being lives for about 80 years. The working life is almost 40 years between 20 to 65 years making approximately 50% of life at work. During those

working years, most spent a minimum of 40% on work and work-related issues making work to occupy one of the longest times in one's life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rasow (1974) depicts the significance of work and relates it to the achievement and disappointments of humans in society. Taking into account of the deeper meaning of work to the individual and life's values, it is the core of Life.

Human resources are the only resource that appreciates over time among all the resources. Human resources decide the economic, social, and cultural development of any nation. Organizations relies heavily on its committed human resources for its successful management.

Society today is becoming more conscious of the Quality of work life. People need to be not only employed gainfully but also not underemployed or overemployed. Conditions of work are important as employees have certain expectations about them. Each person has subjective standards of adequacy. How the organization attracts, recruits, motivates, and retains its workforce. Is critical to its success.

Organizations are a collection of humans. Only humans and not organizations can create Excellence. Employees should be treated with dignity and respect, as human resources are trustworthy, responsible, and capable of making a valuable contribution. They need to be handled with care as managing them is a complex affair,

Work (or lack of work) represents the connection that we have with the outside world. It is pivotal in which human existence revolves as it occupies our thoughts, and determines our schedule for the day. Work provides the requirements for life. It is the source of identity and standing in the larger community by proving opportunities for achievement. It is a significant aspect of life that influences one's lifestyle tremendously. It even determines our decision on whether or not to have a family.

Work was an essential part of the Community in pre-industrial society and carried out in the same community setting where one lived. More than half of the workers were self-employed. According to Brisken (1996), the Industrial revolution reduced agricultural work and increased mechanical work. It also separated work from the community and created the organization. Work now became detached, separated from the community, and contained within specific buildings and times with two-thirds of the working population becoming wage earners by 1900.

Factors of Quality of life include income, health, social relationships, and other factors that give happiness and fulfillment. Quality of Work Life (QWL) refers to the nature of the relationship the employees felt in the working environment, and involves four significant aspects:

- ★ Safe place to Work
- ★ Convenient Working time.
- \star Salary or wages that is appropriate and
- \star Occupational health care,

Though FW Taylor was one of the pioneers who gave due importance to human resources, his scientific methods tried to match the requirements of the work to the abilities of the employee by giving training, etc. and overlooked the matching of the employee with the job. Mayo (1933, 1960) is one of the pioneers who recognized the importance of the environmental factors on plant worker's performance through the famous Hawthorn experiments towards humanization of employee's working conditions

Another factor is the increase in the number of women joining the workforce, which had an impact on the family structure and values. This resulted in the changing requirements of the employees. Working as part of the family in the pre-industrial era was quite different.

Like many management terms, 'Quality of Work Life' (QWL) is also ambiguous. Gilgeous, (1998), found Quality of life as a person's satisfaction with the dimensions of their life comparing with their ideal life. For Nadler and Lawler (1983), found it is a person's perception of and attitudes towards their work and the total working environment. They delineate six factors for more successful QWL efforts as

- (1) A problem arises when members of an organization perceive their requirements.
- (2) The organization finds the problem to be significant.
- (3) Creation of a structure for participation
- (4) Rewards for both processes and outcomes of QWL activities.
- (5) Involvement of the different levels of management and
- (6) All members avoiding "we-they" rivalries are involved.

They conclude that QWL efforts must be managed by development of the projects at various levels, modifying management structure, and systems and tangible participation of senior management.

Broadly, QWL has Classical and contemporary dimensions. The Classical dimension comprises Physical working conditions, job factors, employee welfare, employee assistance, and financial factors. The contemporary dimension consists of -Industrial safety and health, Collective bargaining, Procedure of Grievance redressal, Quality circle, work-life balance, worker's participation, etc.

Walton. R.E, (1973) with his significant research on QWL, is the pioneer to the concept of productivity and human resources. His eight-point criteria to evaluate the 'Quality of Working Life' still hold true.

- Compensation that is Fair and adequate,
- Creating a Safe and healthy Working environment,
- Opportunity to develop human capabilities,
- ✤ Growth and security,
- ✤ Social integration,
- Constitutionalism,
- ✤ Total life space and
- Social relevance.

These eight categories are interconnected in a complex way. Some of them are complimentary. Several pairs tend to be positively correlated. Some pairs have apparent inconsistencies.

Productivity seems to have a curvilinear relationship with these eight dimensions of QWL There is the diversity of human preferences due to diversity in culture, social class, family background, educational levels, personality, age, etc.

In recent years, the following variables have contributed to an increase the awareness for the Quality of Work Life:

- ▲ Change in job aspirations of employees mainly due to higher levels of education;
- ▲ Development of association of workers;
- ▲ Occurrence of widespread industrial unrest;
- ▲ Consciousness of the importance of human resource management (HRM) with the development of knowledge in human behavior

COMPONENTS AND FACTORS OF QWL

Havlovic (1991) identified the key elements of QWL to include

- Job Security,
- Job Satisfaction,
- Better Reward System

- Employee Benefits,
- Employee Involvement And
- Organizational Performance

The QWL depicts the sum of the total of an individual's healthy experience in different facets of work life. Employee's reaction to work depends upon the factors as under:

- Individual Characteristics and personality traits like Employee's abilities, skills, Values, Work ethics, locus of control, the pattern of needs, tolerance for ambiguity, etc.
- Work Characteristics like the extent of skills required in performing the work, autonomy in doing the job, challenge it offers, etc.
- Working Environment Attitude of the supervisors and co-workers, Friendly atmosphere, Reward systems, training facilities, etc.

