

# Quality of Work Life in the Globally Changing Workplace – An Exploration

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of quality of work life (QWL) is gaining increasing attention by all organisation all over the world. Quality of life encompasses the sum total of healthy experiences that individuals experience in various facets of life. A sizable component of the quality of life is the quality of life experienced by organisation members at the workplace. The QWL therefore is important and worthy of deep study as individuals do not compartmentalise their lives but carry even their satisfaction of otherwise experienced at work where they spend the major part of their time. Thus, the QWL spills over to the quality of life experienced in the family. QWL will have direct and indirect relationship with the economic and social well-being of large portion of population which lies beyond the domain of industry. Improved QWL naturally helps to improve the family life of the employees and also improves the performance of the industry/enterprises. Ever since the concept of QWL was first used over 30 years ago, a range of definitions and theoretical constructs have succeeded each other with the aim of mitigating many problems facing the concept. A historical overview of the concept of QWL is presented here. Given the lack of consensus concerning the solutions that have been developed to date, a new definition of QWL is suggested, inspired by the research on a related concept. This article reviews the meaning of QWL, various definition of QWL and determinant of QWL based on the reviews.

**Keywords:** QWL, HRD interventions, Career development, Work–life balance, Organisational effectiveness, Job satisfaction, Organisational commitment

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## INTRODUCTION

Around the world, companies find themselves on a competitive treadmill as they cope with a weak economy and look for ways to meet expectations. Some company leaders address this economic environment by taking a straight business approach to compete by creating new markets and revenue streams, trimming costs or delivering new products to customers, whereas other company leaders choose to take a more holistic approach, melding the business view with a work/life view by finding ways to help employees work more effectively, tuning the workplace so that employees have more flexibility in deciding where and how they want to work and providing access to services and tools that

allow employees to take care of their personal-life needs while minimising the anxiety that sometimes accompanies these activities (Childs, 2003). Childs (2003) argues that the latter approach is gaining attention because such a work/life view appears to work for the business as can be gleaned from the global surveys made in IBM in 2001 conducted in 20 languages and 48 countries which showed that quality of work life (QWL) programmes have a strong correlation with productivity. Moreover, the issue of QWL has become critical in the last two decades, not only due to the increasing demands of today's business environment but also of the family structure. This gave rise to an increased interest in QWL not only in business but also for many professions and fields (Akdere, 2006).

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Although the expression QWL was not used in the late nineteenth century, certain isolated efforts had already been made to improve conditions for workers (Martel and Dupuis, 2006). For example Peter Drucker (as cited in Chalofsky, 2007) asserted that Frederick Taylor (father of scientific management), among all his contemporaries, truly deserved the title humanist because he believed in matching the person's abilities to complexities of the job – he encouraged worker suggestions, he believed in appropriate training for a job, he felt that management was to blame for worker restriction of output rather than worker inferiority and he believed in giving people feedback to help them change. However, this mechanical or quantitative approach that scientific management assured gave way to the frustration of workers which led to the human-relations movement and later socio-technical movement which is the basis for today's QWL. Thus, to improve the knowledge and understanding of the complex mechanisms that regulate the relationship between an individual and his or her work life, this paper elucidates a theoretical knowledge concerning QWL. To do this, the first part presents a brief history of changes in the definition of the QWL construct, with a focus on the main avenues of research conducted and on the conceptual problems that have marked its development. The following section constitutes the definitions and determinants of the construct. The last part of the article provides some implications of the construct.

## EMERGENCE OF QWL

Although the term 'Quality of Work Life' was not used in the late nineteenth century, certain isolated efforts were made to improve working conditions for workers, for example the fact that certain companies shared profits with their employees and others. From a more contemporary perspective, these initiatives may be viewed as an attempt to improve QWL (Goode, 1989). It would be several decades before the social sciences and humanities showed real interest in work and, more specifically, in the relationship between workers' attitudes and behaviours, on one hand and the company's productivity, on the other. The studies by sociologist Elton Mayo, at Western Electric's Hawthorn plant in 1933 –

now recognised as 'classic' – involved verifying the influence of environmental factors on plant workers' performance. Mayo's results tempered the Taylorian performance rules applied until then. From that point on, the beginnings of a movement towards a policy of humanising employees' work conditions can be seen (Mayo, 1960).

