

Job Factors, Perceived Satisfaction and Quality of Work Life: An Overview

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Abstract

Quality of Work Life is viewed as an alternative to the control approach of managing people. The Quality of Work Life approach considers people as an 'asset' rather than 'cost' to organization and this change could be due to rising levels of education, changing aspirations, shift in values, etc. It is a major contributing factor in achieving greater job satisfaction, improving productivity, adoptability and overall effectiveness of an organization. So the viability of any organization depends not only on the context of economic benefits, but also the extent to which it bears responsibilities towards human beings on a continuous basis. This approach motivates people by satisfying not only the economic needs but also their social and psychological ones. Thus, organizations are coming up with new and innovative ideas to improve the quality of work and quality of work life of every individual in the organization. This article focuses on various extrinsic and intrinsic job factors those make the job more interesting, meaningful and challenging for the employees and lead towards satisfaction with quality of work life.

Introduction

The ongoing economic reform process and the resultant liberalization have brought in the entirely new management styles and contemporary world class technologies. Innovation, technology improvement, re-engineering, restructuring, etc. have occupied the attention of industry in totality. Fast moving advancement in science and technology, rapid development in engineering, automation, information technology, computerization of workplace and several changes in the industrial and economic spheres have contributed to a rising sense of dissatisfaction and alienation with the workforce. The relationship of man and organization has undergone several drastic changes in the above context. Technology which was welcomed, as the boon to liberate the modern man, now rather seems to enslave him in its inescapable clutches. This confused and changed perspective requires organizations to adopt appropriate strategies to ensure growth and to restore adequate humane conditions at the workplace. This glaring change can be assimilated better through information sharing, worker involvement, transparency, training and improving the quality of work. For quite sometime organizations have been pre-occupied in coping up with the challenges that came with the LPG economy by giving more focus on quality of work life. Thus, creating a sense of fulfillment and developing a conducive environment are the major challenges to HR professionals today.

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In today's industrial society, workers can not be coerced into work as had been the practice in the early days of industrialization, but can be encouraged and cajoled to work. They now consider themselves having much potencies, ability, skills, work knowledge, etc. There also has been change in the attitude of workers. This change could be due to rising levels of education, changing aspirations, shift in values, etc. So the viability of any organization depends not only on the context of economic benefits, but also the extent to which it bears responsibilities towards human beings on a continuous basis. QWL is a major contributing factor in achieving greater job satisfaction, improving productivity, adoptability and overall effectiveness of an organization.

Review of literature

Quality of Work Life (QWL) is a philosophy, a set of principles, which holds that people are the most important resource in the organization as they are trustworthy, responsible and capable of making valuable contribution and they should be treated with dignity and respect (Straw and Hecksher, 1984). QWL is related to the overall satisfaction of employees at their work. The elements that is relevant an individual's quality of work life include the task, the physical work environment, social environment within the organization, administrative system and relationship between life on and off the job (Cunningham and Eberle, 1990).

In this context R.E.Walton (1975) has emphasized on eight important areas of QWL. These include (1) adequate and fair compensation (2) safe and healthy working conditions (3) immediate opportunities to use and develop human capacities (4) opportunities for continuous growth (5) social integration in work organizations, (6) constitutionalisation of work organizations, (7) works and total life space and (8) the social relevance of work life. Depending also what the vested interest is, quality of work life can be defined in terms of degree to which an organization's work environment motivates effective job performance, alternatively with the degree to which it safeguards the physical as well as psychological well-being of employees, and in other cases the degree to which it limits stress reducing factors. High quality of working life has been equated with high employee motivation and also with a high level of employee satisfaction (Lawler, 1975).

The American Society for Training and Development established a task force which defined QWL as "a process of work organization which enables its members at all levels to actively participate in shaping the organizations environment, methods and outcomes." This value based process is aimed towards meeting the twin goals of enhance effectiveness of organizations and improved quality of life at work for employees. Cohen and Rosenthal (1980) described it as "an internally designed effort to bring increased labor management operation to jointly solve the problems of improving organizational performance and employee satisfaction". Lawler III and Finegold (2000) advocated in favour of individualizing organizations to improve the quality of work life and satisfaction of their employees. There are eight major areas where individualization of the work situation can occur. Such areas are employment contracts, selection, job design, career development, leadership, work-life balance, pay, and benefits. As individuals differ significantly in their abilities and expectation from work, various potential

options in the said areas such as intranet-based job matching selection, competence and skill based work design, self management performance and team leadership, support for career self management, flexible work arrangement, variable pay for skill and performance, cafeteria benefits, etc. are to be employed for tailoring the employment relationships to meet employee needs. Mirvis and Lawler (1984) suggested that quality of working life is associated with satisfaction with wages, hours and working conditions, describing "the basic element of a good quality of work life" as, safe work environment, equitable wages, equal employment opportunities, and opportunities for advancement.

