QUALITY OF WORK LIFE: DRIVER OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

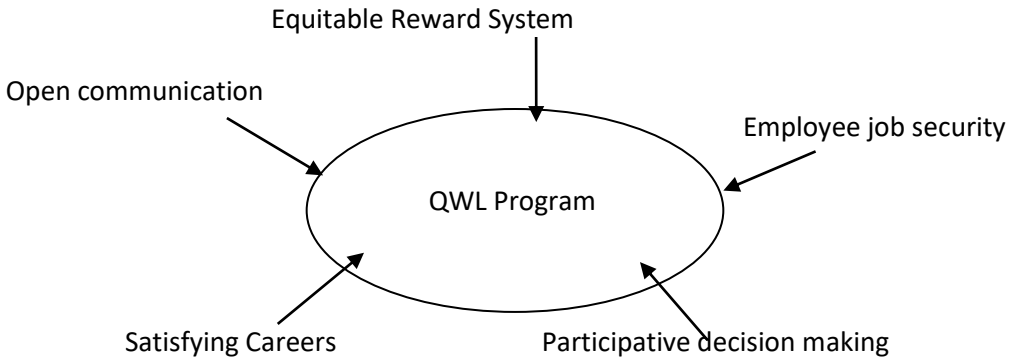
The term Quality of work life has been proposed Quality of work life is being used these days by organizations as a strategic tool to attract and retain the talent. The term (QWL) refers to the favorableness or unfavourableness of a total job environment for people. QWL policies are increasingly becoming part of the business strategies and focus is on the quality of working life and more importantly to help them maintain work-life balance with equal attention on performance and commitment at work. The present paper is an attempt to review the literature and the studies done in past to establish a relationship between QWL, employee performance. QWL programs are another way in which organizations recognize their responsibility to develop jobs and working conditions. The elements in a typical QWL program include - open communications, equitable reward systems, a concern for employee job security and satisfying careers and participation in decision making.

KEYWORDS: Compensation, Job satisfaction, Performance, Quality of Work Life (QWL), Work Life balance.
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INTRODUCTION

The success of any organization is highly dependant on how it attracts, recruits, motivates, and retains its workforce. Today's organizations need to be more flexible so that they are equipped to develop their workforce and enjoy their commitment. Therefore, organizations are required to adopt a strategy to improve the employees 'quality of work life'(QWL) to satisfy both the organizational objectives and employee needs. The term (QWL) refers to the favorableness or unfavourableness of a total job environment for people. QWL programs are another way in which ***organisations recognise their responsibility to develop jobs and working conditions that are excellent for people as well as for economic health of the organisation.*** The elements in a typical QWL program include - open communications, equitable reward systems, a concern for employee job security and satisfying careers and participation in decision making. Many early QWL efforts focus on job enrichment. In addition to improving the work system, QWL programs usually emphasise development of

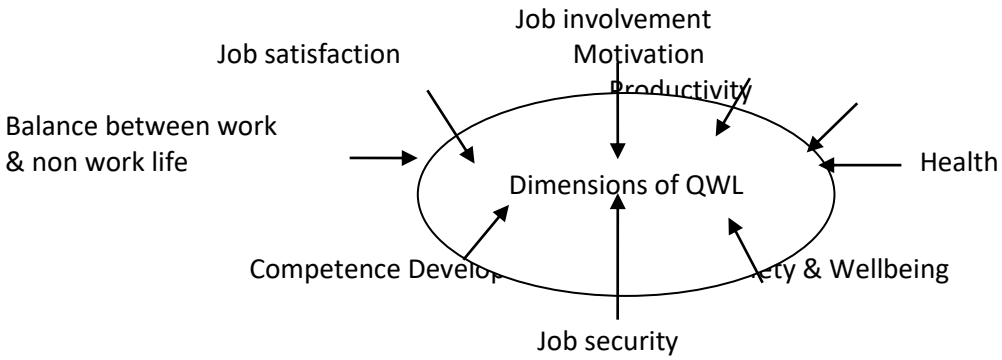
employee skills, the reduction of occupational stress and the development of more co-operative labour-management relations. The recent definition by Serey (2006) on QWL is quite conclusive and best meet the contemporary work environment. The definition is related to meaningful and satisfying work which emphasizes 4 C's i.e. Concern, consciousness, capacity and commitment. It includes (i) an opportunity to exercise one's talents and capacities, to face challenges and situations that require independent initiative and self-direction; (ii) an activity thought to be
worthwhile by the individuals involved; (iii) an activity in which one understands the role the individual plays in the achievement of some overall goals; and (iv) a sense of taking pride in what one is doing and in doing it well.



