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## *Quality of Work Life and Emerging Issues of Workplace Trends*

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**Abstract:** *Organization in the past gave more importance on innovative technology for higher productivity surpassing the needs and mental state of its employees. This created a negative impact on the working environment among the employees. Thus it was realized that societal support goes hand in hand with technical innovations. This integration can only be made through quality of work life (QWL) programmes. Quality of work life refers to all the organizational inputs which aim at the employee's satisfaction and enhancing organizational effectiveness. This paper aims at describing about QWL concept, objectives, programmes and also highlights how emerging workplace trends affect the quality of work life of employees.*

**Keywords:** *Innovative technology (QWL) quality of work life programmes, organizational effectiveness, workplace trends.*

**Objective of the Study:**

- 1) *To understand the concept and objective of quality of work life.*
- 2) *To brief on ideal quality of work life programme.*
- 3) *To discuss workplace trends and how emerging trends affect the quality of work life of employees.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Organization in the past, gave more “importance on innovative technology for higher productivity surpassing the needs and mental state of its employees. His created a negative impact on the working environment among the employee. Thus it was realized that societal support goes hand in hand with technical innovation. This integration can only be made through quality of work life programmes. Quality of work life refers to all the organizational inputs which aim at the employees satisfaction and enhancing organizational effectiveness.

In today's competitive business environment, employees of organizations can be viewed as representing a unique organizational resource, which can be used for gaining competitive advantage under a work environment that is conducive for human work. An organizational environment conducive for human work requires the creation of work conditions that can enhance the quality of an employee's work life in the organization towards increased performance and productivity. In other words, the organizational environment must have the capacity to satisfy meaningfully an employee's organizational and personal needs, and also the ability to shape' organizational values that better support and promote employees' health and well-being, job security, job satisfaction, competency development and balance between work and non-work life.

### Quality of Work Life Constructs

There are many “quality of work life” constructs in literature. Hackman and Oldhams (1980) consider “quality of work life” as a work environment that is able to fulfill employees' personal needs by providing a positive interaction effect between their physical and mental well-beings. Therefore, “quality of work life” can be considered as a complex organizational issue,

since it concerns the challenge of creating positive interaction between the physical and mental well beings of employees towards increased productivity (Lawler, 1982). In this regard, “quality of work life” represents the level of freedom that employees have in ensuring that their job functions match their personal needs and interests. The “quality of work life” is a program designed to increase employees’ satisfaction with their work environment along with their productivity (Carrell & Heavrin, 2009). “Quality of work life” is a reflection of the way of thinking about people, work and organization involving a concern for employees’ wellbeing and organizational effectiveness.

### **Quality of Work Life in Organizational Work Designs**

“Quality of work life”, as a philosophy, holds that employees are the most important resources an organization can have and so seeks to have an important concern for the creation of an environment devoid of stress and management of stress. The concept emphasizes the importance of employees having a positive attitude to work. When employees become less satisfied, they are less committed to the goals of the organization and this definitely can have an impact on organisational performance. The management of stress is both an organisational and individual responsibility. Employees must resort to relaxation, exercising, managing their time and role, developing and maintaining support groups. Most organisations have also seen the importance of getting involved in the process of managing stress. The “quality of work life” concept is multidimensional and can include many programmes.

## **II. CONCEPT AND OBJECTIONS OF QWL**

The term ‘quality of work life (QWL) has different meanings of different people. Some consider it industrial democracy or codetermination with increased employee participation in the decision making process. For others, particularly managers and administrators, the term denotes improvement in the psychological aspects of work to improve productivity. Unions and workers interpret it as more equitable sharing of profits, job security and healthy and humane working conditions. Others view it as improving social relationships at workplace through autonomous workgroups. Finally, others take a broader view of changing the entire organizational climate by humanizing work, individualising organizations and changing the structural and managerial systems.

In general terms, QWL, refers to the favorableness or unfavorable-ness of a job environment for people. It refers to the quality of relationship between employees and the total working environment. According to Harrison, QWL is the degree to which work in an organization contributes to material and psychological well-being of its members. One expert defines quality of working life as “a process of joint decision making, collaboration and building mutual respect between management and employees”. It is concerned with increasing labour management cooperatives to solve the problems of improving organizational performance and employee satisfaction. According to the American Society of Training and Development, it is “a process of work organization which enables its members at all levels to actively participate in shaping the organization’s environment, methods and outcomes. This value based process is aimed towards meeting the twin goals of enhanced effectiveness of organization and improved quality of life at work for employees.

