



Effective organisations: the people factor

Introduction

Key points:

- Growing pressures requiring organisational change
- The importance of responsive, flexible organisations
- People the key factor
- A strategy for organisational effectiveness - QWL

The success of manufacturing and service organisations depends on their ability to satisfy their customers. Achieving this goal requires a level of responsiveness to change, flexibility and organisational effectiveness not usually expected or attained in the much less severe competitive market conditions of the past.

The thrust of this booklet is that improved levels of organisational effectiveness and hence competitive edge can be achieved by further developing the contribution of people in organisations. This requires the development of more rewarding, satisfying, effective jobs and work environments both rooted in the active encouragement of involvement at all organisational levels. These are the two broad elements of a strategy which are then incorporated into the design of the organisation. The strategy is flexible and non prescriptive in that it recognises that organisations may have differing starting points and allows for differing combinations of the design features.

This approach, often described as Quality of Working Life (QWL), is not without its difficulties. While QWL has international recognition and application, connotations of altruism and anti-trade unionism have been acquired, not least because of the way the strategies have sometimes been introduced in the past. A QWL strategy is not about any of these motivations. It has the broad aim of bringing together and satisfying both the goals and development of organisations and the needs and development of all their people.

This booklet is therefore about developing a QWL approach as a direct contribution to the effectiveness of organisations and the people that work in them. It has drawn upon the writings, research and experience of many individuals and organisations.

The need for change

Today's business climate is increasingly characterised by rapid change and fierce competition. Organisations must adapt to this environment if they are to survive and prosper. The pressures for change include:

- global economy, global market, global competition
- even higher standards of reliability and performance, with increasingly demanding quality requirements
- methods of production that are precise, efficient, in control and constantly improved

- competitor workforces that are highly educated and involved in their organisations' survival and prosperity
- employees who want to change the way they work to achieve a better balance between work and home life

People the key factor

These pressures are causing organisations to examine themselves critically. The ability of established patterns of managing people and work organisations to cope adequately with this changing world are particular issues for scrutiny.

The way an organisation attracts, develops, motivates and retains people will increasingly determine whether it succeeds or fails particularly as:

- new forms of work organisation based on skilled, flexible and committed people are required to enable organisations to achieve enhanced performance
- parents of young and disabled children now have the right to request a flexible working pattern and employers have a legal duty to consider such requests seriously and to refuse them only if there are clear business reasons for doing so
- competitors develop a co-ordinated approach to their human resources to achieve competitive advantage
- technology becomes much more freely available and much less a potential source of long-run competitive advantage
- changing demographic factors and skills shortages lead organisations to develop new approaches to attracting, keeping and motivating people
- education levels and expectations continue to rise among workers making them less willing to accept work that allows little opportunity for self-development and pride in the job.

A strategy for organisational effectiveness - QWL

The 'control' approach to people management is still much in evidence. It is designed to produce consistent if not outstanding performance. This strategy was appropriate in a world of limited change, long product life, increasing markets and poorly educated workforces. However, in a faster changing and more competitive environment organisations using such an approach will be at a disadvantage when competing against more flexible organisations designed to develop people and generate commitment and not merely obedience. Successful organisations are turning through the introduction of a QWL strategy to the people who work in them to maintain competitive advantage. The benefits to both management and workers include:

- improved organisation performance through the development of people
- increased co-operation and teamwork within and across all levels of the organisation including movement towards management/trade union partnership
- increased commitment to doing a good job and improved quality performance
- increased commitment to the values and goals of the organisation
- the anchoring of the development of a quality organisation
- increased flexibility and responsiveness as the organisation moves away from hierarchical, bureaucratic structures

- easier introduction and development of new technology and of new competitive systems, for example, Total Quality Management (TQM) and Just in Time (JIT)
- increased worker satisfaction as a result of better jobs and organisational environment
- increased opportunities for personal learning and growth.

What is Quality of Working Life?

