Quality of life management at work: A strategic program for improved performance in micro and small companies in the Jundiaí Region, Brazil

Hamilton Pozo*, Takeshy Tachizawa, Roselaine A. F. and Teodoro Pozo

Faculdade Campo Limpo Paulista (FACCAMP), Brazil.

Accepted 13 May, 2013

This paper investigates the human resources management practices focused on internal stakeholders, namely employees, in a context of small business. Numerous studies have addressed the economic significance and effects of small business but contributions to Human Resources within small businesses have remained relatively unexplored in contemporary quality of work life (QWL). Qualitative-quantitative approach method was used to select the companies and the situational analysis of small business in the region was done; with QLW practices 7 small business of manufacture and 2 of services were selected. A semi-structured interview with the employees of the small business who are also the managers was conducted using a survey instrument consisting of 8 qualitative open questions and 19 Likert scale. The research demonstrated that it is possible to correlate strategic action and QWL programs for personnel well-being to obtain better performance and a competitive advantage.

Key words: Quality of work life, human resource management, small business, strategy.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on a relatively novel area of Quality of Work Life (QWL focused on internal stakeholders, namely employees, in a context of small business. Numerous studies have addressed the economic significance and effects of small business but community and sociological contributions of small businesses. This study is driven by the aggregate potential of small businesses, the primary organizational form with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that provides an economic justification for research into small business by Spence and Rutherford (2001). This suggests an emerging recognition of the small business sector in the process of generating goodwill to the society. This research is designed to fill a gap that exists in the literature and can be considered innovative and timely given the growing interest by society in the QWL from a small business.

In recent decades, techniques and systems have been developed for companies to handle the growing complexity they face, both in terms of their formulation and resolution. The context of global competitiveness and the constant changes that affect organizations have required the educational system to be prepared to present responses and indicate courses to overcome old management paradigms. However, the simple fact that this involves change has created certain resentment. Change itself is a complex process that breaks apart...
resistance in all senses. People naturally see these new paradigms as something they are being forced to accept. The great challenge for Small Business (SB) is to reconstruct – in a competitive, highly technological and stimulating manner – a system of well-being in the sense of QWL for the organization’s employees, based on the biological, psychological, and social factors of each human being. According to Limongi-França and Assis (2009),

... philosophically, everyone believes it is important to implement Quality of Work Life in the Workplace programs, but in practice what prevails is immediatism, and the medium- and long-term investments are forgotten. Most QWL programs originate in safety and health programs at work and many are not even associated with total quality or organizational environment improvement programs. QWL only makes sense when not restricted to internal health or leisure programs and opened to a more ample discussion, including quality of work relations and their consequences on the health of the organization’s personnel.

The technological revolution, changes in the productive system, and globalization has not been enough to resolve all social and environmental problems. This has raised the issue of corporate social responsibility. The result is that many companies seeking sustainable development have begun social actions in the community, reaching the entire chain of relations: employees, clients, suppliers, investors, governments, competition, stockholders and society. Following this trend, there has been an observable strong inclination within the academic sector and some companies towards the perception that the firm and long-lasting positioning of an organization in the globalized market is related to the question of improving the quality of work life of employees.

The quality of life theme has received much attention because of the push towards better conditions of life, not only in the social context but also, primarily, within companies. Therefore, promotion of health, encompassing a range of factors that determine the quality of life of employees requires emphasis. Health is clearly one of the primary parameters, though various indicators exist to quantify it.

Some companies concerned with quality of life while still maintaining the quality of their products and productivity has affected strategies to favor these conditions. Companies must consider workers’ health from a new perspective promoting health in the workplace that has repercussions in the competitiveness of the company and the country, as well as investing in the quality of life in the workplace and of the worker. This is because certain aspects are important not only to the company but also to the country. Such is the case of the cost of days off, early retirement because of injury and accidents in the workplace.

Therefore, investing in health and quality of life promotion programs at work provides considerable economy, in terms of cost reductions in medical assistance, health leaves and occupational illness and, primarily, in gains in productivity. It should be emphasized that today, we understand that quality of life actions are not enacted only because fashion dictates or to improve company image. According to Limongi-França (2003),

...there is clearly a greater disposition for work, improvement in the internal environment, stronger commitment, fidelity to the company and attraction by benefits when the management methods incorporate the concepts of quality of life in the workplace.

This approach allows, for example, an inclusion of the largest possibility of personal development, facilitating teamwork, a greater harmony between personal and professional life.

The differentiated quality of life perceived by both the company and the employee is linked to a strong motivational process. This process arising from a quality of life in the workplace program provides a strategic result for the company, since employees perceive this program when the company implements it through a participatory action that is clear and objective with the participation and intervention of all. The principal objective of this research is to broaden the understanding of QWL and economic roles of small businesses in the community.

The objectives and the perfect communication of each element that composes this QWL program together with the benefits that it can provide employees, the perfect interpretation of the results expected and the promotion of how they can provide improvements in the personal and familial lives of each employee should be very clear.

