

## POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES OF QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

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### **Abstract**

This paper makes an attempt to analyze the strategies adopted for improving the quality of work life. The strategies are (a) the development of careers and career paths, (b) work design, (c) organizational reward systems, (d) design and maintenance of group and inter-group relationships, (e) managerial practices, and (f) internal and external strategies for change. Quality of work life increases the efficiency of the organization with the strategies which are to be followed with greater effect which may create a good work environment, which may lead to the satisfaction of both for employee and employers.

### **Introduction**

There has been much concern today about the nominal wages, convenient working hours, conducive working conditions, etc. The term “Quality of work life” has appeared in Research Journals and press in USA in 1970s. There is no commonly acceptable definition about this term. However, some attempts were made to describe the term quality of work life (QWL). It refers to the favorableness or unfavorableness of a job for people. QWL means different things to different people. J.Richard and J.Loy define QWL as “the degree to which members of a work organization are able to satisfy important personnel needs through their experience in the organization. Quality of work life improvements are defined as any activity which takes place at every level of an organization, which seeks greater organizational effectiveness through the enhancement of human dignity and growth ,a process through which the stockholders in the organization management, unions and employees- learn how to work together better to determine for themselves what actions, changes and improvements are desirable and workable in order to achieve the twin and simultaneous goals of an improved quality of life at work for all members of the organization and greater effectiveness for both the company and the unions.

### Dimensions of Quality of Work Life

Richard E. Walton explains quality of work life in terms of eight broad conditions of employment that constitute desirable quality of work life (QWL). He proposed the same criteria for measuring QWL. Those conditions criteria include:

- **Adequate and Fair Compensation:** These are different opinions about the adequate compensation. The committee on fair wages defined fair wage as” the wage which is above the minimum wage but below the living wage”
- **Safe and Healthy Working conditions:** Most of the organizations provide safe and healthy working conditions due to humanitarian requirements and/or legal requirements. In fact these conditions are a matter of enlightened self interest.
- **Opportunity to Use and Develop Human Capacities:** Contrary to the traditional assumptions, QWL is improved to the extent that the worker can exercise more control over his or her work, and the degree to which the job embraces an entire meaningful task” but not a part of it. Further QWL provides for opportunities like autonomy in work and participation in planning in order to use human capabilities.
- **Opportunity for Career Growth:** Opportunities for promotions are limited in case of all categories of employees either due to educational barriers or due to limited openings at the higher level. QWL provides future opportunity for continued growth and security by expanding one’s capabilities, knowledge and qualifications.
- **Social Integration in the Work Force:** Social integration in the work force can be established by creating freedom from prejudice, supporting primary work groups, a sense of community and inter- personnel openness, legalitarianism and upward mobility.
- **Constitutionalism in the Work Organisation:** QWL provides constitutional protection to the employees only to the level of desirability as it hampers workers. It happens because the management’s action is challenged in every action and bureaucratic procedures need to be followed at that level. Constitutional protection is provided to employees on such matters as privacy, free speech, equity and due process.
- **Work and Quality of Life:** QWL provides for the balanced relationship among work, non work and family aspects of life. In other words family life and social life should not be strained by working hours including overtime work, work during inconvenient hours, business travel, transfers, vacations etc.
- **Social Relevance of Work:** QWL is concerned about the establishment of social relevance to work in a socially beneficial manner. The workers’ self-esteem would be high if his work is useful to the society and the vice versa is also true.

### **Potential Difficulties of Quality of Work Life**

Notwithstanding potentially powerful mechanisms, QWL programmes in their collaborative forms (involving joint union- management activities) are filled with difficulties. At least potentially both union and management open themselves to substantial risks. The union may perceive joint activities (undertaken at the initiative of the management) as a means by which it intends to 'do them in'. Likewise, the management may perceive joint activities (initiated at the instance of the union) as an intention of diluting its ability to manage and a means by which the union will acquire more power. Particularly, the middle management may find it hard to believe the benefits of QWL, and may perceive that the management is 'becoming soft and giving in to union dominance'.

Whether originated at the instance of the management or the union, or a third party, QWL programmes have been successful in various settings and in a number of ways. Lehrer indicate certain conditions which help overcome the above difficulties. These are:

- Acknowledgement by both parties of 'mutuality of concerns' and specific identification of these concerns.
- An understanding that joint activities will, in fact, be joint and supportive of the continuing integrity of both parties.
- Acceptance of QWL concepts as the norm by the top management, by union leadership and by middle management and supervision.
- An administrative structure to provide guidance for QWL project activities.
- An established charter for QWL committees and project activities, specifying ground rules, responsibilities, authorities, etc.
- A clear cut understanding that joint ownership of the entire QWL is a reality and open acknowledgement of what each party expects to receive as benefits.
- A mechanism for involvement; handling substantive issues, worthwhile participation in personal terms and in influencing affairs of the organization; and a provision for knowledge and skills to deal with such problems effectively.

### **Strategies for Improving Quality of Work Life**

QWL is the shared responsibility not only of the management and workers, but also of the union leaders, government officials and behavioral scientists. Hackman and Suttle present six strategies which have frequently been used for improving QWL in organizational settings. These are: (a) the development of careers and career paths, (b) work design, (c) organizational reward systems, (d) design and maintenance of group and inter-group relationships, (e) managerial practices, and (f) internal and external strategies for change.

