

Quality of Work Life- Exploring Organizations Initiatives against Need Satisfaction Theory

Charu Ranawat

SRF, Deptt of Business Administration, UCCMS, MLSU,
Udaipur

Abstract

It is an exploratory research which explores various initiatives taken by modern organizations to implement the concept of quality of work life against the need satisfaction theory provided by Sirgy et al(2001) based on the Maslow hierarchy of needs theory for the analysis of quality of work life which has been the topic of interest of researchers of behavioral science since early 70's as it deals with the psychology of employees which have been always an crucial part of any organizational setup and plays a decisive role in the rise and fall of the corporate empires.

Keywords: Quality of work life, need satisfaction theory, quality of life, employee empowerment

Introduction

Evolution of the concept "Quality of Work Life"

The expression "quality of work life" (QWL) was first utilized in a manpower development program organized by Irving Bluestone, who was then employed by General Motors in the 1960s (Tongo, 2013). This program allowed workers play an active role in decisions concerning their working lives. Many authors believe that it actually served as a starting point for researchers, employers, unions, and employees who wished to define and monitor certain indices that would allow them reconcile the aspirations of all parties involved in the working world (Martel & Dupuis 2006; Tongo, 2013). While some researchers have the opinion that the term 'quality of work life' is reputed to have originated from an international labor relations conference in 1972 at Arden House, Columbia University, New York (Davis & Cherns 1975; Afsar & Burcu, 2013). One of the conclusions of this conference was to acknowledge the necessity of coordinating efforts by the researchers and organizations concerned in order to build up a solid theoretical corpus in the area of QWL research. Thus, in August 1973, the International Council for the Quality of Working Life was created (Martel & Dupuis 2006; Afsar & Burcu, 2013).

Towards developing a theoretical framework Walton (1975), based on the work of Douglas McGregor (1960), Vroom (1964), and Vroom and MacCrimmon (1968), grouped together eight organizational components that believed to give quality to employees' work life, namely(Yaghi & Yaghi, 2014)

- (1) Adequate and fair compensation,
- (2) Safe and healthy working conditions,
- (3) Immediate opportunity to use and develop human

capacities,

- (4) Opportunity for continued growth and security,
- (5) Social integration in the work organization,
- (6) Constitutionalism in the work organization,
- (7) Work and total life space, and
- (8) Social relevance of working life (Heiskanen & Jokinen, 2013).

Much before that, however, it was not very clear how to engage employees or get them satisfied until Abraham Maslow (1965) and David McClelland and his colleagues outlined the different levels of employees' needs and how satisfaction is crucial to achieving organizational goals (Yaghi & Yaghi, 2014). Hassan et al. (2013) in his study stated that quality of work life (QWL) programs was related to Maslow hierarchy of needs, Porters needs and a work life identity model. They further added that Maslow Hierarchy of needs was considered a consistent theory of quality of work life because it consists of physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization needs and transcendence. Based on the same thought Sirgy et al. (2001) developed a new measure of QWL based on need satisfaction and spillover theories. The measure was designed to capture the extent to which the work environment, job requirement, supervisory behavior, and ancillary programs in an organization are perceived to meet the seven needs of an employee, which have been identified on the basis of Maslow hierarchy of needs.

Researcher in this paper has adapted need satisfaction theory mentioned by Sirgy et al. (2001) in order to explore organizations' initiatives to provide good QWL to their employees.

Literature Review

Spencer (2014) argued that economics has offered a one-sided conception of work. Standard economic theory has defined work as a means to income and consumption. The paper aimed to develop an alternative conception of work that captures the formative impacts of work on the well-being of workers. The paper emphasizes that effect of work on the well-being of workers can be captured by job satisfaction data. The paper proposed a need-based conception of work thus enhancing the quality of work life.

Afsar and Burcu (2013) adapted the Quality of Work Life Scale developed by Sirgy et.al (2001) to Turkish culture in order to examine its psychometric properties. Research has been conducted on 254 Faculty members in Ankara, Turkey. QWL scale was conceptualized as a summation of satisfaction of seven categories of needs:

- Health and safety needs
- Economic and family needs
- Social needs
- Esteem needs
- Actualization needs
- Knowledge needs
- Aesthetics needs.

