QUALITY OF WORK LIFE, EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND CAREER GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Quality of work life is being used these days by organizations as a strategic tool to attract and retain the talent. QWL policies are increasingly becoming part of the business strategies and focus is on the potential of these policies to influence employees’ quality of working life and more importantly to help them maintain work-life balance with equal attention on performance and commitment at work. One of the most important determinants of Quality of Work Life (QWL) is the career growth opportunities as supported by various researches done in past. Studies also predict that employee performance is also correlated with QWL. The present paper is an attempt to review the literature and the studies done in past to establish a relationship between QWL, employee performance and career growth opportunities.

KEYWORDS: Career growth, Compensation, Job satisfaction, Performance, Quality of Work Life (QWL), Work Life balance.

INTRODUCTION

The term QWL gained importance in the late 1960s as a way of concerns about effects of job/work on health and general well-being and ways to positively influence the quality of a person’s work experience. Up until the mid 1970s, employer’s concern was on work design and working conditions improvement. However, in the next decade of 1980s, the concept of QWL included other aspects that affect employees' job satisfaction and productivity and these aspects are, reward systems, physical work environment, employee involvement, rights and esteem needs (Cummings and Worley, 2005).

However the radical changes in the world of business, like factors such as globalization, information technology, world business competitiveness, and scarcity of natural resources have changed employee's outlook of how a good company is defined. The trend in past was to include,
financial figures in defining “a good company”. Latest trends like, ethics, quality of work life (QWL) and job satisfaction are now considered important predictors of sustainability and viability of business organizations.

Bagnara, Mariani and Parlangeli (2001) found in their survey that people working in high technology enabled and uncertain working environment are more vulnerable to stress than others. Martinsons and Cheung (2001) concluded from their research that frequent changes in work environment directly or indirectly influence the performance and productivity of IT professionals. Indeed the changes in working conditions result in stressful conditions and the employees are still expected to perform under stress. Now the organization needs to have effective coping strategies in place; to handle the after effects of performance under stress.

QUALITY OF WORK LIFE DEFINED: THE VARIOUS FACETS OF QWL

Recently Serey (2006), observed in his research on QWL, that career growth opportunity is a crucial factor determining constructs of QWL. He concluded that QWL includes (i) an opportunity to realize one’s potential and utilize one’s talents, to excel in challenging situations that require decision making, taking initiative and self-direction; (ii) a meaningful activity perceived worthwhile by the individuals involved; (iii) an activity in which one has clarity of role necessary for the achievement of some overall goals; and (iv) a feeling of belongingness and pride associated with what one is doing and moreover doing it well. This aspect of meaningful and satisfying work is generally integrated with aspects of career related variables, and assumed to be more favorable to QWL.

Beukema (1987) suggested QWL is the extent to which employees are able to shape their jobs actively, in accordance with their options, interests and needs. It is the measure of power given by management to its employees to reshape their work. In other words, an employee has the full freedom to design his job functions commensurate with his personal needs and interests. This definition focuses upon the individual’s choice of interest in carrying out the task.

However, this definition reflects a slightly different approach than the former which stresses on the organizational efforts to reshape the job to meet employees’ interest. An organization may not be able to fulfill the personal needs and meet expectations of each employee. However if the organization is flexible where employees can exercise appropriate authority to redesign work activities to their satisfaction, then the probability is that the work activities are able to fulfill employees’ needs resulting in enhanced organizational performance.

Similarly Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger (1997) suggested QWL as the feelings that employees have about their jobs, co-workers and organization in general that act as a catalyst resulting in the organizations’ growth and profitability. A positive feeling towards their job reflects that the employees are happy doing work and a satisfying work environment increases productivity. This definition indicates that the satisfying work environment is one of the factors responsible for better QWL.
Proceeding further, Lau, Wong, Chan and Law (2001) defined QWL as the favorable working conditions that support and enhance satisfaction by providing employees with rewards, job security and career growth opportunities. Indirectly the definition reflects that an employee who is not satisfied with reward may be satisfied with the job security and may be possibly enjoying the career growth opportunity available in the organization for personal as well as professional growth.

It can be concluded from the above discussions about QWL definition, that QWL is a multi-dimensional construct that inculcates variety of interrelated factors. It includes job satisfaction, job involvement, motivation, productivity, health, safety and well-being, job security, competence development and balance between professional and personal life as described by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions (2002).

Past scholars have suggested definitions of QWL from various dimensions and concluded different constructs of QWL. For instance, QWL is a philosophy, a set of principles, which states that employees are the most meaningful resource in the organization and they should be dealt with dignity and respect [30]. The elements important to an individual’s quality of work life include the job, the physical work conditions, social arena within the organization, administrative policies and relationship between life on and off the job [8].