Key points:

- The goal
 - organisational effectiveness
 - more challenging, satisfying, effective jobs
- The process
 - the involvement and commitment of people throughout the organisation
- The philosophy
 - people seen as assets not costs

The background

The concept of QWL is not new. It is an approach to organising work and managing people that has evolved over a long period of time. It is an alternative to the management of people through the tight measurement and control of work. Its main contributory strands are:

- people will be better motivated if the work experience satisfies their social and psychological needs in addition to economic needs
- people work more effectively if they are managed in a participative way
- factors which satisfy people at work are essentially different from those factors which cause dissatisfactions
- individual motivation and therefore greater efficiency can be enhanced by attention to the design of jobs and work organisation
- there is a need to see an organisation as a balance between its technical systems (the way the goods or services are produced) and its social systems (the way that people are organised, managed, trained, consulted).

Quality of Working Life in practice

Quality of Working Life (QWL) is best understood if it is seen as a goal, as a process for achieving that goal and as a philosophy setting out the way people should be managed.

QWL as a goal

As a goal, QWL aims to improve organisational effectiveness through the creation of more challenging, satisfying and effective jobs and work environments.

QWL as a process

As a process, QWL calls for efforts to realise this goal through the active involvement of people throughout the organisation. It is about organisational change usually from a 'control' to an 'involvement' organisation.

QWL as a philosophy

As a philosophy QWL views people as 'assets' capable of contributing skills, knowledge, experience and commitment, rather than as 'costs' that are merely extensions of the production

process. It argues that encouraging involvement and providing the environment in which it can flourish produces tangible rewards for both individuals and organisations.

The QWL approach is therefore a broad and flexible strategy which:

- is rooted in the involvement and participation of people at all levels in the organisation
- recognises that where there is a trade union it should be party to and have a stake in the process
- is aimed at the joint interests of both people and organisations
- recognises that management and worker representatives have a joint interest and a joint role in creating organisations that meet both business and human needs
- recognises that the need to respond to markets is usually the initiating force in organisations which drives the introduction of change whether in the office or on the shop floor through the development of technology, new products and services, new forms of organisation and production processes
- provides an enduring set of best principles and practices designed to release the potential of people at all levels in organisations
- looks at the organisation 'as a whole' with the particular need for all people systems to form a coherent element supportive of other organisational objectives, values, policies and practices
- is not just a 'quick fix' or a 'plug in package' which will be a panacea for all organisational and operational problems. The perspective is long- not short-term
- is not just one vehicle such as quality circles, or job enrichment.

Elements of a Quality of Working Life Strategy

Key points: -

- The elements of a QWL organisation reinforce each other
- The elements may include:
 - A statement of organisation philosophy and values
 - A 'participative' management style
 - A flat organisational structure
 - QWL based job design and work structuring
 - Effective communications
 - Joint problem solving
 - Reward strategies focusing on the organisation, the group and skill acquisition
 - Selection processes emphasising individual attitudes and personal characteristics
 - Training to match the QWL culture
 - 'Developmental' performance appraisal

There are a number of key elements in building a work system based on QWL principles. These are described below. Each organisation has its own individual start point and will introduce particular design elements as the strategy is developed. The need is for the elements to reinforce each other and send consistent messages to all workers. Without consistency individual involvement and commitment, and hence organisation, performance will be impaired.

Organisational philosophy and core values

A clearly expressed statement of how people are to be viewed by the organisation and how they will be managed is a useful benchmark. A fundamental change in behaviour reflecting this statement will usually take some time to achieve.

'Control' Values	QWL Values
Labour is a direct cost to be reduced or eliminated	People are an asset to be developed and a major stake holder in the organisation
People are a source of error, of human failings	People are a unique, talented flexible resource
People are essentially lazy, and try to avoid work	People want to take pride in their work and be productive
People are motivated purely by economic reasons	People have a need for recognition, enhanced self image, and influence on decisions affecting their workplace
Management has to think for people, and closely control and supervise their behaviour	Management empowers workers to participate in decisions and contribute to personal and organisational growth

Organisation culture

These different views of people at work are reflected in different organisation cultures, that is: 'different ways of doing things'. Progression from a 'control' organisation culture to a QWL involvement culture will again take time. The perspective is long- not short-term.