However, this new approach remained marginal; at the end of the 1950s, the concept of QWL was slowly taking root in the specific context of working conditions in the industrialised countries. Indeed, the post-war economy triggered a spectacular growth in the service sector which, by the end of the 1960s, represented approximately 60% of all jobs in the United States. Despite this major change in the job market, most organisations persisted in using an old-style Taylorian model in managing their companies; the result was that jobs became more dehumanised (Davis and Cherns, 1975).

It was in this context that the first major research into work organisation took place, initially in Europe. In Sweden, the social democratic policies of the government favoured a shift towards work conditions that were more focused on workers' well-being. From the early 1960s, this approach was supported by Swedish unions, employers and the main political parties (Davis and Cherns, 1975).

At the same time, the need to reorganise work was simultaneously becoming clear in a number of other western European countries, but unlike in Sweden, the initiatives undertaken in the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Ireland, England and Norway were characterised by unorganised and isolated efforts (Cherns and Davis, 1975).

On the other side of the Atlantic, pressure was becoming stronger to follow the trend initiated in Europe. It was not until the late 1960s that Irving Bluestone, who was then employed by General Motors, used the expression 'Quality of work life' for the first time (Goode, 1989). This programme was the first one set up in the United States that allowed workers to play an active role in decisions concerning their working conditions. Its goal

was essentially to evaluate employee satisfaction to develop a series of programmes to increase worker productivity (Goode, 1989). According to many authors, this event represents the starting point for a number of researchers, employers, unions and employees who wished to define and monitor the common denominator that would enable them to reconcile the goals and aspirations of all parties involved in the working world.

In addition to the context of job dehumanisation observed during the post-war period, the reasons mentioned by Lawler (1975) to explain researchers' sudden, marked interest in QWL include workers' constantly increasing educational level and budget problems in the United States that forced managers to reconsider their production methods. The early 1970s was therefore a fertile period for research and attempts to clarify the definition of QWL. The culmination of this boom was undoubtedly the international conference on QWL held from 24 to 29 September 1972 at Arden House, Harriman, New York. One of the conclusions of this conference was to acknowledge the necessity of coordinating efforts by the researchers and organisations concerned to build up a solid theoretical corpus in the area of QWL research. Thus, in August 1973, the International Council for the QWL was created, with a mandate to promote research and the exchange of information concerning mental health at work.

## REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

### Definitions

QWL is interpreted and viewed in different ways. Though many people tried to define it, in specific terms, a few among them are presented below. QWL has been defined as 'The quality of relationship between the employees and the total working environment'. QWL is concerned with the overall climate of work and the impact on work and people as well as on organisation's effectiveness.

In 1983, Nadler and Lawler perceived that after the phase of 1979–1982 when QWL means everything, it would lose its impact and mean nothing. But, instead of losing importance, QWL is gaining momentum day by day and as following stages: First definition during 1969–

1972 considered QWL as variable; second definition during 1969–1975 considered QWL as approach; third definition during 1972–1975 considered QWL as methods; fourth definition during 1975–1980 considered QWL as movement and fifth definition during 1969–1982 considered QWL as everything.

De (1976) has pointed out, 'Quality of Work Life is an indicator of how free the society is from exploitation, injustice, inequality, oppression and restrictions on the continuity of the growth of a man leading to his development to the fullest. By providing good Quality of Work Life, one can eliminate the exploitation, injustice, inequality oppression and restrictions which tamper the continuous growth of human resource which in turn leads to its overall development'.

Hackman and Suttle (1977) proposed that the QWL served happiness and satisfaction of every performer in the organisation, whether in levels of labourers, supervisors, management or company or agency owners. The good QWL not only made personnel to have job satisfaction, but also resulted in other prosperities such as social, economic, environmental conditions and products. Most importantly, the QWL could lead to job satisfaction and attachment to the organisation. Moreover, it helped to reduce rates of absenteeism, turnover, morale and accidents, whereas the organisation proficiency in respect with encouragement and job satisfaction as well as product quality and amount was higher.

Rosow (1977) explains the importance of work more in detail and relates it to success and failure of a man in his society. According to him, 'Work is the core of life, considering the deeper meaning of work to be individual and to life's values. Work means being a good provider, it means autonomy, it pays off in success and it establishes self-respect or self-worth. Within this framework, the people who openly confess active job-dissatisfaction, is verily admitting failure as a man, a failure in fulfilling his moral role in society'.

