

Conceptualising the Quality of Working Life (QWL)

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I. Introduction.

Recently, many books and articles which have a new sort of titles, e. g., “humanisation”, “humanizing”, “people matter”, etc., have been published in the field of economics, organizational theory and personnel research. For instance, I can point out some well known books which are written by E. LoebI (*Humanomics*, 1976), E. F. Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful ... A Study of Economics As If People Mattered*, 1973), P. G. Gyllenhammar (*People at Work*, 1977,), L. E. Davis et al (*The Quality of Working Life*, 1975,), S. Takezawa et al,¹⁾ etc. The later two books which deal with Labor and Personnel problems are related especially closely to this paper.

Although this tendency (utilizing the term “humanisation”) has grown since the end of the 1960s, is it merely a short-term prevailing phenomenon (fad) or a new essential paradigm which will lead

the epoch ?

Professor Seiki Sha emphasized the following idea : “we have seriously recognized in the 1970 s that faith in science has broken, and the modern rationalism and the functionalism have been doubted by a great many of people. However, from the long-term viewpoint, this kind of tendency is not a product of the era of the irrationalism but a transition from the science-oriented rationalism to the new humanism which esteems not the civilization of mechanicalism and functionalism but intellectual culture and plural values.”²⁾ Moreover, professor Kenzou Sakamoto argues his opinion as follows : “we should reconsider the standpoint that the mechanicalism is the best and only way as a science and it is applicable to all dimensions, including economy, society and human-beings. We have to recognize that the mechanicalism is merely a part of the epistemology, and we have to deal it with as one of man’s instruments.”³⁾ However, professor Sakamoto maintains a point of view that we should not deny the mechanicalism but utilize it humanly as one of man’s tools, and we should also reconsider the consequences of the other scientific methods, e. g., organicism and the new interpretation of alchemisticalism (or Hermeticalism).⁴⁾

If we take those two opinions into account, it seems that the above-mentioned tendency (growing use of the term “humanisation”) commonly has the significant meaning of criticism of mechanicalism and/or the “anti-mechanicalism”. Such a tendency, in recent years, has become more or less a consensus goal both in capitalist and socialist industrialised societies. Particularly, the field of the “QWL” (Quality of Working Life) and/or the “Humanisation of Work”

which is the focus of this paper has also become an extremely important consensus goal. Nevertheless, this consensus goal “may sometimes conceal the fact that opinions differ as to the causes of dehumanisation, and the instruments, strategies, and concrete objectives of humanisation policies. Differences of this type are not only a matter of divergent socio-economic reference schemes but at least, in the capitalist countries, mirror also the plurality of ideologies, interests, conceptualisations as well as disciplines and research orientations relevant to the theme.”⁵⁾

In short, owing to the ensuring ambiguity and also unclitcal use of the concept QWL or Humanisation of Work, it is necessary to explore the following points:

- (1) What is the QWL or Humanisation of Work ?
- (2) When was the QWL born, how has it evolved and who first conceived it ?
- (3) Why has the QWL born and developed ?
- (4) Where was the QWL born and developed ?
- (5) How was the QWL born and how has it evolved (or what are the practical contents and characteristics of the growth of the QWL) ?

The literature that has developed around these terms is somewhat ambiguous with regard to the above-mentioned questions. Therefore, it is necessary to elucidate these questions.

However, given space and time limitations, I would like to focus merely on the first question : What the QWL is, and I will explore briefly the following few points.

- (1) Evaluating the term QWL or Humanisation of Work and its

synonym.

- (2) Defining the concept of the QWL ;
 - a) The connotation of the QWL or the criteria for the QWL,
 - b) Historical, philosophical and methodological background of the QWL.
- (3) The denotation of the QWL, that is, a brief outline of practical countermeasures of the QWL.
- (4) Brief concluding remarks.