When employees perceive that they are working in a locale that provides comfort – with their bodies in appropriate ergonomic positions, good ventilation and light levels, defined procedures, and opportunities to use their abilities and grow – they tend to be more effective. With this, they then enjoy complete social integration in the workplace, with the power to make decisions, without suffering the pressures that lead to stress, and with favorable remuneration, and they are imbued with a strong motivational element that becomes a competitive differential: a strategic tool for the company.

In this context, there is a significant tendency for change that permeates work relations and formal employment. It demands a new profile for administrators, prepared to identify operations and business opportunities, executing their career and projects. As such, they become historically important for the company, agents of change for the organizations, founded on a Strategic Program linked to the quality of life perceived in the
workplace.

Nowadays, companies face various interpretations of QWL, from the medical viewpoint to the requirements of resources and procedures to meet the demands of the people and the collectives both within organizations and in personal life – outside the company – that then compose the programs of quality of life in the workplace. In this view, a collection of actions and attitudes within an organization will be adopted as the concept of quality of work life.

They will involve the analysis and implementation of improvements and innovation in the management and in the internal and external structure of the work environment with support for new technologies to create full conditions of employee well-being for the execution of employee work.

It is necessary to change the paradigms and historical parallels more commonly encountered in the romantic social movements of the beginning of industrialism, taken by artisans, plebeians, and workers, in the defense movements of the popular middle class. In the movements from the second half of the 20th century, with the beginning of globalization, the uncontrollable and unmeasured search for gains in productivity motivated by the bourgeois critics of civilization committed by reformers, modernists and onward. Möller (1997), a renowned specialist in personnel management, affirms that in the beginning of the last decade that:

*Many Latin-American companies spend more on maintaining managers’ automobiles than on the development of their personnel and, in the future, the companies will compete among themselves not only for clients but also for human resources.*

The primary concern is that the quality of products and services of a company reflect the quality of life of those who produce them. The concept of quality of life in the workplace is composed of various company procedures that should involve Management of Human Resources, Management of Business and the existing Potentials to emit coherent signals that the company’s higher administration values the organization’s culture and the work and that it should be used as a strategic tool within the company. As such, the objective is to demonstrate the strong correlation between motivated work and the quality of life perceived in the company environment that increases the degree of employee commitment thus making it strategic element for the company.

A strategic project directed at motivation of employees should be intimately involved with the project of QWL so that the people may be emotionally involved and believe that they too will be gaining something by being able to give the best of themselves. A company will not be successful without its employees achieving professional development. For this reason, it is necessary to define views of success in such a way as to provide coherence in the expected results concerning initiative, productivity, relationships, personnel quality and, finally, professional abilities or competence.

Thompson and Phua (2012) show motivation at work as the provision that employees have to perform and their tasks in order to try feelings of satisfaction and happiness for the good work. As the work can be restructured, it becomes more effective and efficient in which workers have the reward and personal satisfaction from it. The authors make an analysis of the basic to promote high motivation and potential satisfaction, work environment and determine how these conditions can be created.

When people are well on their work, is seldom necessary to force them to work with commitment, requiring their good results, instead, they try to do better because thereby obtain personal reward and satisfaction at work. Performing a job well is to provide itself a self-reward, which serves as a kind of incentive to continue producing well, and provides feelings of unhappiness. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle of positive motivation to work, fed the self-generation of reward for good work developed (it is preferable to self-generation reward than the generation of external reward).

In this aspect, it is important to create a new model or space for reflection about the strong condition of organizational competition and the struggle for the best competitiveness at any cost. The specific interest here is to analyze how SB is fully involved in the search for greater productivity and change with the intention of improving their competitive positioning in the market. Consequently, QWL is increasingly gaining space in company and academic discussions, and in SB.

The search for a strong competitive advantage leads companies to consider quality of life as an important component in formulating strategies of people management for the overall success of the organization.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The role for management is relevant for large businesses with its division of power between owners and managers Cyert and James (2007); Bolton 1971) with small businesses having a greater likelihood of coincidence of power between owners and managers. Small business owners usually have a more direct impact on operations and activities of businesses than owners of large businesses (Guazi, 2003; Wiklund, 1998a, 1998b; Jenkins 2004). A close and direct role of small business owners may imply multidimensional goals; a commercial orientation as well as personal preferences, objectives and ambitions such as desire for lifestyle, family and reputation in communities (Sekaran, 2003; Birley and Westhead, 1994; Spence and Rutherfoord, 2001; Southwell, 2004). Consequently, owners of small
businesses play a more critical role in the development of their business than owners of larger businesses (Eternad, 2004; Wiklund, 1998a, 1998b), prompting Storey (1994, p. 10) to argue a small business is ‘not simply a scaled down version of a large firm’.

