

## “Quality of Work Life – The Need of the Hour”

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**ABSTRACT:** *The success of any organization is highly dependent on how it attracts, recruits, motivates, and retains its workforce. Today's organizations need to be more flexible so that they are equipped to develop their workforce and enjoy their commitment. Therefore, organizations are required to adopt a strategy to improve the employees 'Quality of Work Life' (QWL) to satisfy both the organizational objectives and employee needs. The term (QWL) refers to the favorableness or unfavorableness of a total job environment for people. QWL programs are another way in which organizations recognize their responsibility to develop jobs and working conditions that are excellent for people as well as for economic health of the organization. The elements in a typical QWL program include - open communications, equitable reward systems, a concern for employee job security and satisfying careers and participation in decision making. It is assumed that if employees have more positive attitudes about the organization and their productivity increases, everything else being equal, the organization should be more effective. This paper aims at describing about the QWL concept and also highlights on its need in today's organizations.*

**KEY WORDS:** *QWL; QWL in India; Quality Work Life; Quality of Work Life; QWL Evolution*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The quest for improved productivity through human resources has its beginning in the early 1900s. *F.W Taylor's* scientific management principles created a new awareness regarding human resources, who were earlier considered as mere instruments of production, ready to work from dawn to dusk under whatever conditions and being motivated by the lure of money. From then, till today continuous research and experiments have been undertaken to understand human beings at work and then ways to improve their satisfaction, balanced with the aim of the organization to combine better productivity with the job. In order to achieve this twin objective, different approaches have been developed and applied. The concept of QWL has originated from this continuous research process. Modern society is organizational society. Individuals spend much of their lives in organizations. Hence, the importance of QWL is unquestionable. It has an ideological core comprising the perceptual gap across individuals about the real connotation of QL as well as QWL. The QWL movement aims at integrating the socio-psychological needs of employees, the unique requirements of a particular technology, the structure Psychological needs of employees, the unique requirements of a particular technology, the structure and processes of the organization. It is a set of methods, approaches and technologies for enhancing the work environment. According to *American Society of Training & Development*, “it is a process of work organizations which enables its members at all levels to participate actively & efficiently in shaping the organization environment methods and outcomes”. It is a value based process aimed towards meeting twin objectives.

#### Evolution of QWL:

Hian and *Einstein* (1990) have traced origin of the term "Quality of Work Life" (QWL) as first being introduced in 1972, during an international labor relations conference in Rome, though it had been in existence since 1960s. QWL received more attention after United Auto Workers and General Motors Company in the United States of America initiated a QWL program for work reforms to make work pleasant. *Robbins* (1989) defined QWL as a process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work. The author adds that Quality of work life is specifically related to the level of happiness a person derives for his career. Walton attributes the evolution of QWL to various phases in history. Legislation enacted in early 20th century to protect employees from job injury and to eliminate working conditions, followed by the unionization movement in the 1930's and 1940's were the initial steps. The emphasis was given on the following factors:

- 1) Working condition
- 2) Job security
- 3) Work place & economic gains
- 4) Positive relationship between morale & productivity
- 5) Equal employment opportunity
- 6) Human needs & expectations
- 7) Relationship between motivation & leadership

QWL has been well recognized as a multi-dimensional construct and it may not be universal or eternal. Each person has different needs when it comes to their careers; the quality level of their work life is determined by whether those needs are being met. While some people might be content with a simple minimum wage job as long as it helps pay the bills, others would find such a job to be too tedious or involve too much physical labor and would find such a position to be highly unsatisfactory.

## II. DEFINITION

From the business dictionary, QWL means “The extent to which employees can enhance their personal lives through their work environment and experiences”. Quality of Working Life can be generally defined as “The quality of relationship between employees and the total working environment.” According to *Jerome M. Rosow* “When organizations have addressed the issue of quality of working life, they have always achieved great productivity breakthroughs”. In a deeper sense, quality of work life (QWL) refers to the quality of life (QL) of individuals in their working organizations – commercial, educational, cultural, religious, philanthropic or whatever they are. There has been much concern today about decent wages, convenient working hours, conducive working conditions etc. Their term “Quality of work life” has appeared in research journals and the press in USA only in 1970s. There is no generally acceptable definition about this term. However, some attempts were made to describe the term quality of work life (QWL). It refers to the favourableness or unfavourableness of a job environment 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.” The definition by *Serey* (2006) on QWL is quite conclusive and best meet the contemporary work environment. The definition is related to meaningful and satisfying work which emphasizes 4 C's i.e. Concern, consciousness capacity and commitment. In brief, QWL includes,

- 1) An opportunity to exercise one's talents and capacities, to face challenges and situations that require independent initiative and self-direction;
- 2) An activity thought to be worthwhile by the individuals involved;
- 3) An activity in which one understands the role the individual plays in the achievement of some overall goals; and
- 4) A sense of taking pride in what one is doing and in doing it well.

### What Does QWL Really Deals About?

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

- 1) **Adequate and Fair Compensation:** There are different opinions about adequate compensation. The committee on Fair Wages defined fair wage as “... the wage which is above the minimum wage, but below the living wage.”
- 2) **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 or enlightened self-interest.

- 3) **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 and 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.
- 4) **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.
- 5) **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, egalitarianism and upward mobility.
- 6) **Constitutionalism in the Work Organization:** 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.
- 7) **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.
- 8) **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.