Beukema (1987) describes QWL as the degree to which employees are able to shape their jobs actively, in accordance with their options, interests and needs. It is the degree of power an organization gives to its employees to design their jobs. This means the employee has the full freedom to design his job functions to meet his personal needs and interests. It is difficult for the organisation to fulfill the personal needs and values of each employee. However, if the organization provides the appropriate authority to design work activities to the individual employees, then it is highly possible that the work activities can match their employees' needs that contribute to the organizational performance. Some have argued that quality of working life might vary between groups of workers. For example, Ellis and Pompli (2002) identified a number of factors contributing to job dissatisfaction and quality of working life in nurses, including: Poor working environments, Resident aggression, Workload, Unable to deliver quality of care preferred, Balance of work and family, Shift work, Lack of involvement in decision making, Professional isolation, Lack of recognition, Poor relationships with supervisor/peers, Role conflict, Lack of opportunity to learn new skills. Rathianam and Ismail (2008) have described QWL as the effectiveness of work environment that fulfill employees' personal needs as well as organizational needs. They focus on employees' health and well being which include both physical and psychological aspects of an individual, Job security, Job satisfaction, competency development and opportunity to develop, balance between work and non-work life which make a harmonious equilibrium among career, family life and leisure activities. Organization must address these elements to make the work environment more meaningful for the employees. Newstrom and Davis (2002) described QWL programs as a way in which organizations recognize their responsibility to develop jobs and working conditions that are excellent for people as well as for the economic health of the organization. They focused more on two areas, redesigning jobs and redesigning organizations for a better QWL. Job redesign provides the job attributes described by people and redesigning organizations provide the work environment desired by people. There is a need to give workers more challenging task and more opportunity to use their ideas.

Thus, Quality of Work Life is not a unitary concept, but has been seen as incorporating a hierarchy of perspectives that not only include work-based factors such as job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay and relationships with work colleagues, but also factors that broadly reflect life satisfaction and general feelings of well-being (Danna & Griffin, 1999). It is a multi-dimensional construct, made of number of interrelated factors that need careful consideration. It is associated with job satisfaction, job involvement, motivation, productivity, health, safety and well-being, job security, competency development, balance between work and non work life.

Job factors and qwl

A human being always performs within an environment composed of physical, cultural, social, and psychological aspects of it. These environmental influences affect the quality of work life. Specially, different categories of job components namely extrinsic and intrinsic job factors influence the overall quality of work life of the employees. Moreover, extrinsic and intrinsic job factors tend to be positively inter-correlated with QWL (Warr, 1987).

Extrinsic Factors

Extrinsic job factors concern aspects of a job that form background or context to the task itself. It consists of activities that are externally motivated by rewards and it is carried out only because of its effects. Those factors are:

- ♦ **Adequate and Fair Compensation:** Even though accepted operational measures are not available to judge the adequacy of income from work and the fairness of the compensation, but these two are important determinants of quality of work life. Adequate income: does the income meet the socially determined standard of sufficiency or the subjective standard of the recipient? Fair income: does the pay received from certain work bear an appropriate relationship to the pay received from other work? (Walton, 1975)
- ♦ **Safe and Healthy Work Conditions:** The comfort dimension of job satisfaction assesses the employee's reaction to the aspects of job, which includes travel to and from work, the physical work surroundings such as architecture, equipment, noise, lighting, temperature, work hours and sufficient time to complete assignments. These have an impact upon a person's achievement, affective satisfaction and psychological strain. It is widely accepted that workers should not be exposed to physical conditions that are unduly hazardous or detrimental to their health.
- ♦ **Promotion Prospects:** An employee who is overqualified (according to promotion policy) for his job will almost always be concerned about his possibilities of promotion. It is found that employees show greater concern with promotion than with pay or other job aspects. With promotion, different needs can be involved such as more power, more pay, more status, sense of achievement and new challenges.
- ♦ **Benefits:** There are usual benefits that flow from work, including pay, promotion, position, rank and status, privilege of the position, fringe benefits. These have significant influence on overall job satisfaction, but compared to other stressors it has the least influence.
- ♦ **Job Security:** Job security is associated with the feeling of security about future employment, for example, feeling secure knowing that one is not likely to get laid off. Job insecurity was found to give rise to stress symptoms and work overload, as well as higher level of intra-personal conflicts concerning work and family life.
- ♦ **Resources Adequacy:** Resource adequacy has to do with enough time and equipment, adequate information and help to complete assignments. It gives free hand to employee to complete his assignment.
- ♦ **Job Demands:** Employees are required to accept certain goals, often imposed as task demands arising from their job description. This is one of the aspects that is a normal requirement of a job, but where there is a too much of it, it can be

experienced as stressful. Job demand refers to the person is required to do, and particularly the quantity and quality of work to be done. Too little demand leads boredom, just enough to excitement and too much to break down.

