

# An Insight into Conceptualization of Quality of Work Life

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## Abstract

In the present era, organizations cannot sustain competitive advantage and growth unless they take care of the different needs of their employees. Suitable working conditions, monetary and non-monetary benefits, amicable working environment, appropriate working schedules, regular communication etc. are some of the factors which can be helpful in winning the trust and whole hearted commitment of workforce. Quality of work life (QWL) is related to those factors which influence the life of the individuals which they spend while working for their organisations. It encompasses certain subjective and objective indicators which are related to the well being of the employees in the organisation. QWL of employees in an organisation is the indicator of the significance which an organisation attaches to their employees. In this regard, the present paper attempts to examine the concept of QWL. The study discussed four main issues related with QWL. Firstly, individual versus organizational perspective is discussed. Secondly, subjective versus objective approach of QWL is presented. Thirdly, QWL is discussed as a domain of quality of life. In the last, the concept of customized QWL is discussed. The paper is based on secondary sources of data.

**Key words:** Well-being, Satisfaction, Dignity, Holistic.

## Introduction

Today no organization can deny the fact that human resources working in an organization are the most valuable asset and without their committed involvement, competitive advantage cannot be achieved. Without humane considerations, organizations cannot think of working smoothly because whatever may be the extent of technological development, the human beings are the ultimate users of the technology and hence can enhance the success of the organization by making proper use of technology. In the present era, it is just impossible to think about an organization which can sustain its growth and development without the whole hearted contribution of its workforce towards its goals. Human resources are a source of competitive advantage to the organization and provide sustainability to the organizational success (Wright et al., 1993; Cummings and Marcus, 1994; Boxall, 1996).

Another aspect which makes human beings working in an organization worth consideration is the fact that work-life of an individual comprises significant part of one's total life and its interactive relationship with total life cannot be ignored. Work not only satisfies one's economic needs but also leads to self-esteem and formation of identity (Indumathy and Kamalraj, 2012). "Work is not a simple instrument or a mean of subsistence any more; it is now a multifactor process in which human being is placed as a driving centre" (Timossi et al., 2008).

The term 'Quality of Work Life' (QWL) was put

forward as a development towards humane considerations in the organization. The movements which were precursors to the quality of work life include Taylor's scientific management, Elton Mayo's human relations movement and Eric Trist's social technical systems (Tandon et al., 1982; Vetrivel, 2012). "The mechanist or quantitative approach provided by scientific management resulted in frustration to workers which paved way for human relations movement and later socio-technical systems which became bases for quality of work life" (Pujari, 1992). However, the term QWL gained significant attention of academicians and researchers only after the International Conference on Quality of Work Life held from September 24-29, 1972 at Arden House, Harriman, New York (Gani and Ahmad, 1995; Martel and Dupuis, 2006; Rose et al., 2006; Kheradmand et al., 2010).

## Review of Literature

Robbins (1989) defined QWL as a process through which an organization develops mechanisms to enable employees to participate in making those decisions which influence the satisfaction level of their needs and hence design their lives at work. On the other hand, Carayon et al. (2003) viewed QWL as quality of relationship which exists between employees and their working environment when human dimensions are collaborated with technical and economic dimensions. Nadler and Lawler (1994) explained this concept as a mindset or way of thinking about people, work and organization. According to Ali and Zilli (2013) "It is a degree of excellence in work and working conditions which contribute to overall satisfaction of individual, thereby,

enhancing the organizational effectiveness". Monkevicius (2014) explained it as a level of subjective human well-being and personal satisfaction which results from working environment in which human beings are put to work.

Over the years, this concept has been defined by numerous researchers. Majority of studies explained this concept as an approach; as a philosophy; as a goal and as an effort. As an approach, it focuses on collective efforts of employees and management which aims to enhance dignity of workers and satisfy their economic as well as psychological needs through improved organizational culture (Balaji, 2013; Chandrasekhar, 2007; Martin, 2010; Indumathy and Kamalraj, 2012). As a philosophy it refers to those principles which consider human beings to be trustworthy and capable resources hence they ought to be treated with dignity and respect (Varghese and Jayan, 2013a). When it is considered as a goal, then it requires that organizational mission and objectives should aim at improving the economic, social and psychological well-being of the employees. "As an effort, it refers to strategies aimed at reduction in absenteeism, building the environment of trust in the organization and supporting individual participation and involvement" (Katz, Kochan and Weber, 1982).