Footnote)

- 1) Shin-ichi Takezawa et al, *Roudou no Ningenka...Shidou Shita QWL Kakumei (The Humanisation of Work... Growing the QWL Revolution)*, 1975, Sougou Roudou Kenkyu-jyo Book Co. in Japan, (English translation by K. Kikuno).
- 2) Seiki Sha, *Atarashii Kagakushi no Mikata (A New Viewpoint of Science History)*, 1978, Koudan-sha Co. in Japan, pp.219 — 220, (English translation by K. Kikuno).
- 3) Kenzou Sakamoto, *Gendai Kagaku o Dou Toraeruka (How do we consider the Modern Science)*, 1978, Koudan-sha Co. in Japan, p. 170, (English translation by K. Kikuno).
- 4) Ibid, pp. 121—132 and 173—182.
- 5) Hans Günter, "Humanisation of Work and Social Policy" in *Labor and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Jan. 1977, p. 89.

II. Evaluating the Term QWL and Humanisation of Work and Its Synonym.

Due to the growing interest being shown recently by the indus-

trialised countries, whatever their political systems, in an attempt to improve conditions and the quality of working life, various terms have developed as follows.

The ILO uses the terms “humanisation of work”, “job satisfaction” and the “quality of working life”; the OECD speaks of the “quality of working life”, “job satisfaction” and “improvement of the internal working environment”; the Commission of the European Communities emphasises the necessity for “improving working conditions” and points to the link between this and “improving the quality of life”.¹⁾

On the other hand, many behavioral scientists, many employers and various union leaders use more narrow terms such as “job satisfaction” (a bias of many behavioral scientists); “job enlargement”, “job enrichment” and “group prouduction methods” (a tendency of many employers); “participation in management” (stressed by various union leaders).²⁾

Furthermore, certain people have recently recognized that the Quality of Working Life (QWL) and Humanisation of Work have a wider meanings to be linked with all desired change in society (the environmental conditions). Eventually, QWL (Quality of Working Life) is recently used so often that it has a more positive ring lending itself to less controversy.³⁾

Hence, in the following pages, I will merely use the term QWL which means an attempt to improve and humanize working conditions and working life. However, it seems that the concept of QWL is still ambiguous. Therefore I will explore briefly the concept of QWL in the following parts. By so doing, I hope to provide clues for

understanding the significance of the “QWL”.

Footnote)

- 1) J. Carpentier, “Organisational Techniques and the Humanisation of Work” in *International Labor Review*, Vol. 110, No. 2, Aug. 1974, p. 94.
- 2) H. Günter, op. cit., p. 89; ILO use recently International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (PIACT ... from the French initials of the programme) ... ibid, p. 89.
- 3) Ibid, p. 89.

III. Defining the Concept of the QWL.

J. Carpentier argued that : “Concern over the application of work organization principles is not new and as long ago as the nineteenth century Saint-Simon and Fourier were suggesting that work communities should be set up. Attempts to apply new principles started in the 1930s with the communities and autonomous work groups of Dufreuil and Rimailho. But it was not really until the second half of the 1950s that serious research got off the ground, reflecting process in the scientific study of man and his working environment.”¹⁾

And, L. Davis wrote : “Job design research is relatively new, having originated only in the last decade (the 1950s ... Kikuno). More recently, a few industrial firms have begun to manipulate some job contents and configurations. The first such experiment that was reported took place in the late forties in a large U. S. electronics firms which undertook a series of job changes in the form of

job enlargement (Richardson and Walker, *Human Relations in an Expanding Company*. Yale University, 1948). The changes were instituted as a part of management industrial relations policy.”²⁾

However, it should be emphasized that term QWL was born since the end of the 1960s.³⁾

Footnote)

- 1) J. Carpentier, op. cit., pp. 104—105.
- 2) L. Davis and J. C. Taylor (eds.), *The Design of Jobs*, Penguin books, 1972, p. 304.
- 3) S. Takezawa, “The Quality of Working Life : Its Development and Dimesions as a New Labor Problem”, *QWL Research Report* in Japan, Vol. 1, No. 1, Autumn 1975. p. 5.

1) The Criteria for the “QWL”.