Broadly the definition of quality of work life involves four major parts: safe work environment, occupational health care, suitable working time and appropriate salary. The safe work environment provides the basis for the person to enjoy working. The work should not pose a health hazard for the person. The employer and employee, aware of their risks and rights, could achieve a lot in their mutually beneficial dialogue. The working time has been established by the state according to legislation. The standard limits on overtime, rest days, and public holidays etc. have also been stipulated. The appropriate salary is agreed upon by the employee and the employer and fixed by the Pay Commission. The Government also establishes the rate of minimum wage, the employer should not pay less than that to the employee.

The concept of QWL is based on the assumption that a job is more than just a job. It is the center of a person’s life. In recent years there has been increasing concern for QWL due to several factors:

- Increase in education level and consequently job aspirations of employees;
- Association of workers;
- Significance of human resource management;
- Widespread industrial unrest;
- Growing of knowledge in human behaviour, etc.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF QWL

- The main objectives of the QWL programs are to :
- Improve employee satisfaction;
- Improve physical and psychological health of employees which creates positive feelings;
- Enhance productivity of employees;
- Reinforce workplace learning;
- Improved management of the on-going change and transition; and
- Build the image of the company as best in recruitment, retention, and in general motivation of employees.

### IV. IDEAL QWL PROGRAMME

Eight Practices of QWL Quality of working life though came into circulation in 1970s became popular only in 90s and organizations realised its potential to enhance the productivity in the new century. This works as a comprehensive model to those employers who want to ensure quality in working life of their employees. An ideal quality of work life programme will include practices in eight major areas as discussed below:

Adequate and fair compensation. This is fundamental to QWL. Human beings work for livelihood. Therefore success of rest of the initiatives depends upon fulfillment of this. However, important here is that compensation offered must be adequate implying it must be proportionate to labour, and there should be internal consistency among salaries of employees.

Safe and healthy working conditions. Unsafe and hazardous working conditions cause problems to both employers and employees. There may be little advantage to the employer in short-term but in medium and long-terms, it adversely affects the productivity. Therefore, adequate investment must be made to ensure safe and healthy working conditions.

Immediate opportunity of use and develop human capacities. The jobs have become routine, meaningless and too specialized, depriving the employees of fulfillment satisfaction. Therefore, efforts should be made to increase the autonomy, perspective and exposure to multiple skills.

Future opportunity for continued growth and security. This is related to career aspects of employees. Meaningful career paths must be laid down and career mapping of employees is to be followed. The provision of advancement opportunities play a central role in QWL.

Social integration in the work organization. Relationships between and among the employees is an indicator of healthy work organization. Therefore, opportunities must be provided for formal and informal interactions. All kind of classes religions, races, crafts, and designations must be treated equally on a social platform. In other words, it creates egalitarian environment.

Constitutionalism in the work organization. This is related to organizational norms that affect the freedom of an individual employee. Efforts must be made to see right norms are formed in the organization. It means norms that accommodate the privacy of an individual employee, freedom of speech, equity and freedom to dissent on some aspects.

Work and the total life space. Employees should not be allowed to continuously exert themselves. The continuous hard work causes psychological and physical strains. Therefore, there has to be a balance between personal and professional life. Organization must create proper work offs to enrich the life of employees.

The social relevance of work life. Employees must be given the perspective of how his/her work in the organization helps the society. This is essential to build relevance of the employee's existence to the society he/she lives in.

