

# PART ONE

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## QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE

### *Abstract*

*In this article the author defines the concept of the quality of working life, describes the situation in Slovenia and tests the relation between the quality of working life, on the one hand, and the shift towards more intellectual jobs, the service economy and flexible forms of employment, on the other hand. The quality of working life is defined, according to Allardt, as the possibility for workers to satisfy the following needs through their work: 'having' or material needs, work security needs, 'loving' or societal needs and 'being' or personal needs. Using the analytical method, the author has created indicators and indexes which demonstrate the ability to satisfy these needs in the work place. Application of these indicators and indexes on data collected in 1994 shows that there is a relatively low quality of working life in Slovenia. In particular, the study has revealed poor physical working conditions, a high level of technological control, a high rate of conflict and low autonomy in the work place. The analysis also shows that a shift towards intellectually more demanding work and towards the service economy are associated with enhanced possibilities for satisfying material, security and personal needs. However, opportunities for the satisfaction of societal needs tend to decrease with such a shift. The increased flexibility of employment has not, at least for the time being, caused any deterioration in the quality of working life.*

*Key words: quality of working life, quality of employment, satisfaction of needs, social indicators.*

### INTRODUCTION

The quality of working life (QWL) deserves special attention for a variety of reasons.

First, irrespective of the recent reduction in working hours, work continues to take up a significant part of the daily time of economically active adults. In many cases, working adults think about their jobs and prepare for

them even during non-working hours. The burdens of work are not left behind the walls of offices and workshops. The QWL thus has an impact on the individuals' quality of life in general.

Second, although there has been a decrease in available jobs, individuals are not ready to take and keep any kind of job if they have alternatives. In Slovenia, for instance, there are many vacancies in engineering jobs as well as vacancies for waiters and nurses which persist in spite of high unemployment numbers (Republiški zavod, 1995: 35). Twenty-four percent of temporary employees and 34.7% of those on short-time work contracts are actively seeking another job (Svetlik, 1994: 131). What matters is not merely to have a job, but to have one which is well-paid with a certain level of employment security. Moreover, in addition to work ethics there has been an increasing emphasis on work aesthetics (Kerr, 1979).

Third, recent developments related to the globalization of the economy, which makes technology and capital equally available to any producer, is causing a shift in competition from the markets for products and services to the market for labour (Pieper, 1990). The most important question for a producer is how to attract the best employees and how to develop and utilize their work capabilities in the best possible way. This is certainly not possible without the acknowledgement that people have a multitude of needs which must be met by the working environment. In this respect, QWL may serve as a good conceptual framework.

Fourth, in recent decades, there has been a shift from the concept of quantity to that of quality of production. The leading theory has been total quality management (Becker, 1991). However, one cannot expect the highest quality production if the work of employees is not well-paid and is not relatively secure, if the employees do not have a good relationship with their co-workers and with their superiors, if they do not cooperate in well-organized working teams, if they do not have the opportunity to learn at work and to use their knowledge and experience at work, and if they do not have sufficient autonomy. Therefore, total quality management and QWL go hand in hand.

Fifth, one can observe an increasing share of workers dealing in services and information, an increasing share of intellectual workers as well as the growing flexibility of labour markets and work arrangements. The key issue is what these changes will bring about with respect to the quality of working life. Does the shift of production to services and information and the utilization of a more educated labour force increase the QWL? Do flexible work arrangements decrease QWL as is usually assumed (Kravaritou-Maniatakis, 1988)?

In this article, we will first present an empirically based concept of the QWL and will describe the QWL of employees in Slovenia. In the second part, we will examine the relationship between the production sector, the educational profile of employees and the type of (in)flexible employment arrangements on one hand and QWL on the other. This will be done using cross-section data collected on a representative sample of Slovenian employees in 1994.

## THE QWL CONCEPT AND ITS MEASUREMENT IN SLOVENIA

The QWL concept has mainly been used in human resource management literature (Werther and Davis, 1987: 489-509; Dessler, 1988: 464-476). It aims at enhancing productivity by means of workers' motivation and satisfaction as well as such methods as avoidance of stress, improvement of communications and the reduction of resistance to change. It assumes that work productivity cannot be increased by autocratic leadership which tends to provoke resistance and absenteeism.

