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The nature and development of the construct "quality of work life"

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Major changes have taken place in the nature and composition of organisations in South Africa. The greater importance of knowledge workers, the different ethnic composition of the membership of organisations, and changes in value systems and beliefs may be seen as factors influencing the quality of employees' work life (QWL). There is a significant lack of clarity regarding QWL as a construct, and no single instrument to promote consistency in its measurement. This article therefore attempts to provide more information on the content of the construct by means of a literature review. The origin and development of the construct, as well as the different approaches taken to define and measure it, are discussed. QWL emerges as a multifaceted and ambiguous construct with no universal identity. How it is defined, how to approach or measure it appear to depend on the goals of the various researchers and management practitioners.

Die aard en ontwikkeling van die "kwaliteit van werklewe"-konstruk

Die afgelope dekade is gekenmerk deur grootskaalse veranderinge ten opsigte van die aard en samestelling van die werksmag in Suid-Afikaanse organisasies. Die groter klem op kenniswerknemers, etniese diversiteit binne organisasies, asook veranderinge in die waardestelsels en oortuigings binne die werksmag, word beskou as faktore wat moontlik die kwaliteit van werklewe (KWL) van werknemers kan beïnvloed. Dit is opvallend dat daar 'n gebrek aan eenstemmigheid in die literatuur bestaan oor wat presies die KWL-konstuk behels en hoe dit gemeet behoort te word. In hierdie literatuuroorsig word gepoog om meer inligting te verskaf oor die inhoud en aard van die konstruk. Die oorsprong en ontwikkeling van die KWL-konstruk, asook die verskillende benaderings wat gevolg word in die definiëring en meting daarvan, word bespreek. Die literatuuroorsig toon dat KWL 'n konstruk is wat nie noodwendig op 'n universele wyse gedefinieer kan word nie. Die wyse waarop dit gedefinieer word, die benadering tot, asook die meting daarvan, hang klaarblyklik af van die doelwitte wat navorsers en bestuurspraktisyns daarmee wil bereik.

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The scale and pace of change in organisations over recent years has brought about a renewed interest in the issue of the quality of people's work lives (Kirby & Harter 2001: 121; Bohl *et al* 1996: 6). At present, many South African organisations are involved in a process of large-scale organisational change, while management also expects employees to internalise certain organisational values. Major changes have also been witnessed in the nature and composition of organisations in South Africa. The greater importance of knowledge workers and the different ethnic composition of the memberships of organisations, as well as the changes in value systems and beliefs, are seen as factors that may influence the quality of work life (QWL) of employees. Many management theorists believe that it is not only the ethical obligation of organisations to protect the welfare of their employees, but also in their own interests to develop their human resources in order to increase the return on investment and to upgrade the skills of the labour pool. It is the responsibility of organisations, and specifically of management, to ensure that employees who commit themselves fully to achieving the organisation's objectives also experience a high QWL.

Although the totality of an individual's life consists of a variety of domains within which the individual operates as a role-player, the majority of adults spend most of their time in the workplace. Therefore, the quality of their work life is one of the most important components contributing to their general quality of life. Previously, a positive QWL environment was defined as one in which employers and employees could fulfil their economic responsibilities to each other and to society. Such an environment would provide workers with stable employment, an adequate income and benefits, fair treatment, and a safe and secure place to work. Today's workers have been found to have a lower level of respect for authority and a greater desire for self-expression, personal growth, and self-fulfilment. They expect work that provides opportunities to fulfil their higher-order needs.

Although QWL is a concept and practical tool that has been discussed, examined, and debated by social scientists, psychologists, and the business world for many years, its definition and application remain rather vague (Kierman & Knutson 1990: 102). There is a significant lack of clarity on the QWL construct, and no reliable instrument to promote consistency in its measurement. The question is whether QWL

is a construct in search of a universal identity or whether its definition may be a matter of values and standards that depend to a great extent upon one's cultural context. Values depend partly on personal choices, but what one considers to be good or bad is dictated largely by one's cultural context (Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 192). Furthermore, differences between the ambitions of the First and Third Worlds create different expectations in the workplace. Tension may exist between postmaterialistic aspirations and purely materialistic ones (Moller 1992: 103). That researchers who approach this issue in Third World countries have relied too much on definitions of "quality" derived from North American and, to a lesser extent, West European values is of equal concern (Hofstede 1984: 395).

