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In search of organizational excellence through quality of work life

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Abstract

The term Quality of Work Life has different meanings for different people. Some consider it industrial democracy or codetermination with increased employee participation in the decision-making process. For others, particularly managers and administrators, the term denotes improvements in the psychological aspects of work or improve productivity. Unions and workers interpret it as more equitable sharing of profits, job security and healthy and humane working conditions. Others view it as improving social relationships at workplace through autonomous workgroups. Finally, others take a broader view of changing the entire organisational climate by humanising work, individualising organisations and changing the structural and managerial systems.

Keywords: human behaviour, job satisfaction, organisational excellence, productivity of employees, quality of work life

Introduction

In general terms, Quality of Work Life (QWL) refers to the favourableness or unfavourableness of job environment for people. Harrison opines QWL is the degree of which work in an organisation contributes to material and psychological well-being of its members. Cohan defines quality of working life as a process of joint decision-making, collaboration and building mutual respect between management and employees. The American Society of Training and Development considers it as a process of work organisation which enables its members at all levels to actively participate in shaping the organisation's environment, methods and outcomes. This value-based process is aimed towards meeting the twin goals of enhanced effectiveness of organisation and improved quality of life at work for employees.

The concept of QWL is based on the assumption that a job is more than just a job. It is the centre of a person's life and a worker has a whole individual rather than a half human and half machine personality of Jekyll Hyde type. In recent years there has been increasing concern for QWL due to several factors:

- Increase in education level and consequently job aspirations of employees,
- Association of workers,
- Significance of human resource management,
- Widespread industrial unrest,
- Growing of knowledge in human behaviour, etc.

QWL exercises a significant influence on productivity of employees. Research has established that good QWL leads to physically and psychologically healthier employees with positive feelings.

Quality of work life is concerned with the following types of questions:

- How to develop careers that allow employees to realise

their full capabilities and interests?

- How to design jobs to provide meaningful, interesting and challenging work experience?
- How to utilise group dynamics and participative management to improve the quality of life at the workplace?
- What supervisory strategies help to improve the quality of work life?
- How can the desired organisation changes be carried out?

Measurement of Quality of Work Life

The indices which may be used to judge the quality of work life in an organisation include

1. **Job Involvement:** It represents the degree of an individual's identification with or ego involvement in the job. The more central the job is to the individual's life, the greater is his involvement in it. Therefore, the individual spends more time and energy on the job. People with high job involvement are better motivated and more productive. Research reveals that skills variety, achievement and challenge help to improve job involvement.
2. **Job Satisfaction:** It implies the worker's satisfaction with the environment of his job environment consisting of nature of work, quality of supervision, pay, co-workers, opportunities for promotion, etc. Job satisfaction is related to job involvement and people involved in their jobs are satisfied with their jobs and vice versa.
3. **Sense of Competence:** It refers to the feelings of confidence that an individual has in his own competence. Sense of competence and job involvement reinforce each other. An individual acquires a greater sense of competence as he engages himself more and more in work activities. When he feels more competence as he engages more involved in his job and becomes better

motivated. When both sense of competence and job involvement are high, the level of job satisfaction also increases.

4. **Job Performance:** When an individual's job involvement, Job satisfaction and sense of competence increase, there is a rise in job performance.
5. **Productivity:** When the level of job performance increase, the output per unit of input goes up. Thus, match between job characteristics and productivity traits of employees generally results in higher productivity.

Dimensions of Quality of Work Life

Quality of work life is a multi-dimensional concept implying a concern for the members of an organisation. The basis underlying QWL is the humanisation of work which means developing a work environment that ensures dignity to the employee, stimulates his creative abilities and facilitates self-growth. What constitutes high quality of working life may vary in relation to both the worker's aspirations and the objective reality of his work and society. It is ultimately defined by the worker himself. According to Richard Walton, the main aspects of QWL are:

1. **Adequate and Fair Compensation:** There should be a just and equitable balance between effort and reward. The compensation should help the employee in maintaining a socially desirable standard of living and should be comparable to the pay for similar work elsewhere. Several factors must be considered for determining such compensation, e.g., ability of the organisation to pay, demand and supply of labour, cost of living, productivity of labour, job evaluation, etc.
2. **Safe and Healthy Working Conditions:** Quality of work cannot be high unless the work environment is free from all hazards detrimental to the health and safety of employees. Reasonable hours of work, cleanliness, pollution free atmosphere, risk-free work etc. are the main elements of a good physical environment for work.
3. **Opportunity to Use and Develop Human Capacities:** The job should obtain sufficient variety of tasks to provide challenge and to ensure the utilisation of talents. Today work has become repetitive and mechanical so that the worker has little control on it. Quality of work life can be improved if the job allows sufficient autonomy and control, provides timely feedback on performance and uses a wide range of skills.
4. **Opportunity for Career Growth:** The work should provide career opportunities for development of new abilities and expansion of existing skills on a continuous basis.
5. **Social Integration in Work Force:** The worker should be made to feel a sense of identity with the organisation and develop a feeling of self-esteem. Openness, trust, sense of community feeling, scope for upward mobility, equitable treatment are essential for this purpose.
6. **Constitutionalisation in the Work Organisation:** QWL provides constitutional protection to the employees.

Management action can be challenged. Constitutional protection is provided to employees on such matters as free speech, equity and due process.