The best known organizational form for the improvement of the QWL are quality control circles. Other forms, such as working teams, socio-technical systems, co-decision making, and autonomous working groups, are also frequently mentioned in the literature. These are methods which aim to make work more interesting and challenging, and to create a good physical and social working environment. The aim of management is to lower the strain and health risks of employees, to increase their incomes, to enhance mutual support at work and to develop and utilize their creative potentials.

These managerial solutions seek synergetic effects that would result in both a high level of satisfaction of individuals' needs and in the successful attainment of business goals. However, these solutions are not sufficiently elaborated for the purpose of this analysis. Therefore, we shall use as a starting point Allardt's concept which is composed of the three groups of needs: having, loving and being (Allardt, 1993). In the first group there are basic material needs and the need for security, in the second there are social needs or the need to belong, and in the third group there are personal needs or the need for self-actualization. We will concentrate primarily on the resources that individuals have at their disposal in the work environment to satisfy these needs. The aim is to combine Allardt's needs concept with Titmuss' concept of 'command over resources' (Titmuss, 1958).

The QWL has been described by a number of indicators, which have been grouped into 15 composite measures - indexes (see table 1). However, the indicators used in the questionnaire were chosen rather eclectically without a clear link with the above-mentioned concepts. Therefore, we grouped them into indexes post-festum keeping in mind the basic concepts on the one hand and employing factor analysis (of the main components), on the other hand. The same procedure was used when deciding which of the 15 indexes describes the possibility of satisfying either 'having', 'loving' or 'being' needs.

On the basis of factor analysis, 15 indexes have been placed into five factors which explain 55.2% of the variance. The grouping was close to Allardt's conceptual framework, with the exception that the indexes of having (excluding security) and being were placed together in one factor, that the indexes of loving were grouped into two separate factors, and that the index showing the daily distribution of work time was isolated as a separate factor. However, according to the basic concept, four groups of indexes have been formed for the purpose of analysing the following: having, security, loving and being.

## HAVING

We describe one's ability to satisfy material needs by the following indexes:

- monthly income,
- fringe benefits, and
- daily distribution of work time

In fact, all variations of the factor analysis have placed monthly income and fringe benefits among the being indexes. This shows that income is not just a means to satisfy basic needs but also has an important symbolic meaning. It is an indicator of one's social position and personal achievements. That is why individuals are more sensitive to wage differences than to absolute wage levels. From the theoretical perspective there is no dilemma between 'having' and 'being' (From, 1976). In fact, these two concepts seem to be complementary. They could be linked with such relationships as 'to be and to have' or perhaps 'to be via having'. In spite of these results, we will deal with 'having' indexes separately assuming that they indicate the possibility of satisfying material needs.

As expected and in accordance with certain other studies (Hedstrom, 1988), the distribution of monthly income is asymmetrical meaning that a higher percentage of employees receive lower incomes and vice versa.

Fringe benefits appear not to be used extensively as a part of compensation packages. Among eight possible fringe benefits, only 2.53 are received on average. The standard deviation is 1.07, meaning that the treatment of various groups of employees does not differ significantly. The majority of employees get two traditional benefits: coupons or money for hot meals (69.0%), and money for travelling costs (55.7%). The other benefits are rather rare: partial reimbursement of holiday costs (10.0%), purchase of various goods at reduced prices (9.6%), profit sharing (6.5%), a car (2.6%), paid telephone costs (0.7%), and paid housing (0.2%). Perhaps in Slovenia, we should pay closer attention to the possibility of profit sharing plans as a new kind of fringe benefit, a practice which in 1994 was still rather limited because the privatization process had only just begun.

The daily distribution of work time does not seem to have much in common with wages and fringe benefits. However, there is a clear relationship between the two: the more favourable one's distribution of daily work time is, the higher the fringe benefits. It seems that 'privileges' accumulate. Having high wages, getting fringe benefits and working in the most convenient part of the day essentially means having a good job.

The daily distribution of work time is assumed to be:

- favourable if one works in accordance with one's choice or, in general, during the day;
- medium if one works in two separate shifts;
- unfavourable if one works in the evening or in the night, in three shifts, or if one does not know when one's shift will occur.