#### **Specific Issues in QWL:**

Besides normal wages, salaries, fringe benefits etc., the specific issues are being identified by the human resource managers on regular basis. Following issues are highly relevant and determine the Quality of Work Life in any organization;

- 1) **Pay and stability of employment:** Good pay dominates most of the factors in employee satisfaction. Alternative means of providing wages should be developed to increase the cost of living index, profession tax etc.,
- 2) **Occupational stress:** It’s a condition of strain on employee emotions. Stress is caused due to irritability, hyper excitation or depression, unstable behavior, fatigue, stirring heavy smoking and drug abuse has to be identified.
- 3) **Organizational health Programmes:** Its helps to aim at educating about health Programmes, means of maintaining and improving of health.
- 4) **Alternative work schedules:**Includes flexi times, work at home, staggered hours, reduce work hours, part time employment.
- 5) **Participative management and control of work:** The trade unions and workers believe that workers participation in management and decision - making improves QWL.
- 6) **Recognition:** Rewarding system, congratulating the employees for their achievement, job enrichment, offering membership in clubs or association, vehicles, etc recognizes the employees.
- 7) **Congenial worker-supervisor relations:** This gives the worker a sense of social association, belongingness, achievement of work results etc.
- 8) **Grievance procedure:** Employees will have a fair treatment when the company gives them the opportunity to ventilate their grievances and present their case sincerely rather than settling the problem arbitrarily.
- 9) **Adequacy of resources:**Resources should match with states objectives; otherwise employees will not be able to attain the objectives.
- 10) **Seniority and meriting promotions:** Seniority is considered as basis for promotion. Merit is considered as the basis for advancement for managerial people.
- 11) **Employment on permanent basis:** It gives security and leads to higher order QWL.

#### **How to Enhance the Quality Of Life in a Workplace Environment?**

Higher quality of life in the workplace leads to higher employee retention and worker satisfaction. According to a study from Northwestern University, employee satisfaction is directly linked to customer satisfaction, which is directly linked to a company’s financial performance. From the benefits that a company offers to the snacks available at break time, numerous opportunities are available to improve the workplace environment.

- **Hire Quality Attitudes**

Human attitude plays a big role in workplace quality of life. Hiring people with the right attitude toward solutions, teamwork and healthy work environments can help create a culture of empowerment and healthier interaction. Companies such as Southwest Airlines and ING Direct have had success, going so far as to elevate attitude and personality above skills and industry experience when considering new hires. The idea is that job skills can be taught but high-quality mindsets and work habits benefit the culture of the company overall.

- **Enhance Organizational Support**

Offering benefits that can help ease employee worries enhances quality of work life. Day care, flexible hours, work-from-home options and monetary bonuses help solve problems for many employees -- improving their ability to concentrate and produce at work. Leaders' approaches to workplace safety are also critical to the quality of office life. Effective enforcement of policies on harassment of any kind builds employee trust. Putting an employee assistance program in place for workers struggling with personal problems such as alcoholism or depression is a valuable investment in employee well-being.

- **Improve Office Comfort**

Improvements in lighting, temperature, music choice, cubicle and desk arrangements, and bathroom and kitchen cleanliness can make working in the office more comfortable. Live trees and plants improve aesthetics. Discomfort can be a distraction that takes away from productivity and overall job satisfaction over time. Creating a workplace atmosphere that is secure, clean and comfortable demonstrates basic respect for the people and the company.

- **Encourage Personal Health**

Supporting nutrition, fitness and stress relief in your employees contributes to a higher-quality workplace environment. Inc. magazine suggests keeping people moving around by getting them to walk to different floors for meetings or hiring health coaches to teach about healthier living. Removing junk food from vending machines and serving healthier fresh foods may be something your company can do to support better nutrition. Allow employees to take breaks before meetings to organize their thoughts. As a company leader, arrange for the occasional wellness day for your employees. Bring in a massage therapist, chiropractor or yoga instructor and let employees sign up for the experience. Set up group walks outdoors, gym breaks or spa days for interested employees. Activity and healthy diets improve creativity and productivity.

### **Some Obstacles to QWL Programme**

It is not easy to implement QWL programme. Many hurdles do crop up from time to time.

- 1) **MANAGERIAL ATTITUDES:** QWL demands democratization at in work place. Managers must be willing to share decision making with employees but they may be reluctant to give a part of decision making power.
- 2) **UNION'S ATTITUDE:** Union may have a genuine feeling that QWL programme speed up work performance & achieve productivity without offering adequate returns to workers.
- 3) **COST CONSIDERATION:** The capital cost & day-to-day operational expenses of QWL programmes seem to be quite phenomenal beyond the reach of organization.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

In the life of a working individual, the quality of work life holds prime importance. Over a period of time, numerous opportunities have been created in the corporate world, each offering a more conducive work environment to the employee than the last. This has given rise to employee expectations, which coupled with the acceptance of the importance of employee retention, has forced employers to think even about the minutest of parameters which influence the quality of work life. It is concluded that, to be successful, QWL programmes must be planned thoroughly. The aspirations and attitudes of workers must be examined closely before launching any programme. The work must be studied carefully and a congenial work atmosphere must be provided where the work itself provokes interest and workers genuinely desire to progress on their own.

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