Despite the fact that the term QWL has been used very often since the end of the 1960 s, it seems that its fundamental meaning has not been definite and no concensus has been developed on a definition of it. Therefore, it is necessary to examine what the concept of the QWL is i.e., what the connotation of and/or the criteria for the QWL is.

Primarily, if we define very roughly the concept of the QWL, it seems to be generally to improve and/or humanize working conditions and the quality of working life in terms of two factors : (1) the subjective conditions of the worker and working life ... the worker’s internal (psychological, phsiological, spiritual, etc.,) situation, meaning the conditions for the worker’s satisfaction. (2) the

objective conditions of the working life ... worker's environmental conditions which consist of three levels (a. the work place level, b. management of the enterprise level, c. societal level).

According to this rough definition, the QWL means to deal with most dimensions of the working life, e. g., ethical, psychological, physiological, sociological, economical, juridical, political and ecological dimensions. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to define exactly the QWL, and no consensus has yet been developed on a definition of it. In order to briefly examine the concept I will show a number of definitions written by well known researchers.

(A) N. Q. Herrick and M. Maccoby :

The first one is an attempt by Herrick and Maccoby who propose four principles for measuring the QWL. 1. The principle of security at the workplace. 2. The principle of equity. 3. The principle of individuation (the development of unique abilities, craftsmanship, and the capacity for continued learning). 4. The principle of democracy.¹⁾

(B) R. E. Walton :

Walton points out the concept of QWL in the 1970s which consists of eight major conceptual categories, 1. Adequate income and fair compensation, 2. Safe and healthy working conditions (reasonable working hours and physical working conditions), 3. Immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities (autonomy, information and perspective, whole tasks, planning, etc.), 4. Opportunity for continued growth and security (development, prospective application

and security), 5. Social integration in the work organization (freedom from prejudice, egalitarianism, mobility, supportive primary groups and community). 6. Constitution in the work organization (privacy, free speech, equity and due process), 7. Work and the total life space (balance of work), 8. The social relevance of work life (social responsibility).²⁾

© Y. Delamotte and K. F. Walker :

In introducing six criteria of the the QWL, they said, "Several strands of thought have been active in this continuous process of humanisation of work. One has been need to protect workers from hazards to health and safety, together with physical working conditions and amenities appropriate to the living and social standards of the time. This aspect of the concept of humanisation of work covers the physical working environment.

A second aspect of the hmanisation of work has been the wage-work bargain, focussing on wages, hours and fringe benefits. Whe-reas concern with the physical working environment implies that the worker should do his work under 'decent' conditions, concern with the wage-work bargain implies that the worker should have an 'adequate' and 'fair' standard of living, negotiated freely by him or his union on equal terms with the employer.

Third, the protection of workers against hazards of illness and unemployment has been an objective of those aiming to humanise the industrial system.

Fourth, concern for the humanisntion of work has also focussed on protection of the worker against the exercice of arbitrary authority

by the employer, including dismissal. Grievance procedures are a tangible expression of this concern, as are some forms of workers' participation in management.

Fifth, the protection and extension of human rights in the society, enabling workers to have their interests represented by their own organizations, has been an important element.

Finally, there is the strand of thought that draws attention to workers' need for meaningful and satisfying work and for participation in decisions that affect their work situation."³⁾

(D) K. F. Walker and R. Shore :

They indicate the hard core of such related concepts as Humanisation of Work, QWL and "internal industrial environment", i. e., 1. the nature of tasks performed by the worker, 2. the physical environment in the enterprise, 3. the social environment within the enterprise, 4. the length and arrangement of the worker's hours of attendance at his place of work, and 5. the extent and manner of the worker's participation in decisions on 1 to 4.⁴⁾

(E) L. E. Davis :

Davis has developed seven criteria defining the psychological requirements...or needs...of a meaningful job. The first is the need for the job content to be reasonably demanding of the individual, in terms other than sheer endurance, and that it provide some variety. Second, is the need for some area of decision-making in which the individual can exercise discretion and can call his own. (This requirement is related to "democracy at the work place",

participatory management, or autonomous work groups.) The third criterion involves the individual's need to know what his roles are and how he is performing them; of critical importance in this context is reassurance through feedback. The fourth criterion deals with the need for social support and recognition. Fifth is the need to relate what the individual does or what he produces to the objectives of the organization and to his life in the community. Sixth, is the need to be able to learn and continue learning. These criteria all are interrelated ... if the individual has a variety of challenging tasks, if he has some autonomy in dealing with them, and if he has feedback on his performance, learning is going to take place and will continue.