The above classification is adjusted to the most common work and life patterns and is not tested for the preferences of individuals which may vary during the course of time. Nevertheless, 68.5% of employees have

favourable, 17.7% have medium and 13.8% have unfavourable distribution of the daily working time. In the light of the expanding service sector, these results seems quite good.

## SECURITY

Allardt places security among the basic 'having' needs. However, factor analysis has created a separate and consistent group of indexes with the respective factor values in brackets:

- the probability of work injuries and occupational diseases (0.67),
- physical working conditions (0.58),
- physical strain at work (0.72).

These indexes describe physical security. Unfortunately, the indexes that would cover social or job security were not included in the research.

The probability of work injuries and occupational diseases is described in the following way:

- If a worker was injured at his/her present work place and if he/she or one of his/her coworkers were off the job for a certain period during the prior year as a result of a work related injury or an occupational disease, we consider the probability of work injuries and occupational diseases as high. According to our data, 6.6% of workers have such jobs.
- If neither of the above occurred, we consider the probability of work injuries and occupational diseases as low. 70.7% of workers were working in such a positions in 1994.
- For the other 22.7% of workers the probability of work injuries and occupational diseases was classified as medium.

The physical work environment varies in accordance with conditions related to noise, computer screen, monotony, unnatural body position, gas, dust, smoke, vibration, poison, acid and explosive. Exposure to such conditions may be more or less frequent or even permanent. The results reveal that between 35% and 39% of employees are exposed to the noise, gas, monotony, unnatural body position and the computer screen. The percentage of employees exposed to poisoned substances and vibrations is 16.9 and 11.5 respectively.

The index of the quality of physical working conditions is formed by counting the amount of one's exposure to the enumerated conditions during at least a part of one's working time. No exposure is found in only 18.2% of cases, exposure to up to two of these conditions in 35.0% of cases, and more than two in as many as 46.7% of cases. Although exposure to the computer screen is becoming more and more common and may not be sufficiently harmful to warrant much attention, the number of other unfavourable working conditions in Slovenia remains very high. Nearly half of Slovenian employees are exposed to two and nearly a quarter to five unfavourable working conditions apart from the computer screen.

Physical strain seems to have a close relationship to work injuries, occupational diseases and unfavourable working conditions. It is described in the following way:

- one must be strong enough to lift 60 kilos in order to perform one's job,
- one's job is so demanding that one sweats every day,
- one's job is physically demanding in certain other respects.

The respondents answered yes (2) or no (1) to the above three items. The values were summed up and 2 was deducted. Therefore, the physical strain index has values from 1 - 4. Nearly a quarter of employees have values of 3 or 4, which means that they have physically very strenuous jobs.

## LOVING

Loving denotes fundamental societal needs, the need to belong. One needs to be accepted, respected, helped and awarded and one must be enabled to do the same in return for co-workers and superiors. Through these emotions, an individual considers him/herself to be a member of his/her working group and a member of the organization. The individual thus has a certain intra-group and intra-organizational status according to which he/she may influence the behaviour of others.

In the case of these particular needs, it is very difficult to determine deductively which indexes describe the ability to satisfy the needs of 'loving'. Factor analysis formed two groups of indexes with the respective factor values:

- individualization of work (0.72),
- control of workers by their superiors (0.69),
- control of workers by technology (0.64),
- conflicts at work with either co-workers, superiors and subordinates, or with clients and business partners (-0.83),
- psychical strain (0.71).

Individualization of work decreases if:

- one can get necessary help at work by co-workers,
- one works in a group which shares the responsibility for the result of such work,
- the pace of one's work is determined by the pace of one's co-workers.

Each of the above characteristics was estimated on a scale of 1 -5. The results indicate that 50.6% of employees have a high probability of being helped by co-workers (values 4 and 5) and that 24.1% of employees have a relatively low probability of being helped by others (values 1 and 2). It is difficult to judge from this information whether individual solidarity is high or low. We also do not know the reasons why approximately one-half of employees cannot rely on the help of co-workers; there could be technical, organizational or personal reasons.