The QWL was created to put a stop to employer exploitation and injustice. By providing good QWL, one can eliminate injustice, inequality, oppression, exploitation and restrictions and ensure the continuous growth and overall development of the human resource.

The evolution of the concept QWL have these phases

- ★ Scientific Management of FW Taylor (1919)
- ★ Human Relations Movement of George Elton Mayo (1933) and
- ★ Social-technical Movement of Emery and Trist (1960)

The modern concept of QWL can be traced to the research on the Socio-Technical system. The fundamental feature of the Socio-technical system is the organization's design that is compatible with its goals and capable of change, by utilizing an individual's creative abilities. People ought to be able to participate in the job design they are expected to do as part of a system (Cherns 1979).

Davis and Trist (1974) trace the term The Socio-Technical Approach to the United States and the United Kingdom. It then spread to Norway, Netherlands, India, and Japan. The two fundamental premises are

- Men are expected to perform tasks in both the social context and technical systems in any purposeful organization. These systems overlap and the accomplishment of the result becomes a function of their joint operations.
- The Socio-Technical System is ingrained in a setting that is decided by the culture, its values, and commonly accepted practices that allow organizations,

groups, and individuals to assume specific roles. To understand a working system, one must comprehend its environmental influences.

Maslow (1954) depicted the complexity of human nature in direct, simple and practical terms, by describing various levels of human needs and satisfaction as

- \star Physical or Basic needs
- \star Safety needs
- \star Social needs
- \star Esteem needs, and
- \star Self-actualization needs.

These are comparable with the factors of QWL of Walton. Basic or Physical needs like monetary benefits come first, followed by good working conditions. Maslow's Safety and social needs can be seen in Career planning, growth, and development of human capabilities of QWL. Esteem needs utilize the opportunity to use and develop human capabilities. Finally, self-actualization to take the place of challenging work.

Herzberg (1968) went further and found that an individual acquires a sense of self-actualization, achievement and meaning from the job itself rather than from what the individual brought to the job, the context of work, or the work environment.

To differentiate between the distinct causes of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, he identified two sets of factors: Hygiene Factors (Job Context) and Motivating Factors (Job Content).

The Hygiene factors that are to avoid dissatisfaction include interpersonal relationships, salary, status, working conditions, supervision, company policy, and security. Employees would not experience long-term satisfaction from these hygiene factors.

Motivating factors are inherent to the job, content of the job, the work itself, recognition, accountability, development, and promotion. Poor policy administration and bad supervision are the most common causes of job dissatisfaction. The greatest source of extreme work satisfaction is a sense of accomplishment.

In his well-known theory X and theory Y exposition, McGregor (1960) presented two in his famous theory X and theory Y exposition McGregor (1960) presented two opposing sets of assumptions. According to Theory X, people dislike work inherently, and would avoid it if possible. Their supervisors and managers have a

pessimistic option of their employees and believe they are in need of constant direction as they are lazy and fear-motivated.

Theory Y put the opposite assumptions and presented a completely different picture of human nature. People by nature are ambitious and are ready to take responsibility. The Supervisors and managers have an optimistic opinion of their employees. They encourage a more collaborative and trusting relationship using a decentralized, participative management style.

The work is of great importance to the worker as it is the very reason of his being at the workplace. The employee's QWL is influenced by satisfactory work. A challenging work, utilizing the capabilities of employees enhances the QWL.

In the olden days, people treated work as worship and were sincere and committed to work. Lifelong work or working in the same organization for 30 years etc. was the norm. These values seem to have eroded over time. The four factors identified by Michall Maccaoby (1984), to measure the Quality of working Life are

- Job Security
- ✤ Equality
- ✤ Democracy and,
- ✤ Individualization

Klott, Mundick and Schuster (1985) suggested eleven major QWL issues. They are:

- Pay and stability of employment,
- Occupational stress,
- Organizational health programs,
- Alternative work schedules,
- Participative management and control of work,
- Recognition,
- Congenial worker supervisor relations,
- Grievance procedure,
- Adequacy of resources,
- Seniority and merit in promotions and
- Employment on permanent basis

Arts *et al.* (2001) prescription to enhance the QWL was to focused on things like job satisfaction, involvement with work, motivation, efficiency, work load, productivity, health, safety, stress, burnout, and other issues.

According to Royela et al. (2007), dimensions for the QWL proposed by European Commission (EC) are

- ★ Intrinsic job quality,
- ★ Skills, life-long learning and career development,
- \star Gender equality
- ★ Health and safety at work,
- \star Flexibility and security,
- ★ Labor worker involvement and Inclusion
- \star Diversity and non-discrimination, and
- \star Overall, work performance.

