

Quality of Work Life: an empirical exploration in the United Arab Emirates

INTRODUCTION

Background

QOWL is a combination of fulfilling the physical, emotional, and professional needs of employees to ensure that they are motivated, satisfied, and productive at work and can grow personally, as well as professionally (Easton & Van Laar, 2012; Walton, 1973).

Study objectives

- To explore the complex, multi-faceted, and interdependent determinants of QOWL of careerists in the UAE.
- To investigate how organizational policies, processes and practices can contribute or undermine QOWL.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An outline description of the theoretical framework and concepts

This research explores QOWL through the lens of six psychosocial sub-factors proposed by Easton and Van Laar (2012) that constitute QOWL: General Well-being, Home-Work Interface, Job-Career Satisfaction, Control at Work, Working Conditions, Stress at Work.

METHODS

The method in this study was an exploratory, qualitative study, to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020), that is, QOWL.

Research setting

The research setting is the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The research aligns to the UAE Vision 2030 that aims to preserve and enhance a better quality of life for all integrated within the three pillars of environmental, economic and social sustainability (UAE Government 2024). Improvements in QOWL positively influence organizational success and contribute to the economic growth and development of the UAE.

Sample and procedure

A purposeful sampling technique was used to identify and recruit participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Palinkas, Horwitz, & Hoagwood 2015; Patton, 2015). The total sample comprised 24 expatriates and UAE nationals residing and working in the UAE.

Data collection

Data collection took place in November and December 2024 through online and in-person semi-structured interviews to elicit an in-depth understanding of respondents' QOWL experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018; Yin, 2016).

RESULTS

General Well-being

Some participants felt mentally overwhelmed and experienced burnout due to work. Also, some participants mentioned that tyrannical and autocratic managers undermined their well-being. Other participants expressed that their employers had created comfortable workspaces and offer health and wellness programs to support their general well-being.

Home-Work Interface

Balancing work life while being under work pressure and demands was perceived as a struggle. However, participants mentioned that there are strategies that they and employers together can initiate and use to reduce the impact of work on private life, such as allocated family and leisure time, hybrid work modes, and employers respecting personal boundaries.

Job-Career Satisfaction

Appreciating efforts at work appeared as a crucial factor in their job satisfaction and QOWL. This made respondents feel more valued and respected. Appreciation is positive reinforcement that boosted respondents' morale and they felt generally happier at work.

Control at Work

Exerting control over work life, for example, by being able to flexibly schedule their work timings emerged as an important determinant of QOWL. Having autonomy at work fostered participants' QOWL. Building trust at work to earn a level of credibility enhanced participants' control at work.

Working Conditions

Workplace culture and environment

Participants addressed the importance of a positive, informal, and open culture and work environment, including supportive and respectful managers and coworkers, and positive interactions and equality among employees. Participants desired the creation of a work environment that enables improvements in physical and cognitive health and decreasing stress.

Stress at Work

Evident from the findings is that resilience is a crucial trait. To thrive, employees must be able to handle stress and hardship, bounce back from setbacks to move forward in their careers and lives. Respondents mentioned that programs and practices to relieve stress in the workplace and to help develop healthy psychological strategies to cope with psychological distress would greatly enhance their QOWL.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated factors that influence QOWL of employees in the UAE. The study has shown that absence of a structured recognition system, fewer professional development opportunities, lack of flexibility at work, lack of mental health support, and lack of career advancement pathways undermined QOWL of the interviewees. Conversely, hybrid work models to enhance work life balance, mental health contributed to respondent's QOWL. Ultimately, organizations that honour human dignity and humanity by nurturing their employees' intellectual, emotional and physical capabilities and fostering their QOWL will thrive.

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