- ♦ **Fellow Workers:** The emphasis on *spirit de corps* in organization necessitates that we pay greater attention to the role of co-worker relations in determining the nature and quality of work life. Conflict and infighting among fellow workers are associated with low job satisfaction, while worker harmony is associated with greater job satisfaction. Supportive co-worker relations appear to be part of a favourable environment.
- ♦ **Supervisors:** The degree to which superiors treat subordinates with respect and have confidence in their abilities is a significant predictor of the quality of working life. The feeling of empowerment in a work group with an approachable leader encourages worth of the group and increases the job satisfaction of the members. The transformational leader meets the emotional needs of each follower by paying attention to their particular development needs. Thus, supportive, recognizing, developing, rewarding and conflict management supervisor behaviour is conducive to good quality working relationships.

Intrinsic Factors

Intrinsic factors cover aspects inherent in the conduct of the job itself. It consists of activities that are intrinsically motivating, meaning that they are rewarding by themselves. The intrinsic motivation would be brought about by the feeling of competence and self determination that someone experiences while engaging in a task. The intrinsic factors are:

- ♦ **Job Content:** The content of the job should be more meaningful and creative. The job must be characterized by variety, learning opportunities, mental challenge, growth, good future work opportunities and contribution to society. Such jobs are more satisfying and give more personal stimulus to development than specialized, routine tasks.
- ♦ **Opportunities to Use and Develop Human Capabilities:** The job should allow substantial autonomy and self control, and permits the learning and exercise of a wider range of skills and abilities, rather than a repetitive application of few skills. It must contribute to maintaining and expanding one's capabilities and must provide opportunities to use acquired knowledge and skills in future work assignments. Employees reporting no opportunities to use their abilities in their jobs exhibit significantly lower job satisfaction.
- ♦ **Control:** This is the degree to which a work environment permits an individual to control activities and events. Freedom of action, discretion, influence, power, participation in decision-making and decision latitude on the job is inseparable from a high quality of work life.
- ♦ **Meaningfulness:** There is a strong link between meaning and work satisfaction. This emphasizes the importance of the degree to which an individual finds work personally meaningful as precondition for work satisfaction.
- ♦ **Autonomy:** Autonomy is the degree of freedom enjoyed by the employee while exercising his duties. It is the key component of intrinsic motivation and is the strongest predictor of overall job satisfaction. The activities related to autonomy

are something not enforced by the external environment, but rather performed out of interest.

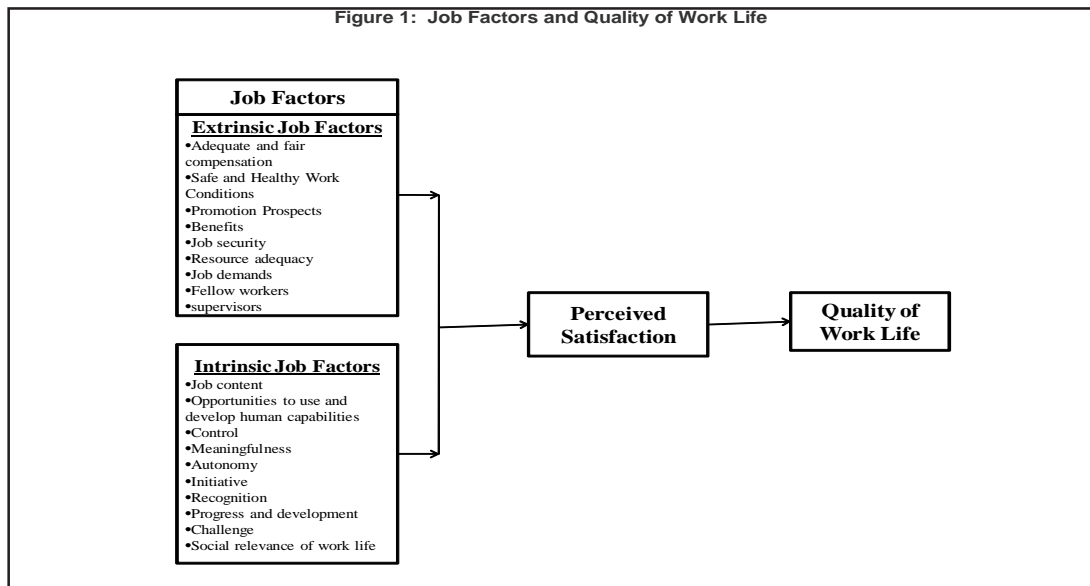
- ♦ **Initiative:** It is an important aspect of work. It translates into the sense that people are given opportunities to use their own initiative in execution of their work and are able to influence certain outcomes. The balance between the degree of clarity in the role and the amount of discretion allocated to it is important to determine the degree of control the person has over his or her environment.
- ♦ **Recognition:** Recognition means being known as an individual and being visible not only personally but as a contributor. It involves giving praise and showing appreciation to others for effective performance, significant achievements and important contributions. Recognizing is one of the effective tools of building commitment, increased job satisfaction and improving working relationships.
- ♦ **Progress and Development:** These are among the benefits we derive from work. They include the internal rewards available from the organization: challenge, exercise of competence, development of skills and a sense of accomplishment.
- ♦ **Challenging Job:** Degree of challenges experienced by the employees with respect to individual job will foster development of abilities, freedom to decide on work control, job involvement, and a chance to see results of work.
- ♦ **The Social Relevance of Work Life:** Organizations are not only acting in a socially responsible manner and honouring human rights, but will not cause anything which depreciate the value of their work and affect their self-esteem.