The seventh criterion is the need to see that the job leads to some kind of desirable future ... a future that is only possible through promotion and is more frequently limited by it. The idea of a horizontal career is relevant here. Some examples of horizontal careers are the professions ... physicians, lawyers, teachers, artists, university faculty ... in which there is growth over time and in which skills and knowledge and the intrinsic nature of relevant activities become richer and more sophisticated. Career success as well as the other six criteria relate specifically to the content of work itself, and this is perhaps the most important factor affecting the quality of working life.⁵⁾

(F) J. C. Taylor :

Taylor found eleven criteria which define the behavioral consequences of quality of working life : (1) alienation, defined here as

a distancing or estrangement of the job occupant from the job, from the task, from the organization, or even from himself as an employed person ; (2) health and safety concerns ; (3) economic security, in the sense that it is freedom from fear and anxiety about income and future employment ; (4) self-esteem, conceptually defined as one's satisfaction with one's feelings of selfworth, and one's attitude involving strength of occupational identity; the next two refer to self-actualization; (5) learning in the sense of expanding one's skills, and (6) using knowledge one already has; (7) the environment criterion relates both to the physical and to the social environment ; (8) control and influence over one's task ; (9) career aspiration meaning career opportunities as well as exception ; and the two final criteria refer to extra-work activities ; (10) how does the work on the job affect family life, and (11) consumption patterns, creative activities, and community involvement.⁶⁾

(G) M. Hoffenberg :

Hoffenberg propose nine criteria for measuring the QWL.

1. *Employment conditions.* Measures of the physical aspects of health and safety as well as other aspects of employment such as hours of work, shift hours, and events where there is both a physical and nonphysical component.

2. *Employment security.* How do workers feel about the future of their jobs ?

3. *Income adequacy.* "Income" may be family income or work income, and its adequacy in relation to the worker and his family-life cycle including the individual's retirement pension.

4. *Equity*. The worker's evaluation of his own relative status.
5. *Worker autonomy*. How much control does the worker have over his task environment ?
6. *Social interaction and isolation*. This criterion was divided into two parts : (a) task-related ; while the individual is working on a particular task, is he alone or does he have social interactions that result in psychological support under conditions of stress ; and (b) non-task-related and referring to social interaction within the workplace.
7. *Self-esteem*. A feeling of self-worth on the part of the individual.
8. *Democracy in the organization*. Several criteria are involved here : (1) the methods by which decisions are reached ; (2) the individual's ability to express his own preferences ; and (3) his opportunity to develop and take on decision-making responsibilities.
9. *Worker satisfaction*. The degree to which the needs of the worker are met in the work situation.⁷⁾

These seven definitions are somewhat different, they share the aim of improving working conditions and working life. For instance, while the first four definitions (A—D) attempt chiefly to describe the worker's environmental conditions (the objective conditions of working life), Davis (E) tries mainly to refer to the conditions for the worker's satisfaction (the subjective conditions of worker and working life). On the other hand, Taylor and Hofenberg (F and G), based upon analyses with both objective and subjective conditions of working life, try to provide wider meaning to the QWL than the first five definitions.⁸⁾

All seven definitions, however, focus mainly on the level of

workplace with only slight concern about the level of management and almost no concern about the societal level. Furthermore, there exist certain interpretations based upon narrower definitions than those of the above seven. For instance, J. C. Taylor makes a distinction between QWL and QL (Quality of Life), this means that “activities off the job are not a part of working life”.⁹ ICQWL (International Council for the Quality of Working Life) indicates also similarly the narrow following definition.