7. **Work and Personal Life:** There should be proper balance between work life and personal life of employees. The demands of work such as late hours, frequent travel, quick transfers are both psychologically and socially very costly and detrimental to quality of work life.
8. **Social Relevance of Works:** Work should not only be a source of material and psychological satisfaction but a means of social welfare. An organisation that has greater concern for social causes like pollution, consumer protection, national integration, employment, etc. can improve the quality of work life.

Principles of Quality of Work Life

In order to humanise work and to improve the QWL, four basic principles may be helpful:

1. The Principle of Security

Quality of work life cannot be improved until employees are relieved of the anxiety, fear and loss of future employment. The working conditions must be safe and fear of economic want should be eliminated. Job security and safety against occupational hazards is an essential precondition of humanisation of work.

2. The Principle of Equity

There should be a direct and positive relation between effort and reward. All types of discrimination between people doing similar work and same level of performance must be eliminated. Equity also requires sharing the profits of the organisation.

3. The Principle of Individualism

Employees differ in terms of their attitudes, skill, potential, etc. Therefore, every individual should be provided the opportunity for development of his personality and potential. Humanisation of work requires that employees are allowed to decide their own pace of activity and design of work requires that employees are allowed to decide their own pace of activity and design of work operations.

4. The Principle of Democracy

This means greater authority and responsibility to employees. Meaningful participation in the decision-making process improves the quality of work life.

Responsibilities of Stakeholders

The concept of quality of work life has been operationalised through various systems such as job enrichment, workers participation in management, organisation development, quality circles, employee welfare, etc. While some of these schemes have been successful in improving the quality of work life, others are still to show results.

In 1981 the National Productivity Council organised a national seminar on quality of work life. The seminar made several suggestions and pointed out the responsibilities of different groups in improving the quality of work life. These responsibilities are summarised below:

- 1. Responsibilities of employers:** These include the following:
 - a. Provision of physical amenities at the work place, health and safety and welfare provisions.
 - b. Involving workers in decision-making on all matters.
 - c. Initiating suitable forms of work design.
 - d. Formalisation of QWL experience for future use.
 - e. A re-examination of policies of work.
 - f. Developing an appreciation of changing environment.
- 2. Responsibilities of unions and workers:**
 - a. Educating and making workers aware of QWL.
 - b. Search areas of collaboration with management.
 - c. Identifying ways and means to satisfy workers' needs through non-monetary alternatives.
 - d. Organising labour in the unorganised sector and specially making them are of QWL.
 - e. Encouraging workers to participate in QWL activities.
- 3. Responsibilities of professional organisations:**
 - a. Organise workshops and seminars to bring about greater awareness of QWL.
 - b. Initiate specific research projects in this field.
 - c. Provide professional assistance to organisations to help generate internal competences.
 - d. Developing state-of-art profiles on QWL.
 - e. Developing special programmes for various classes of workers.
 - f. Developing a network for collection, storage and dissemination of information on QWL.
- 4. Responsibilities of the Government**
 - a. Legislating standards and norms in never areas.
 - b. Change in policy to provide greater autonomy to experiment with QWL.
 - c. Executive action to ensure implementation of legislated facilities.
 - d. Encouragement and adoption of appropriate technology.
 - e. Finding projects on QWL.
 - f. Suitable modifying the structure and scope of education in the country.

Techniques for Improving Quality of Work Life

Some of the techniques used to improve QWL are given hereunder:

- 1. Job Redesign:** Narrow jobs need to be combined into large units of accomplishment. Jobs should be redesigned to enrich them. Job enrichment helps to satisfy higher order needs by providing interesting, stimulating and challenging work.
- 2. Career Development:** Opportunity for career advancement and growth personality improve commitment. Career planning, counselling second careers, etc. help to meet expectations of achievement-oriented employees.
- 3. Autonomous Work Groups:** In an autonomous work group, employees are given the freedom of decision-making. In such a group the workers themselves plan,

coordinate and control their activities. The group as a whole is accountable for success or failure. It is also called a self-managed work team.

- 4. Flexible Work Schedules:** Flexible working hours (flexitime), staggered hours, reduced work week. Job sharing, part-time employment and other types of alternative work schedules provide freedom to employees in scheduling their work.
- 5. Participative Management:** Employees want to participate in deciding matters which affect their lives. Therefore, quality circles, management by objectives, suggestion system and other forms of employee's participation in management help to improve QWL.
- 6. Job Security:** Adequate security of job is a high priority of employees and should be provided.
- 7. Administration Justice:** The principles of justice, fair and equity should be applied in disciplinary procedure, grievance procedures, promotions, transfers, work assignment, leave, etc.

Hence, the following course of actions are desired in order to improve Quality of Work life:

- Fair and equitable remuneration.
- Reasonable stability of employment.
- Employee health and safety programmes.
- Alternative work schedules.
- Participative management or self-managed teams.
- Recognition of employees as human beings.
- Congenial worker supervisor relations.
- Grievance procedures and effective leadership.
- Sound promotion policy and career development.
- Management of employees' stress.
- Job redesign and enrichment.

Conclusion

The concept of QWL is based on the assumption that a job is more than just a job. Research has established that good QWL leads to physically and psychologically healthier employees with positive feelings. The basis underlying QWL is the humanisation of work which means developing a work environment that ensures dignity to the employee, stimulates his creative abilities and facilitates self-growth. What constitutes high quality of working life may vary in relation to both the worker's aspirations and the objective reality of his work and society. It is ultimately defined by the worker himself. The concept of quality of work life has been operationalised through various systems such as job enrichment, workers participation in management, organisation development, quality circles, employee welfare, etc. While some of these schemes have been successful in improving the quality of work life, others are still to show results.

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