Socio-Psychological Determinants of Quality of Work Life among Academicians

Uma Pricilda Jaidev

Associate Professor, VIT Business School, VIT University, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract: *The present study aims to find the perceptions of academicians about Quality of work life (QWL) and identifies the socio-psychological determinants of QWL based on a literature survey. Consequently, six socio-psychological factors namely, Work Culture, Employee attitude to job, Occupational Self Efficacy, Employee participation in non work related activities, Employee perception about the institution have been identified as factors which could alter perceptions about quality of work life. A cross sectional sample of 182 respondents belonging to higher educational institutions returned the filled in questionnaire that measured facets of quality of work life and the 6 factors considered to be its determinant. Findings indicate that all the six factors have a positive relationship with QWL of the academicians.*

Keywords: Quality of work life, Socio-psychological factors, Academicians

1. Introduction

1.1. Quality of work life

Quality of work life has been defined in different ways. In its simplest form, the concept is seen to be concerned with employee job satisfaction, particularly in relation to how much access is available to tangible aspects of work such as income, and employment benefits (Juuti, 1991; Lau and Bruce 1998). Towards the more complex is to associate the concept with an employee's subjective well-being. This notion would consider issues such as how secure the employees feel in their job, and how safe they feel in terms of occupational health and safety. This approach accepts that the quality of work life involves both the tangible and intangible aspects of individuals' working-life experiences; and acknowledges that the quality of work life extends beyond organizational boundaries. (Sirgy *et al*., 2001, Considine and Callus, 2001).

However, the quality of work life is most widely accepted at its most complex definitional form, where it is considered a dynamic, multi-dimensional construct that incorporates any number of measures relating to employment quality (Levine, 1983; Carayon, 1997; Prujit, 2002). In other words, QWL is the extent to which the employees' lower and higher level needs are satisfied through meaningful experiences in the work environment where the work environment is instrumental in releasing the creative potential of every employee and retains him in the organization for years together.

To sum up, in the beginning, QWL was synonymous with employability rate, job security, earnings and benefits (Elizur and Shye, 1990). This listing of objective criteria soon gave way to job satisfaction as the target assessment criterion. The definitions of QWL, most frequently quoted during the 1980s, reveal a marked trend towards accepting the subjectivity of the construct. In his description of a QWL model as a dynamic process, Carlson (1980) defines QWL as an organizational goal, which the business is perpetually striving to achieve. Moreover, from the organizational point of view, this author considers QWL as a philosophy which, even though varies with organizations, brings them together under a common denominator: human dignity. There are also different models that are related to QWL which are discussed later.

According to Tripathi, (2003), the scope of QWL concept originally included only job redesign efforts based on the socio-technical systems approach. Today this concept encompasses a wide variety of interventions. Important among them are: Job enrichment, Stress management, Job satisfaction, Promotions and Career planning, Quality circles, Suggestion schemes, Employee participation, Empowerment, Autonomous work teams, Flexible organizational structure, and Socio-technical work system.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Work Culture

Given the importance of organizational culture and its impact on organizational outcomes such as physical and mental well being of employees, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and employee performance, it is currently one of the hottest business topics in both academic research and the popular business press. Hence, organizational culture is one of the crucial elements in determining the effectiveness, competitiveness and success of organizations in facing today's challenges. These have practical implications for managers and consultants in management development, and ultimately could enhance superior performance of the managers in the organization. Organizational culture is a set of attributes specific to an organization that may be induced from the way the organization deals with its members. It refers to current situations in an organization and the linkages among individuals, work groups, and work performance. Factors that include in culture are openness, confrontation, trust, authenticity, pro-action, autonomy, collaboration, experimentation (Pareek, 2004). Thus it deals with social context in an organization and aims at affecting the behavior of organization members.

Organizational culture can be defined as cumulative ways of thinking and behaving shaped by the values, attitudes, rituals, and sanctions in an organization (Pareek, 2004). Operationally, development of culture would involve: developing a strong corporate identity, development of important values, building healthy traditions, developing consistent management practices, development of conducive organizational climate, improving organizational communication, and evolving effective reward systems.

2.2 Employee attitude to job

Attitude is the specific mental state of the individual towards something, according to which his/her behavior towards it is molded. Young (1951) defines attitude as "a learned and more or less generalized and affective tendency or predisposition to respond in a rather persistent and characteristic manner, usually positively or negatively (for or against) in reference to some situation, idea, value, material object or class of such objects or person or group or persons".