Chung *et al* (1997: 83) propose that researchers should remain critical about the use of constructs such as QWL. They emphasise the importance of regularly questioning the fundamental assumptions embedded within the construct and remaining critical about its usage. Re-examining topics such as QWL may lead to new perspectives which, in turn, may generate new insights. Such critical attitudes may not necessarily lead researchers to a perfect understanding of constructs, but rather to keep updating the way in which they perceive and use them. Indeed, this is an important step in the development of research in the area of QWL.

1. The QWL as a concept

QWL is a term used today in virtually every area of organisational activity — in academic, government, labour, and management circles. At the very least, it may be viewed as a late twentieth-century phenomenon to be considered and studied for its social value. At the other extreme one finds those who are implementing QWL concepts in organisations, believing that their efforts will have lasting benefits for the organisation and its individuals. Definitions of QWL tend to change focus continuously and have been used at different times to refer to a variable reflecting the affective evaluations of individuals, to a group of methods or approaches to management in organisations, or to a movement (Nadler & Lawler 1983: 23; Skrovan 1983: xi-xii).

1.1 QWL as a variable

Some authorities trace the beginning of the QWL movement to the British coal mines of more than fifty years ago. During the fifties and sixties, QWL was generally regarded as a variable focusing on individual outcomes such as job satisfaction and mental health, with the emphasis on the impact of work on the individual. It has been suggested that organisations should be evaluated on the basis of how successful they are in providing QWL for their employees (Nadler & Lawler 1983: 24). Some researchers argue that in the USA the term QWL can be traced back to at least the late sixties (Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 189) and/or the early seventies (Ault 1983: 27; Skrovan 1983: xi; Kierman & Knutson 1990: 101). Kerce & Booth-Kewley (1993: 189) state that, during 1969 and 1973, employment surveys were conducted at the University of Michigan to assess the effects of job experiences on the individual, and that a number of projects were initiated to improve QWL. According to Kierman & Knutson (1990: 102), the term QWL originated with General Motors and United Auto Workers, being used to describe levels of job satisfaction. The dominant theme of much QWL research was the assumption that individuals' experiences of satisfaction or dissatisfaction define the quality of their work life (Wilcock & Wright 1991: 458; Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 190). Thus, as a variable, QWL is measured by assessing an individual's reaction to work or the personal consequences of the work experience (Nadler & Lawler 1983: 24).

1.2 QWL as an approach and a series of programmes and methods

During the early seventies, many projects were launched in order to encourage labour and management to co-operate in the improvement of QWL in the workplace. The US government also took an interest, which led to the creation of a Federal Productivity Commission and the sponsorship of a number of joint-labour QWL experiments (Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 189). As a consequence of these projects, the term QWL became synonymous with certain approaches. A second definition emerged which regarded QWL as an approach, with the focus still on individual, rather than organisational outcomes (Nadler & Lawler 1983: 23). At this stage, the improvement of QWL was often considered to proceed in two separate, but not mutually exclusive directions. The

first concerns the alleviation or removal of negative aspects of work and working conditions in order to diminish fatigue, boredom, and psychological stress. The other concerns the modification of aspects of work and working conditions to enhance the capabilities of workers and to relate jobs to a desirable future, in order to promote behaviour which is deemed desirable or valuable for the individual and society. This includes increased productivity, improved personal initiative and growth potential, a more active social and community life, and a greater capacity to cope with change. Changes in work and working conditions include modifying the content of jobs to provide tasks offering increased interest, challenge, and job satisfaction as well as reduced conflict between the demands made on the individual at work and in other areas of life. QWL was thus seen as reflecting the extent to which workers are able to satisfy important personal needs through their experiences within the organisation, not only in material terms, but also in terms of self-respect, contentment, the opportunity to use one's talents or to make a contribution, and to achieve personal growth (Dessler 1981: 519).

Although QWL began as a variable focusing on the level of worker satisfaction, it developed during this period into an approach and series of programmes designed to increase worker productivity. Another definition emerged, reflecting QWL as a set of methods, approaches or technologies which improve the work environment in order to make it more productive and satisfying (Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 190; Nadler & Lawler 1983: 23). Here, QWL refers to methods which attempt to serve both individual needs and organisational effectiveness, and is considered in the light of specific changes and methods that companies can use to enhance employee's identification, their sense of belonging and their pride in their work (Kiernan & Knutson 1990: 105). QWL was regarded as synonymous with concepts like autonomous work groups, job enrichment, work structuring, innovative reward systems, and the design of integrated social and technical work systems (Nadler & Lawler 1983: 24; Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 190). Brooks & Gawel (2001: 5) state that efforts to understand the theoretical underpinnings of QWL can be traced back to the theory of sociotechnical systems (STS). STS theory maintains that engaging employees fully in work design gives them a sense of well-being because they find their work fulfilling; at the same time, it is productive in that it helps

the organisation attain its goals. This theory has emerged as a significant approach in designing organisations, especially at the interface of technology and people. It recommends the simultaneous modification of technical and social systems to create work designs that can lead to both greater task productivity and increased fulfilment for the members of the organisation (Bachner & Bentley 1983: 62). By the 1970s, Davis (Davis & Trist 1974: 23) used QWL to describe the work life of individuals employed in settings using the STS approach to work design.

