

Quality of Work Life (QWL) and Employee Engagement : A Study Among Faculty of Higher Education

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Abstract

Quality of Work Life (QWL) has been identified as an important factor for a high level of organizational performance and for keeping the employees motivated and satisfied. It is also extremely important for any organization to keep its employees highly engaged. It has been reported that employees who are fully engaged will find their work more stimulating and are likely to work harder and be more productive. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of QWL on the employee engagement levels of faculty in of higher education sector and also to identify any significant difference between the QWL and engagement levels amongst the private and government universities. The valid data of 250 faculty members was analyzed using Pearson's Correlation and Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis. The results indicate a significant relationship between the two constructs i.e. QWL and employee engagement. The independent T-test confirmed that there is a significant difference between the engagement levels in private and government universities. However, no significant difference was found in the QWL among the government and private universities.

Key Words

Quality of Work Life (QWL), Employee Engagement, Faculty Members, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Work is an important part of people's life, as significant amount of time and

energy is devoted towards work. Happiness at work trickles down to happiness in life and hence, would improve the quality of life. Quality of life has been defined as the overall satisfaction with life, and life satisfaction is influenced by satisfaction with life domains, including work (Sirgy 2006).

Improvement in the work environment is paramount for the satisfaction and productivity of employees. The term 'quality of work life' was hence coined in the 1960s emphasizing on the quality of relationship between the worker and the working environment (Tabassum *et al.*, 2012).

QWL, being a very comprehensive construct, in some researches it has been referred to as a program, a series of methods, or even an approach that mutually benefits an employee and the organization. It is actually a two-fold construct that not only improves the satisfaction levels of the employees in the organization but also improves its productivity. Researchers have proved that there is a positive relationship between high QWL and job performance, and that QWL also has a positive impact on the quality of life (QoL) an individual leads (Koonmee *et al.*, 2010; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2011; Noor & Abdullah, 2012; Shahbazi *et al.*, 2011).

According to Gibbon (2006), employee engagement is defined as "a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, co-worker that in turn influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work". However, to the best of our knowledge little evidence exists on the nature of relationship between QWL and employee engagement, especially in the academia of higher education sector in India.

Since employee engagement has appeared in the management literature, it has become quite clear that employee engagement is an important concept if organizations need to be productive and to have a competitive advantage. In fact, many a researchers have found link of employee engagement with innovative work behavior (Agarwal, 2012), profitability, increased productivity, greater employee retention, reduced absenteeism and better work performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit, organizational citizenship behavior (Saks, M.A., 2006; Biswas, *et al.*, 2013; Wollard, 2011).

Research has provided evidence that an engaged employee would show passion, enthusiasm, creativity and are energetically and effectively connected to their work and the organization, whereas a disengaged employee would be robotic, passive, alienated and disinterested in finding innovative ways of doing the work, and would properly just finish the assigned job. Engagement is characterized by high levels of energy and identification (Wollard, 2011, Schaufeli, *et al.*, 2007).

Studies on employee engagement have concluded that the overall percentage of engaged employees is alarmingly low and is also on a slide, and the disengaged employees cost billions annually world over, due to low productivity and wastage of resources (Gallup Research, 2008). However, it has been widely accepted that operational excellence in an organization can only be maintained through engaged employees.

Our study focuses on QWL and engagement of academia in the higher educational sector and the dimensions of QWL that would most impact engagement levels.

Education is the surest path to sustained economic development and social transformation. Any growth model to be successful in an economy, it is important that we have skilled and educated population. For that we need to have a world class education system. India can boost of the citadels of higher learning like Takshashila and Nalanda universities that existed in 600 B.C. and the 5th century A.D., respectively.

The President of India, at a convocation address of a reputed university in 2015, had expressed his anguish over the dismal conditions of our higher education sector and had stated, "We have less to trumpet about the quality of our institutes. None of our institutions are ranked in the top two hundred, a vast majority are mired in mediocrity" (*The Indian Express*, 2015).

There is an urgent need to address the problem of the ailing higher education sector of India. The education system needs revamping and immediate reforms, so that they attract and retain proficient faculty members who are emotionally and cognitively connected to the organization and their work. Policies need to be set in place to keep the faculty members fully engaged. Today's students have access to information on their finger tips, are creative and take personal initiative. Only an engaged faculty will be able to develop their potential.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Employee Engagement

Engagement first entered the academic discussion in the social psychological work of Khan (1990) who proposed that personal engagement occurs when 'people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performance'. Khan (1990) suggested that engagement involves "the harnessing of organizational members' selves in their work roles. In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances". For human spirit to thrive at work individuals must be able to

completely immerse themselves in their work.

The notion of employee engagement is relatively new one, one that has been heavily marketed by human resource (HR) consulting firms that offer advice how it can be created and leveraged. Academic researchers are now slowly joining the fray (Macey and Schneider, 2008).

