

Perceptual Factors in Quality of Working Life of the Garments Workers in Bangladesh

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***Abstract:** The present study examines the perception of Quality of Working Life (QWL) of the garments workers in Bangladesh. This study was conducted based on a sample of 300 workers from 94 garments enterprises of Bangladesh. Results from the factor analysis suggest five factors of QWL labeled as (1) nature of the job and career progress, (2) relationship with the supervisor, (3) favourable work environment, (4) rewards and recognition, and (5) union-management relations. The results provide a useful benchmark measure of QWL in Bangladesh. Overall, the findings of the study support conceptualization of factors involved in the perceived QWL derived from the different parts of the world.*

Introduction

‘Quality of Working Life’ (QWL) may have different connotations to different persons, but to academics it means the degree to which the members of a work organization are able to satisfy their important personal needs through their experiences in the organization. The term ‘Quality of Working Life’ was believed to be first coined by Louis Davis at an international conference in New York in 1972 (Bharadwaj, 1983; Rahman, 1984, Mathur, 1989; Hian and Einstein, 1990). In this conference the term ‘Quality of Working Life’ was introduced and the International Council for the Quality of Working Life (ICQWL) was formed to facilitate research on and action for QWL.

Concept of Quality of Working Life

‘Quality of Working Life’ is not a single theory or technique; it’s not job-enrichment, profit-sharing or incentive scheme. QWL is a process of joint decision making, collaboration and building mutual respect between management and employees. This process seems to cause a change in people- in how they feel about themselves, their work and each other.

In the words of Trist (1985), QWL is both an end and a means. It is an end in itself, because it is a highly significant component in quality of life in general and it is a means by which employees can acquire civic competencies and skills.

According to Cummings and Worley (1997), QWL is a way of thinking about people, work, and organization involving a concern for employee well-being and organizational

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effectiveness. These definitions do not, however, unfold major criteria of QWL for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. In this regard, the concept of Walton (1973) appears to be more comprehensive in coverage. He proposed eight major conceptual categories relating to QWL- (1) adequate and fair compensation, (2) safe and healthy working conditions, (3) immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, (4) opportunity for continued growth and security, (5) social integration in the work organization, (6) constitutionalism in the work organization, (7) work and the total life space, and (8) the social relevance of work life.

Importance of Quality of Working Life

QWL programs have two objectives: to enhance the productivity and the satisfaction of employees (Gardon, 1984). Better quality of work life leads to increased employee morale. It helps to minimise cost, control quality, increase profits and satisfy employees' most important needs (Cascio, 1992; Suttle, 1977). It minimizes attrition and checks labor turnover. Moreover, QWL has direct impact on human outcomes and it significantly reduces absenteeism, minor accidents, grievances, and quits (Havlovic 1991). It is also found that employee turnover can be minimized with better QWL (Newaz, Ali & Akhter, 2007).

Rationale of the Study

The researcher has made a thorough review of the previous researches conducted in the area of QWL in Bangladesh and abroad to identify the various determinants of QWL. Results showed that different authors and researchers indicated different factors for determining quality of work life. Probably for this reason Seashore (1975) comments that it is difficult to best conceptualize the QWL elements. A preliminary survey of the relevant literature would enable one to gather that the problem of QWL had not been given due attention, especially by the Bangladeshi researchers. As compared to western countries, there have not been many empirical investigations concerning the measurement of QWL. So, the present study will help us to identify the factors of QWL of garments workers in Bangladesh. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be an important reference for the practicing managers and policy makers of the garments industry as well as other industries of Bangladesh. So, there is a need to conduct research on the perceptual factors in the quality of working life of garments workers in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

General Motors, the American largest industrial employer, has made a major commitment to QWL. While surveying the QWL of workers in General Motors, Carlson

(1978) considered a list of 16 dimensions as determinants of QWL. These dimensions are as follows: 1. employee commitment, 2. absence of developing apathy, 3. on the job development and utilization, 4. employee involvement and influence, 5. advancement based on merit, 6. career goal progress, 7. relations with supervisor, 8. work group relations, 9. respect for the individual, 10. confidence in management, 11. physical working environment, 12. economic well-being, 13. employee state of mind, 14. absence of undue job stress, 15. impact on personal life, and 16. union-management relations. Rosow, J. M. (1980) has identified seven critical factors which will affect the quality of work life. These are pay, employee benefits, job security, alternative work schedules, occupational stress, participation and democracy in the workplace.