This approach sees QWL as having, at its core, two goals: to humanise the workplace and improve the quality of employees' work experiences, and (simultaneously) to improve the overall productivity of the organisation (Krim & Arthur 1989: 17; Pratzner & Russell 1984: 24). The central thrust of this perspective is that organisational productivity can be increased by providing people with the opportunity to use their human capacities, pursue self-improvement, and identify with the work place. QWL responds to both organisational needs and workers' needs for improved work and working conditions. This dual purpose is less explicit in traditional endeavours to achieve job satisfaction:

> [...] If one simply looks at the semantics of the term 'quality of work life', we can see in the way the words are put together at this time that a large part of humanity has become awakened to the possibilities for measuring the quality of each person's working life and for pursuing quality as a goal (Skrovan 1983: xii).

According to Rubinstein (1983: 115), these dual and sometimes apparently conflicting needs are interdependent. Management in a QWL style encourages attention to both and seeks to involve workers themselves in the process of integration. Most QWL programmes are thus based on the assumption that organisational survival and economic well-being relate directly to the dynamics of the "total job environment" for people. Corporate education programmes, including training and development, are seen as an integral part of human resources management in firms recognized for their outstanding QWL (Kirby & Harter 2001: 121). Stein (1983: 8) argues that the issue is not whether productivity and a high QWL go together, but how to define the circumstances in which both can be increased. Cummings & Molloy (1977:

4) propose four distinct strategies, each representing a set of beliefs and findings about the causes of productivity and QWL, namely: autonomous work groups, job restructuring, participative management, and organisation-wide change.

1.3 QWL as a movement

During the seventies, QWL was regarded more as a movement (Nadler & Lawler 1983: 23) than as a specific programme. It was seen as an ongoing process, not something with a beginning, a middle, and an end that could be started one day and stopped the next (Brooks & Gawel 2001: 4). The focus was on making progressively better use of all of an organisation's resources, especially its human resources and developing among all its members an awareness and understanding of the concerns and needs of others, and a willingness to be more responsive to them. This perspective also includes improving the way things are done in order to assure the long-term effectiveness and success of an organisation (Skrovan 1983: 2).

The terms "participative management" and "industrial democracy" were frequently employed to express the ideals of the QWL movement (Nadler & Lawler 1983: 23). Although the scope and emphasis of organisational QWL efforts varied, the involvement and participation of employees in the creation of their workplace was a central focus of every QWL process (Skrovan 1983: 6). All members of an organisation thus have some say in the design of their jobs in particular and the work environment in general, via the appropriate channels of communication set up for the purpose (Bachner & Bentley 1983: 67). Thus, QWL is defined

> [...] as the process used by an organization to unlock the creative potential of its people by involving them in decisions affecting their work lives (Rubinstein 1983: 115).

Ellinger & Nissen (1987: 198) established the following definition of QWL after discussion with five representatives of top management and five top union officials at a large manufacturing facility in the USA:

> Quality of Work Life is an environment based on mutual respect which supports and encourages individual participation and open communication in matters which affect our jobs, our business, our futures, and our feelings of self-worth.

Bachner & Bentley (1983: 67) state that this increase in worker participation should not be confused with the socio-political concept of "democratic management".

> Decisions about what is to be done in the work context are not achieved by voting. Rather, the QWL process is democratic in a psychological sense. It invites employee participation at all levels, allowing workers a say in what they do, which in turn makes for a sense of part ownership in any change that may result and a stake in organizational success. It enhances self-esteem and reduces feelings of powerlessness (Bachner & Bentley 1983: 67).