Work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption." Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.(Schaufeli, Salanova, 2007).

Hence, work engagement is characterized by high level of energy and strong identification with one's work, whereas burnout is characterized by opposite: a low level of energy and poor identification with one's work. Results from research suggest that engagement is "contagious", it crosses over not only from partner to spouse, but also from one employee to another (Schaufeli, Salanova, 2007).

A similar explanation is provided by Attridge (2009) when he defined engagement as containing three factors that include a physical component (e.g. "I exert a lot of energy performing my job"), an emotional component (e.g. "I really put my heart into my job") and a cognitive component (e.g. "Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else").

Work engagement has not only been linked with organizational outcomes like higher productivity, low absenteeism, greater retention, (May *et al.*, 2004) innovative work behavior (Agarwal, 2013) but also with positive organizational behavior like personal initiative and learning (Sonnentag, 2003). Consulting firm Hewitt Associate LLC (2005) have established a conclusive, compelling relationship between engaged employees and profitability through increased productivity, sales, customer satisfaction and employee retention.

Quality of Work Life

The evolution of quality of work life (QWL) began in late 1960s emphasizing the human dimensions of work that was focused on the quality of relationship between the worker and the working environment (Rose *et al.*, 2006; Tabassum *et al.*, 2011).

Although there is no formal definition for Quality of Work Life (QWL), industrial psychologists and management scholars agree in general that QWL is a construct that deals with the well-being of employees (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). QWL is a combination of strategies, procedures and ambiances related to a workplace that altogether enhance and sustain the employee satisfaction by aiming at improving work conditions for the employees of the organization (Nazir *et al.*, 2011). QWL differs from job satisfaction, where job satisfaction is only one of the many outcomes of QWL. QWL does not only affect job satisfaction but also satisfaction in other life domains such as family life, leisure life, social life, financial life, and so on (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001).

A better QWL initiative supports to fulfill technical and social requirements of job in the organization. The benefits of QWL initiatives go to both employees and employers. The employees trust, feel safe, are relatively more satisfied and are able to grow, and thus develop as human beings (Adhikari and Gautam, 2010).

Tabassum *et al.* has pointed out that an improved QWL will lead to a higher level of job satisfaction, which in turn reduces job turnover that is currently prevailing in the private universities of Bangladesh. High QWL is crucial for organizations to attract and retain workers. This is important as it indicates that the firm is able to offer appropriate working environment to the employees (Noor and Abdullah, 2012).

Shahabazi *et al.*, 2011 on the study on chairpersons of universities has noted that QWL and its dimensions have a significant positive relation with the performance. Hence a good QWL will enhance performance. Saks *et al.*, 2011 noted that performance management could impact employee engagement positively.

It is a concept that includes a multiple of variables which could impact the working culture of the organization. Many factors contribute to QWL which may include working conditions, job satisfaction, general well being, career prospects and compensation, training and development (Vijaimadhvan *et al.*, 2013), safe and healthy working conditions and social integration in the work organization that enables an individual to develop and use all his or her capacities (Gupta and Sharma, 2011).

Walton proposed eight major conceptual categories relating to QWL i.e. adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy working condition, opportunity to use and develop human capacities, opportunity for continued growth and security, social integration in the work organization, constitutionalism in the work organization, work and total life space and social relevance of work life.

Sirgy *et al.* (2001) identified seven major needs (Maslow's hierarchy), each having several dimensions based on his Need Satisfaction and Spillover Theory. Health and safety needs, economic and family need, social needs, esteem needs, actualization needs, knowledge needs and aesthetic needs.

From the review of literature it has been seen that most of QWL studies preferred the concept of QWL by Walton's definitions (Timossi *et al.*, 2008; Kanten and Sadullah, 2012).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

The study has three objectives :

1. To examine the association between quality of work life (QWL) and employee engagement in the higher education sector.
2. To ascertain whether there is any significant difference between the perception of QWL among the faculty members of private and public universities.
3. To assess the difference in the work engagement levels of faculty members in private and public universities

In order to achieve the above objectives, three hypotheses have been formulated.

Kanten and Sadullah (2012), in their study have pointed out that literature on QWL is limited and most of the studies focus on the relationship of QWL with some of the variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, turnover intention and labor relations etc. However, there is lack of empirical evidence of relationship between QWL and employee work engagement.

Recent approach to enhancing engagement level is the Job Demand Resource (JD-R) model. It has confirmed that job demands like work overload and job insecurity cause burnout and health problems and resources such as salary, supervisory support, inter-personal and social relations predict work engagement, organizational commitment and extra role performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Thus, our first hypothesis is as follows :

H₁ : There is a strong positive association between the QWL and employee engagement among faculty members in universities.