Perceived satisfaction and QWL

Quality of work life is specifically related to the level of satisfaction a person perceiving from the job. Each person has different needs when it comes to their careers; the quality level of their work life is determined by whether those needs are being met. While some people might be content with a simple minimum wage job as long as it helps pay the bills, others would find such a job to be too tedious or involve too much physical labor and would find such a position to be highly unsatisfactory. Thus, requirements for having a high “quality of work life” vary from person to person. Regardless of their standards, those with a high quality of work life generally make enough to live comfortably, find their work to be interesting or engaging and achieve a level of personal satisfaction or fulfillment from the jobs that they do. In other words, employees who are generally happy with their work are said to have a high quality of work life, and those who are unhappy or unfulfilled by their work are said to have a low quality of work life.

Sirgy et al. (2001) suggested that the key factors in quality of working life are: need satisfaction based on job requirements, need satisfaction based on work environment, need satisfaction based on supervisory behaviour, and need satisfaction based on ancillary programmes. They defined quality of working life as satisfaction of these key needs through resources, activities, and outcomes stemming from participation in the workplace. They, therefore, consider need satisfaction those results from workplace experiences, as an important contributing factor to not only job satisfaction, but also satisfaction with other life domains. Being presence of various extrinsic and intrinsic factors, employee perceives satisfaction from his job and that leads to better quality of work life (Figure-1).

Figure 1: Job Factors and Quality of Work Life



Satisfaction has emotional or affective component. The emotional state will depend on how individual interprets his job in terms extrinsic and intrinsic factors. The presence of above discussed job factors make employees feel valued and contribute to the improved performances. The employees who perceive satisfaction from their work, experience better quality of work life as well as non work life and this leads to high productivity, higher commitment, less absenteeism and low turnover.

Conclusion

Quality of work life (QWL) is viewed as an alternative to the control approach of managing people. The QWL approach considers people as an 'asset' to the organization rather than as 'costs'. It believes that people perform better when they are provided autonomy in managing their work and make decisions. This approach motivates people by satisfying not only their economic needs but also their social and psychological ones. To satisfy the new generation workforce, organizations need to concentrate on job designs and organization of work. Further, today's workforce is realizing the importance of relationships and is trying to strike a balance between career and personal lives. Successful organizations are enhancing social support and facilitating to their people to balance the scales. In this process, organizations are coming up with new and innovative ideas to improve the quality of work and quality of work life of every individual in the organization. The presences of various extrinsic and intrinsic job factors make the job more interesting, meaningful and challenging for the employees and those lead towards satisfaction with quality of work life. As a result of which organizations will enjoy the fruits in the form of increased productivity, and an efficient, satisfied, and committed workforce which aims to achieve organizational objectives.

Scope for future research

A fair amount research has been conducted on satisfaction with quality of work life around the globe. From this study there are a few considerations that can be taken into account when similar research is attempted. This study focuses on the importance of the various extrinsic and intrinsic job factors and emphasizes how much they influence the employees' satisfaction with quality of work life. For researchers, this model provides an integrated conceptual framework for testing the cause and effect relationship between job factors and

perceived satisfaction with quality of work life of the employees. A standardized, valid, reliable, scientific recognized and contemporary questionnaire should be used to measure the influence of job factors on perceived satisfaction of employees and also to recognize which job factor affects in what extent to the satisfaction of employees at work place. In future research, these variables should be measured objectively. A look at the relationship between personality types and satisfaction with quality of work life may be necessary. So, future research could focus on the interaction of personality, job structure, and organizational policies for jobs that determine the overall satisfaction with quality of work life.

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