According to Rubinstein (1983: 152), in order to accomplish this integration of organisational needs and worker growth needs through active participation by employees, it is vital that employees understand all facets of the organisation so that their participation can be meaningfully founded on the organisation's mission. Since few workers have been invited to contribute their knowledge and skills to the solution of organisational problems in the past, they are not practised in the necessary skills. Many need to be trained to participate effectively in group settings and to acquire the necessary skills for participatory problem-solving. Methods such as quality circles may be used to provide a vehicle for unlocking the potential in worker participation (Stein 1983: 33). Quality circles also offer workers a sense of dignity and of fuller participation in the organisation, as well as an opportunity to develop their skills. They thus contribute to the organisational goals of increased productivity, cost reduction and improved quality. Although quality circles are not the only appropriate vehicles for these purposes, there is increasing recognition of the importance of establishing such mechanism (Bachner & Bentley 1983: 69). Other interventions include suggestion boxes, general opinion surveys, all-employee meetings, representative communication councils and worker representation on boards of directors (Stein 1983: 32-3).

1.4 The role of trade unions in QWL

Among QWL theorists, a certain body of opinion views the collaboration, participation, and endorsement of trade unions as a key component of the QWL process (Fuller 2001: 37; Maccoby 1984: 29; Bluestone 1989: 39). According to Maccoby (1984: 29), QWL grew out of the collective bargaining process and is a commitment on the part of ma-

nagement and unions to support localised activities and experiments aimed at increasing employee participation in determining how to improve work. This process is guided by union-management committees and facilitators, and requires education about work goals as well as training in group processes:

> The growth of quality-of-worklife projects requires a developing relationship between management and union built on mutual respect for institutional interests and values (Maccoby 1984: 31).

Bluestone (1989: 40) concurs, saying:

> A quality-of-worklife program cannot succeed unless the local parties develop a collective bargaining climate of mutual respect, a climate in which solving problems supersedes beating the other party down. If management sees the union as a potential ally to be brought into strategy, quality-of-worklife projects can guarantee the new companies a highly motivated, flexible, and productive work force (Maccoby 1984: 32).

According to Nadler & Lawler (1983: 24), by the late seventies and early eighties QWL was equal to any other approach. All Organisation Development (OD) and Organisation Effectiveness (OE) interventions were equated with QWL. These authors warn that this approach could lead to a situation in which QWL might be regarded as equal to "nothing". According to Scobel (1982: 106), both OD and QWL began as emotional movements, attempting to call attention to the creative power of the vast body of people in the organisation called "the managed". Scobel (1982: 106) suggests that both OD and QWL have progressively lost touch with this constituency:

> QWL galloped in on the feet of the managed with an emotional cry for democracy. QWL hoped to draw on the emotionalism inherent in unionism and on the popular appeal of work place democracy for the everyday work-a-person …
>
> And then the 'hierarchy' masters, masters at resisting encroachment, asked the simple questions, 'What's in it for us? What good is QWL without improved productivity?' Soon, a new line of euphemisms appeared called: semi-autonomous work groups, improvement sharing, employee participation circles, self-directed problem-solving teams, and even that old OD favorite, sociotechnical systems, was repackaged. Bit by bit, the blood and guts of QWL is giving way to a bureaucracy of systems and processes. It's not that the systems aren't worthwhile. They are. But in the process, QWL is becoming possessed by them and losing its simple cry for dignity and involvement. It is sacrificing its constituency.

Thus the motivation for improving QWL derives mainly from the strategy aimed at improving the performance of employees, rather than from that aimed at evaluating the work environment as experienced by workers (Nzimande 1983: 109). According to Kiernan & Knutson (1990: 104), the most complex view of QWL is the social movement — the overall commitment not just to the bottom line, to the employee, or to society, but to the interaction of all three. Definitions of the relevant criteria differ depending on the point of view: individuals, organisations, or society at large. QWL must be considered in the light of the whole person if one is to understand the concept and enhance QWL for any individual.

1.5 QWL as need fulfilment, employee well-being and work wellness

It seems that, during the last decade, there has been a tendency for research on QWL to focus more on the perspective of employees and the fulfilment of their needs. According to Reid (1992: 4), understanding and interpreting individuals' experience of work is a crucial factor in determining their QWL. Sirgy *et al* (2001:241) state:

> Although there is no formal definition of quality of working life (QWL), industrial psychologists and management scholars agree in general that QWL is a construct that deals with the well-being of employees.

These authors argue that there are two dominant theoretical approaches in the QWL literature, namely need satisfaction and spillover. They base their measure of QWL on these two perspectives. The need satisfaction approach to QWL is based on the models developed by Maslow (1954), McClelland (1961), Herzberg (1966), and Alderer (1972). The basic tenet of this approach to QWL is that people seek to fulfil basic needs through work. Employees derive satisfaction from their jobs to the extent that their jobs meet these needs.