Karmaker, S.S. (1992) grouped the various measures reflecting different dimensions of QWL into three, viz. industrial welfare measures, industrial democracy and wages related measures. Industrial welfare measures include working conditions, worker's accident compensation, medical care and maternity benefits, canteen facilities, bonus, housing facility and worker's education; while industrial democracy dimensions includes freedom of association, right to strike and worker's participation. Sirgy et al. (2001) identified seven key factors of quality of working life, each having several dimensions: 1. health and safety needs, 2. economic and family needs, 3. social needs, 4. esteem needs, 5. actualization needs, 6. knowledge needs, 7. aesthetic needs. According to Lau RSM and May B.E. (2007), QWL is a dynamic multidimensional construct that currently includes such concepts as job security, reward systems, training and career advancements opportunities and participation in decision making.

Rethinam, G.S. & Ismail, M. (2008) in their study used 5 dimensions of QWL such as health and well-being, job security, job satisfaction, competence development and the balance between work with non-work life. Kameswara R.P. and Venugopal, P. (2009) conducted a study on a sample of 332 executives from the financial sector and the transport business in India to illustrate their perceptions concerning quality of work life (QWL). Results from the factor analysis suggest four dimensions of QWL labelled (1) supportive management and favourable work environment, (2) personal growth and autonomy, (3) nature of the job, and (4) stimulating opportunities and co-workers.

Objectives

- ❖ To find out the perceptual factors in the Quality of Working Life of garments workers in Bangladesh.
- ❖ To analyze and highlight each of the factors in the Quality of Working Life of garments workers in Bangladesh.

Methodology

Sample

The required sample was drawn from the population of woven, knitwear and sweater enterprises. There were 5063 garments enterprises in the year 2008-09 in Bangladesh. Among these enterprises, 3044 (60 percent) are woven, 1214 (24 percent) are knitwear and 805 (16 percent) are sweater enterprises.

This distribution of population was considered while selecting the sample enterprises for the field survey. A stratified sampling technique was used for selection of the sample in a manner that ensured an acceptable level of confidence. Sample enterprises were stratified on the basis of concentration of location of the RMG enterprises.

The required sample workers were determined with a population of 3.6 million workers at 95% confidence level by using Cochran's formula (1963). Finally, the present study was conducted on a sample of 300 garments workers of Bangladesh including 181 from woven, 70 from knitwear and 49 from sweater enterprises.

The Instrument for Measuring Quality of Working Life

For measuring QWL of garments workers of Bangladesh the Bengali version of Sinha and Sayeed's (1980) inventory was used. The inventory consisted of 85 items of which 3 were negative (question no. 56, 57 and 60) and their scoring was reversed. It was a 5-point scale. The response categories were from minimum to maximum with the scale values of 1 to 5 respectively. The higher the total score, the higher was the perceived QWL.

Results and Discussion

The results and findings of this study are based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The various dimensions of the QWL were examined using the principal components of factor analysis with varimax rotation. Table A-1 shows the results of the factor analysis.

Five Main Factors of Quality of Working Life

From factor analysis five main factors were derived and labeled as (1) nature of the job and career progress, (2) relationship with the supervisor, (3) favourable work environment, (4) rewards and recognition, and (5) union-management relations. The total variance explained by the five factors is 72.7%. The QWL items which were loaded on the five factors in the present study are shown below:

