

## Evidence and Implications Towards Challenges of Quality of Work Life in Developed And Developing Countries



### Management

**KEYWORDS :** QWL, Well-being, Policies, Satisfaction, Working Age

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### ABSTRACT

*In the promotion of health and well-being at work, recent evidence suggests that work can be good for health in reversing the harmful effects of unemployment but yet if one is unhappy in their working environment, one can easily fall into sickness absence or ill-health. This paper would deal with the well-being of the working age population deriving data and evidence and implications from surveys in specific industry and country. The nature and characteristics of the jobs, supportive colleagues and employers contribute in terms of satisfaction, reward, and improved performance. The concept of well-being is open to interpretation and cultural context in addition to changing perceptions of expectations in terms of work benefits and conditions given the presumption that there is relationship between good quality of work life and good health, in creating new perspectives on wealth and work, improving work and work-places, and supporting people to work policies. This paper will contribute a critical perspective on the nexus between work and well being in developed and developing countries given the different contextual and cultural settings taking some evidence from empirical studies, reports to the governments, policies, etc., and thereupon conceptual interpretation.*

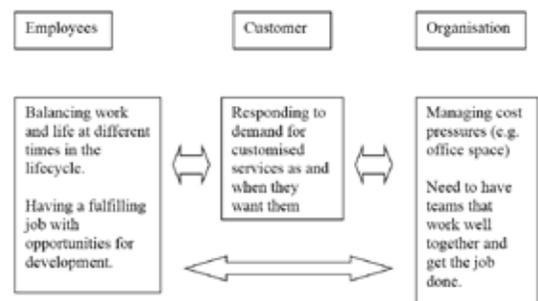
### Introduction

The concepts of Quality of Work Life (QWL) and work-life balance are not new. In its initial development in the mid 1970s, QWL was first defined in terms of people's reaction to work, particularly individual outcomes related to job satisfaction and mental health. Using this definition, QWL focused primarily on the personal consequences of the work experience and how to improve work to satisfy personal needs. A second definition was defined in terms of techniques and approaches used for improving work such as job enrichment, self-managed teams, and labor-management committees (Davis & Cherns, 1975, Davis, 1977). The expansion of QWL beyond the initial development include features of the workplace that can affect employee productivity and satisfaction such as reward systems, work flows, management styles, and physical work environment (Cummings & Worley, 2005).

This paper briefly reviews some of the issues facing industrialised developed and developing countries in regards to work-life balance and quality of work life. As Duxbury & Higgins (2003) said that work-life conflict is not only a moral issue but also a productivity and economic issue, a workplace and social issue and needs to be addressed as such. The evidences for QWL suggest that it is not only a concern for the individual but also a consideration for the organisation and society at large, both individual and collective experiences.

### Literature Review

In autumn 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) funded by the European Social Fund, launched an investigation into transforming work, looking at how work organization can be transformed to improve productivity for businesses and the economy and better lifelong choices for men and women. According to Jones et al. (2007), sustainable 'transformed work' is ECO Work that balances the needs of employees, customers and the organisation in a flexible way to increase the productivity and efficiency of the organisation and to meet the needs of individual employees and customers as shown below.



Research on work and family has sought to explain work-family conflict from multiple theoretical approaches such as boundary theory, compensation theory, ecological systems theory, social identity theory, and spillover theory, to name a few. Researchers generally state that role theory has provided the broad theoretical umbrella for much of the work-family conflict literature. Role theory implies that work and family roles result from the expectations of others, and what is believed to be appropriate behaviour for a particular position.

### Work-Life Balance Policies in Developed and Developing Countries

Current approaches to work have increased economic pressure on organizations, which has equated to greater work pressures and affected work life balance. Individual consequences of work-life imbalance are documented (e.g. Brough and O'Driscoll, 2005) and organizations, for instance Higgins, Duxbury & Johnson (2004) in a benchmark study, estimated that work overload cost the Canadian healthcare system CA\$5.92 billion per annum, followed by caregiver strain (CA\$4.85 billion), work-to-family interference (CA\$2.77 billion), and family-to-work interference (CA\$514 million).

Recent policies of work-life balance include initiatives for employees to achieve balance regardless of their actual care-giving responsibilities (Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007).