The spillover approach to QWL posits that satisfaction in one area of life may influence satisfaction in another. For example, satisfaction with one's job may influence satisfaction in other domains, such as family, leisure, social health, or finance. Spillover may operate horizontally and vertically. Horizontal spillover is the influence of affect in one life domain on a neighboring domain (job satisfaction may influence feelings

of satisfaction in the domain of family life, or *vice versa*). Life domains (job, family, leisure, community, and so on) are organised hierarchically in people's minds. At the top of the hierarchy is the superordinate domain, namely overall life. Feelings in this superordinate domain reflect what quality-of-life (QOL) researchers call life satisfaction, personal happiness, or subjective well-being. Subordinate to the superordinate life domain are the major life domains such as family, job, leisure, community, and so on. Satisfaction/dissatisfaction within each of these major life domains "spills over" to the most superordinate domain, thus affecting overall life satisfaction (satisfaction in the job domain spills over to affect overall life satisfaction). This is called vertical bottom-up spillover, as distinct from vertical top-down spillover, which refers to the influence of overall life satisfaction on a particular domain (job satisfaction). LeFevre (1988) postulates that life happiness and contentment within and outside the work situation are linked to the opportunities for self-actualisation and development offered by the work situation. Some authors thus take the view that the challenge lies in bringing meaning and work contentment back to the workplace (Anderson *et al* 1996: 14).

Campbell (1981: 14) makes it clear that individuals do not evaluate their QWL on the basis of a society or a psychiatrist's evaluation criteria, but on the basis of the quality of their own experiences and feelings:

> In this definition well-being is entirely subjective, known directly to the individual person and known to others only through that person's behavior or verbal report (Campbell 1981:14).

What people see as the meaning of their lives and the kind of living they consider desirable or undesirable are matters of personal choice. Definitions of QWL may thus be culturally dependent, since some cultures associate QWL with the degree to which people have satisfied their material needs, while other cultures associate it with the degree to which they have succeeded in subduing and reducing those very needs (Hofstede 1984: 389).

Although the focus of QWL has returned to being concerned with individuals' experiences of their work, as well as individual outcomes, this concept differs from that of the fifties and sixties in the sense that QWL is now viewed more broadly than merely relating to being satisfied

or dissatisfied with one's job.[1] According to Sirgy *et al* (2001: 241), QWL differs from job satisfaction in that job satisfaction is construed as only one of many outcomes of QWL. QWL affects not only job satisfaction but also satisfaction in other domains, such as family life, leisure, social life, financial life, and so on. Therefore, the focus of QWL goes beyond job satisfaction. It involves the effect of the workplace on satisfaction with the job, satisfaction in non-work domains of life, and satisfaction with overall life, as well as personal happiness, and subjective well-being. Van der Doef & Maes (1999: 954) also regard job satisfaction as an outcome variable of QWL. Brooks & Gawel (2001: 3-4) distinguish between job satisfaction and QWL by stating that conventional job satisfaction research focuses on the employee's likes and dislikes, and sees the solution to problems as something for management to "fix". QWL research, on the other hand, focuses on the opportunities offered to employees to make meaningful contributions to their organisation. Kerce & Booth-Kewley (1993: 193) argue that, although job satisfaction offers a simple way of conceptualising QWL, it does not, by itself, adequately reflect the impact of the work environment on employees. While survey-based research on job satisfaction has found that workers are generally satisfied with their jobs, researchers using the case study method have frequently found that workers are angry, unhappy, and bored.

Carayon (1997: 325) based his work on QWL on the balance theory of Smith & Carayon-Sainfort (1989). According to this theory, the work system can be conceptualised as comprising five subsystems: the individual, tasks, organisational factors, the physical environment, and tools and technologies. These are all related and influence one another. The outcomes of the work system are employee reactions, such as stress and musculo-skeletal disorders. The conceptual framework of Carayon's research is based on this system approach to work, QWL, and stress. According to the balance theory, the relation of work, QWL, and stress may not be direct, simple, or linear. A variety of factors can interact with one another or influence one another in complex ways, thus affecting worker stress. QWL is defined as the complex interactions of the different subsystems of the work system. Various outcomes can result, for example, stress-related outcomes, such as employee attitudes, psycho-

1 Cf Sirgy *et al* 2001: 242; Van der Doef & Maes 1999: 955, Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 189; Orpen 1983: 18.

logical and physiological strain, mood disturbances and work-related musculo-skeletal disorders.