### **Development of Careers and Career Paths**

Career refers to a sequence of positions occupied by an individual during the course of a lifetime. There are four stages in an individual's career- exploration, establishment,

mid-career, and later career. From management's perspective, the process of development of careers and career paths forms a means to improve, or at least, sustain employees' productivity and prepare them for changing work situations in the organizational setting. It involves a number of issues, including career counseling, charting career paths, career information systems, human resource planning, periodic skill assessment, training and help for disadvantaged groups. There are, at least, the following three prerequisites to effective performance of activities relating to the development of career paths of employees in organizational settings:

- Coordination of these activities with other activities in human- resource management
- Active involvement of line supervisors in designing and implementing them.
- Provision for equal access to their benefits to all employees.

Specifically, as a strategy for improving QWL, the development of careers and career paths involves a matching process embracing three elements- individual, the organization, and the broader cultural environment. Accordingly, management may effectively perform this function by taking into account the life cycles of individuals, the needs of the organization and the society, and the norms and values of the broader culture. In conjunction with these contexts, attempts should be made to consider the implications of the following factors in performing this responsibility

- The distinction and relationship between internal (subjective) and external (objective) views of careers.
- The need to understand the individual within the total lifespan and throughout his lifetime.
- The need to consider the issues concerning development of career and career paths in interaction with those concerning self- development and family development.

### **Work Design**

Job design influences employee satisfaction, motivation and productivity. As a strategy for improving QWL, work design must take into account factors which moderate employees' reactions to their work. These moderators relate to individual differences and interpersonal and organizational factors. Obviously, there is no such thing as a universally good design for work. An attempt was made to describe various job- design options to improve QWL. Depending upon the situational requirements, managements may select the relevant strategies for specific design options. Whatever job design options are used, the following strategies or planned personal and organizational change appear to be relevant for effectively introducing QWL through work redesign in organizational settings:

- Diffusing knowledge about work redesign theory and practice.
- Disseminating work-redesign innovations
- Paying more attention to the jobs of first level managers.
- Paying more attention to the role of unions in work- redesign efforts.

### **Organisational Reward Systems**

The role of the rewards systems relates to the motivation of employees in organizational settings. As pointed out in chapter6, employees do what they do to satisfy needs. Prior to doing anything, they look for the pay-offs or rewards- salary increases, benefits, desirable job assignments, etc., which are organizationally controlled. These organizational rewards are highly complex. They may be direct and indirect compensations, or financial and non financial in nature, and distributed on individual or group or organization-wide basis. Whatever be their nature, they influence every other aspect of the organization. Accordingly, as a strategy for improving QWL, the organizational reward systems must be used as an integral part of broadly- oriented programmes of organizational change. The management may take the following precautions in effectively managing them in this context:

- Effectively design the programmes, as they influence individual attitudes and behaviours, and organizational structures and procedures.
- Improve communication and participation systems, as they influence the effectiveness of the reward systems in the organization
- Ensure that the reward systems are operated in a congruent way in the organization.
- Redesign these systems when subsystems in the organization are changed.

### **Design and Maintenance of Group and Inter-group Relationships**

In conjunction with varied characteristics of intra- group behaviour, there are systematic properties of inter- group relationships in organisational settings. There arises a complex set of behaviours, emotions, attitudes and beliefs when groups tend to have interdependent relationships. There are three types of inter- groups:

- Task- induced inter- groups, which stem from the need for division of labour.
- Hierarchically induced inter- groups, which arise from the hierarchy of authority and the inevitability of superior- subordinate relationship in organisations.
- Historically rooted inter- groups, which are based on personal and social characteristics that members bring into the organisation.

As a strategy to improve QWL, attempts may be made to take into account the dynamics of intra - group and inter- group relationships in designing and maintaining them in organizational settings. Several behavioral science interventions (e.g. inter- group meetings) can be used to reduce the destructive effects of inter- group conflict and improve QWL. The goals of such interventions are to increase communications and interactions between work- related groups, reduce the amount of dysfunctional competition, and replace a parochial, independent point of view with an awareness of the necessity for independence of action calling on the best efforts of these groups.

### **Managerial Practices**

QWL in an organization is a function of prevailing management practices. Specifically, the role of supervision and management is of utmost significance in improving QWL. The supervisor influences QWL and employees' productive behaviour both directly through his treatment of the individuals, and indirectly through his influence on the design of jobs, the reward systems and the development of teamwork. He plays three key roles:

- Providing consideration
- Serving as a facilitator of employees' work efforts
- Encouraging appropriate amounts of participation in crucial work decisions.

In conjunction with supervisory and management practices, QWL is also influenced by the structural characteristics of organizations and those of trade unions obtained in specific settings. Thus, while attempting to improve QWL, efforts may be made to humanize organizational structures, and obtain union cooperation and involvement in this context.

### **Internal and External Strategies for Change**

There are a set of internal and external strategies to introduce the above five strategies aimed at improvement of QWL in an organizational setting. Prior to adherence to this set of strategies, there is need to make a number of choices between: a) centralized-decentralized strategies, b) power- based and collaborative strategies, c) fast and slow-paced strategies, and d) individual and structure oriented strategies.

Frequently, three general strategies are used to introduce QWL change programmes. These are:

- Strategies arising internally in the organisations, such as OD, or management and union strategies.
- Strategies originating with political and special interest groups, such as community action approaches.
- Societal- level strategies, such as use of legislation involving integration of internal and external programmes.

### **Conclusion**

The management in every organization should honestly invite their employees to suggest ways to improve their production operation and the quality of their work life, only if these ideas are received in a spirit of appreciation. The employees should be participated in studying the feasibility and recommend appropriate means of implementing each suggestion that survives such review. The quality of life-at-work probably can be enhanced. A management practices that manifests concern about job enrichment, employee job security, career advancement and the opportunities for employees to express their opinion in matters which affect them is entirely consistent with meticulously controlled operations

in the interest of employee's efficiency, effectiveness, quality assurance, customer service, profitability and high employee morale.

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