Thus, in an attitude, the process of motivation, emotion, perception and thought are present. The major characteristics of attitudes are the following:
(1) Attitudes are related with images, thoughts and external objects.
(2) Attitudes guide the behavior of individuals in one particular direction.
(3) Various kinds of affective experiences are also attached to attitudes.
(4) The unconscious motive is an important factor in the creation of attitudes.
(5) Attitudes are related to the person's needs and problems

An individual forms positive attitudes towards those objects, human groups, institutions, profession and associations which are instrumental in the achievement of the values he holds. On the other hand, the individual forms a negative attitude in respect of any object, institutions, profession and associations which hinder the achievement of values. If the employees do not have the right attitude towards their jobs, team leaders and organization, their morale also will be low. This may affect their perception of the quality of work life in the organizations.

2.3 Occupational Self Efficacy

Self efficacy is an individual's conviction or confidence about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and course of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998b). Bandura (1997) perceived self-efficacy as people's belief about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance. It is believed that high levels of self-efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways; people with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be measured rather than as threats to be avoided. Such an efficacious outlook produces personal accomplishment, reduces stress and lowers vulnerability to depression (Bandura, 1998). Employees who have higher levels of self-efficacy may also have better

perception about the quality of their work life in their respective organizations. This is the assumption made in this study, the validity of which is to be tested for its acceptance. The positive relationship between self-efficacy and both individual and organizational performance also has been established (Bandura, 1997, Gist, 1989, Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998a; Tierney and Farmer, 2002). According to Bandura's (1998) theoretical analysis, "perceived self-efficacy" is people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance which exercise influence over events that affect their lives.

2.4 Employee participation in non work related activities

Job satisfaction comes not only from work-related activities, that is, task accomplishment, but also from non-work related activities. The concept should be employees work together, live together and grow together. In this process of working, living and growing together, they organize and participate in different non-work related activities. Examples of non-work related activities are sports and games, celebrating birthdays, celebrating promotions, wedding anniversaries, festivals, organizing tours and trips etc.

2.5 Self Concept

Self is a construct, a useful and convenient abstraction not open to direct observation and analysis. The use of this construct enables to make inferences about the deeper motives of human behavior.

Self is defined as the individual's unique, dynamic organization of personal meanings emerging from the interaction of organism and environment that determines his/her characteristic behavior, feelings, and thoughts. Thus the term self encompasses the totality of meanings of one's personal existence including those at psychological and unconscious levels which directs and influences his/her behavior.

The self – concept includes only those meaning for facts which the individual in some degree consciously recognizes as part of aspects of himself. The self-concept, then, consists of the most highly differentiated perception, beliefs, feelings, attitude and values which the individual holds as or about himself. It refers to the individual's perception of oneself and assessing him in terms of his own assessment. The self-concept is formed as one identifies those aspects, qualities, ideas and things that he regards as "me" or "mine". Basically, the self-concept is made up of a large number of percepts, each of which contains one or more qualities that one ascribes to himself.

Since each of the percepts one ascribes to himself may have a positive, negative or neutral value, the aggregate of attributes, qualities and abilities one ascribes to him/her constitutes a hierarchy of personal values. As a hierarchy of values, the self-concept serves as a standard for evaluating all experiences. Since the individual behaves in a manner consistent with his self-concept, the self-concept also exerts a directing influence on behavior.

3. Employee Perception about the Institution

Perception is the process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment (Robbins, 2005). Employee's behavior is based on their perception of what the organizational reality is, not on reality itself. Hence, the world as it is perceived by them is the world that is behaviorally important.

Employee perception is a factor that can make huge difference in the quality of the workplace. When employees perceive the employer, their work, and their relationships within that workplace as being positive, there is good chance that the employee will be productive and remain with the employer for long time. Negative perceptions of the company and the working environment can cause qualified employees to seek opportunities elsewhere. Some of the factors that can impact employee perception include how well the employer communicates with employees, the nature of the working conditions, the policies and procedures of the business in general, and how much trust and respect is present between managers, employees, and coworkers. In addition, the benefits paid and how they relate to the work assigned can also have impact on the perception of an employee.

For many employees, clear and concise communication within the working environment is essential. When employers choose to not create channels of communication with employees that allow each party to share information with the other, chances are that employee perception of the company will be less than ideal. Lack of communication can go a long way toward setting up an us/them mentality that breeds negativity in the workplace, opens the door for rumors to develop, and can undermine the morale of even the most devoted of employees.