Small businesses are heterogeneous, reflecting the nature of diverse ownership traits, managerial behaviors frequently learned from experience rather than textbooks that give unique, perhaps idiosyncratic ways of doing things in their business, commonly called business culture. Not surprisingly, small business culture has responded to the almost limitless stimuli across industry types, location and position on the business life cycle and family life cycle (Habbershon et al., 2003). Within a milieu of enterprise diversity, small businesses exhibit a general characteristic of informality that is illustrated by a lack of written management procedures and practices, such as human resource management (Kotey and Slade, 2005).

The concept of Quality of Life in the Workplace, although it may appear broad, requires a clear and objective definition, as the professional positions of workers within an organization are means for satisfying their needs of all orders, with evident repercussions in their quality of life. Quality of life is based on an integral vision of people, which is the biosocial focus that proposes the integrated life of the human being with work and social activities.

Once the human being is seen as a whole, the view becomes biosocial. Human beings have biological, psychological and social potentials to handle daily life. This combination functions inter-connectedly and not compartmentally. Clearly, for some authors it is only the physical conditions of work that influence the QWL, however, it is of utmost importance to consider other factors as well, such as the relationships between the individual and other individuals, the work, the organization where the work is developed, and society itself in which the individual is involved also be considered. Therefore, the human being must be the central piece in the QWL program and not merely a tool. The biological level refers to the physical characteristics inherited or acquired at birth and during life, involving the metabolism, resistances, and vulnerabilities of the individual’s organs.

Furthermore, it is on the social level that we perceive the importance of how the values corresponding to beliefs, the family role, the work role and the community to which each person belongs affect his/her good performance. In addition, in the environment that is the geographical position, they form the social dimension. On the psychological level this refers to the affective, emotional and rational processes, both conscious and unconscious, that form the personality of each person and the way of seeing and perceiving the environment and, thus, how that persons faces others and life in general.

For Walton (1973), the expression “Quality of Life” has been used with growing frequency to describe certain environmental and human values ignored by organizations that are concerned exclusively with advances in technology and productivity. He considers QWL as a direct result of the combination of various basic dimensions of the performance of activities, and of other dimensions not directly dependent on tasks, capable of producing motivation and satisfaction on the different levels, activities and conducts of people within the organizations.

QWL must be treated as a process by which an organization tries to reveal the creative potential of its personnel, involving them in decisions that affect their lives at work. An important characteristic of the process is that these objectives are not simply extrinsic, focusing improvement in productivity and efficiency; they are also intrinsic in that the worker sees them as means for self-realization and self-aggrandizement.

Moraes and Kilimnik (2000) in turn affirm: the emphasis of quality of life in the workplace is in the substitution of sedentarism and stress for a greater balance between work and leisure, which results in a better quality of life.

QWL must be understood as choices of well-being in the workplace oriented by the search for and guarantee of development of the work environment synchronized with the organization’s political and cultural objectives.

These theoretical concepts are operationalized using standardized methods of social and behavioral sciences (e.g. systematic observation, structured interviews, and standardized questionnaires. Therefore, measuring stressful working conditions provides a theoretical and methodological challenge. As mentioned, in theoretical terms, those components of working life need to be identified that produce intense, recurrent, and long lasting stressful experience at least in a substantial proportion of those exposed. Moreover, researchers have to argue whether they restrict their formulations to particular job characteristics or whether they analyze stressful work experience in terms of an interaction of work characteristics and of coping characteristics of the working person for the QWL.

At a methodological level, measures of work stress are expected to be reliable, sensitive to change, and valid. Two theoretical models: the demand-control model and effort-reward imbalance model fulfill these methodological criteria and identify stressful working conditions that are widely prevalent in advanced marked economies, such as changes in task profiles, work control, structure of salaries, occupational stability and QWL. Over the past ten years, these two models have been tested in a number of studies, and a substantial body of knowledge has been generated, strengthening the assumption that stressful experiences at work.

In the sixties, research on job conditions had explored working demands and working hours (Hinkle et al, 1968). In the seventies, several research traditions found
evidence for a favorable effect on mental health produced by skill development (Hackman and Lawler, 1971) and autonomy at work (Kohn and Schooler, 1973; Gardell, 1971). It was Karasek’s original contribution to formulate a two-dimensional concept of work stress where a high level of psychological demands combined with a low level of decision latitude (low level of decision authority and low level of skill utilization). In 1981, Karasek first found evidence of a predictive role of high demand-low control conditions, using data on a representative Swedish sample (Karasek et al., 1981). Since then, a large number of prospective and cross-sectional studies on associations of stressful work as defined by high demand and low control with cardiovascular risk and disease have been conducted (Karasek and Theorell 1990, Schnall and Landsbergis 1994; Kristensen, 1995; Theorell and Karasek, 1996; Hemingway and Marmot, 1998). A number of these studies have focused on methodological considerations and have used new outcome measures, the majority of which have revealed positive findings.