### **Workplace Trends**

All economic indicators show a positive view of the U.S. economy in 2018. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the unemployment rate will continue to decline from 4.3% in 2017 to 4.2% in 2018, with an overall projection of 20.5 million jobs being created by 2020. While the majority of occupations are projected to grow, those that will experience the fastest growth next year are healthcare, personal care, social assistance and construction. The workforce participation of older workers will increase, yet the overall labor force growth rate will decline by next year. U.S. salaries are predicted to increase from 3.1% in 2017 to 3.2% in 2018. Gross domestic product is expected to increase from 2.3% in 2017 to 2.5% in 2018. The top workplace trends for 2018 include:

### **Work Place Trends and Quality of Work Life Of Employees**

#### **1. Leaders encourage more human interaction.**

Companies will continue to promote their workspaces and design them to facilitate interpersonal relationships between employees. IBM stopped their remote-working program, pushing thousands of employees from core groups that support their brands back to the office. Apple's innovative new facility is designed to promote worker relationships, idea sharing and collaboration. Google Cafés are designed to encourage interactions between employees across departments and teams. All three companies have found that when employees bump into each other in physical environments, it sparks creativity and relationship building that leads to positive outcomes. One study found that moments of conversation between co-workers increases performance by 20% and another study uncovered that 72% of employees who have a best friend at work are more satisfied with their job. In our research, in partnership with Randstad, we found that Gen Z's and millennials choose in-person conversations over using technology and prefer corporate offices over telecommuting. While technology can make us more efficient, and feel highly connected to one another, it will never replace face-to-face conversations. Leaders who encourage personal connections will have more committed, satisfied and productive workers. Researchers Mahdi Roghanizad and Vanessa K. Bohns found that one face-to-face conversation is the equivalent to thirty-four emails. You will see more companies pull back their telecommuting programs and leaders who put more emphasis on phone calls, video conferencing and in-person meetings.

#### **2. The next wave of learning credentials.**

One of the most disrupted industries is education, with more third parties offering courses, credentials and certifications than ever before. There is now an abundance of online courses provided by LinkedIn Learning, Coursera, edX, Udemy, Udacity, The Khan Academy and others.

Few Research reports that self-directed learning is driving the need for new credentialing systems. More employees will be accepting different types of credentials as they seek to build diverse talent pools and expand their reach. Almost three out of every four adults agrees that individuals have the responsibility to make sure that the workforce has the right skills and education to be successful in today's economy compared to only 52% of colleges and 49% of employers. Younger generations are starting to resist the traditional degree due to the ever increasing cost of tuition, which grew by nine percent from last year for four-year public schools. Some are avoiding college altogether and are

pursuing these free or low cost online courses that provide enough education on important skills to get by. As companies continue to accept non-traditional credentials, students will be able to avoid debt and study at their own convenience, without fear of unemployment.

### 3. **Companies focus on upskilling and retraining current workers.**

While the political discussion is focused on bringing manufacturing jobs back to America, and the news media continues to publish articles on how automation will eliminate jobs, we should really be focused on the growing skills gap. There are currently 6.2 million job openings in America that are unfilled, which is up from 5.6 million during the same time in 2016. Companies can't find the right workers, that have the right skills, at the right time, which has slowed growth in the economy. The National Federation of Independent Business reports that 45% of small businesses were unable to find qualified candidates to fill job openings and 60% of all employers have job openings that stay vacant for twelve weeks or longer, which costs them \$800,000 annually in lost productivity and advertising fees. In our current economy, change is happening faster than ever before and the half life of a learned skill is a mere five years. As more industries become disrupted, companies are evolving their business models to align with new customer demands. AT&T, for example, notified 100,000 of their employees that their job roles wouldn't be relevant in ten year and then subsequently created the Workforce 2020 initiative, with over \$1 billion invested, to help upskill their employee base. We not only lack the right set of skills, but the ones we currently have are becoming less relevant over time. Almost half of all tasks people are paid to do everyday are at risk of being automated and multiple studies show that total headcount will be decreased by between 12% and 50%. Employers will be investing more money into their training and development programs in 2019 in order to fill their skills gaps and reach their full capacity. IBM found that 84% of employees at the best performing organizations are receiving the training they need compared to only 16% at the worst performing ones. When teams are appropriately trained, companies save an average of \$70,000 annually and receive a 10% increase in productivity. As Generation Z enters the workplace, they face an even greater skills gap, where 65% of the jobs they will need to fill don't even exist yet.

