



The Approaches to Improve Quality of Work Life

KEYWORDS

Quality of Work Life, Work Life Balance, Employability, Quality of Life

R. Miyal Vaganan

Assistant Professor, Research Scholar Anna University Chennai, Vivekanandha Institute of Information and Management Studies, Tiruchengodu

Dr. P. Vikkraman

Associate Professor, School Of Management Studies, Anna University Regional Centre, Coimbatore

ABSTRACT *This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the conceptual model of QWL with respect to various dimensions which are prevailing in the organizations. The importance of QWL is having tremendous response which creates harmonious relations among employees in different sectors. The effect of QWL leads to improved Work Life Balance and productivity for the organization. QWL is concerned with how the relationship between individuals, their physical, social and economic work environment affect their attitude and behavior that society considers to be important both on and off the job. Moreover, this phrase has been increasingly used to describe certain environmental and humanistic values neglected by the industrial societies in favour of technological advancement, industrial productivity and economic growth*

Introduction

Quality of working life has recently emerged as an important area of concern. The quality of working life refers to the relationship between a worker and his surroundings, totaling the human dimension to the scientific and economic dimensions within which work is normally viewed and designed. Quality of work life relates to the facilities and conditions in which workers have to work. For improving QWL, working conditions and environment have to be improved and more satisfactory conditions are to be created. Humanization of work, for instance, is often used in a number of languages as a synonym for quality of working life. Improving QWL in India is a task of gigantic magnitude. The programmes and projects aimed at improving Quality of working life are therefore required to be initiated simultaneously at macro, sub-macro and micro-levels at the business, administration and society levels. Quality of work life improvements is defined as any activity which takes place at every level of an organization which creates greater organizational effectiveness through the enhancement of human self-esteem and growth, as a course employees gain knowledge of how to work jointly better, to decide for themselves what events changes, improvements are desirable and workable in order to achieve the twin and simultaneous goals of an improved quality of life at work for all members of the organization and greater effectiveness for both the company and the unions.

Concept of Quality of Work Life

With rapid technological advances and their applications in business have resulted into creation of a situation in which employees have started developing the feeling of weakness, meaninglessness, formlessness, communal isolation, and self-estrangement. Such a feeling has resulted into lesser increase in productivity as compared to what was envisaged at the time of adopting a new technology. This forced the academicians and practitioners to see the workplace problems with a different perspective, that is social perspective which resulted into the conclusion that productivity of employees was not affected by the type of technology alone but by the environment that prevailed at the workplace. This led to the materialization of concept of quality of work life (QWL) during 1970s which aims at integrating the socio-psychological needs of people in the work place, the unique requirements of a particular technology, the structure and processes of the work place, and socio-cultural setting. From the shop level, the concept of quality of work life extended to other parts of the organization covering white-collar employees and even managerial personnel.

Stuttle has defined quality of work life as follows: "Quality of work life is the level to which members of a work organization are able to satisfy important personal needs through their experiences in the workplace". At the beginning stage of quality of work life, many dimensions were included. For example, Walton has suggested eight programmes to humanize the workplace: adequate and fair reward, safe and healthy work atmosphere, improvement of individual capabilities, increase and security, social addition in work environment, constitutionalism (rule of law), work and total life space, and social relevance of work life. However, the contemporary human-technological-organizational interfaces lead to a better quality of work life. Work atmosphere is a set of specific attributes to a particular organization that may be induced from the way the organization deals with its members.

Five Dimensions of Quality of Life

A review of the arguments advanced so far indicates five relevant qualitative dimensions, which emerge in an evaluation of time arrangements in terms of quality of life:

- Work/life balance
- Employability
- Income security and social security
- Quality of work
- Time sovereignty

Work/Life Balance

Work/life balance may be defined as an individual's attempt to find suitable time arrangements and options that lead the best possible coordination of requirements of work with time arrangements and quality of life requirements for personal life. To this extent, work/life balance is not automatically about working less but about having control and flexibility over when, where and how to work (Pillinger, 2001). Consequently, the argument for a better work/life balance also appropriately reflects social change, such as the rise of dual profession families, solitary parenthood and the addition of care to cover older family members. Work/life balance may also be regarded as a product of changes in employment practices, particularly the need to maintain employability in a more uncertain labour market.

As responsibilities for work and family are still not evenly divided between the genders, in many, if not in most of the families, women in particular experience overload and exclusion from the labour market as a result of a work/life imbalance. Work/life balance as a core dimension of quality must

be improved if this problem is to be confronted, along with a further consequence of this dilemma-the declining birth rate, as people are unable to have the number of children they actually want to have, given the prevailing institutional conditions.

Quality of life and work/life balance differ conceptually in that work/life balance encompasses only a specific segment of quality of life, mainly the compatibility of the demands of work and personal life at the level of daily life (the horizontal level). Quality of life may also involve further aspects of self determined life, for example, the subjectively experienced meaningfulness of decisions about time structures and life phase courses (the vertical level).