Following this interpretation, a strong tendency clearly arises within the academic sector and some companies to the opinion that the firm and long-lasting positioning of an organization in the globalized market must be seen from the viewpoint that the employees have an improved quality of life. Therefore, investing in programs to promote health and quality of work life will provide considerable economy, in terms of reductions in the costs of medical assistance, health leaves and occupational illness and, primarily, in productivity gains.

Karasek and Theorell (1990) in original concept that excessive psychological demands interact with lack of decision latitude in generating increased risk of cardiovascular disease was supplemented by a second concept, which concerns the learning of new patterns of behavior, and skills on the basis of psychosocial job experience. According to this, learning for adults accrues over a lifetime of work experience. It may contribute to the worker’s possibility to exert control over his or her working situation and thus have an impact on broader conditions of adult life. According to this concept, the active situation is associated with the development of a feeling of mastery, which inhibits the perception of strain during periods of overload, for instance. This makes it likely that the active job situation may stimulate healthy functioning.

Epidemiological studies in Sweden indicated that the active job situation is associated with high rates of participation in socially active leisure and political activities (Karasek and Theorell 1990), and, on the contrary, the daily residual strain arising in the strain situation gives rise to accumulated feelings of frustration, which may inhibit learning attempts. It is obvious that some of the ‘classic’ high strain jobs are found in mass industry, especially under conditions of piecwork and machine paced assembly line work. Nevertheless, a number of strain jobs were also identified in the service sector. The concept therefore proves to be relevant in different employment sectors, and will remain important in the near future due to changing patterns of employment. For example, the rate of temporary employment is increasing in Western Europe, particularly for those with low education. It is in these kinds of employment that lack of control will be a major problem. Even in those with a high education, the increasing demands for flexibility will create new decision latitude problems. The ever-increasing demands for effectiveness from the workforce are raising the levels of psychological demands for all workers. This is particularly reflected in Swedish national welfare statistics.

More recently, the original demand-control concept was modified to include social support at work as a third dimension (Johnson and Hall, 1988) and to assess work control in a life-course perspective ‘total job control exposure’ (Johnson et al., 1990). Another important innovation concerns the exploration of health effects produced by intervention studies that are based on the theoretical concept, and several promising intervention studies have been reported recently (Theorell, 1992; Orth-Gomer et al., 1994; Karasek, 1992).

This process, which is a very important socio-corporate movement, although the idea of social movement, as with most social science notions, does not describe part of reality, is an element in a specific mode of constructing a social reality.

Social movements can be seen as social mechanisms that construct translations between the discourse of civil society and the most particularist type of institutional processes. They are movements of a practical and historical nature but can only be successful if they are able to employ civil meta-language to relate these practical problems with the symbolic center of society and its utopian premises …Touraine suggests a very different point of view. He designates the social movements as idealized responses to the tension between utopian and general orientations and the limited institutional position that characterizes the contestation of daily life. The only way of developing this seminal idea is to relate the social movements to culture and to the structures of civil society (Alexander, 2000).

To overcome this ingenuous and illusory positivism created by barriers to have a new positioning of man in the workplace, the meaning of the words must be made clear, placing them in a more general intellectual frame of reference, not simply explaining "what I think", but comparing the categories of people with the types of construction of social reality desired.

Innovations in management affect the culture of the company and should not be treated as conflicts. A conflict presupposes a clear definition of opponents or competing actors and of resources for which they are fighting or negotiating for control. In order to be successful, a quality
of life program should have a clear and objective definition of its proposals and be open to all approaches and angles.

According to Albuquerque and Limongi-França (1998, pp. 40-51), quality should be administered with quality of life. Company’s efforts, when there is no other option, should lead to human realization. In other words, quality will only make sense if it generates quality of life.

Nevertheless, there is a profound distance between the discourse and the practice of what well-being for people is. Efforts and competencies are acquiring new meanings. The changes occur as much in the strategic focus as in the management of business as a whole and in the involvement of the people. These changes demonstrate an increase in the strategic responsibility of Human Resources managers.

It is important to point out that the participation in the decisive problems that concern them, as well as the possession of information related to the post that they occupy, are the factors most frequently mentioned by authors to raise the level of employee participation.

Pressured by technological, administrative, legal and demographic changes, companies and their employees seek new demands and specific attentions. By their own work efforts and professional development, and for a transition to retirement, they perceive how important are the specific characteristics of human development in the development of this project. In this sense, Quality of Life and Quality of Work Life complement each other as a proposal in the model of quality of life over the course of life, according to Wittmer and Sweeney (1992).

Changing the paradigms and historical parallels of the social and business movements involving workers and their struggles for improvements must be taken into consideration in all the work condition improvement movements to improve employee well-being.