This issue of meaningful and satisfying work is often merged with discussions of job satisfaction, and believed to be more favourable to QWL. This review on the definitions of QWL indicates that QWL is a multidimensional construct, made up of a number of interrelated factors that need careful consideration to conceptualize and measure. It is associated with job satisfaction, job involvement, motivation, productivity, health, safety and well-being, job security, competence development and balance between work and non work life as is conceptualized by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions (2002). There is an all round demand for developing the humanised jobs which can satisfy workers' higher needs, employ their higher skills and make them better citizens, spouses and parents. The jobs need to be excellent both from the point of view of technology and human needs. The traditional job design needs to be replaced by enriched job design. This demand for redesigning of jobs has come to be known as Quality of Work Life. It enjoins management to treat workers as human resources that are to be developed rather than simply used.

Background

The term QWL gained importance in the late 1960s as a way of concerns about effects of job/work on health and general well-being and ways to positively influence the quality of a person's work experience. Up until the mid 1970s, employer's concern was on work design and working conditions improvement. However, in the next decade of 1980s, the concept of QWL included other aspects that affect employees' job satisfaction and productivity and these aspects are, reward systems, physical work environment, employee involvement, rights and esteem needs (Cummings and Worley, 2005).



However the radical changes in the world of business, like factors such as globalization, information technology, world business competitiveness and scarcity of natural resources have changed employee's outlook of how a good company is defined. The trend in past was to include
financial figures in defining "a good company". Latest trends like, ethics, quality of work life (QWL) and job satisfaction are now considered important predictors of sustainability and viability of business organizations. Bagnara, Mariani and Parlangeli (2001) found in their survey that people working in high technology enabled and uncertain working environment are more vulnerable to stress than others. Martinsons and Cheung (2001) concluded from their research that frequent changes in work environment directly or indirectly influence the performance and productivity of IT professionals. Indeed the changes in working conditions result in stressful conditions and the employees are still expected to perform under stress. Now the organization needs to have effective coping strategies in place; to handle the after effects of performance under stress. A high quality of work life is essential for organizations to continue to attract and retain employees. QWL is a process in which organizations recognize their responsibility to develop job and working conditions that are excellent for the employee and organization.

Affect of QWL on Organizational Performance

Quality of work life is a concept of behavioral scientist, and the term was first introduced by Davis in 1972 (Mathur, 1989; Hian and Einstein, 1990). According Robins (1990) QWL is "a process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work". The key elements of QWL in the literature include job security, job satisfaction, better reward system, employee benefits, employee involvement and organizational performance (Havlovic, 1991; Scobel, 1975). For the purpose of this study, QWL is defined as the favorable condition and environment of employees benefit, employees' welfare and management attitudes towards operational workers as well as employees in general.

Therefore, quality of life is sociological and psychological phenomenon, but sociologists are not putting their interest in industrial sector, where the workers are the core potential resource for organizational performance. In the workplace, the term 'QWL' is 'work in excellence' and 'working conditions' such as standards of living, life styles. Now the term has developed with the introduction of social compliance (SC) in the workplace. In the past decade, there was a trend to introduce ISO 9001, and ISO 14000, with the emphasis on product quality. Blishe and Atkinson (1978) have shown that there are two kinds of indicators for defining quality of life. One is an objective indicator, for example money and

the other is subjective indicator, such as financial status, living standard, job etc. In a nutshell, objective indicators define as quality of life in terms of goods and while subjective indicators are defined as quality of life as perceived by individuals. Hankiss (1978) stated that 'quality of life' is not a sum of its component units. Quality of life is more than interaction, attitude, aspiration, fears, satisfaction or dissatisfaction thus it creates cross cultural similarities and dissimilarities. The behavioural scientist Abrams (1973), Hall (1976), Andrews and Withey (1976), Campbell et al., (1976) and Blishen et al., (1975) believe and state their views of 'quality of work' that it is the combination of statistical and psychological factors. They assessed responsibility as subjectivity and the other people well-being as objective indicators. Stone (1978) has stated in his paper on organic solidarity and life quality indicators that quality of life has been accepted by psychological factors. That has been considered as an individual satisfying or frustrating factors. Later, Mishra (1985) found in his study that age and length of service did not affect QWL. It was a function of income of the employees, income leads to high QWL, and higher level of education higher level of QWL.