In South Africa, there is currently a strong research emphasis on "work wellness". Although the term has not been explicitly defined (Van Schalkwyk & Buitendach 2004: 1), it seems to include individual outcomes in the workplace such as burnout,[2] occupational stress,[3] employee happiness (Oswald 2004: 68), and employee well-being (Theron 2004: 1), as well as the role that organisational issues can play in employee wellness, for example "value wellness" (the congruency of individual and workplace values, which build wellness) (Lotriet 2004: 2), the creation of wellness cultures in organisations (Lubbe 2004: 1), the role of recruitment and selection processes in the creation of work wellness (Meiring 2004: 1), the influence of leadership on employee wellness (Spangenberg 2004: 1) and the structure and contents of work wellness programmes for executives (Putter 2004: 1).

1.6 Work/life balance and QWL

Employers and employees have become more concerned with work/life and family issues. The concept of work/life balance has also become more apparent in the literature relating to QWL.[4] Greenhaus *et al* (2003: 513) define work/family balance as "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in — and equally satisfied with — his work role and family role". Greenhaus *et al* (2003: 513) view work/family balance as a matter of degree, a continuum anchored at one end by excessive imbalance in favour of a particular role (for instance family) through some relatively balanced state to extensive imbalance in favour of the other role (for instance work) as the other anchor point. According to these authors, three components of work/family balance can be assessed, namely, time balance (equal time devoted to work and family), involvement balance (equal involvement in work and family), and satisfaction balance (equal satisfaction with work and family). These authors

2 Cf Mostert *et al* 2004: 2; Naudé & Rothmann 2004: 1; Van Zyl & Buitendach 2004: 2; Cloete & Stuart 2004: 1.

3 Cf Oliver *et al* 2004: 1; Steyn *et al* 2004: 2; Swartz 2004: 1; Taylor & De Bruyn 2004: 1.

4 Cf Kelly & Voydanoff 1985: 369; Ellis *et al* 1993: 24; Greenhaus *et al* 2003: 510; Tytherleigh 2004: 3; Putter 2004: 2.

state that work/family balance is generally thought to promote well-being. Imbalance — in particular towards the work side — arouses high levels of stress, detracts from quality of life, and ultimately reduces individuals' effectiveness at work. Work/family balance enhances an individual's QWL because involvement in multiple roles protects or buffers individuals from the effects of negative experiences in any one role. In addition, work/family balance is thought to promote well-being in a more direct manner. Balanced individuals experience low levels of stress when enacting roles, presumably because they are participating in role activities that are meaningful to them.

According to Jacobson & Kaye (1993: 24), the traditional approaches to achieving balance tend to be too dichotomous. Balance, to them, implies an interconnection between many areas of work and life. The model presented by these authors is divided into four areas: employment, commitment, development and nourishment, and can be described as follows.

- Employment

  I am what I do (meaning our work is who we are). It's the label by which others quickly identify us and by which we present ourselves to the world.

- Commitment

  I am who I know (our connections with other people affect all aspects of our lives, including work). The most rewarding relationships result from two-way commitments with people who are significant to us. Belonging to a family, a group of colleagues, or an organisation helps us define our identity.

- Development

  I am what I can be (our visions of the future affect our identities, our feelings about ourselves and others, and our performances on and off the job). The term "development" implies a bright future with personal and professional well-being. Career development no longer connotes just higher salaries and status. It has come to mean doing something in the workplace that is personally meaningful.

- Nourishment

  I am what I feel. Nourishment has to do with our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. It occurs outside the workplace.

We nourish ourselves when we set aside time to relax, regroup, and recuperate.

- Enjoyment

  The armour for the battle. Enjoyment is the thread that runs through and connects all aspects of balance. When we enjoy our work, our relationships, and our free time — and feel positive about our futures — we experience true balance (Jacobson & Kaye 1993: 26-7).

When employees and organisations understand and act on the need to balance these elements, they are moving together towards a holistic workplace — one that recognises a range of employee needs, the interconnectedness of those needs, and their relationship to achieving organisational goals (Jacobson & Kaye 1993: 26).

1.7 Summary

The various definitions of, and approaches to QWL indicate that there are differences in the meanings given to its concepts and practices. It seems that different goals in terms of QWL activities influence organisations' and researchers' definitions. Whether the aim is to improve productivity, or to promote union/management relations, human relations, worker participation, employee wellbeing, or to establish employee problem-solving groups, will determine the kinds of projects undertaken and the definitions formulated. Each will give a different character to the statements and programmes that follow. Because of these varied goals and approaches to QWL, management theorists and academics have had difficulty in embracing any central concepts.