'Control' Culture	QWL Culture
Emphasis on rules, procedures; precedent provides guidelines	Emphasis on core values; mission statements provide guidance
Emphasis on control and compliance. Co-ordination and control via rules and procedures	Emphasis on commitment. Co-ordination and commitment via shared goals, values and traditions
Power and decision-making centralised at the top (position authority)	Power and decision-making devolved throughout organisation (relevant expertise)
Top down controls (authoritarian)	Mutual influence systems (participative)
A culture of inferiority. People cause problems and therefore have to be controlled	A culture of pride. Tap peoples' problem solving skills. People are the greatest asset

Individuality suppressed and systems dominate. One best way – the system	Individuals trusted and can question systems. Develop appropriate way
Human resource issues are a secondary consideration in strategic business decisions	Human resource issues are a primary concern in strategic business decisions
A closed system, highly resistant to change stressing stability	An open flexible system, stressing adaptability
Internal orientation, boundary problems, political conflict and demarcations	External orientation, market led, close to the customer, and the environment

Management style

QWL based organisational change may require changes in management style. New structures and new approaches to work organisation will not be effective unless the practices and beliefs of management actively support the new environment.

The manager's role becomes that of initiator, counsellor and facilitator. Particular managerial tasks must be to:

- provide a vision and communicate it
- encourage effective team work and co-operation
- encourage the free flow of ideas and initiative
- develop subordinates rather than rigidly controlling them
- oversee more flexible less authoritarian work structures and ensure they meet their objectives.

The need to initiate and manage change will place increasing emphasis on management leadership skills. Managers will need to be able to motivate and inspire those around them. The skills required will include the ability to:

- build trust and openness
- support self motivation
- delegate decision making to the relevant locations and people
- accept questioning and debate as part of the organisation's search for the best answer
- understand and manage the interactions of people individually and in groups
- adopt joint problem-solving and continuous improvement approaches and techniques.

A manager's authority will not come from his or her status but will be earned through competence.

Organisation structure

The QWL approach to managing people at work has implications for organisation structure. It is assisted by 'flatter' organisation structures which push decision making down to the appropriate level within the organisation to capitalise on individual skills and experience.

It stresses the advantage of structuring around particular products or customers rather than functional specialisms. The aim is to get people to identify with and own the product or service whether that be for internal or external customers. This approach eliminates the need for extensive, hierarchical control systems which are necessary to coordinate different functions. It ensures delivery of the product or service that the customer wants.

'Work organisation and job design'

The QWL organisation gives high priority to the way work is structured and jobs are designed. The principles which are important in job design are listed in Appendix 1. The job design principles employed should be consistent with the organisation's structure and culture. Changes

in job structure and job design therefore need to be approached cautiously and involve the job 'owners'. The table below sets out the distinguishing features of control and QWL approaches to effective job design.

'Communications'

The QWL approach is designed to maximise the contribution and commitment of every worker. The approach demands that considerable attention be given to communications. It requires more than the top down passing of information. Specific objectives are the need to provide the information necessary to decision-making at all levels in the organisation and to provide speedy feedback about the work situation and performance in order to create awareness, to generate understanding, acceptance and commitment to change.

'Control' job design	QWL job design
Work broken down into single tasks requiring narrow skills, deskilling and fragmentation	Tasks are grouped and require multiple, broad skills; emphasis on the whole task
Jobs designed to the lowest common denominator, to enhance control/administration	Jobs are designed to take account of people's needs
Workers require and like laid down rules and external controls	Workers, either individually or in groups, like a degree of self determination
Separates doing and thinking. Workers work and managers think	Combines doing and thinking. Everyone's ideas can contribute to the organisation
Fixed job descriptions. Quality inspected in at the end	Flexible job descriptions. Everyone has responsibility for quality
Job design and accountability focused on closely controlled individuals who have no authority	Job design and accountability focused on more loosely controlled individuals or teams who are encouraged to take decisions and solve problems

Well known communication vehicles include: company newspapers, briefs, bulletins, videos, briefing meetings, 'management by walking about'. Computer networks provide a channel for immediate organisation-wide information.

