

Quality of work life: Budding dimension of Human resource Management***Harinder Singh****ABSTRACT**

There are many ways to determine the meaning of Quality of Work Life (QWL), one of which is work environment. QWL composed of techniques related to management field that are of mutual benefit to employees or employers or we can say that it is based on employee management cooperation. This article reflects the meaning of QWL, dimensions of QWL, practices and techniques of QWL for improving the effectiveness of the organization. The dimensions of QWL include health and wellbeing, job security, job satisfaction, career development and the balance between work and personal and social life.

Key words: Quality of Work Life, Job satisfaction, career development.

1. Introduction

Human resources play a vital role in success or failure of an organization and therefore, managing the human resource is of great importance. There are many issues which affects the management of human resources. One such issue is Quality of Work Life (QWL). Quality of work life is a philosophy, a set of principles, which believes that people are the most crucial resource in the organization as they are the ones who are responsible and capable of making valuable contribution towards business activity and they should be treated with dignity and respect. The elements that are important to an individual employee's quality of work life include the task, the physical work environment of the organization, social environment within the organization. QWL composed of techniques related to management field that are of mutual benefit to employees or employers or we can say that it is based on employee management cooperation. People also view QWL as a set of ways which are aimed at enhancing the satisfaction and productivity of workers. It requires employee commitment towards the organization and an environment in which this commitment can flourish. Thus, QWL is a comprehensive process that includes an individual's job related issues as well as personal life issues.

Quality of work life has its roots in the theories of Abraham Maslow, Fredrick Herzberg. The needs for fulfillment as that of Abraham Maslow's motivational theory of needs hierarchy are comparable with those of the factors of QWL. Basic needs like monetary and fringe benefits come first, with good working conditions, later comes career planning, growth and development of human capabilities to satisfy. Maslow's esteem needs are comparable with opportunity to use and develop human capabilities. Lastly challenging work is advocated by Walton to satisfy self actualization need in need hierarchy. QWL is also related to both hygiene factors and motivators as identified by Herzberg to improve the work life of employees. Thus, it is quite clear that the QWL has had its origin in these theories of motivation.

1.1 Origin of Quality of Work Life

Legislation related to protect employees from job related injury and to eliminate hazardous working conditions, followed by the strong unionization movement in the 1920s to 1940s were the initial steps towards QWL. After that high emphasis was given to job security for economic benefit of the workers. The 1950s and the 1960s saw the evolution of different theories proposing a “positive relationship between morale and productivity”, and the possibility that improved employee-employer relations would lead to the effectiveness of organization. Finally, in the 1970s the concept of QWL was conceived by Walton. The theories of motivation and leadership provided a sound base for the concept of QWL. If the lower order needs are satisfied, people seek satisfaction for the higher order needs. QWL activity gained huge popularity between 1970 and 1975, when a broad group of researchers, union leaders and government showed keen interest in improving the condition of employees through improving work related experience.

The term “Quality of Work Life” was introduced first in research journals in USA only in 1970's. The term quality of work life was introduced by Louis Davis. The first International QWL conference was organized in Toronto (Canada) in the year 1972. The international council for quality of work life was established in the year 1972. From 1980 onwards QWL gained importance on employee centered productivity programs. Since 1990s up till today business is facing with challenges of economic downfall and corporate restructuring, but now QWL is repositioning itself as employees are getting aware about QWL through rising educational levels and occupational aspirations in today's slow economic growth. In India, QWL offers a huge value frame to improve the effectiveness of organizations through effective utilization of human potential. Some evidence of the rising interest in the quality of work life issue is the fact that the second International Conference on quality of work life held in Toronto in 1981 attracted more than 1,500 participations. Quality is no more a specialized word but now the word quality become a necessary and a must work for the best survival in the business field. In this era, Quality of human inputs is the greatest asset to any organization. Maintaining the quality of such human inputs requires proper human resource management. A perfect quality of work life will always help the organization to grow in a positive manner.

1.2 Meaning and Concept of QWL

The term 'quality of work life (QWL) has been explained differently by different peoples, some consider it aspect of industrial democracy and few consider it as a improved way employee participation in the decision making process. Generally for employers and administrators, the term QWL means improvement in the psychological and social aspects of work to improve the productivity. Trade unions interpret QWL as a way of equitable sharing of profits, job security and healthy and proper working conditions.

In general terms, QWL, refers to the favorableness of a job environment for employees. It refers to the quality of relationship between employees and the total working environment. According to Harrison, QWL is the degree to which work in an organization contributes to physical and mental wellbeing of its members.