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) appointed a task force on the QWL in 1979. The task force defined QWL as, 'a process of work organizations which enables its members at all levels to

actively participate in shaping the organizations environment, methods and outcomes? This value based process is aimed toward meeting the twin goals of enhanced effectiveness of organization and improved quality life at work for employees' (Skrovan, 1980). According to this definition, QWL is a process of work organisation designed to enhance the effectiveness of an organisation and improve the QWL of its employees.

Walton (1979) who has taken up extensive research reports that QWL can be considered the major contributor to this concept. In fact, measuring of QWL has become easy and practicable with the eight factors/elements that Walton has proposed. According to Walton, 'Quality of Work Life is the work culture that serves as the corner stone'. He says that the work culture of an organisation should be recognised and improved to improve QWL of that organisation.

Guert (1979), a noted behavioural scientist, talks about feelings of an employee about his work while defining QWL. He further points out the effect of QWL on person's life. According to him, 'Quality of Work Life is a generic phrase that covers a person's feeling about every dimension of work including economic rewards and benefits, security, working conditions, organizational and interpersonal relations and its intrinsic meaning in person's life' and 'It is a process by which an organization attempts to unlock the creative potential of its people by involving them in decisions, affecting their work lives'.

According to Blue Stone (1980), 'the Quality of work life means bringing to the workplace maximum democratic life-style and balancing the needs of production and needs of the employees and self-fulfilments'. So, the most accepted common denominator of QWL experience is the joint worker management participation.

Cohen and Rosenthal (1980) have focused their attention on the employees' satisfaction. They describe QWL as, 'an internally designed effort to bring about increased labor management co-operation to jointly solve the problems of improving organizational performance and employee satisfaction'.

Daniel (1982) of the ASTD of QWL indications stated that his committee had given a definition on the QWL as a process for work organisation which enables its members at all levels to actively participate in shopping the organisation's environment, methods and outcomes. This value-based process is aimed towards meeting the twin goals of enhanced effectiveness of the organisation and improved quality of life at work for employees.

In the words of Mansell and Rankin (1983), 'Quality of working life is the concrete expression of a particular set of beliefs and values about people, about organizations and ultimately about society'.

Graver (1983), a Senior Executive of American Telephone and Telegraphic Company (AT & T), says, 'Quality of Work Life is more than an attempt to pacify the growing demands of impatient employees. For the Management, Quality of Work Life offers new challenges, opportunities, growth and satisfaction'.

Delamotte and Takezawa (1984) pointed out the idea that QWL originated work and the idea that the quality of life means the development of the worker's life to have a better living condition, to work in a good working condition, to receive fair benefits and safe equal rights. According to these writers, the QWL means good results from work which benefit the workers as a result of the improvement of the organisation and its work nature, the special consideration given to the workers' work life, work satisfaction and decision-making sharing.

Goodman (1985) observes, 'In recent years the term quality of work life has been used to refer to employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction with overall condition of work'.

Huse and Cummings (1985) defined the QWL as the consistency between individuals' fulfilment and job satisfaction with organisational proficiency. In other words, the quality of work life was the organisational proficiency as a consequence of workers' well-being in working, resulting from the perception of working experience that made employees feel satisfied in that job. Huse and Cummings further explained that the QWL affected the organisation in three ways: first, it increased organisational productivity; second, it increased work

spirit, encouragement and motivation of workers and lastly, it helped to improve the potential of workers.

Kast and Rosenzweig (1985) stated that the QWL referred to the perception about individuals' performance that they were involved in sharing opinions, solving problems and making decision within the organisation.

Cascio (1986) specifies the meaning of QWL in two characteristics: the former means working environment and other practices within the organisation such as job enrichment, democratic supervision, employee involvement and safe working conditions. The latter is related to safety, good relationships between employees and employers, growth of career path and development of the working environment.

Robinson and Alston (1988) assert that the key determination of the QWL is whether an individual feels off and a contributor to the industrial environment in which he or she earns his or her living. They further observed, 'the QWL is related to the ease with which people can undertake tasks they require to undertake and thus gives the performance necessary to the economic vitality of the business'.