On the other hand, quality of life and work/life balance may actually conflict with each other decisions in favour of particular working-time models may be efficient and may improve work/life balance without improving the quality of life of the employees either subjectively or objectively. Part-time work, for example, may make it easier for individuals to reconcile the demands of work and private life, but may also trigger subjective dissatisfaction in cases where, for example, the individuals concerned actually prefer full-time employment due job security. Within the framework of a successful or 'good' work/life balance, the demands of work and private life are coordinated efficiently in a functional manner and at the same time are linked satisfactorily from a subjective point of view in such a way that health, material, social and time resources are expended economically. For example, an individual may combine gainful employment and caring for relatives if suitable working-time models and the support of social services are available. In such a case, neither the career nor the person being cared for needs to experience material, social or health disadvantages. By contrast, an unsuccessful or 'bad' work/life balance may, for example, entail an involuntary exit from gainful employment if the support structures to facilitate care for a child or a dependent relative are not available institutionally or informally. Such unsuccessful or 'bad' work/life balance arrangements may also manifest themselves in permanent time stress or in feelings of guilt, prompting the individual's concerned to take on more than their obligatory workload, for example, by accepting employment at unsocial times (like evenings or weekends), causing subsequent and later-onset problems (such as health complaints of a mental or physical nature).

Employability

The term 'employability' refers to the occupational skills and abilities that generally determine the employment prospects of an individual employee in the labour market, whether in work or out of work. Employability includes not only functional skills but also extra-functional skills, such as occupational flexibility, work and/or job-related attitudes, values and motivation, willingness to undertake further training, and work- and/or job-related physical and mental constitution. Furthermore, in our conceptualization, employability also includes the individual's intrinsic abilities to develop occupational skills and competencies. It is obvious that our conceptualization goes far beyond work aptitude (Ilmarinen, 1999). In every part of, we regard both enduring learning and work organization, including working time patterns, as decisive parameters of action in contributing to employability.

Income Security and Social Security

Income and Social Security in this relationship refers to the possible income effects of a particular time arrangement is related to particular sources of income from work, social security schemes or private arrangements or resources. If a particular time arrangement results in a lower income, either at the time of this time arrangement or at a later stage of the life-course, then the final effect could be poverty. To the extent that employment demands increasing flexibility of employees, and so far as the duration and timing of working hours and working life as a whole is concerned, there is rea-

son to fear an increase in the number of legally and financially more insecure and deregulated (precarious) jobs.

The new demands on flexibility in the field of working hours and the structure of working life have an even more tangible influence on the income security and social security of the employees concerned (such as a variable and discontinuous income which cannot safely be relied on, possibly a lower average income, or repercussions for social security entitlement in cases of unemployment, illness or disability, or for later pension entitlement). The far-reaching implications of this risk become clear not least when examined against the background of the 'traditional welfare model'. This means that the system of social security for the population in many European Union Member States, in particular the continental European ones, is closely linked to traditional life-course patterns, particularly to the (male) model of continuous full-time employment. As this model is increasingly becoming obsolete, however, new and more flexible structures of social security are needed.

Quality of Work

Quality of work as multi-dimensional concept refers to different aspects of working and living conditions of the employees. According to a proposal published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of the Living and Working Conditions (Arrowsmith and Sisson, 2001), Quality of work can be conceptualized by the following four prime dimensions:

- Career and Employment Security.
- Health and Well-being.
- Skills Development and
- Resolution of working and non-working life.

The last two dimensions are already covered by the conceptualization of evaluation criteria, namely by 'employability' and 'work/life balance'. As far as 'career and employment security' in a life-course perspective is concerned, it is particularly important to analyze the vertical implications of certain time arrangements and/or their combinations at a specific stage of working life influence choices and options

In later phases of working life. With respect to 'health and well-being', there is a substantial empirical evidence that new patterns of working hours are leading to increasing demands on employees' flexibility at the workplace. Empirical research has also revealed changing and increasing workloads, particularly in psychological dimensions such as decreased autonomy or communication, and an overall higher level of stress and time squeeze, which could lead to new health risks.

Time Sovereignty

The four dimensions discussed so far are indications of what could be called 'working and living conditions'. The fifth dimension relates to another aspect of quality of life, namely, time sovereignty. Time sovereignty is the right and ability of individuals to determine time allocation to a large extent (quantitatively as well as qualitatively) through their whole life and in all fields of life, not just in working life. In this sense, time sovereignty should be seen as a part of 'quality of life' that has still to be achieved, 'as a central point of reference for planning life flexibility in dynamic society'. As Schilling (2001) emphasizes, 'time wealth and time sovereignty should be seen together with sovereignty in the field of the working life. Only those who are able to influence the contents of work in individual fields of life also have a larger scope of influence as far as the duration and timing of working hours are concerned.