High or very high sharing of responsibility for work results is reported by 39.7% of employees, while very low or no sharing of responsibility is reported by some 47.2% of employees. High and low group determination of work pace is reported by 26.8% and 58.7% of employees respectively. This indicates a relatively high level of work individualization.

The index of individualization is formed by summing up values obtained on all three dimensions. Two points are deducted in order that the new scale starts with the value of 1. Values of 1 - 4 represent high, values of 5 - 9 medium and values of 10 - 13 low individualization<sup>1</sup>.

The synthetic results indicate that 31.3% of employees have highly individualized work, nearly half have work with a medium level of individualization, and only 19.3% of employees perform jobs of low individualization. Therefore, it can be concluded that the ability to satisfy societal needs in the work environment are, in general, not very high. This is probably more the consequence of work organization than the consequence of technology. Only 18% of employees say that the pace of their work is highly or very highly determined by technical equipment. Individualized work structures lower the social pressure of working groups to which individuals may be exposed. However, it does not create a supportive environment for synergistic effects of team work. The relatively low level of shared responsibility for work results and the low level of coordination on the pace of work indicates a lack of group and organizational solidarity that should ideally be part of the organizational structure. This deficiency is partly offset by the informal solidarity reflected in the level of help received by co-workers.

The control of workers by their superiors and by technology may be understood as a limit on one's autonomy. However, the factor analysis does not place it among other indexes of personal autonomy. Rather, it places it close to the individualization index, indicating its impact on social connections at work. The following relationship was revealed: the higher the individualization of work, the lower the control of workers by their superiors and by technology, and vice versa. It seems that the individualization of work has not yet been counter-acted by organizational measures nor by the shift of management's orientation from tasks to people.

The control of workers by their superiors includes:

- the interference of superiors in the work process, and;
- the appraisal by superiors of work results.

69.6% of employees report no control or very little control exerted by superiors during the work process and only 17.1% of employees report tight control by superiors. In terms of the appraisal of work results by superiors, the outcome was similar, such appraisal never occurring or only very rarely occurring in the case of 55.0% of employees and being performed regularly or quite often in the case of 26.9% of employees.

The composed index of control over workers by superiors indicates that 55% of Slovenian employees are subject to loose control by their superiors or none at all. 30.8% report medium control and only 14.2% report tight control exerted by their superiors. This may indicate a rather relaxed work-

ing situation which is preferable for most individuals. However, it may also indicate a rather anarchic working environment. A lack of attention paid by superiors to subordinates may also increase the level of social isolation and reduce social links. Workers are left to their own devices, a style better suited to professionals than to other employees. These workers may not be praised enough for their work achievements and may miss the support of the organizations. In such a situation, problems which occur in the work place tend not to be solved promptly if at all.

The control of workers by technology increases if:

- workers must pay high attention to the course of the work process,
- workers must respect precisely defined rules and habits while working,
- the pace of work is determined by machines and equipment,
- the pace of work must be adjusted to the needs of clients.

These four indicators were suggested by a separate factor analysis as constituent ingredients of the technological control index. The separate results are very indicative: 74.1% of employees report that their work demands a lot of attention and concentration; 62.3% report that they must respect pre-defined rules and habits; 40.6% must to a great extent adjust their work pace to the needs of clients; and only 18% say that the pace of work is highly determined by the machines and equipment. This means that technological control is relatively high. However, it is in fact more social and organizational than technical.

The synthetic index reveals that tight technological control is felt by 25.7% of employees, medium control by 56.7%, and loose control by 17.6% of employees. The principal characteristics of the socio-technical system of Slovenian work organizations are thus high individualization of work and low direct involvement of management which prefers to control the work situation via technology. Such a situation is not generally favourable for the satisfaction of societal needs in the working environment.

We have used two additional indexes to describe the work situation from the perspective of satisfying 'loving' needs. The first criteria is whether there are conflicts at work. 60.2% of employees report that they have had disturbing conflicts. This seems to be a rather high percentage which complements the information received about the low level of attention paid to workers by the management. Such conflicts probably do not create a good working and social atmosphere in the work environment.