Factor 1: Nature of the Job and Career Progress: The nature or content of the job and opportunities for career progress is the number one important factor of Quality of Working Life which covers 33.8% of variance. Workers prefer meaningful jobs that provide adequate challenge without compromising their values. Such a high level of QWL jobs must have good benefits and pay, assistance for planning one's career and a congenial and fair work environment. Most of the garments workers of Bangladesh have come from rural poor families. They have no sound economic backgrounds. As a result, job satisfaction of garments workers primarily depends on their wages. Adequate and fair wages make them happy. According to Schreuder and Theron (1997) and Walton (1973), the fundamental driving force behind work is to earn a living. There are some findings which show that wage level is positively associated with job satisfaction (Miller, 1941, Smith and Kendall, 1963) and with QWL (Haque, 1991). Many managers believe that money is the prime retention factor, (89% in one survey), and many employees cite better pay or higher compensation as the reason for leaving one employer for another (Hara Marks, 2001). A significant number of previous studies also revealed adequate income and fair compensation as an indicator of QWL (Walton, 1973; Carlson, 1978; Ganguli, 1979; Rosow, J. M., 1980; Sinha & Sayeed, 1980; Kahn, 1981; Kirkman, 1981).

Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1957) found that favourable job content factors such as achievement and the work itself tended to produce satisfaction. Interest in work is an important contributing factor to the feeling that job is satisfactory. Repetitive job is regarded as monotonous and uninteresting. To break the monotony, management can introduce a system of job rotation. A number of previous studies also identified nature of the job to be an indicator of QWL (Boisvert, 1977; Lippitt & Rumley, 1977; Sinha & Sayeed, 1980; Kahn, 1981; Davis, 1983; Delamotte & Takezawa, 1984; Cunningham and Eberle, 1990; Jain, Sangeeta, 1991; Van Laar, Edwards & Easton, 2007 and Kameswara & Venugopal, 2009). Nature of the job is identified as the third important factor of QWL in Singapore and in India (Wyatt and Wah, 2001; and Kameswara and Venugopal, 2009).

Career advancement is an important issue particularly to a person striving for upward mobility. Opportunities for career progress have often been found to influence QWL significantly. A number of investigations have found positive relationship between the fulfillment of promotional expectations and job satisfaction (Morse, 1953; Spector, 1956; Sirota, 1959). A significant number of previous studies also found career advancement as an indicator of QWL (Walton, 1973; Carlson, 1978; Sinha & Sayeed, 1980; Kahn, 1981; Macarov, 1981; Davis, 1983; Argentero, P., Miglioretti, M. and Angilletta, C., 2007; Lau RSM and May B.E., 2007; Van Laar, Edwards, J & Easton, S., 2007).

Factor 2: Relationship with the Supervisor: The 2nd most important factor of QWL was labeled as relationship with the supervisor which covered 15.1% of variance. To a worker, supervision is equally strong contributor to job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction,

in turn to be the higher or lower level of QWL. The feelings of workers towards their supervisors are usually similar to their feelings towards the company. A supervisor is good, if he is able to produce and establish a climate of good team spirit. The role of a supervisor is a focal point for attitude formation. Bad supervision results in absenteeism and labour turnover. A number of previous studies also identified relationship with the supervisor as an indicator of QWL (Carlson, 1978; Sinha & Sayeed, 1980; Kahn, 1981; and Argentero, P., Miglioretti, M. & Angilletta, C., 2007). A high QWL work situation is one in which there is a great deal of management support. QWL depends also on cordial relationship between workers and the management.

Factor 3: Favourable Work Environment: Factor 3 may be described as the favourable work environment which covers 13.2% of variance. Favourable work environment includes good and safe working atmosphere, pleasing surroundings, etc. which help in increasing the production of an industry. Kerce & Booth-Kewley (1993), Bertrand (1992), and Harrison (2000) agree that safe and healthy work conditions have a significant impact on QWL. It has also been observed that working conditions are more important to women than men. Working hours are more important than any other specific aspect of working conditions, but among women, especially married women, this aspect is even more significant. The results of different studies show that a safe and healthy working condition is a very important factor of QWL. Gupta and Sharma (2001) found 13.202 % of variance for this factor in their study on QWL. A number of previous studies also identified favourable work environment as an important indicator of QWL (Walton, 1973; Lippitt & Rumley, 1977; Carlson, 1978; Ganguli, 1979; Sinha & Sayeed, 1980; Kahn, 1981; Davis, 1983; Kalra & Ghosh, 1984; Mirvis and Lawler, 1984; Cunningham and Eberle, 1990; Karmaker, 1992; Van Laar, Edwards, J. & Easton, S., 2007 and Kameswara R.P. and Venugopal, P., 2009).

