

Quality of Work Life (QWL)

Introduction to Quality of Work Life (QWL):

Dissatisfaction with working life affects the workers some time or another, regardless of position or status. The frustration, boredom and anger common to employees can be costly to both individuals and organisations.

Managers seek to reduce job dissatisfaction at all organizational levels, including their own. This is a complex problem, however, because it is difficult to isolate and identify the attributes which affect the quality of working life.

Profitability of a company is linked to satisfaction of its work force. A company that does not measure and improve employee satisfaction may face increasing turnover, declining productivity and limited ability to attract and retain qualified replacements.

Quality of work life involves three major parts:

1. Occupational health care:

Safe work environment provides the basis for people to enjoy his work. The work should not pose health hazards for the employees.

2. Suitable working time:

Companies should observe the number of working hours and the standard limits on overtime, time of vacation and taking free days before national holidays.

3. Appropriate salary:

The employee and the employer agree upon appropriate salary. The Government establishes the rate of minimum salary; the employer should not pay less than that to the employee. Work represents a role which a person has designated to himself. On the one hand, work earns one's living for the family, on the other hand, it is a self-realization that provides enjoyment and satisfaction.

Principles of QWL

In order to humanise work and to improve the QWL, four basic principles! may be helpful:

1.The Principle of Security

Quality of work life cannot be improved until employees are relieved of the anxiety, fear and loss of future employment. The working conditions must be safe and fear of economic want should be eliminated. Job security and safety against occupational hazards is an essential precondition of humanisation of work.

2.The Principle of Equity

There should be a direct and positive relation between effort and reward. All types of discrimination between people doing similar work and with same level of performance must be eliminated. Equity also requires sharing the profits of the organisation.

3.The Principle of Individualism

Employees differ in terms of their attitudes, skill, potential, etc. Therefore, every individual should be provided the opportunity for development of his personality and potential. Humanisation of work requires that employees are allowed to decide their own pace of activity and design of work operations.

4.The Principle of Democracy

This means greater authority and responsibility to employees. Meaningful participation in the decision-making process improves the quality of work life.

Factors influencing quality of work life

1.Fair compensation and job security

The economic interest of the people derive them to work at a job and employee satisfaction depends atleast partially on the compensation offered. Pay should be fixed on the basis of work done , responsibility undertaken ,individual skills ,performance and accomplishments. Job security is another factor which is in concern to the employees. Permanent employment provides security to the employees and improves their QWL.

2.Safe and healthy working conditions

Organizations should realize that their true wealth lies in their employees and so providing a healthy work environment for employees should be their primary objective. 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 enlightens self interest.

3.Opportunity to Use and develop Human Capabilities

Contrary to the traditional assumptions ,quality of work life is improved 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.

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 and prepare them to accept responsibilities at higher levels.

5. Participative management style and recognition

Flat organizational structures help organizations facilitate employee participation. A participative management style improves the quality of work life. Workers feel that they have control over their work process and they also offer innovative ideas to improve them.

Recognition also helps to motivate employees to perform better. Recognition can be in the form of rewarding employees for jobs well done.

6. Constitutionalism in the work Organization

QWL provides constitutional protection to the employees only 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 the level. Constitutional protection is provided to employees on such matters as privacy, free speech, equity and due process.

A Paradigm Showing the Constructs of QWL



Nature and Scope of Quality of Work Life:

Quality of work life is the quality of relationship between employees and total working environment.

A Great Place to work is where “You Trust the people you work for, have pride in what you do, and enjoy the people you work with.”

Quality of work life represents concern for human dimensions of work and relates to job satisfaction and organisational development.

The following aspects improve the QWL:

1. Recognition of work life issues:

Issues related to work life should be addressed by the Board and other important officials of the company like why people are not happy, do they need training, why employee morale is poor and numerous other issues. If these are addressed properly, they will be able to build, “People-Centred Organisations”.

