

Quality of working life expectations and capability

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to determine a set of factors that can represent the conception of a quality of work life with capability and expectations. This article discusses the main dimensions and meaning of quality of working life and its measurements. Also the system of three main levels to which it relates is introduced. Theory based article, review of literature on the concept and measurement of quality of working life.

Key words: quality of working life, expectations, capability

Introduction

Everyone in the world is involved in work in one way or another, and work is an important part of people's value system. The world of work is changing, becoming more global and more technologically advanced. All societies accept the necessity of work in order to survive, but first we need to decide what we mean by work at this time. There is no agreed definition what work is. Conflict theorists, inter-actionists and functionalists view the nature of work from variety of perspectives. For example, sociologists who focus on micro-level analyses are interested in how the social organisations and economic system affect people's attitude. Inter-actionists, for example, examine the factors that contribute to people's job satisfaction and work activities. To understand the way of life of people living in any kind of society we have to pay close attention to work activities and to the institutions which are related with those activities. Especially when the current and future form of work and occupations in globally integrated world, marked by financial and economic changes, is a topical theme. One of the topical issues related with work conception is quality of working life.

Quality of working life affects not only job satisfaction, but also many other areas of life, such as family, leisure time, social life and also financial areas. It takes an important place in people's time budget and good work place is a precondition for increasing the level of quality of life and welfare.

Although most researchers agree that quality of working life is a complex and multidimensional concept, there is no consensus on what categories and factors define and measure quality of working life. Measuring quality of working life is not a simple task as jobs are made up of many components. There is no consensus on what constitutes a good job [1]. There are both subjective and objective indicators. However, there is no agreement on measures, several researchers have pointed out that it is important to measure both monetary and non-monetary work indicators.

Aim of this paper is to analyse connection of workers' expectations and capability with quality of working life. First, we will discuss quality of working life concept, meaning of quality of working life, measurements of quality of working life and also we will discuss expectations and capability concept related with quality of working life.

Quality of working life

Quality of working life is the topic of a lot of research projects, a subject which is widely discussed in many conferences and seminars. The concept of quality of working life in the social sciences dates back to the 18th and 19th century. Quality of working life has been central to the psychological, economical and sociological agenda for several decades. Several well-known and leading theorists have been preoccupied with quality of working life concept. The issue of the quality of work life has been central in quite diverse sociological perspectives. Two traditions of theory and research have been particularly important – neo-Marxist and the “liberal”. On these perspectives the nature of work tasks and work organisation was the determinant of both personal well-being and broader social cohesion. The neo-Marxist perspective (Braverman, Friedman etc.) was concerned with the extent to which developments in work organisations destroyed the capacity of individual self-development through the simplification of tasks and also separating of conception and execution in work [2]. The liberal approach focused on the types of task characteristics that were conducive to subjective well-being, taken mainly as job satisfaction. Both these traditional approaches placed emphasis on the scope for initiative in carrying out the job, the opportunities for learning, variety of work and the ability to participate in decision-making. Later, in 1980s theoretical perspectives focused not only on the work task as the crucial factor in the quality of working life, but also on the stability of employment, including opportunities for career development and job security [2]. Previous research has laid strong foundations for the study of the quality of working life. Also these two traditions of theory have a conception related with capability and expectations, like self-development, opportunities for learning and decision-making.

As a theoretical category and as a subject of empirical research, working life quality is an extensive and internally diverse category. There are a number of theoretical concepts which define it in various contexts: quality of life, health and safety, labour market, social dialogue, EU legislation, etc. and by means of various aspects: security, satisfaction, employment [3].

Some jobs are better than others. Everyone recognizes this fact, both when they discuss jobs in daily conversations and when they actually choose among jobs [4]. People spend a large part of their life at work; all of us want to have a job with high quality of working life conditions, as well as to increase their overall quality of life.

High quality of working life may reduce poverty and social exclusion, diminish the pressure on the welfare state and improve social cohesion, boost competitiveness and promote motivation and productivity [5].

The improvement of quality of working life has captured the imagination of managers and researchers alike. A number of researchers have tried to identify the kinds of factors that determine it, and their effort has resulted in different perspectives. Given the diversity in perspectives two questions remain: What constitutes a high quality of work life? How can it be measured? [6] Researchers, psychologists, sociologists and management consultants etc. agree that it is difficult to give clear definition. Now we will pay attention to some of them. For example, Nadler and Lawler define quality of working life as a way of thinking of people, work and organisations. Its distinctive elements are a concern about the impact of work on people as well as on organisational effectiveness and the idea of participation in organisational problem solving and decision-making. Nadler and Lawler emphasise the importance of the outcomes for individuals, in that quality of work life is seen as something that does not just cause people to work better, but how work can cause people to experience a more satisfactory work life altogether [7]. According to Levis, Taylor and Davis quality of working life is defined by those aspects of work that the organisations' members see as preferable and as enhancing the quality of working life [8]. It means that for no two organisations the definition

Table 1. Quality of working life indicators and dimensions [5].