Factor 4: Rewards and Recognition: The fourth most important QWL factor is rewards and recognition which covers 6.5% of variance. Workers' reward programs play a powerful role in motivating appropriate employee behaviour. An organization should create reward systems that are fair, relevant and contingent on work performance. In a broader sense, rewards also include a good word, a smile from the supervisor, a promotion or any overt or covert action acknowledging a good work. The previous studies also identified reward system as an indicator of QWL (Sinha & Sayeed, 1980; Straw & Heckscher, 1984; Havlovic, 1991 and Lau RSM & May B.E., 2007). Recognition for achievement is defined by Kotze (2008) as the recognition for achievements by management, colleagues, subordinates and clients.

Factor 5: Union-Management Relations: The fifth and the last, but not the least, factor of QWL has been identified as union-management relations which covered 4.1% of variance. To ensure workers' interest the union plays a vital role. So, the workers'

relations with the union and also union-management relations are crucial for workers to have a better QWL from the organization. A good union-management relationship will depend upon the mutual trust between the employer and employees. Sincere efforts on the part of management to understand human climate prevailing in the organization, provision of suitable welfare activities for the benefit of workers and constructive thinking at appropriate level of management can motivate workers to give their best for their organization. A significant number of previous studies also identified union-management relations as an indicator of QWL (Carlson, 1978; Sinha & Sayeed, 1980 and Jain, Sangeeta, 1991).

Conclusion:

Garments industries in many developing countries like Bangladesh are experiencing tremendous challenges in meeting workers' demand. A good human resource practice would encourage garments workers to be more productive while enjoying their work. Therefore, QWL is becoming an important human resource issue in garments organizations. The present study suggests that the nature of job and career progress, relationship with the supervisor, favourable work environment, rewards and recognition and union-management relations have a significant influence on the overall QWL of garments workers. So, with the consideration of the above factors effective strategic human resource policies and procedures are essential to govern and provide excellent QWL among the garments workers of Bangladesh. The present five-factor model provides useful benchmark measures for QWL in Bangladesh. Although there are notable contributions from this study especially for employee retention strategies, the results of this study need to be viewed and acknowledged in the light of its limitations. Only the garments sector has been included in this study. Therefore, other industries should be studied to examine the extent to which the present results can be generalized across industries.

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Appendix

Table A-1: Loadings of QWL Items on the Five Factors

Scale	Item No.	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Nature of the Job and Career Progress	1	.683				
	6	.430				
	10	.466				
	15	.350				
	16	.371				
	20	.359				
	21	.588				
	24	.492				
	33	.662				
	34	.629				
	35	.466				
	36	.550				
	37	.465				
	39	.563				
	42	.487				
	45	.561				
	46	.390				
	48	.776				
	49	.318				
	50	.588				
	56	.533				
	57	.652				
	58	.475				
	59	.355				
	61	.628				
	66	.447				
	68	.700				
70	.438					
77	.302					

Relationship with Supervisor	8		.722		
	18		.747		
	19		.630		
	28		.686		
	29		.421		
	40		.633		
	47		.641		
	52		.691		
	62		.609		
	63		.674		
	65		.422		
	73		.608		
	78		.573		
	84		.399		
Favourable Working Environment	4		.488		
	14		.635		
	23		.412		
	31		.384		
	32		.682		
	47		.641		
	59		.451		
	69		.493		
	72		.608		
	75		.478		
	76		.611		
	81		.690		
	82		.406		

Rewards and Recognition	17				.694	
	25				.622	
	27				.578	
	53				.626	
	55				.511	
	74				.539	
Union- Management Relations	7					.622
	30					.371
	38					.565
Percentage of explained variance		33.8	15.1	13.2	6.5	4.1
Cumulative Percentage of explained variance		33.8	48.9	62.1	68.6	72.7