**QWL CONSTRUCTS: LITERATURE REVIEW**

People generally have a perception of QWL as a systematic approach including autonomous work groups, job enrichment and active-involvement with a focus on improving the satisfaction and productivity of employees [12]. It requires employee commitment to the organization and an environment in which this commitment can flourish [32]. Thus, QWL is a holistic approach that includes an individual’s job related well-being and the extent to which he is satisfied with the rewards, fulfillment at job and enjoys the absence of stress and other negative personal consequences [28].

As per the model given by Walton (1996), following factors are the basic determinants and parameters of QWL (Table 1 below).
Accordingly, the increasing number of couple working aggravates the concern for employees’ quality of work life. With the growing women participation at work, it is necessary that males and females independently will need to share the both work and home responsibilities. Therefore, quality of work experience rather than work per se gained attention [20] and workplace wellness is indispensable in making work stress free to balance work and home. [25].

Various authors and researchers have proposed models of Quality of working life which include a wide range of factors. Selected models are reviewed below.

1. Hackman and Oldham (1976) [14] observed psychological growth needs as crucial determinant of Quality of working life. Several such needs were identified; Skill variety, Task Identity, Task significance, Autonomy and Feedback. They concluded that

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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Indicators of QWL</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Fair and appropriate compensation</td>
<td>Internal and external fairness, Justice in the compensation, Allotment of productivity profits, Proportionality between wages</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Work conditions</td>
<td>Reasonable hours of working, Safe and healthful physical environment, Absence of unhealthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Use and development of capacities</td>
<td>Autonomy, Relative self-control, Multiple qualities, Information on the total process</td>
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<td>4. Chance of growth and security</td>
<td>Possibility of career, Personal growth, Perspective of wage advance, Job Security</td>
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<td>5. Social integration in the organization</td>
<td>Absence of prejudice, Equality, Relationship, Communitarian sense</td>
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<td>6. Constitutionalism</td>
<td>Rights of protection to the worker, Personal privacy, Labor laws, Freedom of expression, Impartial treatment</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Work and the total space of life</td>
<td>Balanced paper in the work, Stability of schedules, Few geographic changes, Time for leisure of the family</td>
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<td>8. Social relevance of the work in the life</td>
<td>Image of the company, Social responsibility of the company, Responsibility for the products, Job practices</td>
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fulfillment of these needs plays an important role if employees are to experience high quality of working life.

2. Taylor (1979) suggested Quality of working life as an holistic approach that includes; basic extrinsic job factors of wages, hours and working conditions, and the intrinsic job notions of the nature of the work itself. He also viewed other aspects to be equally important such as; authority exercised by employees, employee participation in decision making, fair and equal approach at work, social support, utilizing one’s present skills, self growth, a relevant scope of future at work, social relevance of the work or product, effect on extra work activities. Taylor concluded that Quality of working life policies may vary as per the size of organization and employee group.

3. Warr and colleagues (1979) in their survey for Quality of working life, 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 et al. 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.

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

5. Baba and Jamal (1991) suggested a list of the determinants of quality of working life, including: job satisfaction, job involvement, work role ambiguity, work role conflict, work role overload, job stress, organizational commitment and turnover intentions. Baba and Jamal also suggested that monotony in job due to routine work activities can affect quality of working life negatively.

6. Ellis and Pompli (2002) in their study on nurses identified a numerous factors resulting in job dissatisfaction and quality of working life, including: Poor working environments, Resident aggression, Workload, Unable to deliver quality of care expected, Balance of work and family, Shift work, no involvement in decision making, Professional isolation, non recognition of work, unhealthy relationships with supervisor/peers, Role conflict, absence opportunity to learn new skills.

7. Sirgy et al.; (2001) listed various factors affecting quality of working life as: Need satisfaction based on job requirements, Work environment, Supervisory behavior, Ancillary programmes, Organizational commitment. They observed quality of working life as fulfillment of these key needs through resources, activities, and outcomes resulting from participation in the workplace. This model is based at Maslow’s needs theory,
covering Health & safety, Economic and family, Social, Esteem, Actualization, Knowledge and Aesthetics.

8. Bearfield, (2003) \[^{[3]}\] adopted an all together different approach while examining quality of working life with the help of 16 questions, and the findings were surprising when he observed that causes of dissatisfaction in professionals, intermediate clerical, sales and service workers, vary for different groups and suggested that different concerns might have to be addressed based on different parameters.

9. The differences studied between job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in quality of working life predicts the influence of job satisfaction theories. Herzberg at al., (1959) \[^{[16]}\] used “Hygiene factors” and “Motivator factors” to differentiate between job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction.