This research is designed to develop a plan of quality of Life in the Workplace agents that help in the resolution of problems concerning personal motivation, ergonomics, performance, satisfaction, growth, operations, dynamics and stress in organizational environments, but primarily in Small Business.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs interpretivist ontology with a realist epistemology to access a hidden slice of reality, and to facilitate an understanding of managerial perceptions where meanings are socially constructed rather than being value-free. A substantive qualitative methodology was viewed as appropriate at a pre-paradigmatic stage (Perry, 1998) when ‘investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Yin, 2009). Theoretical replication was used to select purposefully nine cases that were chosen.

This study followed exploratory delineation applied through a qualitative/quantitative angle, via case studies, with data collection through interviews using a Likert Scale amplified by open questions as an instrument.

From the theoretical point of view, it explored, in the relevant literature, concepts, theories and principles related to the problem. Its nature is that of applied research; the intention is to show the manner that the pertinent understandings were utilized, or not, in a determined situation and in the solution of specific problems. The delineation of the research, as Oppenheim (1989, p. 49) clearly states, consists of making the problem researchable and telling us:

...to specify how our sample will be extracted, which subgroups must be included, which comparisons will be made, if control groups will be necessary, which variables will be measured (when and in which intervals) and how these measurements will be related to the external events.

The methodological points examined for the development of the applied exploratory research were: definition of the object of study; bibliographical survey based on operational and available data using the descriptions obtained in the first semester of 2012; delimitation of the sample, the method, the technique and the data collection tool; realization of the ethical procedures for the collection and later release of data, subject approach; data collection; treatment of the Likert scale and open question data; analysis and interpretation of the data, using objectives and theoretical concepts are reference; synthesis and conclusions.

The field research was developed in nine small businesses located in the Jundiaí Region of São Paulo (BR), two being service companies and the other seven being manufacturers. The instrument utilized in data collection was the interview, and for its development criteria such as the possibility of obtaining data directly from the applicant, giving privilege to closed interviews using Likert scale questions as well as open questions that allowed for free responses, with space for explanations and commentaries. Of the 163 questionnaires, 144 were answered, which served as the data for this study. Of the completed questionnaires, 13 were from the two service companies (8 from one and 15 from the other) and 131 were from the manufacturing companies (9, 12, 13, 18, 18, 23 and 28 respectively). The questions that instigated this research and the aforementioned general and specific objectives were considered in the formulation of the questionnaire. The intention was not to measure objects, but to discover the nature of the people’s experiences of the phenomena consonant to the responsibility of which human life, values and decisions should be treated. The questionnaires were applied directly, with employees from the factory floor, the office and management.

Companies seek advancement in their management processes. For this, it becomes necessary to work on behalf of all to improve expected results. For these reasons, the approach to this work focused initially on bibliographical research to study the theoretical foundation and the current situation of Quality of Work Life management.

The survey of the literature covered physical and virtual data from higher education, research centers, governmental organizations, class organizations, databases, etc. In this way utilizing the descriptions obtained, the data were treated in a qualitative form in large part from research limited to the period of the first semester of 2012. The facts encountered were explained based on direct observation and description.

In order to meet the objectives of this article it was necessary to analyze the factors that influenced interest in Quality of Work Life.

In the work of Baughn et al. (2006), the following factors were analyzed: the influence of context, social capital and command of the QWL abilities.

In this research, it was considered advisable to take the ideas developed by these authors as a basis, adopting due adjustments
and adaptations for the national context. As such, the primary aspects of the conversation between the work of Baughn et al. (2006) and this research were the context of empirical analysis, the hypotheses and the scale for measuring the constructs. 

As for the context for analysis, the perspectives of different companies analyzed by the author and considered consistent with the foundation of evaluations the companies of the Jundiaí Region were evaluated in the original study. From the propositions, he developed an empirical study for validation through proper statistical techniques. The procedures and decisions are as stated below.

After the exploratory procedures (bibliographical research and the development of the hypotheses), the phase of general exploratory procedures followed (evaluation of similar works, analysis of scales utilized and development of research constructs). Finally, there was the identification of the respondents, with questions about QLW-related data. In specific reference to the scales of the constructs, all the variables were extracted and translated by Baughn et al. (2006), with some adaptations.

After the preliminary consolidation of the instrument, a pre-test, or pilot study, was performed using a sample of 15 respondents. Making the due adjustments, the questionnaire was applied. In this phase the configurations were established, conformant with that listed below:

1. Research sample: constituted by employees of 9 small business the Jundiaí Region of São Paulo
2. Overall pool: approximately 38 manufacturing and service companies, approximately 773 employees
3. Final sample: 163 respondents, from nine companies (two being service companies and seven being manufacturers), was selected – although only 144 responded to the questionnaire
4. Collection method: data collection was handled directly by the researchers; using convenience and accessibility as the criteria

The statistical procedures for the data collected in the field research were: description of the sample; unvaried analysis of the constructs; and multivariated analysis with the evaluation of the defined hypotheses. The statistical treatments of the data utilized SPSS-18 software, based on Hair et al. (2005) and Malhotra (2009). This study used factorial analysis, a useful technique for analyzing conjuncts of related variables that possess interdependence. Variable, or factor, grouping allows for identifying subjacent dimensions that explain the correlation between the variables. Some care prior to the factorial analysis was necessary, such as the realization of Bartlett's spherical test, KMO value and adequacy of the items for factorial analysis, through verification of the values obtained in the anti-image matrix (Hair et al., 2005).