One other management guru defines quality of working life as “a process of joint decision making and developing mutual respect between employer and employees”. QWL focuses on increasing the employee-management cooperation to solve the problems of improving organizational performance and employee job satisfaction. According to the American

Society of Training and Development, it is “a process of business organization which enables its members at all levels to actively participate in shaping the organization's environment, method. This value based process of QWL is aiming at meeting the goals of enhanced effectiveness of organization and improved level of motivation 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 epicenter of a person's life. In recent years there has been increasing concern for QWL due to several factors:

1. Increase in education level and awareness of employees.
2. Job aspirations of employees.
3. Growing number of trade unions of workers.
4. Increased awareness towards human resource management.
5. Widespread industrial unrest.
6. Knowledge explosion due to globalization.

2. Dimensions of Quality of Work Life

The dimensions of QWL are healthy work environment, job security, employee satisfaction, career development and the balance between professional and personal life. Each of the dimensions of QWL is briefly discussed below.

2.1 Healthy work environment

Healthy work environment or good physical condition at work is important aspect and dimension of QWL. Asakura and Fujigaki (1993) examined that there is direct and indirect effect of physical work environment on workers health and wellbeing. Proper work environment ensures good health and psychological conditions which enable the employees to perform the task with zeal and confidence. Carayon, Smith and Haims (2001) revealed that stress arises in the process of interaction between a person and the work environment that threatens the individual's physical, psychological aspect. Physical illness and psychological disorders increase when pressure at work increases.

2.2 Job security

Organization change such as downsizing, rightsizing and outsourcing have adversely affected employees' loyalty, morale, motivation and perceived job security. Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the year 1996 highlighted that job security is the most important issue in contemporary work environment. Job security is the central aspect of QWL which reflects strength of the organizations to provide permanent and stable employment regardless of the changes in the business environment. Hence, providing a sense of security is important ingredient for satisfying work force.

2.3 Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction means an employee may believe that his or her job is interesting, challenging and stimulating. The behavioral aspect of employee satisfaction represents an employee's behavioral tendencies toward his or her job. The action of attending the work regularly, working hard to achieve organizational goals and intending to stay in the organization for long period of time indicates the positive approach which indicates job satisfaction. On the other hand negative behavioral outcomes such as absenteeism, employee turnover reveal dissatisfaction in job. Job satisfaction of employees may vary. Some may feel salary and fringe benefits that meet his or her expectations is important part of employee satisfaction. On the other hand for few employees challenging task at job can be taken as employee satisfaction. Many researches and studies indicates that many different aspects of the job such as pay, promotions, supervision, fringe benefits, organizational tasks , colleagues support, and suitable working hours (Watson *et al.*, 2003) are related with levels of employee satisfaction.

2.4 Career Development

Growth in skills and knowledge is an important part of career development that increases the level of QWL. Therefore career development is defined as the kind of the job that provides learning of new skills, opportunities and provides growth for career or organizational advancement. Career development comprises of essential training that will help the individual employees to sharpen their skills for the future. Most organizations not only provide training to the employees for a job, but they also try to provide them with a effective support system which encourages workplace learning.

Learning opportunities and skill development provides a positive effect on job satisfaction and reduced job stress that will lead to better QWL. In addition to skill development, employee counseling and behavior training courses are of great use as it helps to control or cope with uncertain situations or tensed situation at work.

2.5 Balance between professional and personal life

A major component of QWL, which is important for the employees now days, is the relationship balance between professional and personal life. In this competitive environment, it is quite difficult to separate professional and personal life. Employees today are more inclined towards a strong balance among career, family life and leisure activities. This has been suggested at the international level as a need and the part of national policy in many countries across the globe.

An ILO convention that was adopted in 1981, states that it is necessary for organizations to help employees in balance their professional and personal demands (Lewis, 1997).

The balance is important particularly among the employees in order to nurture and to develop the sustainable human resource practices in the work environment. Therefore, balance between professional and personal life is suggested as one of the measures of QWL.

3. Objectives of QWL

The main objectives of the QWL programmes are as follows:

1. For improving the employee satisfaction.
2. For enhancing the productivity of employees towards the work.
3. For improving the physical and mental well being of employees.
4. For reinforcing workplace learning among employees.
5. For improving the organizational effectiveness.
6. For improving the employee-management relations.
7. For image building of the company in front of employees, shareholders, government and general public.

3.1 Characteristics of QWL Improvement Programmes

Following are the characteristics of quality of work life improvement programmes.