A career is the progressive sequence of a person's work experiences over time. Chen et al. (2004) defined Career as a person's progress of work roles or work experience over time and results from the interaction of individuals with organizations and society.

QWL is a philosophy that considers people as an asset rather than cost as they are responsible, trustworthy and capable of making valuable contributions. The components that are pertinent to the individual's QWL includes the job, the physical and social environments of the workplace, system of administration, and the connection between life on and off the job.

Edwards (2005), says that employees in high commitment organizations contribute value in three ways.

- ★ Persistence- longer tenure, fewer absences, more punctual and less stress.
- ★ Citizenship- stronger moral behavior, voluntary ambassadorship, more proactive assistance for others and increased discretionary effort.
- ★ Performance-greater productivity, improved customer service, enhanced quality and higher outputs

MODELS OF QWL

Martel and Dupuis (2006) proposed four approaches for the conceptualization of quality of work life linking quality of personal life that interact and influence each other.

- ★ The Transfer Model (or Spill over Effect)
- ★ The Compensation model:

- ★ The Segmentation Model
- ★ The Accommodation model

The first approach is the Transfer Model, also known as the Spill over Effect. This model, initially proposed by Kavanagh & Halpern (1977) and supported by (Schmitt & Bedeian, 1982), traces the linkage between work and non-work areas of life. George & Brief (1990) and Staines (1980) opines that that Employees Job satisfaction affects and is affected by life outside work. Leiter and Durup (1996) suggests that there can be direct or indirect spill over effects between job satisfaction and personal life. A direct effect occurs when objective conditions in either the work or personal life influence the other environment, such as a change of workplace or the arrival of a new baby. An indirect effect occurs when an individual's perception of an objective condition creates either stress or satisfaction.

However, Rousseau (1978) argues that the Transfer Model may not be universally applicable, particularly for individuals who experience high levels of isolation or physical demands in their work or personal life.

The second approach is the Compensation Model, which predicts an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and satisfaction outside of work. Rousseau (1978) and Staines (1980) suggest that individuals who are not satisfied with their work will seek to compensate for this dissatisfaction through engaging in stimulating activities outside of work

The third approach is the Segmentation Model, proposed by George and Brief (1990). This model looks life at work and life outside of work as independent of each other. In other words, individuals can compartmentalize their work and personal life, treating them as separate spheres with minimal influence on each other.

The fourth approach is the Accommodation Model, proposed by Lambert (1990). This model suggests that individuals may reduce their investment voluntarily in one sphere of activity to give better response to the demands of another. For example, someone may choose to prioritize his or her personal life over his or her work life for a period.

However, Loscocco and Roschelle (1991) argue that none of these three models (Transfer, Compensation, and Segmentation) are universally applicable, as they lack precision and are based more on subjective perceptions of individuals as the link between work and personal life.

Another perspective is the Integration Model, proposed by Kiernan and Knutson (1990). This model views quality of work life (QWL) as a social movement. It considers work as a vehicle for personal growth and social support, instead of a means of achieving financial independence. This perspective recognizes that QWL is becoming increasingly important in people's overall quality of life, particularly as workers become better educated and there is a rise in the number of skilled women in the workforce.

These various approaches provide different insights into the relationship between work and personal life, highlighting the importance of considering the quality of work life in the broader context of overall quality of life.

CONCLUSION

QWL has emerged as a critical concept in understanding the relationship between work and employee well-being. Its importance lies in its potential to create a positive work environment that fosters employee satisfaction, engagement, and overall organizational success. As the concept continues to evolve, organizations must adapt their practices to align with the changing needs and expectations of employees, ensuring that QWL remains a key priority in today's dynamic and ever-evolving work landscape. The paper highlights the importance of Quality of Work Life (QWL) in the workplace and emphasizes the significant amount of time individuals spend at work and the impact it has on their overall well-being and satisfaction. The paper also discusses the historical evolution of work from being a part of the community to becoming detached and separate.

The importance of QWL lies in its potential to enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention. When employees experience a high quality of work life, they are more likely to be motivated, committed, and engaged in their roles. This, in turn, positively affects organizational outcomes such as productivity, innovation, and customer satisfaction. Moreover, a positive work environment that prioritizes QWL can help attract and retain top talent, creating a competitive advantage for organizations.

The factors that contribute to QWL, such as a safe work environment, convenient working hours, fair compensation, and occupational health care, are crucial for creating a positive work experience. Additionally, the paper emphasizes the importance of treating employees with dignity and respect, involving them in decision-making processes, and recognizing their valuable contributions.

It also discusses in detail the dimensions of QWL, including physical working conditions, job factors, employee welfare, industrial safety and health, work-life balance, and worker's participation. The paper also explores various models and approaches to understanding the relationship between work and personal life.

Overall, the paper emphasizes the need for organizations to prioritize QWL to ensure the well-being and satisfaction of their employees. By creating a positive work environment, organizations can improve productivity, employee engagement, employee retention and overall organizational success. It is crucial for organizations to recognize that employees are valuable assets and to invest in their well-being, which ultimately leads to a better quality of life for individuals both at work and outside of work.

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