The Bartlett spherical test appeared significant at a level of 1%, with a chi-square of approximately 273.5; KMO value = 0.657. The values obtained for the MSAs (measure sampling adequacy) that identify the adequacy of each item to the factorial analysis model, resultant from the anti-image matrix were superior to 0.55. Utilizing Kaiser's criteria, which considers Eigenvalues superior to 1.0 (Hair et al., 2005) five factors were found, explaining 61.1% of the total variance.

A database was developed from the returned questionnaires for later treatment and analysis of the results. To guaranteed confidentiality and internal consistency of the obtained data, the Cronbach Alpha was calculated, which resulted in 0.73, above the recommendation, which is 0.6 (Malhotra, 2009). In relation to the unvaried analysis, initially the averages and the standard deviations for each of the variables were extracted. With the confirmation of the structure of the items in the construct composition, a general measurement for the construct was extracted, with aggregation of the scores by the average of the inputs of the component items of each construct. Considering that the hypotheses were related to the constructs, evaluating these relationships through the Multiple Regression Analysis tool was chosen. This tool allows for the evaluation of the consistency of the relation of influence between two or more independent variables, and one dependent variable (Malhotra, 2009). As such, the four hypotheses were tested with the dependent variable the interested construct, and the independent variables the support, dominion, rules and property constructs.

With the results obtained, the constructs were evaluated considering the different response alternatives for some of the variables in the study, such as the form of identifying and discussing possible differences. According to Malhotra (2009), such a procedure is possible through statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Data analysis

With the objective of discussing some evidence of the situation relative to QWL with the situation encountered in a study, some important elements that have a correlation between the QWL programs and strategic planning were selected. The data presented are part of the field research realized by the authors. The elements analyzed in this article were extracted from nine small business located in the Jundiaí Region of São Paulo (two service companies and seven manufacturers) that possess quality of life in the workplace programs. For data collection, it used a fill-in form with the Likert scale that was applied personally to each employee in each company. The results hereinafter based on the answers from 144 questionnaires, which were responded to in the presence of the researchers for greater validity and reliability. They concerned:

1. General data from the workers, being of both sexes and working in the areas of operations, technical, supervision and management, with 144 respondents in all
2. The perception of the concept of Quality of Work Life seen by employees and their sensibility to the factors employed by the company
3. Quality of Work Life as a strategic differential, how the employees feel about this new paradigm and how the interpret it
4. Personal development in relation to Quality of Work Life and in the context of the company.

It sought to measure the satisfaction of employees in relation to the quality of life in the workplace program relating to its personal values and to the results expected in the company. The data were obtained on a Likert Scale from 0 to 4, where 0 meant completely unsatisfied and 4 completely satisfied.

The measurements obtained show that the responses to the questions that discussed the perception of the employees concerning their interpretation of the QWL programs practiced by their respective companies was average. The questions related to the QLW programs as strategic differentials in the perception of the employees obtained high notes. In relation to the development of employees with the QWL programs, the perception by all was very high.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The pool of respondents consisted of employees from the companies chosen from the 38 SB in the Jundiaí Region. The results of the research are as follows and the first five questions refer to employee characterization data for
The vision employees have concerning the concept of QLW in the workplace as a competitive strategy provides answers to questions 10, 11, 12 and 13:

10. Strategic management models with QWL programs were very strong (37%), regular (27%) and weak (36%),
11. The perception of improvements and gains in productivity with QWL programs was considered strong by 46% of those interviewed, 27% considered it regular and 27%, weak.
12. Measurement of performance improvement for work teams with QWL programs presented positive results, with 36% as strong; 37%, average and 27%, weak in the companies studied,
13. 46% of employees perceived the QWL program as an important tool for the company’s strategy and competitiveness, 36% perceived it as regular and 18% as little important.

The answers to questions 14, 15, 16, and 17 concern the perception of employees regarding their personal development and improvement from the QWL program and their better performance with gains in effectiveness for the company strategy and competitiveness:

14. More than 55% of employees perceived that the company invests strongly for the improvement of their well-being and productivity gains; 36%, sometimes invest,
15. More than 70% of the employees perceived that the company invests strongly in work environment conditions for the improvement of their well-being and productivity gains; 18%, reasonable and 9% perceived it as bad,
16. 55% of employees perceive that the QWL program provides strong satisfaction and offers conditions to create and innovate, thus increasing the company’s competitive advantage; 27%, sometimes and 27%, rarely or never,
17. The overwhelming majority of employees (95%) perceive that a QWL program is a strong factor in increasing productivity and obtaining greater competitiveness for the company; and 5%, is not.