Joint problem solving

A process of significant potential for developing involvement is joint problem solving. The process is seen as supportive of any existing collective bargaining or consultative machinery. It presents the opportunity for encouraging a much higher level of worker involvement over a wider range of issues than is traditional. Temporary task forces or project teams composed of a cross section of people from within the organisation representing all relevant levels and functions, including trade unions where appropriate, address particular problems. Other approaches also aimed at enhancing worker involvement and capitalising on the experience, talents and abilities of workers include:

- 'Kaizen' meetings (that is: meetings concerned with continuous improvement)
- quality circles
- attitude surveys with feedback
- suggestion schemes.

Reward systems

The reward system should support and be consistent with the QWL approach. It will need to reflect that individuals are being encouraged to participate in the organisation and support the development of the 'involved' organisational culture. It will in particular need to be capable of accommodating the possibility of:

- individual jobs becoming broader, with wider responsibilities and skill requirements

- team working and the need to reward group rather than individual performance
- rewards for skills and knowledge acquired rather than specific job content
- fewer grade levels.

Particular elements of reward strategies aimed at both supporting policies to widen involvement and at encouraging all within the organisation to identify with its success and growth include:

- value added
- share ownership
- skill based pay.

Harmonisation

The commitment of all organisation members is not encouraged if some are treated differently to others.

Differences other than in pay tend to be divisive and difficult to justify. Differences in treatment which do not support a strategy aimed at enhancing commitment and encouraging workers to give of their best include:

- pension schemes
- sick pay schemes
- holidays
- hours of work
- health care provision
- method of payment
- monitoring of attendance (clocking-in).

Cost is, of course, a consideration and may slow progress towards harmonisation. The resistance of some groups may need to be overcome. A measured, staged approach involving negotiation must therefore be necessary.

Single status

The justification for status symbols such as special dining rooms, reserved car parking or separate entrances should be examined. Such differences are again seen as divisive and militate against attempts to generate organisation-wide commitment.

Selection

The selection process becomes critical as a means of matching the individual to the organisation culture. It is important to a QWL strategy that the selection system aims at the individual who is well disposed towards:

- learning and developing
- taking responsibility for his or her own behaviour.

Particular features of the process could be extensive job previews for applicants - for example, open days - and the involvement of people from the potential work area in the selection decision. These facets are both to build ownership of the selection decision and to give the applicant a clear sense of the way the work area operates.

Training

Investment in people is fundamental to the strategy. This means actively facilitating the learning, growth and development of individuals. An extensive capability and commitment to training must be an integral part of the organisation's business strategy. Essential components of the training policy will be:

- the view that continuous training is the norm
- the assumption that training will be a life-long process
- recognition of the need to update existing skills, replace redundant skills and train for new skills
- the need for multi-skilling to cope with change.

Performance appraisal and career plans

The identification of individual training needs will best be supported by a performance appraisal system which focuses on future development needs. The system should be used by managers and workers to:

- create career plans which encompass not only training proposals but also areas of work experience, job goals and personal development
- consider career tracks which may be as much about lateral moves designed to expand learning and competence as upward promotion.

This policy will, in particular, highlight the need for greater use within organisations of open learning facilities and formalised human resource development programmes.

With the support of the organisation emphasis should be placed on the individual taking responsibility for his or her own personal development. The manager's role in this process is predominantly that of counsellor.