1. Strong and Persistent commitment from the management towards the workforce regarding problem identification and suggestions for improving any aspect of the organizational work or in the organizational policies and practices.
2. For encouraging the employee's decision making in the working of the organization.
3. For providing the training to the supervisors for preparing them to function effectively in a democratic style of leadership.
4. For making the strategies for implementing the practicable ideas and suggestions and explanations and reasons for rejecting the impractical ideas.
5. For taking proper feedback from employees.
6. For recognizing the efforts of hard working employees.
7. For selecting the employees in a right manner by using proper selection techniques who can work hard to strive for excellence in organizational task.

3.2 Eight Practices of QWL

Quality of work life came into picture in 1970s but it became popular only in 90s and organizations realized its potential to enhance the productivity in the 20th century. QWL works as a comprehensive model to those employers or organizations who want to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in the working style of their employees. Walton proposes an ideal quality of work life programme in 1973 and it includes practices in eight major areas as discussed below:

3.3.1 Adequate and fair compensation

This is the primary dimension of QWL. Human beings work for livelihood. Therefore compensation plays vital role in the life of employees.

So according to Walton organizations must offer adequate salary and it must be proportionate to their work, and there should be internal consistency among salaries of employees at same level of hierarchy.

3.3.2 Safe and healthy working conditions

Unhealthy, unsafe and hazardous working conditions cause problems to both employees and employers. There may be little advantage to the employer in short-term but in long-term, it will adversely affect the productivity. Therefore, it is the duty of organization and employer to implement adequate funds for ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for the employees.

3.3.3 Opportunity of use and develop human capacities

The works becomes monotonous and meaningless when employees are given same kind of organizational task in a routine manner and it will leads to dissatisfaction among employees. Therefore, efforts should be made from employer's side to increase the autonomy towards work and employees must be exposed to multiple skills in regular intervals.

3.3.4 Future opportunity for continued growth and security

This is related to career development aspects of employees. Meaningful and challenging career paths must be laid down and proper career mapping of employees should be done and must be executed in a planned manner. The provisions of advancement opportunities play a vital role in QWL and in improving the employee motivation which ultimately helps organization in achieving their goals.

3.3.5 Social integration in the work organization

In any organization, the relationships between and among the employees is a sign of happy and healthy work organization. Therefore, techniques and opportunities must be provided for formal and informal interactions among employees. All employees irrespective of their economic class, religions, cast, races, creed and designations must be treated equally on a social platform. It promotes equality and enhances industrial peace in the organization.

3.3.6 Constitutionalism in the work organization

This dimension deals with organizational norms which helps an organization in smooth functioning. So efforts must be made to set the right norms in the organization so that freedom of an individual employee cannot affect in a negative manner. It also means that norms must not affect the privacy of an individual employee, and should be treated with equality.

3.3.7 Work and the total life space

Employees should not be treated like machines and they should not allow to continuously exert pressure on themselves. The continuous hard work may cause physical, social and psychological problems. Therefore, there has to be a right balance between professional life and personal life. Organization and employers must develop proper policies related to holidays and work offs to enrich the life of employees.

3.3.8 The social relevance of work life

Employees must be given the perspective of how his or her work in the organization will help the society. This is essential to build relevance of the employee's existence to the society he or she lives in. So to develop social relevance, it is the duty of employer or organization to counsel employees regarding their work , so that they can understand the value of the work they are doing for the organization and how they are contributing towards society and how society views them.

3.4 Quality of Work Life and Techniques for Improving

The concept of quality of work life has been regulated through various techniques systems such as job enrichment, worker's participation in management, autonomous work groups, organization development, quality circles, employee welfare schemes, etc. These techniques have been successful in improving the quality of work life in the various organizations. The quality of work life movement is of recent origin and individual level as well as group level organized efforts is required to improve the quality of work life in the organizations.

In 1981 the National Productivity Council conducted a national seminar on quality of work life. The seminar made several recommendations and explained out the clear roles of different groups such as employees, trade unions of workers, professional organizations, and government bodies etc. in improving the quality of work life.

Some of the techniques used to improve the QWL among employees in India are given below:

3.5 Job Redesign

Job redesign is an organized effort where job tasks and responsibilities are reviewed, and possibly re-allocated among staff, to improve output and efficiency. Re-designing of jobs can leads to improvement in both productivity and in job satisfaction of the employees. Jobs should be redesigned to enrich them; Job enrichment helps to satisfy higher level needs of employees by providing them an interesting, stimulating and challenging organizational work.