Dimensions			
Job itself	Skills	Work intensity	Autonomy and control
Job rewards	Pay and fringe benefits		Intrinsic job rewards
Labour market	Job security: Having a job or not		

of quality of working life could be the same. Although the conditions and nature of work vary, just as perceptions of what is satisfactory differ from person to person, there are important similarities that cut across these differences.

The concept of working life quality has a dual nature: overall quality of working life comprises two complementary aspects: objective and subjective. The objective level tends to be represented by salary, working hours, the nature of employment and type of work contract, working conditions and so on. The subjective aspects are most frequently explored through evaluations expressed by the workers themselves. The second key attribute of any information on quality of working life is the level to which it relates: micro-, meso- and macro-level. While the micro-level usually corresponds to data on individual workers, the meso-level to aggregated sets of data, for instance at the level of a company, industry or location, the macro-level contains data on entire country or even broader territorial units displaying an even higher level of aggregation [3]. Information required for the analysis of working life quality is in practice found at different levels and usually needs to be combined.

Measuring quality of working life

Measuring quality of working life is not a simple task as jobs are made up of many components; There is no consensus on what constitutes a good job [9]. Different researchers and managers have come up with different categories and factors to measure quality of working life. Economists tend to focus on aspects such as hourly wages, working hours, fringe benefits – particularly monetary benefits. At the same time, psychologists often emphasize non-economic aspects of work, for example job satisfaction and well-being. Sociologists study occupational prestige or status, autonomy and control etc. [5]. However, there is no agreement on indicators, several researchers have pointed out that it is important to measure both monetary and non-monetary work indicators. These measurements examine quality of working life dimensions and indicators.

Expectations of quality of working life

Working in a company does not mean just to work a set number of hours for making money. When a person applies for a job in a certain company, the company is supposed to have a potential to fulfil his expectations for the job and also quality of working life. It is important to find out what expectations of quality of working life are cherished by people. As mentioned before expectations may differ in the factors that influence the principal dimensions of quality of working life and the social group in which they are distributed. To ensure the well-being to the widest part of society it is necessary to change the capacity components (the circumstances and relationships that affect the working life) and individual's ability to implement the expectations. Thereby, expectations of quality of working life are a prerequisite for working life improvement and moving to high-quality employment and welfare.

Given the importance of relative performance expectations for the formation of status hierarchies, it is crucial to specify how social factors influence the formation of the

performance expectations themselves. Expectation states theory posits three distinct processes. These involve: socially significant characteristics (e.g., race, gender, attraction), social rewards, and patterns of behaviour interchange between actors [10].

In expectation states theory, these hierarchies of evaluation, influence and participation, are referred to as the “power and prestige structure” or the “status structure” of the group. The theory seeks to explain how these inequitable structures emerge and are maintained, and how they are related to other aspects of inequality in society [10]. People’s occupation, their place in the division of labour, is also related with their own self-conception, in other words, with their sense of identity. Society is stratified. People differ in their family, class and educational backgrounds and these backgrounds are an extremely important element in the eventual determination of an individual’s occupation and therefore of the quality of working life he/she can expect to enjoy [11]. Different groups in society enjoy differing access to intrinsic and extrinsic satisfactions in work. Quality of working life is often related to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. According to inter-actionists, work is an important source of self-identity for many people therefore it refers to expectations about people’s attitude toward their work. Work can embody stressors, but it can also provide well-being and satisfaction. Different people will have different expectations and perspectives on what makes for high quality of working life for them. The individual’s expectations of work life are an outcome of many interacting factors.

Capability approach

The capability approach focuses on the information that we need to make judgements about individual well-being, it also can be used to measure poverty of inequality. The most important approaches to capability components are designated by the term functioning and potential capabilities. A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functioning is, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead [12]. The functioning is attributable to individual performance or achievement: to do and be aspects. The term of functioning is used to describe the resources, activities and attitudes that people consider as important, such as knowledge, self-control, education and good job. These aspects are related with people expectations. Capability approach mainly focuses on people’s ability and freedom to choose.

Results

Thinking about the possibility of the realization of the capability in the labour market, it is important to find out what expectations of quality of working life are cherished by people, expectations may differ in the factors that influence the principal dimensions of quality of working life and the social group in which they are distributed. In order to ensure the well-being to the widest part of society it is necessary to change the capacity components (the circumstances and relationships that affect the working life) and individual’s ability to implement the expectations of the quality of working life. Thus, expectations of the quality of working life and capability is a prerequisite for its improvement and moving to high-quality employment and welfare.

Conclusions

Different academic fields have conceptualized quality of working life in different ways and the utility of using a multi-dimensional approach has been emphasized. There have always been differences between countries in the importance attached to the issues related to the quality of working life. Quality of working life can be viewed from two different perspectives: as an issue of objective conditions, and as the question of subjective feelings of workers. Work itself is changing, at the same time people have become more diverse in the needs and wishes that they expect to fulfil through their work. Clarifying people's expectations, researchers can identify characteristics which enable the detection of the desired quality of working life comprehension. The desired quality of working life comprehension allows characterising the relationships and determining of what standards should tend in labour market, so that people would like to work there. We need not only more jobs, but better jobs. High quality of working life may reduce social exclusion and diminish the pressure on the welfare state, promotes motivation and productivity.

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