Initiating and maintaining a Quality of Working Life change programme

Key points: -

- Recognise possible 'windows' for change
- Ensure participative planning of change
- Employ a 'checklist for change'
- Keep all of the organisation informed
- Monitor the effect of existing systems on the change process

Initiating the programme

Questioning the relevance and suitability of existing ways of managing the organisation provides fruitful ground for the application of QWL initiatives. Such initiatives could stem from a variety of issues which might provide 'a window for change' to management and/or worker representatives. Some examples are:

- a general sense that the organisation is not performing as effectively as it ought to be; that things could be better
- the need to improve organisation flexibility to meet volatile market conditions
- the need to improve quality, and to develop more customer concern
- a sense that the skills and abilities of people are being under utilised
- concerns that there is a lack of commitment among the organisation's people
- changes in technology or working practices needing to be introduced
- workers feeling that they are being over controlled by supervision or by the process
- jobs seen as being too boring
- concerns that communications are not effective
- poor performance indicators such as high labour turnover, lateness and absenteeism
- fractious relationships between managers and the managed; frequency of grievances; poor industrial relations.

Projects may be undertaken which involve the entire organisation or several parts at the same time, or in small areas. Any pilot site chosen should provide real opportunity for making significant successful changes. Attention to the relationship between the pilot site and the rest of the organisation is often crucial.

QWL programmes and projects are concerned with problem solving, requiring the parties involved to proceed jointly from the outset. A number of particular characteristics can be identified. They require:

- an understanding of the QWL approach by those involved
- top management and trade union commitment and a climate of mutual trust
- the QWL approach to be seen as a different way of managing people, not a short-term response to a short-term crisis

- a steering committee or a work group as the tool to look at the particular issue. A suggested approach is provided in Appendix 2.

A change checklist

The following checklist is an aid to progressing and building commitment to change.

- Allow room for participation in the planning of the change
- Leave choices within the overall decision to change
- Provide a clear picture of the change, a 'vision' with details about the new state
- Share information about change plans to the fullest extent possible
- Divide a big change into more manageable and familiar steps; let people take a small step first
- Minimise surprises; give people advance warning about new requirements
- Allow for digestion of change requests - a chance to become accustomed to the idea of change before making a commitment
- Repeatedly demonstrate your own commitment to the change
- Make standards and requirements clear - tell exactly what is expected of people in the change
- Offer positive reinforcement for competence; let people know they can do it
- Look for and reward pioneers, innovators, and early successes to serve as models
- Help people find or feel compensated for the extra time and energy change requires
- Avoid creating obvious 'losers' from the change (but if there are some, be honest with them early on)
- Allow expressions of nostalgia and grief for the past - then create excitement about the future

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, author of *When Giants Learn to Dance* and *The Change Masters*, and the staff of Goodmeasure, Inc. Dr Kanter is also Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School.

Participants in the programme need to have a sense of ownership of it. They need to take responsibility for working through difficulties and learning from their experiences. They will also need to be clear about their expectations of the outcomes of the programme. This will be essential both to progress and to build commitment to the change process.

It is often advantageous to enlist the help of a third party, whether internal or external, to play a facilitating role - that is: someone who will work with the participants to help them to find their own solutions.

Maintaining the initiative

Enthusiasm at the outset of a QWL programme can over a period of time fade slowly away. Yet a long-term perspective is essential. Sustaining momentum involves the need to:

- maintain the commitment both of managers, workers and, where appropriate, their representatives at every stage of the development of the programme
- initiate with all participants regular reviews of the progress of the programme, the uncertainties generated by the change, and expectations which have not been realised
- ensure that those parts of the organisation which might not be directly involved with the programme are kept informed about its development. This is important in order to reduce feelings of, for example, jealousy, suspicion and special treatment
- evaluate and monitor any changes resulting from the programme both through the steering committee, or work group, but in particular through those at the receiving end
- examine existing organisation systems such as pay or training to ensure that they are supportive of any change introduced.

The ultimate aim must be to reach a position where the QWL strategy represents not just a programme but an organisation's way of life - a new culture.

Quality of Working Life

Key points: -

- Collective bargaining process remains in place
- Development of a management/trade union partnership
- Movement towards a less adversarial, problem solving approach in management/trade union relationships

QWL strategy promotes the joint interests of people and their organisations. It recognises that management and trade unions have a joint concern in creating organisations that meet both business and individual needs. It is therefore good practice for management and trade unions to be jointly involved in the design and implementation of the QWL programme, perhaps through a joint steering committee. Any attempt to develop the QWL approach without the full and active involvement of the trade unions, where they are recognised, will not succeed.