10. Worrall and Cooper (2006) \[^{[34]}\] found in their recent survey that a low level of well-being at work may cost dear to an organization resulting in a loss of about 5-10% of Gross National Product per annum.

11. However a general conception is that Quality of Working Life fundamentally relates to well-being of employees but it is differentiated from job satisfaction which solely represents the workplace domain (Lawler, 1982) \[^{[19]}\].

12. Quality of Working Life is a holistic concept, which not only considers work-based factors such as job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay and relationships with work colleagues, but also includes factors that predict life satisfaction and general feelings of well-being (Danna & Griffin, 1999) \[^{[9]}\].

13. However recent researchers have also observed that, work-related stress and balancing work and non-work life domains (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991) \[^{[21]}\] affect QWL significantly and should conceptually is considered as determinant of Quality of Working Life.

14. An individual’s feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction might be an outcome of their perception, rather than predicting their “real world”. Further, an individual’s perception may be influenced by relative comparison –I am paid higher/less than that person - and comparisons of internalized ideals, ambitions, and expectations, for example, with the individual’s present state (Lawler and Porter, 1966) \[^{[18]}\].

15. LooSee Beh, (Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1996), in his study on “Linking QWL and job performance: Implications for organizations” found a positive link between QWL and employee performance.
16. As per the definitions given by (Morrison & Holzbach, 1980) [23] Careers can be understood as a ‘series of work roles or a step by step sequence of a person’s job experiences over a definite tenure (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). Researchers have proved that career tenure and total work tenure in one’s professional life are positively related to career attainment (Judge & Bretz, 1994) [17] which significantly predicts the feeling of accomplishment in their work life. Findings are also favorable to the assumption that there exists a relationship between the number of hours worked per week and salary and ascendancy (Cox & Cooper, 1989; Judge & Bretz, 1994) [7].

17. The feeling of career achievement is reflected in the willingness to spend extra time at job. It was observed that positive QWL acts as a motivation behind willingly working for long hours that was enjoyed by the executives. It was concluded from the study of managers that the ambition or the desire to excel acts as a catalyst for advancement in career. Researchers in their study on managers and executives have concluded a definite relationship between ambition and career achievement (Cannings & Montmarquette, 1991; Cox & Cooper, 1989) [5].

18. Career satisfaction is an outcome of the fulfillment of career growth needs of individuals that depends upon intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of their career, including pay, advancement, and developmental opportunities (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Worley, 1990 [13]; Rice, Phillips, & McFarlin, 1990; Berry, 1998) [4]. This is contrary to the job satisfaction which is termed as a positive emotional well being and a feeling of happiness derived from appraisal of one’s job or work experiences. Career satisfaction is actually subject to the comparison made by a person, of his/her career and life expectations with those being offered. There are several factors that affect these expectations to get fulfilled, like economic considerations (e.g. compensation and retirement benefits) and occupational and family considerations (e.g. professional satisfaction, job satisfaction, advancement opportunities, relocation, etc) (Hill, Wilson, & Sanders, 1998).

19. The time and energy consumed at work must be commensurate to the time and energy devoted to life, thus maintaining family and career balance. As Cascio (2003) [6] analyzed, the efforts must be aimed at enhancing the overall quality of life and shifting the focus from work to life and from balance to quality. As far as the career balance is concerned, Herriot (1992) [15] suggests that many a times people find themselves in conflict between family life and work, and what actually they perceive as success in life as compared to what success they get. Family and work are two most important domains of life and a balance is crucial. Nevertheless, one can hardly find any compatibility between the role demands of these two domains, thereby resulting in conflicts between work and non work life (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996) [24]. It is observed that because of the conflicting role demands between job and family, and commitment, QWL is inversely proportional to the work conflict meaning thereby that the higher the work role conflict, the lower will be the quality of family life, and vice versa.
20. Rapoport and Rapoport [26] concluded that the family’s psychological support and the diversion that it entails make it a crucial factor affecting QWL. Studies also support the facts that a happy family life has a positive impact on the greater job satisfaction and objective career achievement with a directly proportional relationship [27].

CONCLUSION

The world economies have recently recovered from recession blues and the continued restructuring, downsizing and reorganization in the post recession scenario have created havoc for HR managers as they have to struggle with preserving staff morale and job satisfaction. In this scenario, high quality of work life is essential for organizations to continue to attract and retain employees. This is the reason QWL concept has gained momentum recently and researches are going on worldwide to find out inputs for framing effective QWL strategies. Moreover the literature review discussed above also supports the relationship between QWL, employee performance and career growth aspects. Still many facets of QWL need to be unexplored through further studies.

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