Second, factor analysis adds to the index of conflicts also the index of psychical strain. 66.9% of employees claim that their work is psychically strenuous. The more psychically strenuous one's work the lower the number of conflicts the employee is involved in. Those with more psychically demanding jobs, the intellectuals, seem to handle conflicts at work better than other employees.

## BEING

The ability to satisfy one's personal needs at work are measured by the following indexes:

- autonomy of working time,

- work autonomy,
- participation in decision-making,
- learning and the utilization of knowledge at work.

These indexes were grouped by factor analysis, and as mentioned already, monthly income was also added in.

Indicators of autonomy of working time are:

- that 78.8% of employees are allowed to receive private visits during working time,
- that 66.9% of employees can determine their own pace of work,
- that 17.4% of employees are not required to begin and end their work punctually,
- that one-third of employees have flexible working schedules, and;
- that 38% of employees may leave their work place for a short period without notifying superiors.

It is clear that the autonomy of working time varies depending on different aspects being examined. However, a synthetic index shows that 17.7% of employees enjoy very low autonomy of working time, 66.4% enjoy medium autonomy and 15.9% enjoy high autonomy of working time. These do not seem to be unfavourable results, particularly in light of the rather tight control over workers by technology.

However, perhaps the most important aspect of one's over-all autonomy is autonomy over the work itself. This is a function of the employee's ability to decide 'what to do' and 'how to do it'. The assumption that the ability to make the decision on 'what' also implies the ability to make the decision on 'how' is confirmed to a great extent by the results. Of a total of 809 respondents, only 30 replied that their ability to decide on 'what' was greater than the ability to decide on 'how', while the reverse was reported by 242 of the 809 employees. The remainder reported that they had equal autonomy over both 'what' work was performed and 'how' it was to be done.

A synthetic index, created in a similar fashion as the previously mentioned indexes, shows that a low level of work autonomy is given to 55.4% of employees, a medium level to 28.4% and a high level to only 16.2%. The interesting outcome is that low control of superiors and high individualization of work does not automatically provide for high work autonomy, especially when technological control is high.

32.5% of employees responded that they participate in the decision-making on what to produce as well as on personnel and money issues. This is close to the 30.9% of those who answered that they significantly influence the decisions on what to do in their work organizations.

In terms of fulfilling one's need for 'being', perhaps the possibility of learning on the job and of utilizing one's knowledge at work is even more important than autonomy over working time and over the actual work itself. This contributes to both career development and self-actualization. For the creation of the 'learning and utilization of knowledge' index, we take into account those indicators which showed the following: how much creativity

was demand at the work place; if employees learn new things at work; if employees had the opportunity to attend courses during the previous year, and; if employees use at work the knowledge acquired during their formal education and training as well as knowledge acquired during former jobs. The results yielded low values for 27.4% of employees, medium values for 49.3%, and high values for 23.4%. This result is somewhat better than the result for work autonomy.

## **THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRENDS AND THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE**

We are facing three important developments in the sphere of work in Slovenia.

First, an increasing share of educated people are entering the labour force. From 1971 to 1991, the share of the population with a secondary education aged 15 or more increased from 25.4% to 42.8%. During the same period, the share of the population with a college or university education increased from 3.3% to 8.8% (Statistični letopis, 1994).

Second, Slovenia is entering the post-industrial developmental stage. In 1991, 15.0% of the active population were employed in agriculture, 45.1% in industry and 39.9% in services (Ignjatovič, Svetlik, Vehovar, 1992). Only two years later, the respective percentages were 10.7%, 44.2% and 45.1% (Zavod Republike Slovenije za statistiko, 1994).

Third, the flexibility of the labour market, virtually non-existent until 1989, is now rapidly increasing. In 1994, already 11.1% of employees were working in flexible work arrangements, such as temporary work contracts, part-time work contracts and work for direct pay (Svetlik, 1994).

It is not easy to forecast what changes these developments will bring about in terms of the QWL. This is especially true because we have available cross-section data only. However, the cross-tabulations of the 15 indexes of the QWL, the educational profiles of the employees, the sector of production and the type of work arrangement may provide useful indications.