(H) ICQWL :

ICQWL defines in its “*News Letter*” (1973) that the QWL consists of two principles, individuation and democracy. This definition is narrower than the first three definitions (A—C) in that the principles of security and equity indicated by Herrick and Maccorby are excluded, Walton’s two categories (1. compensation, 2. safety and health) also excluded, and most criteria except “worker’s need for meaningful and satisfying work” defined by Delamotte and Walker are excluded.

However, the impact of a job on social and political relations can be expected to deeply influence working life on the job. Hence, I will introduce certain definitions argued by well known researchers who recognize that the QWL has a wider meaning to be linked with the societal level.

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(I) S. E. Seashore :

Seashore suggests that the boundaries of the QWL be expected to enclose what society considers important and what employers

consider important, as well as what the individual believes to be important.¹⁰⁾

Table I. Examples of Indicators of Work Role Effectiveness as Viewed from Three Perspectives.¹⁰⁾

From the perspective of a worker

- Job satisfaction assessed both generally and with regard to specific aspects of job and job environment.
- Job-related feelings of excessive strain or tension.
- Self-esteem
- Affective states, such as anxiety, depression, resentment, hopelessness, etc.
- Physiological states, such as fatigue, work-related illness or injuries, coronary heart disease risk symptoms, drug dependency if work-related, etc.
- Satisfaction with work-role potential for personal development, adaptability, career-long value realization, etc.

From the perspective of an employer

- Productivity, including quantity and quality of output, innovative behavior, initiation of new techniques or procedures that increase productivity, etc.
- Adaptability to changing work procedures, skill acquisition.
- Turnover absenteeism, lateness.
- Counterproductive behaviors, such as theft, sabotage, work stoppage, etc.
- Alienation from work.
- Identification with work organization.

From the perspective of society

- Gross national product.
- Increasing value of manpower pool.
- Cost of welfare protection for workers and their dependents.
- Political behaviors and attitudes.
- Consumer behaviors and attitudes.
- Societal adaptability.
- Life satisfaction rate in society.
- Alienation.
- Quality of life with regard to nonwork roles and situations.

However, Seashore's classification indicated miscellaneous factors with only a slight concern about what the most important factor is and what the relationship among fundamental factors and auxiliary factors is, and with almost no concern about the political system (e. g., capitalism or socialism). I will now refer to B. Tietze's definition in order to demonstrate that his argument concerning "capital and labour", "political systems", "participation of workers", etc., is not superficial but fundamental and profound.

(J) B. Tietze :

Tietze regards the QWL as a set of social strategies as follows.¹¹⁾

1. Humanisation as a strategy against health hazards at work (safety, hygiene, ergonomics, physical work environment, etc.)
2. Humanisation as a strategy for the abolition of Tayloristic parcelling of work and separation of executing and dispositive functions. (the aim of this strategy is the increase of action and decision potentials of workers at the workplace.)
3. Humanisation as a strategy for obtaining participation of workers, in particular through institutional arrangements giving equal weight to capital and labour.
4. Humanisation through a revolutionary abolition of class society.
5. Humanisation as a Utopian model of a dominance free society.

In short, it seems that there exists almost the same or common basis to improve the "subjective" and "objective" conditions of working life among the various above-mentioned definitions, though there are a number of differences among them. This means that (1) we are

able to regard the QWL as one of the antitheses to the “one best way” methods supported by the Scientific Management, Human Relations and Human Resources; accordingly (2) the QWL attempts to improve the “subjective” and “objective” conditions of working life through contingent situations and with the use of various values and countermeasures, while Scientific Management tried to ameliorate mainly the subjective working conditions by the “one best way” method, and Human Relations and Human Resources attempt to improve chiefly the objective conditions of workers with the use of the “one best way” methods¹²⁾; eventually (3) the QWL aims to reorganize working life through the new concepts of humans and work under the influence of Ecology, Systems Theory, etc.¹³⁾

However, it should be emphasized that the concept of the QWL still has certain ambiguous points. We are obliged to reconsider more profoundly the fundamental meaning or historical and philosophical background of the QWL for the reason that, apart from the practical field and dogmatical area, it is inevitable that we should investigate the following few items in the theoretical or academic dimension.