Hassan et.al (2013) examined the relationship between quality of work life (QWL) programs and quality of life (QOL) among employees at multinational companies in Malaysia. For the study researchers have chosen Work-Life Identity model and found positive and significant relationship between QWL and QOL.

Heiskanen and Jokinen (2013) focused on observed changes since 2005 in the quality of working life in Finnish municipalities. Surveys were carried out twice in 2009 and 2011 accounted that observed level of QWL has varied relatively little over the years which concluded that QWL is a slow changing phenomenon.

Singhapakdi et al. (2013) studied gender disparity in job satisfaction in the context of Western versus Asian managers. Data was collected from Thailand and U.S. as representatives of Asian and Western countries respectively. The study considering past studies correlated job satisfaction with QWL and chosen seven needs suggested by Sirgy et.al. (2001) further categorizing them into two major categories of needs: lower order needs (basic needs) and higher order needs (growth needs). M. Joseph Sirgy, himself was the part of research team.

Marta et al. (2011) compared the effect of ethics institutionalization on quality of work life between Thai and

American managers. M. Joseph Sirgy, the famous professor of Virginia Tech, USA being part of the research team. The study conceptualized QWL based on need-hierarchy theory by Maslow (1970). ANCOVA test has been applied to test the difference on ethics institutionalization and QWL between the U.S. and the Thai samples. The results indicated no significant difference in lower-order QWL between Thai and American marketing managers while overall, Thai managers' report a higher degree of QWL than American managers do.

Quality of Work Life

QWL is defined as “employee satisfaction with a variety of needs through resources, activities, and outcomes stemming from participation in the workplace” (Sirgy et.al, 2001; Marta et.al, 2011). Quality of work life (QWL) highlights the need for balancing the organization's needs for jobs to be performed on one hand and employees needs and expectations on the other hand to work in acceptable environment that reduces turnover and other related problems (Yaghi & Yaghi, 2014). Although there is a lack of consensus on one definition of QWL, the quality of employees' work life is viewed as a wide-ranging concept and is made up of a number of consistent factors (Mirvis & Lawler, 1984; Rethinam & Ismail, 2008; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2014). Since definition of QWL is influenced by personal feelings and perceptions (Yaghi & Yaghi, 2014), researchers differ regarding their points of view about the constituents of QWL but agree on its impact on turnover (Sirgy & Terri, 2001; Van Laar et al., 2007; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2014).

One conceptualization of QWL, based on need-hierarchy theory (Maslow, 1970), regards QWL as employee satisfaction of seven sets of human developmental needs: (1) health and safety needs, (2) economic and family needs, (3) social needs, (4) esteem needs, (5) actualization needs, (6) knowledge needs, and (7) esthetic needs (Sirgy et al., 2001; Marta et.al, 2011). Based on their research, these seven dimensions collapse into two major categories: lower-order and higher-order needs. Lower-order QWL is comprised of health/safety needs and economic/family needs; higher-order QWL includes social, esteem, self-actualization, knowledge, and esthetic need (Marta et.al, 2011).

Initially, the QWL concept was misconstrued for some other related concepts like job satisfaction and job quality (Champoux 1981; Lawler 1982; Efraty & Sirgy 1990; Martel & Dupuis 2006; Royuela et.al. 2008; Gonzalez 2010; Cooke et.al. 2013; Tongo, 2013). The main focus of QWL is beyond job satisfaction/job quality. It entails the effect of the workplace on job satisfaction/ job quality, satisfaction in non-work life domains, and satisfaction with overall life, personal satisfaction, and entire well-being (Sirgy et.al. 2001; Tongo, 2013). This therefore means that QWL should be seen as a broader concept that places the job against its

wider socioeconomic context (Cooke et al. 2013; Tongo, 2013). As a matter of fact, QWL cannot be extricated from the general quality of life (QOL)—defined as "a state that corresponds to the level attained by a person in the pursuit of her hierarchically organized goals" (Dupuis et al. 2000; Tongo, 2013).

Organizations Initiatives against Need Satisfaction Theory

Before exploring the initiatives one should understand what these needs are all about. As per Sirgy et al. (2001) health/safety needs relate to protection from ill health and injury at work and outside of work, and enhancement of good health; economic/family needs relate to pay, job security and other family needs; social needs relate to collegiality at work and leisure time off work; esteem needs relate to recognition and appreciation at work within the organization and outside the organization; actualization needs relate to realization of one's potential within the organization as a professional; knowledge needs relate to learning to enhance job and professional skills; and aesthetic needs relate to creativity at work as well as personal creativity and general aesthetics. As mentioned above these needs are further divided into two categories lower order and higher order needs.