2. Commitment to improvement:

QWL can be improved if the staff is committed to improvement in productivity and performance. This issue can be taken by the board through staff recognition and support programmes. Board should prepare QWL reports on periodic basis to boost the system. They can also introduce reward system which will be of help to them.

3. Quality of work life teams:

Board members should form the combined team of managers and workers and all the issues and common themes must be identified.

Work Life Teams = Managers + Staff

All issues must be addressed like loss of morale, lack of trust, increased intensity of work, reward, recognition etc. and commonly, managers and staff should arrive at solutions.

4. Training to facilitators:

Both the leader and staff can assess the job requirement and decide jointly what type of training is required to improve the quality of work life

5. Conduct focus groups:

Formation of focus groups can affect the QWL and discuss the questions in a positive way like:

- (a) What brought you here today?
- (b) What do you feel are the top three issues that affect your quality of work life?
- (c) What do you want the organisation should do for you?
- (d) Do you want company to increase the salary, etc.

6. Analyze information from focus group:

After the formation of focus groups and their discussion on different issues and collection of information, the information should be analysed to give right direction to organisational activities.

7. Identify and implement improvement opportunities:

It is important to identify and implement improvement opportunities like communication, recognition and non-monetary compensation. Improving support structure, constant review of reward and recognition system etc. would help in formulating communication strategies, focusing on linkages between managers and staff.

8. Flexible work hours:

The diverse work force of today does not want to work for fixed hours or days. They want flexibility in their work schedule so that professional and personal life can be managed together.

Flexibility can improve the QWL in the following ways:

- i. Work for longer hours in a day with less number of working days in a week.
- ii. Going to office for fixed hours but in different time slots rather than fixed working hours. Many companies even provide the flexibility of work from home.

9. Autonomy to work:

Delegation is an essential element of organisation structure. People want freedom to work in their own way, in terms of forming teams and making decisions. If they are allowed to do so, it enhances the QWL. An organisation with high quality of work life is “an organisation that promotes and maintains a work environment that results in excellence in everything it does – by ensuring open communication, respect, recognition, trust, support, well being and satisfaction of its members, both, personally and professionally”.

Importance of Quality of Work Life:

Many companies find that paying attention to the needs of employees can benefit the company in terms of productivity, employee loyalty and company reputation.

QWL is important because of the following reasons:

1. Enhance stakeholder relations and credibility:

A growing number of companies that focus on QWL improve their relationships with the stakeholders. They can communicate their views, policies, and performance on complex social issues; and develop interest among their key stakeholders like consumers, suppliers, employees etc.

2. Increase productivity:

Programmes which help employees balance their work and lives outside the work can improve productivity. A company's recognition and support — through its stated values and policies — of employees' commitments, interests and pressures, can relieve employees' external stress.

This allows them to focus on their jobs during the workday and helps to minimize absenteeism. The result can be both enhanced productivity and strengthened employee commitment and loyalty.

3. Attraction and retention:

Work-life strategies have become a means of attracting new skilled employees and keeping existing ones satisfied. Many job seekers prefer flexible working hours as the benefit they would look for in their job. They would rather have the opportunity to work flexible hours than receive an additional increment in annual pay.

a. More employees may stay on a job, return after a break or take a job with one company over another if they can match their needs better with those of their paid work.

b. This results in savings for the employer as it avoids the cost of losing an experienced worker and recruiting someone new.

c. Employers who support their staff in this way often gain loyalty from the staff.

4. Reduces absenteeism:

a. Companies that have family-friendly or flexible work practices have low absenteeism. Sickness rates fall as pressures are managed better. Employees have better methods of dealing with work-life conflicts than taking unplanned leave.

b. Workers (including the managers) who are healthy and not over-stressed are more efficient at work.