The contingency analysis of the 15 QWL indexes and the educational profile of employees shows a significant relationship ( $p=0.00$ ) in all but two cases: namely, fringe benefits and conflicts at work. The contingency coefficients are the highest in cases of learning and utilization of knowledge (0.43), monthly income (0.42), work autonomy (0.39), participation in decision-making (0.38), autonomy over working time (0.31), physical working conditions (0.31, and physical strain (0.28).

The results indicate that more educated employees are better able to satisfy their being needs, i.e. they enjoy higher autonomy at work and they acquire and utilize more knowledge than less educated employees. The same could be said of the having and security needs of more educated employees. They have better wages, better physical working conditions and less physically strenuous work. They also work at more convenient times of

day and are less exposed to work injuries and occupational diseases. It may be expected that the continued intellectualisation of work will improve these aspects of the QWL.

Although significant, the relationship between the education and the loving indexes are weak. They indicate that more educated employees have more individualized work, that they are less controlled by their superiors and by technology, and that they have more mentally strenuous work. On these grounds, one might expect decreasing opportunities to satisfy the needs of loving at work along with the increasing educational level of employees.

The strong relationship between the level of education and wages indicates that the introduction of the market economy has strengthened rather than weakened the value of education as a measure of human capital. Fringe benefits do not yet represent a means of social stratification within work organizations.

Contingency analysis of the QWL indexes and the sector of economic activity reveals similar results as the previous analysis with the exception that the contingency coefficients are somewhat lower. This could be explained by the higher education of employees in the service sector. The percentage of employees without vocational education in the agricultural sector and in industry is 37.1%, in market services 15.9% and in public services 15.1%. The respective percentages of employees with college or university education are 11.9%, 10.3% and 38.0%. One may expect that the effects on the QWL of the ongoing transformation to a service economy will be similar to those of intellectualisation, i.e. opportunities to satisfy having, security and being needs will increase while opportunities to satisfy loving needs will decrease.

The analysis of the relationship between the 15 QWL indexes and the type of work arrangement which was defined as either flexible or inflexible did not yield statistically significant differences with the exception of monthly wages ( $p=0.00$ ,  $c=0.14$ ) and participation in decision-making ( $p=0.05$ ,  $c=0.07$ ). Contrary to some other analyses (Kravaritou-Manitakis, 1988, Crook et.al, 1992), we cannot conclude that the increased flexibility of work and employment arrangements or of the labour market is bringing about a lower QWL. However, this process has only recently emerged in Slovenia and may not have yet shown its darker side.

**Table 1:**  
**THE VALUES OF THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE INDEXES IN THE CASE OF A SAMPLE OF SLOVENIAN EMPLOYEES**  
 (in percentages of all employees)

INDEX	VALUE CATEGORIES				
<b>HAVING</b>					
- Monthly income in 1.000 SIT	more than 105 6.5	60 - 104 27.5	45 - 59 27.8	up to 44 38.5	
- Fringe benefits	four or more 15.9	2 or 3 61.6	1 or none 22.5		
- Daily distrib. of working time	favourable 68.5	medium 17.7	unfavourable 13.8		
<b>SECURITY</b>					
- Probability of injuries and occup. diseases	low 70.7	medium 22.7	high 6.6		
- Physical working conditions	very good 18.2	good 16.8	medium 18.2	bad 23	very bad 23.4
- Physical strain	small 75.4	big 24.6			
<b>LOVING</b>					
- Individualizat. of work	low 19.3	medium 49.4	high 31.3		
- Control of superiors	loose 55.0	medium 30.8	tight 14.2		
- Control of technology	loose 17.6	medium 56.7	tight 25.7		
- Conflicts at work	no 39.8	yes 60.2			
- Psychological strain	small 33.1	big 66.9			
<b>BEING</b>					
- Work time autonomy	high 15.9	medium 66.4	low 17.7		
- Work autonomy	high 16.2	medium 28.4	low 55.4		
- Participation in dec. making	yes 32.5	no 67.5			
- Learning and knowledge utiliz	a lot 23.4	medium 49.3	a little 27.4		

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## NOTE

1. Most of the indexes are formed in a similar way. Namely, the highest values of the separate indicators are summed up, and n-1 is deducted from the sum so that the scale starts with the value of 1. The scales are, as a rule, recorded in three equidistant values.