QWL and organizational factors

QWL practice involves acquiring, training, developing, motivating and appraising for the best performance of the employees as per organizational objectives. Indeed, core elements of QWL are of working conditions, employee job satisfaction, employees' behavioral aspects, and employees' financial and non-financial benefits, growth and development, and supervision (Lau & May, 1998; Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Taylor & Bowers, 1972). Job satisfaction can be understood by explaining people want to come to work. Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as "a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences". Though various researchers identified it in different ways and conclude that it's a combination of physiological, psychological and environmental circumstances, the result of this combination is a person's job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has significant affect on organizational performance in terms of wages, salary, incentives, boss-subordinate relationships, company policy, promotion, job itself, co-worker relationship (hygiene factors) (Nash, 1985). Job satisfaction in recent year has become associated with quality of work life movement. It is well known that employee intrinsic motivation has an impact on organizational performance and Herzberg et al. (1959) had shown that motivated employees tend to performs better. Company need to find out the factors that influence employees' satisfaction and to ensure their quality of work life (Gilgeous, 1998).

Literature Review

"Work Productivity and Job Satisfaction" Katzell et. Al (1975) viewed quality of work life more broadly as an individual's evaluation of the outcome of the work relationship. They observed that a employee may be said to enjoy a high quality of working life when he has positive feelings towards his job and its future prospects, is motivated to stay on the job and performs well and feels his working life fits well with his private life to afford him a balance between the two in terms of his personal values. "Quality of Work life Indicators- Prospects and Problems" Walton (1973) suggested eight major conceptual areas for understanding quality of work life. These were adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, development of human competencies, growth and security, social integration, constitutionalization and total life space and social reliance. Various other studies conducted on quality of work life include employment conditions, employment security, income adequacy, profit sharing, equity and other rewards, employee autonomy, employee commitment, social interaction, self- esteem, self-expression, democracy, employee satisfaction, employee involvement, advancement, relations with supervisors and peers and job enrichment. "The Job Diagnostic Survey" Hackman and Oldham (1976) observed psychological growth

needs as crucial determinant of Quality of working life. Several such needs were identified; Skill variety, Task Identity, Task significance, Autonomy and Feedback. They concluded that fulfillment of these needs plays an important role if employees are to experience high quality of working life. "The quality of working life in Western and Eastern Europe" Taylor (1979) suggested Quality of working life as an holistic approach that includes; basic extrinsic job factors of wages, hours and working conditions, and the intrinsic job notions of the nature of the work itself. He also viewed other aspects to be equally important such as; authority exercised by employees, employee participation in decision making, fair and equal approach at work, social support, utilizing one's present skills, self growth, a relevant scope of future at work, social relevance of the work or product, effect on extra work activities. Taylor concluded that Quality of working life policies may vary as per the size of organization and employee group. "Scales for the measurement of some work attitudes and aspects of psychological well being" Warr and colleagues (1979) , in their survey for Quality of working life, considered a variety of factors resulting in QWL, including work involvement, intrinsic job motivation, higher order need strength, perceived intrinsic job characteristics, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, happiness, and self-rated anxiety. They studied different correlations in their research, such as those between work involvement and job satisfaction, intrinsic job motivation and job satisfaction, and perceived intrinsic job characteristics and job satisfaction. In particular, Warr et al. concluded that there exists a moderate association between total job satisfaction and total life satisfaction and happiness, with a less strong, but significant association with self-rated anxiety.

"Accounting for the Quality of Work Life" Mirvis and Lawler (1984) found in their study that Quality of working life was related with satisfaction with wages, hours and working conditions, describing the "essentials of a good quality of work life" as; safe work environment, equitable wages, equal employment opportunities and opportunities for advancement. "Routinisation of job context and job content as related to employee's quality of working life: a study of psychiatric nurses" Baba and Jamal (1991) suggested a list of the determinants of quality of working life, including: job satisfaction, job involvement, work role ambiguity, work role conflict, work role overload, job stress, organizational commitment and turn-over intentions. Baba and Jamal also suggested that monotony in job due to routine work activities can affect quality of working life negatively. "Quality of working life for nurses" Ellis and Pompli (2002) in their study on nurses identified a numerous factors resulting in job dissatisfaction and quality of working life, including: Poor working environments, Resident aggression, Workload, Unable to deliver quality of care expected, Balance of work and family, Shift work, no involvement in decision making, Professional isolation, non recognition of work, unhealthy relationships with supervisor/peers, Role conflict, absence opportunity to learn new skills. "A new measure of quality of work life based on need satisfaction and spillover theories" Sirgy et al.; (2001) listed various factors affecting quality of working life as: Need satisfaction based on job requirements, Work environment, Supervisory behavior, Ancillary programmes, Organizational commitment. They observed quality of working life as fulfillment of these key needs through resources, activities, and outcomes resulting from participation in the workplace. This model is based at Maslow's needs theory, covering Health & safety, Economic and family, Social, Esteem, Actualization, Knowledge and Aesthetics. "Quality of Working Life" Bearfield, (2003) adopted an all together different approach while examining quality of working life with the help of 16 questions, and the findings were surprising when he observed that causes of dissatisfaction in professionals, intermediate clerical, sales and service workers, vary for different groups and suggested that different concerns might have to be addressed based on different parameters.