4. **Artificial intelligence becomes embedded in the workplace.** The topic with the biggest buzz in HR circles is AI because there is both excitement and fear around the topic as it relates to how we do our jobs. Almost every new device and service will contain AI in the next few years. Google, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, Apple and others are focused on creating smarter products using AI and there are now over one thousand AI vendors supporting all types of companies and people. As part of the World Economic Forum "Global Shapers Study", they asked millennials what the next big technology trend is globally and almost a third said AI. Chatbots, which are fueled by AI, will continue to permeate the workplace in 2018. Chatbots, which are programs that facilitate text conversations, are expected to save companies over \$79 million dollars in salary expenditures annually, and the efficiencies received by using them are in excess of 30%. Nearly 20% of companies have already deployed chatbots in the workplace, with an anticipated 57% by 2021. Companies are using chatbots as personal assistants, for on-demand customer support, to mine data, streamline business processes, recover product information and to answer employee questions. For example, at Overstock, they have a chatbot for HR called Mila, that lets managers know when employees are sick and at Intel, they use an HR virtual assistant that answers questions about pay and benefits. As more employees see the efficiency benefits of chatbots, and AI, they will be adopted at a more rapid pace.

### 5. **Financial and mental wellness get prioritized.**

With 78% of Americans living paycheck to paycheck and student loan debt at over \$1.4 trillion, workers are struggling and it's affecting their health. Workers are stressed out, burned out and it's affecting not only their productivity but their satisfaction on the job. Northwestern Mutual reports that more than a quarter of millennials say financial stress affects their job performance and made them feel physically ill and depressed. Nearly half of employees have financial

concerns, causing them to lose an average of six productive work days annually. As a result, there are numerous companies that are helping employees payback student loans to ease their financial burdens, including Fidelity, PwC, Aetna, Penguin Randomhouse and Chegg. Mental health, which has long been a stigma in the workplace, is now becoming something that is more common and accepted by leaders. Now HR is taking on the role of mental health counselors, helping support employees who have all sorts of mental health issues like depression, anxiety, bipolar and ADHD. While many of these disorders are hidden, 84% of employees have experienced physical, psychological or behavioral symptoms of poor mental health. Symptoms like depression can result in about five missed work days and 11.5 days of reduced productivity every three months, costing the U.S. 200 million lost workdays annually, resulting in \$17 to \$44 billion in lost productivity overall. After the story about Madalyn Parker, a web developer whose manager was accepting of her taking a mental health day, went viral, many companies are starting to have real serious conversations around the topic. PwC, for example, provides 24/7 access to counseling, a mental health toolkit and a group of six mental health advocates to support the de-stigmatization of mental health in the workplace.

#### **6. Employee burnout causes more turnover.**

Employees are burned out from working longer hours with no additional compensation, while companies are posting record profits. Full-time employees work an average of 47 hours per week and the tenure has decreased from 4.6 in 2016 to 4.2 in 2017. According to Right Management, over a third of workers get after-hours email from management and almost 10% get emails on vacations. Technology has expanded the workday and forced employees to spend more time during work for the same salary and without a bonus. In a study, in partnership with Kronos, we found that almost half of HR leaders say employee burnout is responsibility for up to half of their annual workforce turnover. They believe burnout is caused by unfair compensation, an unreasonable workload and too much after-hours work. Even outside of America, work creep has become a major employment issue, so much so that the French government introduced legislation that gives workers "the right to disconnect". In order to prevent employee burnout, companies are focused on creating wellness and flexibility programs that allow them to take time off and stay healthy.

#### **7. The aging workforce.**

The workforce is continuing to age, with baby boomers living longer than previous generations and retiring later. About three in every four Americans plan to work past retirement age and almost two-thirds said they will continue to work part-time. Pew Research estimates that the number of people 65 and older is projected to triple by mid-century from 531 million in 2010 to 1.5 billion by 2050. The population of seniors in the U.S. is expected to more than double from 41 to 86 million during this time and almost triple in China from 8.3% in 2010 to 24% by 2050. About ten thousand baby boomers turn 65 each day, yet fewer than half said they expect to retire by 65. Just over a third of companies are preparing for this projected increase in older workers and it will come at a major cost to companies in the form of retirement benefits, healthcare and equal opportunity. As baby boomers maintain their leadership positions, it will be harder for younger workers to rise up in their organizations and could lead to higher turnover, stress and frustration.

### **V. CONCLUSION**

In the new economy emphasis is placed upon the latest technology, most ground-breaking management practices, and state of the art office building. However these are of no worth without the talent commitment and contribution of a quality workforce. Every organization must do its best to provide a working environment that is inclusive enriching and encouraging to all employees. This spirit must be visible in all work processes and benefits.

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