1. How is the outlook on the “worker or human-being” in the QWL different from that of the former disciplines (e. g., Scientific Management, Human Relations, Human Resources, etc.) ?
2. What is the relationship between the political (or economic) system and the QWL ? This means that what is the relationship :
 - (A) in the capitalistic system, (a) between pursuit of profit (or cost) and limitation of the QWL ;
 - (b) between the capitalist mode of production (or the capitalistic ownership, management, control, etc.,) and the QWL ;
 - (c) between the capitalistic government, managers,

labor unions, etc. and the QWL ; (B) in the socialistic system, (a) between interests of the socialistic government and the QWL ; (b) between socialist ideology and the QWL ; (c) between socialistic management control (bureaucratic mechanism) and the QWL ?

3. In the industrialised countries whatever their political systems, what is the relationship among work, life and working life ?

4. Is the QWL based upon the former viewpoint or that of the later, in the following respective items ? i, e., (a) organicism-oriented viewpoint on human-being vs. mechanicalism-oriented viewpoint on human-being, (b) holism-oriented vs. atomism-oriented, (c) open-system-oriented vs. closed system-oriented, (d) teleology-oriented vs. mechanistic causationism-oriented, (e) qualitative analysis-oriented vs. quantitative analysis-oriented, (f) historical and/or dialectic-oriented vs. functional, pragmatism and analytical-oriented, (g) ethical pluralism vs. determinism and/or monism, (h) relativism and/or contingency-oriented vs. the one best way-oriented.

However, given space and time limitations, I will focus chiefly on questions 1 and 4 in the following publication.

(To be continued.)

14 November, 1978

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- 1) N. Q. Herrick and M. Maccoby, "Humanizing work: A Priority Goal of the 1970 s" in *The Quality of Working Life*. edited by L. E. Davis and A. B. Cherns, Vol I, 1975, pp. 64-66.
- 2) R. E. Walton, "Criteria Quality of Working Life" in *The Quality of Working Life*, edited by L. E. Davis and A. B.

- Cherns, Vol. I, 1975, pp. 93-97.
- 3) Y. Delamotte and W. F. Walker, "Humanisation of Work and the Quality of Working Life ... Trends and Issues", *The Bulletin of International Institute for Labor studies*, No. 11. 1974, p. 4.
 - 4) K. F. Walker and R. Shore, "Towards a Policy for Life at Work" in *Labor and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Jan. 1977, pp. 90-91.
 - 5) C. M. Cadenhead, "Quality of Working Life ... Definition and Dimensions" in *Quality of Working Life in the United States*, published by Center for Quality of Working Life (CQWL), Institute of Industrial Relations (IIR) in University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), 1976, pp. 13-14.
 - 6) Ibid, p. 14.
 - 7) M. Hoffenberg, "Measuring the Quality of Working Life" in *Quality of Working Life in the United States*, published by CQWL, IIR in UCLA, 1976, pp. 41-42.
 - 8) Kazuo Kikuno, "Koudou Kagaku to Roumu Kanri (Behavioral Science and Personnel)" in *Roumu Kanri Nyumon (Personnel Textbook)* written by K. Okubayashi, K. Kikuno et al., Youhikaku Book Co., 1978. pp. 211-212.
 - 9) J. C. Taylor, "An Empirical Examination of the Dimensions of Quality of Working Life" published by CQWL, IIR in UCLA, 1977, p. 3.
 - 10) S. E. Seashore, "Defining and the Quality of Working Life" in *The Quality of Working Life* edited by L. E. Davis and A. B. Cherns, Vol. I. 1975, p. 110.

- 11) H. Günter, op. cit., p. 91.
- 12) J. Carpentier, op. cit., pp. 94-95.
- 13) Ibid, p. 103.