QWL and collective bargaining

The boundary between QWL programmes and areas covered by traditional collective bargaining needs to be carefully delineated. The rights, privileges and obligations of both parties in the collective bargaining process should not be disturbed. QWL initiatives should not be used by either party to circumvent collective agreements. However, QWL programmes, which by definition are associated with change, will impinge on collective bargaining areas and there will be overlaps. For example, changes to job design and work organisation will probably require changes to pay and staffing practices.

The relationship of collective bargaining to the QWL process will play an important part in determining the life and effectiveness of any QWL programme. One approach to developing an effective relationship might be a 'QWL forum'. Such a forum can provide an opportunity to examine issues from a problem-solving perspective, with the emphasis on exploring options, finding common ground and reaching consensus. It is a useful device for alleviating friction between the parties which might otherwise develop into serious confrontation. More positively it provides a developmental process which strengthens relationships. Any existing negotiating machinery would continue to deal with bargaining issues requiring formal agreements. The skill required of both trade union and management representatives is to know which is the appropriate channel to progress an issue, and when to switch it over. The challenge is to carry hard bargaining and problem solving in the same relationship. It requires skill, flexibility, and above all trust - but it is achievable.

A QWL strategy will not erode collective bargaining or totally eliminate conflict or adversarial 'win/lose' attitudes. It can, however, facilitate a more mature and constructive process of conflict resolution. Above all, QWL approaches will allow trade unions and management to identify areas of mutual interest and concern. As workers are increasingly recognised as a major stakeholder in the enterprise and are consulted about change, so trade union representatives become more agents of change. The management/trade union relationship becomes more directed towards one of partnership and co-operation designed to secure organisation effectiveness and success.

Benefits for trade union members

Trade union members can, therefore, have much to gain from QWL approaches and initiatives, based as they are on the principles of participation and involvement. They are designed to enhance the dignity and satisfaction of the individual worker. The benefits from a QWL programme can include:

- more interesting and challenging jobs, increased job satisfaction, self worth and self fulfillment
- more meaningful involvement of people in decision making affecting their work
- increased opportunity for utilising skills and abilities and developing new ones

- more participative, less authoritarian management styles
- increased access to information
- increased emphasis on harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment
- reduced conflict and discontent
- less stressful work environment
- a more effective organisation
- the prospect of greater job security and enhanced rewards.

Appendix 1

Job design principles

It is rarely possible for jobs to be designed to incorporate all the characteristics listed. Some will need to be traded off against others. Ideally, however, jobs should:

- form a coherent whole, either independently or with related jobs. Performance of the job (or jobs) should make a significant contribution to the completion of the product or service, a contribution which is visible to the job holder
- provide some variety of pace, method, location and skill
- provide feedback of performance, both directly and through other people
- allow for some discretion and control in the timing, sequence and pace of work efforts
- include some responsibility for outcome
- provide some opportunity for learning and problem-solving (within the individual's competence)
- be seen as leading towards some sort of desirable future
- provide opportunity for development in ways that the individual finds relevant.

Appendix 2

An organisational change model

Stage 1

Initial meetings between management, trade unions (where recognised) and workers to obtain agreement to jointly explore ways of improving the identified situation.

Stage 2

Obtain agreement on the approach to be adopted; the possible use of a third party facilitator as a resource.

Stage 3

Set up a joint steering committee to initiate, develop, implement, and co-ordinate the change programme.

Stage 4

Undertake through the steering committee diagnosis, analysis of the situation; the extension of the diagnosis to involve individuals and work groups working to the main steering committee to deal with particular issues.

Stage 5

Develop alternative solutions and approaches; evaluate feasibility; select the optimum solution.

Stage 6

Implement the change involving those concerned including any necessary preparation and training.

Suggested further reading

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Effective communication: the most important management tool of all
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