Approaches to Improve QWL

There are a number of factors involved in QWL and these factors can be grouped in three categories: personality factors, work factors, and managerial factors. The individuality of these factors affect the individual involvement in the work,

sense of capability which lead to job satisfaction and finally to job performance and productivity

An individual in the organization wants to satisfy his needs while working for it. Depending on the nature of the personality, they may want reasonable economic package, employment benefits, job security, interesting work, involvement in decision –making process affecting and employment, and getting proper feedback about routine. If these factors are positive, the individual will feel job involvement and sense of competence, consequently job satisfaction and contribute positively with the support of organizational facilities. Therefore, in improving QWL, all these factors have to be taken into description. Though there may not be any worldwide fact in improving the QWL because of involvement of number of factors in it, some more commonly adopted practices for the purpose are discussed below.

1. **Flexibility in employment program.** Employees desire flexibility in work schedule. There are three aspects of flexibility: flextime, a system of flexible working hours, spread out working hours, different time intervals for beginning and end of working hours, and compressed work. Flexible working hours per day with lesser number of working days per week make the employee to regain his energy and perform well. To the extent, this flexibility is provided in the work system, it becomes more motivating to the employees.
2. **Autonomous Work Group.** Creation of autonomous work group helps in creating positive feelings among workers. They may be given liberty to decide their own teams: there should be autonomy of decision making regarding the alternative of methods for work, allocation of responsibilities among group members, and scheming of work schedules.
3. **Job Enhancement.** Job Enhancement attempts to plan a job in such a way that it becomes more attractive and demanding so that the job holder makes sense out of that. The degree of job enhancement determines the degree of QWL.
4. **Prospect for Development.** An employee, mainly the achievement-oriented one, seeks growth through his work. If the work provides him opening for individual growth and to develop his personality, he will feel committed to the job and the society.
5. **Contribution.** contribution in decision making, particularly on the matters directly concerned with an individual's working, has an important bearing on his satisfaction and performance. Higher degree of contribution increases the QWL and overall organizational climate
6. **Communication.** To build QWL, valuable both-way communication is vital through the descending communication, employees would obtain information about the various aspects of the organization, particularly that which concern them, instructions about job performance and how the job is related to the entire organizational framework, and other specific communication which may be significant for them. In the course of upward communication, employees can distribute their views, problems and how to overcome these, and suggestions for improving the job performance.

Effects of QWL

The role of HR personnel will be key to bring such changes. They will generate and continue high performance cultures which retain talent and provide unique learning and growth.

People administration, will be collective responsibility of all managers and organization leaders. HR will be the facilitator of the world's best people practices in all areas, accountable for the quality of the company. QWL affects job involvement, sense of competence, job satisfaction, and job performance. A favourable QWL results into positive consequences of these factors. Let us see how QWL affects these.

1. **Job involvement.** Job involvement indicates the extent of people's identification with or without ego involvement in the job. Job involvement is how people spend more time on job and turn out better performance. Challenging jobs which have skill variety, influence employees to get involved with their jobs. Similarly, people with high need for achievement and high work ethic feel involved in jobs.
2. **Sense of competence.** Sense of competence denotes the feelings of confidence that one has in one's own competence. Job design affects the sense of competence. By engaging in a work that calls for a variety of skills, abilities, and talents, individuals gain mastery over their work environment. As they engage themselves more and more in work activities, they acquire a great sense of competence and experience and higher level of job involvement. This job involvement further adds to sense of competence. Thus, sense of competence and job involvement mutually reinforce each other. High sense of competence and job involvement produces high job satisfaction and productivity.
3. **Job Satisfaction.** Job satisfaction is a set of favourable or unfavourable feelings with which employees views their jobs, more specifically the nature of work they perform, the quality of management they obtain, co-worker's pay and perks, and promotional avenues. Low Job satisfaction affects job performances, employee turnover, and absenteeism. High job satisfaction results into high work performance, minimum employee turnover and minimum absenteeism.
4. **Job Performance and Productivity.** Job involvement, job satisfaction, and sense of competence affect job performance and productivity of employees. When the level of job performance and productivity factors-job involvement, job satisfaction, and sense of competence-is high, we find that there is fit among the predisposition of employees and the type of jobs they are assigned to do. Since there is congruence between the employee and the job, there is high level of job performance.

Conclusion

Improvement in the QWL is becoming attractive Slogan of today's employers and employees. QWL is a generic phrase that covers person's feeling and sentiments about every dimension of work including economic benefits and other fringe benefits. QWL is concerned with how the relationship between individuals, their physical, social and economic work environment affect their attitude and behavior that society considers to be important both on and off the job. Moreover, this phrase has been increasingly used to describe certain environmental and humanistic values neglected by the industrial societies in favour of technological advancement, industrial productivity and economic growth. QWL programmes have been receiving widespread attention in more and more companies, both in developed and developing nations, for their input, to job satisfaction productivity and organization success.

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