Lower Order Needs

Health/Safety needs

In US Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970. The mission of OSHA is to "assure the safety and health of America's workers by setting and enforcing standards; providing training, outreach, and education; establishing partnerships; and encouraging continual improvements in workplace safety and health". OSHA covers all private sector and public employees in state and local governments (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p. 485,486).

Health for the employees is being a major concern for organizations as increased absenteeism would lead to serious economic loss. Health insurance benefits are usually the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the role of employers in helping their workforce stay healthy. In fact, Family and Works Institute, in the National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) 2008 survey (revised May 2014) find that while 83% of U.S. employees have access to health insurance offered by their employers, more than three-quarters (77%) of U.S. employees are covered by health insurance offered by their employers and 27% of U.S. employees have health insurance from another source (e.g., a spouse's employer), regardless of availability of health insurance through their jobs. Another initiative is providing paid sick days. As per NSCW survey 2008 (revised May, 2014) sixty-two percent of American employees receive at

least five paid days off per year for personal illness (Sakai, 2014).

As per statistics discussed by Dr. David Michaels, Assistant Secretary of Labour for Occupational Safety and Health, in 2013 approximately 3 million private sectors workers in America experienced injuries/illness on the job (Statement U.S. Department of Labor, 2014) and experts estimate that back problems cost employers \$ 50 billion yearly in workers' compensation costs and \$50 billion in indirect costs (replacement workers, absenteeism, training, and so on) (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p. 484,485).

Safe and healthy environment should also be stress free. Undue job stress also has adverse effect on the health of employees. For example, job stress places both women and men at health risk for cardiovascular problems and depressions and increase employee susceptibility to infectious diseases. All of these contribute to higher healthcare costs, and can lower productivity, job satisfaction, and retention (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p. 513,514).

Many employers have developed stress management programs to teach employees how to minimize the negative effects of job-related stress. Organizations like New York based advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, promotes employee health management program which include both cardiovascular fitness and nutritional health. Bob Jeffrey, president of agency's North American division says," Employees can work out and relax in a 'de-stress' room, get free massage and yoga or nutrition lessons, join a company sports team, and consult with personal trainer." Xerox gives its employees a publication called Fit book that includes chapters on the hazards of smoking and the effects of alcohol and drug abuse, facts of nutrition and weight control, and guidelines for managing stress and learning to relax. (Snell & Bohlander, 2007 p. 507,508).

Economic/Family needs

Adequate and fair compensation is the foremost requirement of any individual who would be working for any organization. Organizations with repute value talent and to attract and retain the best pool of employees they adopt lucrative remuneration practices.

Employee compensation includes all forms of pay and rewards received by employees for the performance of their job. Direct compensation encompasses employee wages and salaries, incentives, bonuses, and commissions. Indirect compensation comprises the many benefits supplied by employers, and nonfinancial compensation includes employee recognition programs, rewarding jobs, organizational support, work environment, and flexible work hours to accommodate personal needs (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p.378).

While challenging work, good working conditions, and fair wages and salaries contribute to employee attraction and retention, clearly an employee's benefits program is an important "magnet" drawing employees to employers. (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p.448) Employee benefits may be divided into legally required and discretionary benefits. Legally companies cover employees under comprehensive program of retirement, survivor, disability and health benefits. Law allows employees to take job-protected unpaid time off to care for themselves or a family member like on child birth, adoption or elder care. Discretionary benefits include employee wellness programs, paid time off, employee assistance programs, employee recognition programs, education programs and child care (Bernardin, 2007, p.317).

Higher Order Needs

Social Needs

During last few years more radical changes to how work is done is the introduction of organizational teams. Inherent in the concept of employee teams is that employees, not managers, are in the best position to contribute to workplace performance. (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p.156). Teamwork also embraces the concept of synergy. Synergy occurs when the interaction and the outcome of team members is greater than the sum of their individual efforts. (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p.157). For better cohesiveness among team members organizations send their teams to training sessions. Team training often focuses on teaching members how to work more effectively or efficiently in teams. Some topics include team building, running effective meetings, managing stress, managing productivity, appraising team members' performance, and managing conflict. At Patapso Valley Veterinary Hospital, employees participate in team building training sessions, including outdoor challenge activities, to further enhance communication, trust, and collaboration among the team of veterinarians, vet technicians, and receptionists (Bernardin, 2007, p.260).