Werther and Davis (1982) have given the meaning of the QWL as a good command of supervising, good condition of working, many good benefits, providing good income and job-provoking interest, challenge and rewards from that job. Werther and Davis believed that the QWL and the increasing of productivity of the employee go hand-in-hand.

Kerce and Kewley (1993) stated that the QWL referred to groups, procedures or technologies which allowed the working environment to provide more productivity or employees to have increased job satisfaction. The outcome focused on employees rather than the management. The QWL also covered the involvement in problem solutions, revision of working systems, making jobs interesting, using new methods in the reward system and improving the working environment. Therefore, the quality of life of employees in the organisation comprised overall job satisfaction, facet job satisfaction (or task-specific satisfaction), job characteristics and attachment to work.

According to Ranganayakulu (2004), the term QWL means, 'the favourableness or unfavourableness of a job environment for an organization's employee' and the term quality of working life also means, 'programmes representing a systems approach to job design and job enrichment which will make job more interesting and challenging. Programmes are closely associated with the socio-technical systems approach'.

From the definitions given above, it can be concluded that QWL is concerned with taking care of the needs of employees. The working environment is employee friendly and more humanised in nature. QWL is a protection under which employees feel fully satisfied with the working culture and provide full cooperation and support to the management in achieving goals and improving productivity more efficiently and effectively. One of the reasons for the growing importance of QWL could be the realisation on the part of employees about their rights and growing unionism. Workers are no more illiterate. They do not completely depend upon the mercy of management for their existence. Most of the lower level workers also have primary education. Thanks to the efforts of the government in this regard. It is not only monetary benefits, though monetary benefit still occupies the first place in the list of elements like physical working conditions, job reconstructing and job redesign, career development, promotional opportunities and many more are also gaining importance rapidly. As such, the workers expect the management to improve all these facilities which thereby improve QWL. When organisations provide good QWL, employees concentrate more on their individual and group development. The management can get their attention with their high motivation and morale which paves way for rapid and smooth human resource development.

### **Determinants of QWL**

Walton (1975) proposed eight major conceptual categories relating to QWL as (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 organisation, (6) constitutionalism in the work organisation, (7) work

and total life space and (8) social relevance of work life. Walton (1975) mentioned, 'Dissatisfaction with working life is a problem which affects almost all workers at one time or another, regardless of position or status. The frustration, boredom and anger common to employees disenchanted with their work life can be costly to both individual and organization'.

Ganguly and Joseph (1976) studied QWL among employees in Air India with special reference to life and their job satisfaction issues. Findings indicated that various physical and psychological working conditions, pride on organisation, job-earned community respect and reasonable working hours are more positively correlated with job satisfaction than friendship with colleagues and risk of injury. Findings also indicate that expectations and aspiration of young workers affect QWL.

Hackman and Oldham (1976) observed psychological growth needs as crucial determinant of QWL. Several such needs were identified: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. They concluded that fulfilment of these needs plays an important role if employees are to experience high QWL.

Warr (1979), in their survey for QWL, considered a variety of factors resulting in QWL, including work involvement, intrinsic job motivation, higher order need strength, perceived intrinsic job characteristics, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, happiness and self-rated anxiety. They studied different correlations in their research, such as those between work involvement and job satisfaction, intrinsic job motivation and job satisfaction and perceived intrinsic job characteristics and job satisfaction. In particular, Warr (1979) concluded that there exists a moderate association between total job satisfaction and total life satisfaction and happiness, with a less strong but significant association with self-rated anxiety.

Mirvis and Lawler (1984) found in their study that QWL was related with satisfaction with wages, hours and working conditions, describing the 'essentials of a good QWL' as safe work environment, equitable wages, equal employment opportunities and opportunities for advancement.

Suri *et al.* (1991) undertook a survey to study about the QWL practices in the Indian industry. The organisations covered were in the manufacturing and service sectors. The result of the study indicated that there are several trends, which have implications for QWL practices and their outcomes. Both public and private sector organisations least preferred the job and workplace-redesign programme. Organisations prefer system-wide practices to isolated experiments, which are limited to certain section or departments.

Baba and Jamal (1991) suggested a list of the determinants of QWL, including job satisfaction, job involvement, work–role ambiguity, work–role conflict, work–role overload, job stress, organisational commitment and turn-over intentions. Baba and Jamal also suggested that monotony in job due to routine work activities can affect QWL negatively.