2. Measurement of QWL

The diversity in the definition of QWL generates widespread disagreement about its measurement and interpretation. The point of view from which the construct is defined will determine which criteria are relevant in its evaluation. The definition of the construct will also affect the way in which research on QWL will be approached, as well as the selection of appropriate data-gathering instruments.

The above difficulties, however, have not prevented researchers from trying to measure what they observe empirically and thus to discover the underlying laws and principles which may predict QWL. Working

with their own definitions of QWL, researchers have decided who constitute appropriate survey populations. Many scientific instruments and tools have been developed. The approach taken to QWL measurement varies along a continuum from completely quantitative to completely qualitative methodologies, with many variations (Ellis 2002: 5).

Since a dominant theme of much QWL research is the assumption that individuals' experiences of satisfaction or dissatisfaction define the quality of their work life (Wilcock & Wright 1991: 458), many QWL surveys typically measure the job-related perceptions and attitudes of individuals, such as job satisfaction, job involvement, work commitment and organisational commitment. Job satisfaction is most often studied (Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 193). This approach measures either the overall job satisfaction an individual is experiencing, or specific facets of job satisfaction such as pay, benefits, working conditions, chances for advancement, job security, co-workers, physical surroundings, resources and equipment, chances to develop skills, supervision, and opportunities for personal growth and development.

Those who approach QWL from the perspective of sociotechnical systems theory (STS) usually reduce the measurement of QWL to work content, job characteristics and their consequences for internal labour relations (Gattiker & Howg 1990: 239; Looij & Benders 1995: 27; Abo-Znadh 1999: 4724). Characteristics such as variety of skills, task identity, task significance, autonomy, speed of work and feedback are evaluated. Job characteristics measures are primarily descriptive while job satisfaction measures are primarily evaluative. Thus, the latter assess respondents' reactions to their jobs, while the former assess the extent to which various characteristics are descriptive of their jobs.

According to Kerce & Booth-Kewley (1993: 193), a QWL survey may be distinguished from other standard surveys of employee satisfaction in that it is more comprehensive. A QWL survey should include at least the measure of overall job satisfaction, facet job satisfaction, job characteristics and job involvement. It may also include a dispositional measure, thus allowing individual dispositional characteristics (such as differences in abilities, values, expectations, personality, perceptions and needs to be considered as moderating variables) (Coetzee 2004: 5; Cloete & Stuart 2004: 11; Annandale *et al* 2004: 9):

> With respect to the subjective measurement of QWL, it can be stated that inherently subjective opinions, e.g. perceptions held by individual employees, can play an important role in their decision to enter, stay with or leave an organization (Looij & Benders 1995: 28).

It seems as if a long-standing debate has centred on the question of whether personal factors or structural factors (job characteristics) are the principal determinants of perceived QWL. The basic assumption of the dispositional approach is that personal attributes such as dispositional tendencies are the primary influence on QWL, while the structural approach assumes that situational variables such as the characteristics of the job have the greatest effect on QWL (Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 192). Advocates of the dispositional position argue that individuals' job attitudes tend to be consistent over time and that enduring dispositional attributes exert as strong an influence on job attitudes as objective job characteristics. It is suggested, therefore, that dispositional variables should be considered when studying job satisfaction, even though structural variables probably have a greater impact and are more relevant for managers seeking to improve the QWL of their workers. In the structural approach, high QWL is defined by the existence of a certain set of organisational conditions and practices. High QWL is assumed to occur when jobs are enriched, supervision is democratic, employees are involved in their jobs, and the work environment is safe. According to Kerce & Booth-Kewley (1993: 195), a third approach, based on expectancy theories, suggests the possibility that individuals come to the workplace with different goals and needs, which they seek to fulfil through work, as well as with different perceptions of job characteristics. Although individuals' particular needs, values, and dispositions shape their work attitudes, this approach recognises that a single, pervasive need structure cannot be assumed. Differences in needs are therefore assumed to account for variation in work attitudes among employees performing the same job.

Those in favour of a more integrated approach focus on the interaction of structural and personal influences, with QWL determined by the degree to which the full range of human needs can be met. This asg and enriched jobs are not universally desirable or important. Individuals bring different needs to the workplace and are likely to experience high QWL to the extent that these needs are satisfied (Kerce

& Booth-Kewley 1993: 192). Therefore, some researchers make use of the discrepancy theory of satisfaction to explain their results (Wilcock & Wright 1991: 462; Rice *et al* 1991: 297).