Organizations these days organize various events in different festive seasons like Christmas, Easter, Thanks Giving, Halloween, New Year, Diwali, Holi, Id etc, in order culminate the feelings of brotherhood and companionship among their employees. Such events help employees to charge themselves after busy schedules and reignite their lost energy.

In the life of human beings family holds a special place and whether a person is working for others or for self, time spent with family is always cherished. Organizations have understood this need and have started a concept of Paid Vacation Time. A 2008 (revised May 2014) National Survey of the Changing Workforce conducted by Family and Work Institute found that 78 percent of American employees

receive paid vacation time. 86% of full-time employees receive paid vacation days, compared with 41% of part-time employees. As per it, American employees receive an average of 15 paid vacation days per year, although there is quite a bit of variability (Sakai, 2014).

Esteem Needs

As per an article on the website of Forbes by Bradt (2014), looking across the 18 best companies to work for in the Fortune500 indicates three broad themes: appreciation, access and rewards. Google, American Express and Qualcomm all do things that make their employees feel appreciated. This combined with giving employees access to senior leadership and information and giving employees financial and psychic rewards seem to be the keys to being both big and a great place to work.

Hehad further added in the article that half the companies that are both in the Fortune 500 and in the top 100 places to work did things to show their appreciation of employees. This ranged from 100,000 hours of free massages at Google, to the vice chair at Net App calling 10-20 employees a day who had gotten caught "doing something right", to internal tech conferences at Qualcomm, to safety bonuses, personalized notes, special luncheons, actively recognizing and supporting diversity, low-cost health insurance for part-time employees and health and wellness centers. Whatever form it took, employees at these companies felt appreciated by their leadership.

Actualization Needs

Actualization is the stage when an individual has achieved laurels, appreciations, rewards and awards as an employee of any organization, and now he wants to explore his full potential as an individual which might have been left unutilized. Need of actualization can happen at any level of management, to any employee whether a senior manager or an executive. Organizations design something for everybody. Mentoring is one of such practices which have been followed by several organizations in last few years. It is an effective form of training with a personal side and provides benefit to both mentoring partners. Mentoring could be one to one as well as one too many. Mentoring directly affects an individual's ability to succeed as a leader. Both mentees and mentors benefit from the mentoring partnership and increase their leadership skills. When examining mentoring best practices, it can be helpful to look at examples of successful mentoring programs. Intel and McGraw-Hill both have long running successful mentoring programs. One of the goals of McGraw-Hill's mentoring program is to link people from different business units and areas. Additionally they wanted to engender the growth of diverse leadership talent that would encourage company growth. Mentors and mentees are matched through a series

of interviews, mentors and mentees were matched by their stated preferences, experience and job title. Some asked for professional development help, while others wanted advice on work/ life issues or assistance improving communication skills. A few wanted to speak with senior employees who had global experience (“Examples of Corporate Mentoring Program”, 2014).

Another practice which organizations adopt is concept of empowerment. Employee empowerment is a technique of involving employees in their work through the process of inclusion. In order for empowerment to grow and thrive, organizations must encourage participation, innovation, access to information and accountability. Additionally, employee empowerment succeeds when the culture of the organization is open and receptive to change (Snell and Bohlander, 2007, p. 151,152).

In today's highly competitive and dynamic business environment, employers as diverse as Home Depot, Wal-Mart, Cigma HealthCare, Costco, AutoZone, Disney, and Appelbee's have turned to their employees to improve organizational performance. Empowered employees have made improvements in product or service quality, have reduced costs, and have modified or, in some cases, designed products. At Kraft Foods, employees at the company's Succex, Wisconsin, food plant participated in work-redesign changes and team building that increased productivity, reduced overhead and cut assembly line. Avon Products empowered its minority managers to improve sales and services in inner-city markets. Grounded in the belief that minority managers better understand the culture of inner-city residents, Avon turned an unprofitable market into a highly productive sales area (Snell & Bohlander, 2007, p.152).