Thus, after considering the views of various researchers on QWL, it has been observed that researchers have basically focused on subjective evaluation of QWL from the perspective of employees. It has been explained mainly as experiences that individuals gain in their organizations. Experiences at work lead to arousal of certain perceptions about the work, working environment and the organization itself which may further result into change in attitudes, commitment and performance level of the human resources employed. High QWL in an organization ensures open communication, respect, recognition, trust, support, well-being and satisfaction of its members, both personally and professionally (Dargahi and Seragi, 2007). In fact, high QWL serves twin objectives of satisfying organizational goals as well as individual goals of its employees. Thus, QWL has implications both for organization as well as for its human resources. Its activities help the employees to acquire and/or develop technical, managerial and behavioral knowledge, skills and abilities and mould the values, beliefs and attitudes necessary to perform present and future roles (Mohan and Ashok, 2011). Improvement in QWL is a source of numerous gains (Saklani, 2003) for instance, by improving QWL organizational commitment of the employees can be improved (Normala, 2010; Asgari and Dadashi, 2011; Tamini et al., 2011), performance can be improved (Sabarirajan and Geethanjali, 2011), leads to job satisfaction (Saad et al., 2008; Azril et al., 2010) etc. On the other hand, the improved QWL has also shown the negative relationship with employees' aggression i.e. if employees are provided opportunities for skill improvement, involved

in decision making, provided suitable salary for their work and ensured job security, their aggression is decreased (Porkiani et al., 2011).

### **The Present Study**

The above discussion point out towards divergent views about conceptualization of quality of work life. The present study is also an effort in this direction. The study discussed four main issues related with quality of work life. Firstly, individual versus organizational perspective is discussed. Secondly, subjective versus objective approach of quality of work life is presented. Thirdly, quality of work life is discussed as a domain of quality of life. In the last, the concept of customized quality of work life is discussed. The paper is based on secondary sources of data. Data has been collected from the various research and working papers, journals, technical reports of various agencies etc.

### **Issues in Quality of Work Life**

#### **I. Individual versus Organizational Perspective**

From the individual perspective QWL refers to experiences of individuals at the work place. It involves application of all organizational inputs in such a way that employees' satisfaction level is improved along with improvement in organizational effectiveness (Venkatachalam and Velayudhan, 1999). Specifically, when viewed from employee's view point QWL includes physical working conditions, pay, recognition, participation, supervisory support, feeling of pride, interpersonal relations, job security etc. In other words, QWL encompasses all those issues which affect the life of the individuals working in the organization (Gani and Ahmad, 1995; Martel and Dupius, 2006; Rose et al., 2006, Kheradmand et al., 2010). It involves issues which motivate an individual to remain the part and parcel of the organization thereby eliminating any intentions to leave the organization. It affects employees' job satisfaction as well as satisfaction level of employees with their family, leisure and social needs.

The components of QWL are interlinked to the components of the general/total quality of life (Al-Qutop and Harrim, 2011; Emadzadeh et al., 2012). QWL theory considers four fundamental domains of working life; quality of life (the relation to one self), mastery (to the job function), fellowship (relation to other members of working team) and creation of real value (to what extent individual contributes to the surrounding world) (Ventegodt et al., 2007).

On the other hand, when considered from the organizational perspective, QWL is reflected in policies, programs, goals and processes of the organizations. It strives to integrate organizational objectives with individual objectives of people working in the organization. It aims to build pattern of trust, involvement and commitment in the organization.

At organizational level, QWL initiatives are implemented through envisaging those norms which positions organization's image as an ethical and humane organization wherein every sphere of working like HRM, marketing and production processes have inbuilt system of ethical human practices. It requires implementation of related labor laws, providing equal opportunity to work without discrimination on the basis of the caste, gender, place or religion.

The conceptualization of QWL should undertake the holistic view involving integration of individual as well as organizational perspective. A holistic approach to QWL defines it as encompassing all the goals, policies, procedures and programs in the organization which strive to influence the satisfaction level of individuals working in the organization with respect to the life they spend working for their organization. The components of QWL should be embedded into all the sub-systems of the organization when organization is viewed as a whole system. Organizations which aim at providing high level of QWL to its employees develop such culture which responds to the aspirations of employees and where employees feel inherently attached to the goals of the organization. It is a two way process wherein both the parties, organization as well as employees should respect each other's interests and try to harmonize their interests to the best possible extent.