Figures 1 and 2 show how employees perceive the QWL program as a strategic factor (1) and how it functions for personal and organization development (2).

With Exploratory Factorial Analysis, the variables for each one of the constructs were submitted to the statistical technique that provides a comparison with the previously defined proposal and the results effectively encountered from the field study. In relation to the Perception of the QWL program in the company, the Importance of the QWL program actions, the Value the employees assign to the QWL program, and the QWL as a tool for the company’s Strategic Plan constructs, the factorial evaluation obtained maintains the expectation previously defined, with no necessity for any adjustments.

Figure 1. QWL as a strategy. Source: Research data.

Figure 2. QWL and personnel development. Source: Research data.

those who responded:

1. Most of those interviewed were men (75%), which is in line with statistics in the companies studied, 2. The 82% those interviewed were married,
3. More than 70% of the employees had been with their respective companies for more than eight years and 18% are between 4 and 8 years,
4. More than 70% of the employees that responded to the questionnaire held prominent positions in their companies with good clarification and information. The hierarchical level in management are 55%, operational 27%, technical 9% and superior level 9%,
5. The respondents were from the areas of production (27%), finance (27%), marketing (9%) and assistance (37%),
The employees’ perception of the concept of quality of life in the workplace is seen in questions 6, 7, 8 and 9.
6. The respondents (46%) perceived the concept and application while 54% had little perception,
7. Their view of the impact of QLW: 36%, weak impact; 37%, regular and 27%, very strong impact,
8. The respondents valued QLW actions as very good (45%), good and regular (55%),
9. Rating the employees’ participation in the QLW programs: 36% was very important, 46% was regular and 18% was poor.
In the variables associated with the Strategic management models for QWL, the Improvements and productivity obtained with QWL programs, and the Measurement of team performances with QWL programs, the Exploratory Factorial Analysis raised two distinct factors from the variables initially submitted for analysis. The verification of the variables indicates that these were grouped in a way to show two specific types of conditions that were then identified as the Condition for innovation and the Condition for well-being in the work environment.

By the results obtained, the following can be established: the averages for the personal interest in QWL variables can be considered intermediate, with deviance relatively high. The higher averages were confirmed in the variables that enquired about perception, participation and interest, with anything above 4 being considered high. The variables related to the business itself presented lower averages. In relation to deviances, these can be considered as intermediate. In general, the deviances can be considered intermediate to high, indicating a relatively elevated dispersion in the employee evaluations. The perception of the domain of the strategic factor was homogenous, with intermediate values for the averages and deviances. All of them had values relatively close – between 3.55 and 3.89 for averages and standard deviations between 0.90 and 1.03. The indication was that employees felt quite secure in regards to the possibility of personal and business development.

With the Cronbach’s Alpha index, the variables were analyzed for reliability to represent the constructs. The index was extracted for each construct, arriving at acceptable values, all above 0.6. With the results of the factorial structure determined, and the reliability extracted, it was decided to use the composition of the variables to generate a general measure of each construct.

The average of the scores of the spreadsheet input corresponding to each of the constructs was taken as a rule of composition. The results for the Alpha index values for the average, and the standard deviation for each one of the constructs is shown below. Table 1 shows that the averages of the constructs present values between intermediate and high and the standard deviations can be considered average.

From the results of the averages presented, one can perceive with greater clarity the positioning of the employees in relation to the reference constructs for the development of practices to stimulate development of the QWL, which fundamentally deals with activities associated with the world of business.

The hypotheses defined for the study were evaluated through Multiple Regression Analysis, as this allows for the evaluation of the simultaneous influence of the defined factors. As such, the QWL program value construct was placed in the condition of dependent while perceived vocation in the area, perception of support, domination of abilities (these in the same scale as the dependent variable) and Management and administration models for QWL (as a dummy with 0 for not possessing, and 1 for possessing) were inserted as independents.

Table 2 presents the values for the estimated regression model. The model may be considered consistent (R² = 0.381), and, as can be verified, only the constructs associated with Measurement of team performance, Management models and Workplace environmental conditions do not present significant influence, as shown in the t statistic for the standard coefficients.

With the aforementioned obtained results, one can deduce that the perception of a QWL program within a company is an influential factor in the strategic performance of the people and the organization. In order to develop a greater understanding and exploration of the data, the measurements of the constructs were evaluated in relation to some of the important variables that were utilized in the study. In addition, ANOVA (analysis of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the QWL program in the company</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the QWL program actions important?</td>
<td>0.779</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the employees value the QLW program?</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the importance of participating in the QWL?</td>
<td>0.679</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there Strategic Management Models for QWL?</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are improvements and productivity obtained with QWL?</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there measurement of team performance with QWL?</td>
<td>0.666</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is QWL a tool for strategic planning?</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there investment in personnel training and education?</td>
<td>0.833</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are the work environmental conditions and well-being?</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there conditions for innovation?</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is QWL a factor in competitiveness?</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research data.
aggregate and by the degree of innovation in the company.