Knowledge Needs

Employees always want to excel in their work and look for the opportunities to grow. Stagnant working environment hamper their growth and development. To cater their career needs organizations in today's competitive environment are designing career programs in efforts to decrease employee turnover, prevent job burnout and obsolescence, and improve the quality of employees' work lives. A number of organizations such as Chevron, CIGNA, Sears Information Services, Texaco, Turner Broadcasting, Internal Revenue Service and Marriot International participated in a conference specially to share their strategies for creating a career-resilient workforce. Organizations now provide employees with tools and opportunities to enhance their skills (Bernardin, 2007, p.272). Companies like Motorola and Ford, create an environment for continuous learning by supporting and rewarding employee development and learning (e.g., training, professional associations, schooling). Provide career counselors, career resource

centres, additional training including orientation, core training and computer based training (Bernardin, 2007, p.273).

Aesthetic Needs

A company's most important asset isn't raw materials, transportation systems, or political influence. Its creative capital—simply put an arsenal of creative thinkers whose ideas can be turned into valuable products and services. Creative employees pioneer new technologies, birth new industries, and power economic growth. SAS Institute, the largest privately held software company in the world, is a notable exception. Based in Cary, North Carolina, SAS has been in the top 20 of Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For list every year it's been published. The employee turnover rate hovers between 3% and 5%, compared with the industry average of nearly 20%. The governments and global corporations that rely on SAS's sophisticated business-intelligence software are overwhelmingly satisfied: The subscription renewal rate is an astounding 98%. And in 2004, the company enjoyed its 28th straight year of revenue growth, with revenues topping \$1.5 billion (Florida and Goodnight, 2005).

What's the secret to all this success? SAS has learned how to harness the creative energies of all its stakeholders, including its customers, software developers, managers, and support staff. Over the past three decades—through trial and error as well as organic evolution—SAS has developed a unique framework for managing creativity, one that rests on three guiding principles: Help employees do their best work by keeping them intellectually engaged and by removing distractions. Make managers responsible for sparking creativity and eliminate arbitrary distinctions between “suits” and “creative's.” And engage customers as creative partners so you can deliver superior products (Florida and Goodnight, 2005).

These principles are driven by the premise that creative capital is not just a collection of individuals' ideas, but a product of interaction. Managing with a framework like SAS's produces a corporate ecosystem where creativity and productivity flourish, where profitability and flexibility go hand in hand, and where hard work and work/life balance aren't mutually exclusive (Florida and Goodnight, 2005).

Implications on organizations

An improved quality of work life (QWL) contributes to numerous positive outcomes for the organizations. Employees with better physical and mental health, lower stress levels and higher energy levels would significantly have higher level of engagement, loyalty and job satisfaction. Motivated employees, with focused leaders in the form of their mentors, would try to align their goals with organization's goals thus enhancing their productivity

levels. Effective training programs and innovatively designed policies to back up creativity would help to hone hidden and unexplored potential of employees which in turn would help organizations if any of the new ideas clicked in the market and catch hold of the nerves of the consumers. Thus improved QWL is a win-win for both employees and organizations.

Conclusion

With the advent of globalization, changes in legal, social structure of the society and attitude of employees, it becomes a need of an hour for the organizations to ensure a good quality of work lives to employees or else fight with the evils of reduced productivity, higher absenteeism and employee turnover rate. A physically and mentally fit employee is always an asset for any organization and they should strive hard to increase their assets come whatever price they have to pay as price paid today will give excellent results tomorrow. Employees with their lower order needs satisfied will strive to find solace in their higher order needs and there must be some who have reached the level of lower order needs satisfaction before joining the company and are looking for the esteem and self-actualization. Thus organizations have to strategically frame their policies which will cater to the needs of employees at all the levels whether an executive or a Vice President. There are organizations which have been forerunners in reinventing the employee friendly policies in quite an innovative ways and have set examples for the world by gaining success years by years in the annual surveys conducted by some eminent institutions/ magazines like Forbes, Fortune etc. It's time for the rest of the organizations to pull up their socks and join the Ivy League.

Future Directions

Comparative study of QWL between two sectors like manufacturing and service sector could be carried out keeping need satisfaction theory as baseline. Even level of QWL could also be compared between two cultures, two geographies or two different demographic frameworks. Case studies could also be taken up for any organization or institution.

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