Brooks & Gawel (2002: 4) see the aim of QWL surveys as to study workplace experiences, the work itself, and the world of work, in order to suggest aspects of the workplace or work that could be modified to enable employees and the organisation to attain their goals simultaneously. Lewis *et al* (2001: ix) measure QWL in terms of extrinsic, intrinsic or prior traits. Extrinsic traits are salaries and other tangible benefits; intrinsic traits include skills levels, authority and challenges, while prior traits are those of the individuals involved, such as their gender or employment status.

Those who regard QWL as a series of interventions and/or activities implemented in the organisation to enhance employee participation and management/union collaboration focus on the quantitative and qualitative measuring of QWL in terms of aspects such as company communication, job satisfaction, union communication, perceived QWL success (employees' perception of how successful intervention was) and QWL issues (as revealed by the minutes kept by problem-solving teams) (Fields & Thacker 1992: 440; Nykodym *et al* 1991: 398).

Some researchers base the development of their QWL survey instruments on general topic areas of QWL, as identified by means of a literature review, for example, co-worker and supervisor support, teamwork and communications, staff training and development, or compensation and benefits (Lewis *et al* 2001: x; Hausman *et al* 2001: 145; Considine & Callus 2002: 3). Others base the construction of their questionnaires on specific theoretical models, such as occupational stress models or need satisfaction and spillover theories (Brooks & Gawel 2001: 5; Van der Doef & Maes 1999: 954; Sirgy *et al* 2001: 244). Often researchers design questionnaires by borrowing and combining items from different questionnaires, for example, on job satisfaction, job characteristics, work involvement, work stress or wellness at work (Cohen *et al* 1997: 275; Peletier *et al* 1995: 18, Carayon *et al* 2003: 60). Many other measures are used to determine QWL, including the Michigan Quality of Work Program, which measures various work-related concerns, and the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire

(MOAQ), for measuring group processes, supervisor behaviour, and so on (Kerce & Booth-Kewley 1993: 198).

According to Carayon (1997: 336), diary studies can be useful in examining QWL in terms of technological stressors and certain temporal conceptual issues. Such studies require people to keep track of work-related events on a frequent basis, varying from hourly or daily to weekly, and can be used to examine fluctuations in work stressors.

From the above, it is evident that many attempts have been made to measure QWL. Definitions of relevant criteria differ according to the points of view of individuals, organisations, and society at large. Needless to say, the measures to be included in a QWL index are not without controversy. In addition, there remain significant methodological challenges to overcome in constructing robust measures that can effectively operationalise the indicators (Considine & Callus 2002: 18).

3. Conclusion

The literature review shows that QWL is a multifaceted construct. It began by being defined as a variable, focusing merely on the satisfaction that people derive from their jobs. It then developed into an approach, where the focus is on the implementation of different methods and programmes to humanise the workplace and improve the overall productivity of the organisation. In terms of QWL as a movement, strong emphasis has been placed on participative management and industrial democracy, as well as on trade union involvement. Lately, it seems that researchers and organisations are focusing more on individuals' experiences of their work, in terms of the fulfilment of their needs and on the outcomes of their work on their well-being and work/life balance.

The International Labour Office (ILO) stated half a generation ago that there is no single commonly accepted definition of the term Quality of Working Life (World Labour Report 1989: 1). It seems that little progress has been made since then in terms of the creation of a universal identity for the construct. Although there is indeed variety in the goals being pursued under QWL, it is important to recognise that there also is a body of underlying value beliefs about people that tends to give it consistency. As Skrovan (1983: xiii-xiv) puts it:

Thus, instead of being a collage in which we see people haphazardly trying different approaches, QWL will be viewed more accurately as a diverse movement that is the product of different goals — but with a unifying set of assumptions about people. Some of these values are the following:

- People should be treated in the work environment with the dignity and respect they deserve as human beings in other situations;
- People support what they help to create;
- People in a work environment prefer to learn and grow with the organization;
- People want to understand how their organization functions and how their individual efforts contribute to the whole, and
- People tend to act more responsibly when they are treated as adults.

Ault (1983: 127-8) sums up the situation by saying:

> Never will QWL be defined clearly, absolutely, once and for all, so that we won't ever have to be bothered with 'that silly question again'. The reason is not lack of clarity in our definitions but rather that each organization, group and individual must answer its/his/her own question with its/his/her own answer. The question 'What do you mean by quality of work life?' literally means 'What do you mean?' not 'What is the absolute meaning?'. The term quality of work life is, after all, multi-ordinal.

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