## II. Subjective versus Objective Approach

The overall QWL depicts dual nature involving two complementary aspects: subjective and objective (Kerce, 1992; Vinopal, 2012). These two indicators of QWL are complementary in the sense that in the organizations QWL assessment involves subjective evaluation of objective indicators. Though these are complementary, these indicators cannot be used interchangeably because individuals who may be working in same organization, holding almost same position and enjoying same monetary and non-monetary benefits may perceive different levels of QWL. Kerce (1992) explained the reasons of differences in evaluation of QWL to be aspirational level of individuals and availability of alternatives. When QWL is studied from organizational perspective involving indicators of pay and compensation, working conditions, work schedules, leave rules, workers participation in management, opportunities for promotion, it appears to be an objective approach. However, from individuals' perspective, QWL becomes subjective approach wherein attempt is made to evaluate the satisfaction level of individuals working in the organization with respect to objective indicators. Another reason why QWL can be termed as subjective concept is the fact that the word 'quality' itself cannot be measured in absolute terms under organizational setting particularly in context to individuals working in the organization. Individuals are the subject matter of both subjective and objective approaches

(Vinopal, 2012).

Researchers have attempted to bring objectivity to the subjective concept of QWL by measuring perceptions of individuals through conducting surveys and applying appropriate statistical tools and techniques. Varghese and Jayan (2013b) attempted to provide a list of objective and subjective indicators of QWL. The objective indicators' list includes safe and healthy working conditions, job security, adequate and fair compensation, constitution in the work organization, work and total life space, the social relevance of work life, workload or pressure at work, work and life balance, role ambiguity, job insecurity, social support from supervisor and colleagues, and working conditions.

On the other hand, subjective indicators' list comprises opportunities to use and develop human capacities, social interaction in work organization, acknowledgement for achievement, meaningful and significance of work, autonomy and control, identification with and enjoyment of work, creativity and innovation, skill discretion, task control, stress and its impact on QWL, resiliency, positive attitudes, self-efficacy, self and self-development, well-being and self-actualization.

Considering these subjective and objective indicators, QWL can be termed as a multidimensional construct made up of a number of interrelated factors (Monga and Maggu, 1981; Wyatt and Chay 2001; Azril et al., 2011; Mohan and Ashok, 2011; Porkiani et al., 2011). As a multidimensional construct it refers to certain work related and non-work related elements which help in creating stress free work environment. The researchers have focused on varying factors while evaluating QWL. For instance, Sirgy et al. (2001) developed a measure of QWL on the basis of spill over theory of needs satisfaction. The measures included various dimensions of QWL based on needs like, (a) health and safety needs (protection from ill health and injury at work and outside of work, and enhancement of good health), (b) economic and family needs (pay, job security, and other family needs), (c) social needs (collegiality at work and leisure time off work), (d) esteem needs (recognition and appreciation of work within the organization and outside the organization), (e) actualization needs (realization of one's potential within the organization and as a professional), (f) knowledge needs (learning to enhance job and professional skills), and (g) aesthetic needs (creativity at work as well as personal creativity and general aesthetics). Adopting a psychological perspective, Sverko and Galic (2014) specified (a) economic security, (b) social relationships at work, (c) work meaningfulness and (d) autonomy in work and participation in decision making to be the major dimensions of QWL. Walton (1975) suggested eight parameters to evaluate QWL, namely (i) adequate and fair compensation, (ii) safe and healthy environment, (iii) growth

and security, (iv) development of human capabilities, (v) the total life space, (vi) social integration, (vii) constitutionalism, and (viii) social relevance.

Al-Qutop and Harrim (2011) suggested that QWL is linked to human well-being which involves physical/physiological well-being, psychological well-being, intellectual/mental well-being, social well-being and ethical/moral well-being. On the basis of review of literature, Mejbal et al., (2013) pointed out towards rewards, benefits and compensation, career development, communication, safety and security, top management involvement, cohesion of work and life, job satisfaction and employee motivation to be the dominant drivers of QWL in the order of their importance.