5. Improve the quality of working lives

- a. Minimising work-life role conflict helps prevent role overload and people have a more satisfying working life, fulfilling their potential both in paid work and outside it.
- b. Work life balance can minimise stress and fatigue at work, enabling people to have safer and healthier working lives. Workplace stress and fatigue can contribute to injuries at work and home.
- c. Self-employed people control their own work time to some extent. Most existing information on work-life balance is targeted at those in employment relationships. However, the self-employed too may benefit from maintaining healthy work habits and developing strategies to manage work flows which enable them to balance one with other roles in their lives.

6. Matches people who would not otherwise work with jobs:

- a. Parents, people with disabilities and those nearing retirement may increase their work force participation if more flexible work arrangements are made. Employment has positive individual and social benefits beyond the financial rewards.
- b. Employers may also benefit from a wider pool of talent to draw from, particularly to their benefit when skill shortages exist.

7. Benefiting families and communities:

- a. In a situation of conflict between work and family, one or other suffers. Overseas studies have found that family life can interfere with paid work. QWL maintains balance between work and family. At the extreme, if family life suffers, this may have wider social costs.
- b. Involvement in community, cultural, sporting or other activities can be a benefit to community and society at large. For instance, voluntary participation in school boards of trustees can contribute to the quality of children's education.

While such activities are not the responsibility of individual employers, they may choose to support them as community activities can demonstrate good corporate citizenship. This can also develop workers' skills which can be applied to the work place.

8. Job involvement:

Companies with QWL have employees with high degree of job involvement. People put their best to the job and report good performance. They achieve a sense of competence and match their skills with requirements of the job. They view their jobs as satisfying the needs of achievement and recognition. This reduces absenteeism and turnover, thus, saving organisational costs of recruiting and training replacements.

9. Job satisfaction:

Job involvement leads to job commitment and job satisfaction. People whose interests are protected by their employers experience high degree of job satisfaction. This improves job output.

10. Company reputation:

Many organizations, including Governments, NGOs, investors and the media, consider the quality of employee experience in the work place when evaluating a company. Socially responsible investors, including some institutional investors, pay specific attention to QWL when making investment decisions.

Significance of Good Work-life Quality:

1. Decrease absenteeism and increase turnover,
2. Less number of accidents,
3. Improved labour relations,
4. Employee personification,
5. Positive employee attitudes toward their work and the company,
6. Increased productivity and intrinsic motivation,
7. Enhanced organizational effectiveness and competitive advantage, and
8. Employees gain a high sense of control over their work.

Problems in Improving the QWL:

Though every organisation attempts to improve the employer-employee relations and through it, the quality of work life of employees, problems may occur in effective implementation of QWL programmes.

These problems may occur because of:

1. Poor reward and recognition:

People will not do their best when they feel that employers' commitment in terms of reward and recognition is lacking. Commitment is a mutual phenomenon. When employers want to get the best from employees but do not give them reward and recognition, people will not be committed to work.

2. Dead-end jobs:

Work which does not offer opportunities for growth and promotion is one of the greatest reasons for employees' de-motivation and non-commitment. Jobs which deprive employees of self-development and growth opportunities lead to high dissatisfaction and disloyalty.

3. Managing by intimidation:

Mistreating people and managing them by threats and embarrassment leads to employees' dissatisfaction and weakens their commitment. In a best seller book "The Loyalty Link" Dennis G. Mc Carthy has identified managing by intimidation as one of the seven ways which undermine employees' loyalty.

4. Negative working environment:

Non-acceptance by colleagues, non-cooperation, too much politics, and negative behaviour by colleagues, supervisors and other people in the company also hamper commitment. At the end of the day people want peace of mind, which if not available in the work environment will discourage them to show total support to the company.

5. No job security:

One of the major needs of employees is job security. If the employee feels that he can lose his job anytime, he would not be committed towards company's goals.

6. Negative attitude:

Some people by nature are not committed to anything and anyone and as such they would not be committed to their employers also. Commitment is an attitude and those who lack it will not be committed to their jobs.

Reference

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