The behavioral psychologist, Adams (1963) developed a useful model for explaining why this is true. Equity Theory (or Adam's Equity Theory) explains the thought process an employee uses to determine the fairness of management decision making. The core of equity theory is that individuals judge the fairness of their treatment based on how others like them are treated. Employees make social comparisons to others who are similarly situated in the organization. Said another way, an employee asks himself the following: Based on what I am giving to this organization (inputs), am I getting the same rewards (outcomes) as others are getting who give similar inputs? Equity theory says that employees view a situation as equitable when employees who give similar inputs receive similar outcomes. When the rewards differ for the same degree of effort, employees view the situation as inequitable. Equity theory shows that inequities (perceived or real) harm employee motivation. Employees who feel they are on the receiving end of inequitable treatment will be emotionally motivated to gain equity. What does this behavior look like? When inequities persist, employees may do any of the following:

- Decrease inputs (give less time, do less work)
- Push for more output from the company (more pay, authority)
- Go into survival mode (do their job and little more)
- Become resistant (act out on other issues)
- Become overly competitive (focus on reducing the outputs of others)
- Quit

These outcomes harm an organization's bottom line and where organizational turnover occurs, the loss is two-fold (economic and talent based). Clearly, equity theory shows why employee perceptions about fairness do matter. Thus, employee perception about their company is a powerful variable which determines the productivity, profit and reputation of the company. Hence, it is taken as one of the variables in the present study.

4. Problem Identification

Studies examining the quality of work life of academicians are scant. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the present work environment in which academics function is characterized by long hours of work, requirement to multitask between teaching, research, consultancy which leads to job stress etc., Hence, it is important to study the determinants of quality of work life in this context.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Sampling method

Purposive sampling was adopted to identify higher educational institutions in Tamilnadu through a comprehensive web survey. From among the selected institutions teaching professionals of varied demographic profiles were shortlisted to constitute the sample for this study.

5.2 Data Collection

Around 600 teaching professionals were shortlisted and a questionnaire that measures QWL and the six socio-psychological determinants were sent by email to the selected sample of respondents. Around 210 questionnaires were returned by the recipients' indicating a response rate of 35 %. After checking for missing data and other criteria, 182 responses were chosen for data analysis and further interpretation.

5.3 Administering the questionnaire

A five point likert scale was used to measure QWL and the six socio-psychological determinants of QWL. Indicators ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree with a neutral point at the midpoint. Along with those statements demographic details of the participants were also collected. Participants were asked to tick the most appropriate choice.

6. Results & Discussion

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Out of the 182 respondents, 67 % were male and 33 % were female respondents. All of them had post graduate degrees. 34 % of them had a doctoral degree. Among other who did not have a doctoral degree, 72 % of them were under various stages of completion of Ph.D program.

62 % of them were in the age group 31-45, 16 % were under 30 and the rest were above 45 years of age. 74 % of them were married.

84 % of them had more than five years to total work experience as academicians.

6.2 Inferential Statistics

6.2.1 Correlation Analysis

In order to test whether there was positive relationship among QWL and the six socio-psychological factors, correlation analysis was performed by finding out the pearson's correlation coefficient. Results indicated that all the six factors were positively related to QWL. Interestingly, employees' perception about the institution is most strongly related to QWL. Employees' participation in non work related activities was weakly related to QWL exhibiting the lowest value.

Table 1: Correlation analysis for significant relationship between socio-psychological factors and quality of work-life

Socio-psychological factors	Quality of Work-Life
Work culture	0.520**
Employee Attitude to Job	0.511**
Occupational Self Efficacy	0.329**
Employee Participation in Non-Work Related Activities	0.235**
Self Concept	0.509**
Employee Perception about the institution	0.670**

6.2.2 Regression Analysis

When QWL was kept as the dependant variable and the six socio-psychological factors were set as independent variables, the Adjusted R square value was 0.54 indicating that these variables put together can explain 54 % of variation in QWL of academicians.

7. Conclusion

It is emphasized that organizations must improve the employees' work environment in order to improve their quality of work life. The discussion clearly highlights the fact that QWL is a complex phenomenon, subjective and difficult to interpret.

The study contributes to QWL literature, specifically adding to our understanding about the QWL of academicians. Not much attention was given to assess the QWL of teaching professional who are important constituents of our society, who mould future professionals. This study will throw some light in this area.

8. Scope for Future Research

In future, studies may be undertaken to examine QWL's relationship with employee satisfaction employee performance in this context.

Also, it can be found out whether perceptions about QWL vary depending on their demographic profile.

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Author Profile

Uma Pricilda J is currently serving as Associate Professor at the reputed VIT University and has more than 15 yrs of industry, academic administration and research experience. She has to her credit papers published in International and National Journals. She has also attended many International and National Conferences on Business & Management. She has successfully organized two International Conferences on Emerging Markets and issues in Management at VIT Business School, VIT University.