Kumar and Shanubhogue (1996) have attempted in their study to analyse and compare QWL in university systems. The study was aimed to investigate the reactions of the teachers about the existing and expected QWL in the universities under study, to see the impact of designation and the perception about the QWL and to make a comparative learning of existing and expected QWL of a rural and an urban university. Two structured questionnaires framed for the purpose of the study were administered to more than 200 teachers to observe the existing and expected QWL of teachers. The hypothesis has been proved correct, as there is a significant gap between the existing and expected QWL of Sardar Patel University teachers. But in the case of M.S. University, Baroda, lecturers were expecting improvement in QWL.

Latha and Karthikeyan (1998) have attempted in their study Quality of Life among a metropolis population. The sample consists of 200 urban peoples. Factor 75 analysis of the data revealed the emergence of eight factors related to significant spheres of individual's life. Men were found to reveal better Quality of Life than women.

Hoque and Rahman (1999) conducted a study to assess and compare the QWL of industrial workers of

organisations of public and private nature in Bangladesh (Dhaka) and to measure whether there is any significant relationship among QWL, job behaviour and demographic variables of the workers. The results revealed that the private-sector workers perceived significant and higher QWL than their counterparts in the public sector. QWL has significant correlation with performance and negative correlation with absenteeism and accident.

Sirgy *et al.* (2001) in his study found that QWL is positively related with life satisfaction of employees. Moreover, they argued that satisfaction of employees' needs, mainly help and safety, economic and family, social, esteem, actualisation, knowledge, aesthetic (which they call QWL), resulting from workplace experiences, contributes to job satisfaction and satisfaction in other life domains. Furthermore, they concluded that satisfaction in major life domains (e.g. work life, family life, home life and major life) contributes directly to overall life satisfaction.

Jeyarathnam and Malarvizhi (2011) evaluate the QWL of sugar mill employees and analyse the relationship between the productivity and QWL. They concluded that the basic strategy for improving the QWL is to identify and satisfy the important needs of the employees. The study also indicated that dissatisfaction might happen due to lack of recognition, tedious work, unhealthy peer relations, poor working conditions, low self-esteem, occupational stress, heavy workload, monotony, fatigue, time pressures, job insecurity and instability of job.

Gupta and Sharma (2011) conducted a study on the QWL for the employees of telecom sector and found that there is a high level of satisfaction among the employees regarding the QWL. The factors determining the satisfaction with the QWL in the organisation were 'Adequate Income & Fair Compensation, Safe & healthy working conditions, Opportunities to use & develop human capacity, Opportunity for career growth, Social integration in the work force, Constitutionalism in work organization, Eminence of Work Life and Social relevance of work. All these factors are positively correlated with the quality of work life in BSNL'.

Garg *et al.* (2012) conducted a study of 'QWL: An Overview' and concluded that QWL holds great significance and if it is undermined, then it can affect the organisation adversely. Therefore, to become employer of choice as well as the best organisation to work for, every organisation must provide a healthy QWL to its employees. Many factors such as changing demographics of the work force, increasing expectation of the employees and greater stress level are posing major challenges to the organisations, but if these issues are handled strategically, then the organisations can reap the desired benefits, so maintaining QWL is the need of hour.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHT

Despite all the efforts invested in clarifying and presenting the concept of QWL, the author(s) are forced to acknowledge that the methods and models used until now to define it, with the aim of generating an operational intervention, have been less fruitful than one could have wished. This is symptomatic, as is the fact that no definition of QWL has yet been accepted by consensus; the same, of course, is true of general quality of life, it is sometimes claimed that a single definition is not even desirable but that the definition must be adjusted on the basis of the goals of the research. These authors seriously deplore this attitude, mentioning that if such an approach had been adopted in other fields of psychology, for example, there would still be no definition of depression. Listing components does not really help to specify what QWL actually is; in the unlikely event that consensus was reached concerning their number and designation, it would still be necessary to decide how to measure these dimensions, that is satisfaction, performance and others. Finally, the regular use of job satisfaction to assess QWL in empirical studies has rolled such research back to where it was 30 years ago. Must we therefore resign ourselves to considering QWL as a vague concept, more associated with a well-intentioned philosophy than a clearly defined, verifiable construct? It seems not. Certain theoretical advances discussed earlier make it possible to glimpse solutions to the many conceptual pitfalls traditionally associated with QWL.

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