"The Motivation to Work" Herzberg at al., (1959).The differences studied between job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in quality of working life predicts the influence of job satisfaction theories. The author used "Hygiene factors" and "Motivator factors" to differentiate between job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. "The Quality of Working Life: Managers‟ health and well-being" Worrall and Cooper (2006) found in their recent survey that a low level of well-being at work may cost dear to an organization resulting in a loss of about 5-10% of Gross National Product per annum.

Effects of QWL

QWL affects job involvement, sense of competence, job satisfaction and job performance. A favorable QWL results into positive consequences of these factors. Let us see how QWL affects these:

Job involvement: Job involvement indicates the extent of people's identification with or ego investment in the job. Job involved people spend more time on job and turn out better performance. Challenging jobs, which have skill variety, influence employees to get involved in their jobs. Similarly, people with high need for achievement and high work ethic feel involved in jobs.

Sense of competence: It denotes the feeling of confidence that one has in one's own competence. Job design affects the sense of competence. As they engage themselves more and more in work activities, they acquire a great sense of competence and experience and higher level job involvement. This job involvement further adds to a sense of competence. Thus, sense of competence and job involvement produce high job satisfaction and productivity.

Job satisfaction: It is a set of favourable or unfavorable feelings with which employees view their jobs more specifically the nature of jobs they do, the quality of supervision they receive, co-worker's pay and perks and promotional avenues. Job satisfaction affects job performance, employee turnover and absenteeism. High job satisfaction results into high work performance, less employee turnover and less absenteeism.

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 a fit among the predisposition of employees and the types of jobs they are assigned to do.

Suggestions

Although there may not be any universal phenomenon in improving the QWL because of involvement of a number of factors in it, some more common practices adopted for the purpose are discussed below:

Flexibility in work schedule: Employees want flexibility in work schedule. There may be three aspects of flexibility: flexitime- a system of flexible working hours and compressed work week. To the extent, this flexibility is provided in the work system, it becomes more motivating to the employees.

Autonomous work group: Creation of autonomous work helps in creating positive feelings among employees. They may be given freedom to choose their own teams, there should be freedom of decision making regarding the choice of methods for work, distribution of tasks among group members and designing of work schedules.

Job Enrichment: Job enrichment attempts to design a job in such a way that it becomes more interesting and challenging so that the job holder makes meaning out of that. The degree of job enrichment determines the degree of QWL.

Opportunity for growth: An employee, particularly the achievement-oriented one, seeks growth through his work. If the work provides him opportunity for personal growth and to develop

his personality, he will feel committed to the job and the organization.

Participation: Participation 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 participation increases the QWL and overall organizational climate.

Communication: To make QWL sound, effective two-way communication is necessary. Through the downward communication, employees would receive information about the various aspects of the organization. Through upward communication, employees can share their views, grievances and suggestions for improving the work performance.

Conclusion

To summarize, QWL is viewed as a wide-ranging concept, which includes adequate and fair remuneration, safe and healthy working conditions and social integration in the work organization that enables an individual to develop and use all his or her capacities. Most of the definitions aim at achieving the effective work environment that meets with the organizational and personal needs and values that promote health, well being, job security, job satisfaction, competency development and balance between work and non-work life. The definitions also emphasize the good feeling perceived

The world economies have recently recovered from recession blues and the continued restructuring, downsizing and reorganization in the post recession scenario have created havoc for HR managers as they have to struggle with preserving staff morale and job satisfaction . In this scenario, high quality of work life is essential for organizations to continue to attract and retain employees. This is the reason QWL concept has gained momentum recently and researches are going on worldwide to find out inputs for framing effective QWL strategies. Moreover the literature review discussed above also supports the relationship between QWL, employee performance and career growth aspects. Still many facets of QWL need to be unexplored through further studies.

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