To determine level of QWL, Sojka (2014) categorized QWL characteristics into primary (related to specific work place like financial rewards, working load, working conditions, contents of work, social conditions, work position and potential for career development), secondary (usually common for all organizations like corporate culture and beliefs) and tertiary (going beyond the organization like image of the organization and localization of organization). In the evaluation of QWL subjective measures have been into main focus because the behavior and the attitudes one learns from his experiences in the work situation are depicted in the form of job involvement, job satisfaction and turnover intention (Vliet and Hellgren, 2002). Royuela et al. (2007) suggested that academic definition (which is based on subjective indicators) of QWL should be integrated with the institutional definition of QWL given by European Union (which is based on objective indicators of QWL).

### III. Quality of Work Life as a Domain of Quality of Life

Quality of life encompasses a broad range of issues that impact a person's perception of his/her overall life quality (Dallimore and Mickel, 2006). The term QWL has been conceptualized as a sub-set of the quality of life which encompasses all spheres of life and living conditions covering thereby factors such as general life satisfaction, leisure and well-being (Huzzard, 2003). The domains of QWL are interdependent and thus individual's QWL directly influences his quality of life value (Ruzevicius and Akranaviciute, 2007). Quality of life is assessed by spill over theory wherein satisfaction in one life sphere spills over to another sphere of life thereby promoting satisfaction in another sphere also (Sirgy et al., 2001). High QWL leads to high satisfaction with quality of life as well (provided satisfaction level with other spheres of quality of life is assumed to be unchanged). Organizations are issue of concern not only for their employees rather organizational activities impact community, regions and society as a whole so quality of life cannot be discussed without referring to quality of working life (Susniene and Jurkauskas, 2009).

Various components of life like interpersonal relations, stress, leisure, safety, income, social status, culture, human rights, politics are equally applicable to the organizational settings also, where an individual spends most of his life time. Work place is not only the place where an individual performs his duties to make earnings rather it is the place where variety of experiences are gained which not only influence his behavior in the organization but also influence behavior of individual in social as well as family settings. These experiences may even extend to whole life and shape the personality, perception and attitude of the individual in every sphere of life and get instilled into his memory for the life time.

### IV. Personalized/Customized Quality of Work Life: A Step Ahead

Organizational settings are changing rapidly due to advancement in technological environment. One of these developments is in form of virtual organizations. The new organizational work settings involving flexi timings and flexi places have made workplace a virtual place where employees work according to their own convenience. Work today is of mental nature rather than physical nature with almost no geographical boundaries of work. It is not confined to a particular place rather has got instilled into minds of people that it has become more difficult to relax even during leisure time (Vliet and Hellgren, 2002). Organizations have become increasingly responsible for not only the physical work environment, but also for the mental working environment (Ventegodt and Merrick, 2009). Academicians and researchers are moving ahead from issues of work life balance towards work life integration which requires evolving such strategies where an individual is not only able to balance his work life with other spheres of life rather he is able to integrate work into all the spheres of life. Besides with the increase in the size of the organizations and expansion of organizations across nations, diversity in the work force with respect to the age group, culture, religion, language, gender etc. has emerged as a main issue to be managed properly. Individuals working in organizations differ in their approach towards QWL due to individual differences in preferences for QWL criteria which is result of different sub-cultures and values to which they belong. It is thus necessary for organizations to accommodate these sorts of different preferences, by making the necessary adaptations and adjustments to the QWL evaluation criteria (Orpen, 1981). The diversity in the work force point out towards the requirement for personalized approach towards QWL. Looking ahead towards such organizational changes, even more divergent views may appear regarding conceptualization of QWL. This requires envisaging such policies and procedures which suit the requirements of employees in these organizations. Paying attention to individual requirements may be called

personalized/customized approach towards QWL. Though it may be a complex task to handle but in the times to come it may become imperative for the organizations to adopt such personalized QWL approach so that employees remain committed to their work and organization.

### Conclusion

To conclude, while defining the concept of QWL various researchers pointed out towards one basic requirement of QWL which is satisfied and happy human resources in the organization. Achievement of high level of QWL is possible through good working conditions, adequate and fair pay, job security, organizational support, opportunities for advancement, good interpersonal relations, work life balance, safe and healthy work environment, participation of workers in decision-making and open and supportive communication. Presence of these factors influences the motivational level of the workforce which in turn leads to improved organizational performance and overall organizational effectiveness. No doubt, economic considerations play a major role in determining the satisfaction level of employees with their jobs and organization however ignoring psychological well-being of employees may lead to failure of the organization and hence requires equal weightage.

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