### Case Studies of UK Companies / Research

Employment rates of older workers reflect the recognition of the value of retaining these skilled employees, although rates do vary by country: - 30 – 42% in the southern European and continental European countries, 50% in Nordic countries and the UK, 59% in US, and 62% in Japan (Burniaux, Duval, and Jaumotte,

2003). Mercer (2004) reported that while 93% of UK unemployed workers aged 55 – 64 would prefer to be working, a lack of access to flexible working conditions and quality part-time work directly prevented their employment. Reday-Mulvey (2005) demonstrated that older workers in 'low-quality' jobs were four times as likely to leave employment as workers in 'high quality' positions.

### Case Study 1: Work and Health Network

This group represents a wide range of expertise in delivering occupational health support in primary care, for small and medium-enterprises and the voluntary sector. Members include:

- Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service, which sees over 1,200 patients a year and provides advice on prevention, returning to work and general issues such as employment and health and safety law;
- Health Works in London (Newham) which works alongside other agencies to provide services for long-term unemployed people to help them back to work and support and training for SMEs to help them improve their workplace health and safety standards.

### Case Study 2: AstraZeneca

This pharmaceutical company, made a £5 million saving in one year through a programme of initiatives, including standalone projects and improved management aimed at reducing sickness absence levels through top management commitment.

### Case Study 3: Port of London Authority (PLA)

PLA provides safe navigation on the tidal Thames. The company introduced a sickness absence management policy which resulted in a 70 per cent drop in absence rates from 11 – 12 per cent to 3 - 3.4 per cent (2003). PLA estimate that the improvement was the equivalent of 8.2 per cent more staff at work.

### QWL and Performance

Similarities exist between QWL and Job Performance in that both are organizational-based. Job performance is a function of both the individual and the organization. Therefore the basis of the two constructs is, they are situational based and contextual in the workplace. This means that individuals and organizations are interdependent. As such, QWL can be identified as a plausible predictor of job performance.

Many studies have examined the multidimensional and complex construct of job performance. For example, Campbell, McHenry, & Wise (1990) identified eight major dimensions of performance: (1) job-specific task proficiency, (2) non job-specific task proficiency, (3) written & oral communication tasks, (4) demon-

strating effort, (5) maintaining personal discipline, (6) facilitating peer and team performance, (7) supervision, and (8) management/administration.

The results gave strong support that QWL was applicable across a homogenous sample of organizations and that the work life of acceptable level existed. Thus, the construct can be operationalized along repeatable dimensions. This finding contributes to the theory building in operationalization of QWL construct and validates as a measure instrument. The finding is consistent with the study by Lau (2000) and Delaney and Huselid (1996) that indicated that QWL is a significant factor in determining job performance. Thus, the study exhibits optimism concerning the potential of QWL in enhancing the performance of employees and organizations as QWL is found to significantly reduce absenteeism, minor accidents, grievances, and quits (Havlovic, 1991).

Inevitably, this means that the key determinant of a great organization to work in is the level of QWL. Obviously, employees will want to choose the best employer or organization to work, to share the direction and alignment as to the engagement perpetuated through good practices that can provide such quality of work life. The result of the study (Beh, 2007) has important implications for future research. QWL is a relevant and crucial dimension of job performance. This could be an important prerequisite for future job performance studies involving comparisons across organizations and industries. This study provides strong evidence that QWL accounts for some proportion of job performance. Future studies can provide a discerned pattern applicable to a wider sample of companies. Future research is also needed to provide additional empirical evidence for the two concepts in other work settings.

### Conclusion

This review considers the evidence for future consideration for why work-life balance is important, may not be just an individual's concern but that of organizational and social concerns, though seemingly short-term but rather has long-term effects. Most of the studies which have looked into the relationship between work-family have assumed similar expectations and results between the employees, without considering the individual differences in a range of characteristics. The health and well-being of people of working age is therefore a fundamental importance to our future, given the attention it deserves and a commitment to bringing about a real and sustained improvement. However, there is no one size of QWL that fits all model as every organisation needs to develop its own, responding to employees, customer and organisational needs though evidences and implications in developed and developing countries do not seem to suggest stark differences.

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