This has brought many companies to revisit their strategies and forms of personnel management, as it is clear that “there are no strategically winning organizations without strategically winning workers” (Burigo, 1997), as we have shown.

Companies must assume a vigilant posture against all dehumanizing practices in the workplace through the implementation of strategic quality of life in the workplace programs and building on them to provide better living conditions for their workers. Thus, they will be contributing to the education of the worker, which will result in a better life. From the principle that people spend the greatest part of their lives in organizations, it would be ideal if these places were more pleasurable and healthier to make the execution of their work a satisfying and happy experience.

As such, should implement quality of life in the workplace values as a differential and strategic factor to rescue environmental and humanistic values within the organizations, conducting company consulting and training and processes. In addition, they should provide for the needs and aspirations of the workers, not only in respect to the aspects related to a greater participation on the part of the employee in operational decisions, but also those orienting in the direction of democracy in the workplace and its humanization, emphasizing social responsibility of companies and strengthening the SB.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study realized provided the information that the concern with Quality of Work Life is increasingly being seen as an important element within organizations and has grown in SB as well. This leads to the views from two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Standard coefficient</th>
<th>t Statistic</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the QWL program in the company</td>
<td>0.181</td>
<td>2.266</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the QWL program actions important?</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>1.356</td>
<td>0.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the employees value the QW program?</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>4.809</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the importance of participating in the QWL?</td>
<td>0.277</td>
<td>3.991</td>
<td>0.608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there Strategic Management Models for QWL?</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>1.088</td>
<td>0.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are improvements and productivity obtained with QWL?</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>3.676</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there measurement of team performance with QWL?</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.989</td>
<td>0.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is QWL a tool for Strategic Planning?</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>3.871</td>
<td>0.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there investment in personnel training and education?</td>
<td>0.421</td>
<td>4.978</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are the work environmental conditions and well-being?</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>1.099</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there conditions for innovation?</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>4.079</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is QWL a factor in competitiveness?</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>3.688</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research data.
important angles: one related to the medical well-being of employees and their work in the company and the other to the expansion of the concept of Quality of Work Life in a strongly competitive, globalized company. As such, a new posture for executives and personnel managers with organizations becomes necessary, one that places the QWL activities as a strategic element for human resources and, primarily, for companies.

Although QWL programs in the companies studied are still with limited actions in the operations area, the majority of workers and managers consider QWL an important tool for the development of both employees and the company. This development generates greater motivation for the employees, providing an increase in productivity, a reduction in costs and, thus, strong gains in competitiveness. The companies studied, though small in scale, have a good position in the markets in which they operate, a result of the work of their employees.

The study presented was of an exploratory and quantitative nature, with 15 questions on the Likert scale. The statistical studies showed that 68% of the employees interviewed had a strong perception of the importance of the Quality of Work Life program, that it is very important to the companies and to their own professional and personal development. In relation to the perception of QWL as a strategic differential and that it propitiated greater competitiveness, 52% of those interviewed agreed. The study demonstrated that a relationship between competitive strategies and QWL programs is possible.

As the worker is the differentiating link that drives organizational success, it is necessary for strategies and organizational management forms to provide employees with a commitment to the goals of the organizations where they work and of the quality of life in the workplace program.

This commitment is obtained with a strategic plan that involves a package of continuous improvements focused on: aspects of greater security in the company; more benefits; more training and education; better salaries; better relationships between leaders, followers and colleagues; better physical work environments; better work tools and machines; career plans; and participation in the profits and the decisions defined by the literature as being indicators of quality of life in the workplace. A plan of healthy practices for the well-being of personnel provides for the small business better performance and a competitive advantage.

**Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research**

This work provides data on the development of QWL programs in Micro and Small Companies, based on research and the approach developed in the aforementioned companies, considering a reduced pool for general understanding. In this way, the first limitation consists of the impossibility of realizing generalizations for the entire small business sector on a geographically amplified scope, as well as for other activity sectors. We suggest reapplying this work in other business contexts, whether involving products or services, whether for the same sector analyzed or in a different geographical region. We further suggest studies that contemplate rival or competitive models to that proposed in this study in order to compare the theoretical model with reality.

Future studies should deepen this discussion, further elucidating the question of strategy based on QWL programs, in the strong commitment to personnel within small business. They should also determine if the mode of evaluation of this commitment should not be transformed to better suit the actions for the improvement of quality of life and for greater involvement of the personnel in the business to improve their performances and that of the company.

Finally, the aim herein is to promote advancement in the understanding of Quality of Work Life in SB, constituting one more step towards providing contributions to future investigations on the themes related to the life and growth of the worker in companies. The search for this understanding is infinite, and progress in this discipline depends on it. For this reason, it is hoped that this work will stimulate new studies and debates involving QWL, especially in small business, in great evidence for our socio-economic development when facing the growing complexity of the markets.

**REFERENCES**