3.5.1 Career Development

Opportunity for career advancement and career growth must be provided to deserving employees in the organization. Career planning, Career development programmes and employee counseling etc help to meet the expectations of hardworking and deserving employees.

3.5.2 Autonomous work groups

In an autonomous work groups, employees are given the liberty of decision making. In such a group the workers themselves plan, coordinate and control their day to day work activities. The key feature of these groups is a high degree of self-determination by employees in the management of their day-to-day work. These autonomous group as a whole is accountable for success or failure of their work. It is also known as a self managed work team.

3.5.3 Flexible Work Schedules

Flexible working hours, work from home, reduced work week, parttime employment and other types of alternative work schedules provides freedom to employees in scheduling their work for the organization.

3.5.4 Participative Management

Employees always want to participate in decision making matters related to work which affect their lives. Therefore techniques like employee involvement, quality circles, management by objectives, suggestion system and other forms of employee's participation in management help in improving the QWL of employees of an organization.

3.5.5 Job Security

Job security is the central aspect of quality of work life which reflects strength of the organizations to provide permanent and stable employment regardless of the changes in the business environment. Hence, providing a sense of security is important ingredient for satisfying work force.

3.5.6 Administrative Justice

The principles of fair justice and equality should be applied in all disciplinary procedure, grievance procedures, promotions, transfers, work assignment, leave, etc. All employees irrespective of their economic class, religions, cast, races, creed and designations must be treated equally on a social platform. It promotes equality and enhances industrial peace in the organization.

3.6 QWL and Management's role

Management has to play a vital role in improving the quality of work life of employees. Management must emphasize to make the quality of work life for employees as satisfying as possible. In current scenario employees are challenged as never before to balance their professional and personal responsibilities.

Therefore the management must deal with these challenges by utilizing personnel abilities and creating flexibilities and developing the programs that help employees meet their professional and personal obligations.

Following steps should be taken by the management to implement QWL:

1. By establishing equitable, reasonable and enforced organizational rules.
2. By creating a conducive atmosphere where employees are treated with trust, respect and dignity.
3. By helping and guiding the employees to conduct them in a professional manner.
4. By encouraging proper communication system between employees.
5. By ensuring that all employees are treated equally and fairly.
6. By developing and implementing a flexible organizational policy and procedures.
7. By provide appropriate training to managers for performing organizational task effectively.
8. By encouraging participative work teams by creating trust and helping employees to work more effectively and efficiently in order to accomplish organization goals.
9. By providing employees assistance through the employee counseling.
10. By actively supporting the employee's physical and mental health.

3.7 QWL and Judgment Methods

The following may be used to evaluate the quality of work life in an organization:

§ Job Involvement

It refers to the emotional and psychological extent to which someone participates in his or her work, profession, and company. People with high job involvement are better motivated and more productive. Researches reveal that skill variety, job enrichment, sense of achievement and challenging tasks help in improve the job involvement of employees.

§ Job Satisfaction

It implies the worker's satisfaction with the environment of his or her job environment. It consists of nature of organizational work, quality of supervision, salary, colleagues, opportunities for career advancement, etc. Job satisfaction is related to job involvement and people involved in their jobs are satisfied with their jobs and vice versa.

§ Sense of Competence

It refers to the feelings of confidence that an individual feels in accordance with his own abilities. Sense of competence and job involvement are related to each other. An individual acquires a greater sense of competence if he or she engages them more and more in work related activities. When he or she feels more competent he or she becomes more involved in his or her job and becomes better motivated.

§ Job Performance

When an individual's job involvement, job satisfaction and sense of competence increase, there is a huge increase in the value of job performance of that individual.

§ Productivity

When the level of job performance increases the output of employees also increases. Thus, match between jobs related characteristics and productivity traits of employees generally result in higher productivity and organization can achieve good results.

4. Conclusion

Quality of Work Life (QWL) is a modern way that includes an individual's job related issues. The awareness towards QWL has been increasing day by day due to several factors. These factors include increase in the education level and consequently job aspirations of employees. The association of workers, increased significance of human resource management, widespread industrial unrest, and knowledge explosion also contributes to rise of QWL. The elements of QWL comprise of physical and psychological factors, job security, job satisfaction, competence development and the balance between professional life and personal life. For improving the quality of work life different groups are taking responsibility such as employers, trade unions, employees, professional organizations and government agencies. Therefore, quality circles, management by objectives, employee involvement and other forms of employee's participation in management helps in improving the QWL. If any organization systematically adopts these techniques and execute them in a planned manner, then the quality of work life will be improved to the desired levels in all the organizations.

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