Tabassum *et al.* (2011) found that a significant difference exists between local private and foreign commercial bank employees perception regarding overall QWL. Bharathi *et al.* (2010) found a significant association between Quality of Work Life (QWL) and

Quality of Life (QoL) in teaching environment and concluded that the QWL of teaching staff in college is low. Bharathi *et al.* (2010) concluded that there is a significant difference between the type of the college of the respondent and the perceived level of overall quality of work life in teaching environment. Hence, our second hypothesis is :

H₂ : There is a significant difference between the perception of QWL among faculty members of private universities and that of government universities.

Bakker *et al.* (2007) in the study on Finnish teachers pointed out that job resources such as supervisory support, innovativeness, appreciation and organizational climate provide a buffer to diminish the negative relationship between pupil behavior and work engagement. Organizations may provide varying combinations of job resources and demands (e.g. workload), this combination can predict work engagement. Jenkins *et al.* (2013) have noted that organizational factors and strategy impact engagement. Management practices are not simple and uniform. Management approaches to employee engagement vary, context matters, and there can be soft and hard approaches having varied drivers of engagement.

H₃ : Work Engagement levels of the faculty members of private universities differentiate from that of government universities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedures

The higher education sector has been chosen since it has a huge potential for growth, and plays an important role in shaping the youth who are the future of the nation. The employees in the higher education sector shoulder the responsibility of mentoring India's youth and making them ready as professionals and citizens of 21st century.

Statistical population of this research includes Professors, Associate Professors and Assistant Professors employed in various private, central and state universities in Uttarakhand, chosen by quota sampling technique. Uttarakhand has emerged as an educational hub with one central university, 4 institutes of national importance, 9 state universities, 3 deemed universities, and 11 private universities.

A pilot study with 72 respondents, who are faculty members at various institutes of repute, was conducted through quantitative and qualitative methods. Discussion along with a structured questionnaire was used. Factor analysis was run on the data, the reliability of the scale was established and questions with ambiguous language were corrected.

Primary data for main study was collected by visiting the various universities, interacting with the faculty members and obtaining responses through a questionnaire.

Measures

Employee engagement is measured by the 17-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, as used by Bakker *et al.* (2007), Kanten & Sadullah (2012), Menguc *et al.* (2013) and Bharathi *et al.* (2010). The scale has the following latent variables : Vigor, Dedication and Absorption. Validity, reliability of the scale was well-established, and the three factor structure is superior to any other alternative factor structure, the internal consistency of the three subscales has been proved to be sufficient in each study (Bakker *et al.*, 2007).

Factor analysis done on the pilot study identified four factors, using the retention criterion of Eigen Value. Keeping in mind that the scale is well-researched and has been used in a number of researches we retained the original three factors.

Quality of Work Life scale (QWL) comprised 24 items pertaining to six dimensions. The dimensions of QWL selected for this study have been adopted from the model as proposed by Walton's (1975) and modified by Timossi (2008). As used by Shahbazi *et al.* (2011), Mirkamli, S. *et al.* (2011), Tabassum *et al.* (2011). It is one of the most accepted and used model by researchers. However, the model has been modified to suit our research work.

The construct has six parameters : respect for laws at work; working conditions and work-life balance; capacity and opportunity at work; social relevance and importance of work; fair and appropriate salary and social integration at work.

In order to identify the employee's perception regarding QWL and employee engagement Likert's Five Rating Scale (Likert, 1932) has been chosen. To make comprehension easier and to standardize the answers it has been taken in words ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The questionnaire includes 9 sub-scales with 41 questions on QWL and Work Engagement .The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of Reliability being 0.854, thus confirming the reliability of the scale. As shown in the Table, the alpha

reliability of each of the sub-scale is high (above 0.826), indicating the internal consistency. There were also 6 demographic questions.

Table 1
Mean, Standard Deviation and Reliability for Various Factors

Subscales	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	S.D.	N
Respect to Laws at Work	0.835	3.63	0.85	250
Regarding Working Conditions and Work Life Balance	0.839	3.78	0.62	250
Regarding Use of Capacity	0.826	3.45	0.68	250
Social Relevance	0.844	3.83	0.67	250
Fair and Appropriate Salary	0.842	3.16	1.03	250
Social Integration at Work	0.848	4.02	0.67	250
Vigor	0.834	3.80	0.50	250
Dedication	0.834	4.16	0.56	250
Absorption	0.843	3.95	0.54	250
Quality of Work Life	0.854	3.65	0.55	250
Employee Engagement	0.852	3.97	0.44	250

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Respondents' Demographics

Of the approximately 320 questionnaires distributed 262 were completed and returned, response rate being 81.8%. We further eliminated 12 questionnaires, as they were found to be incomplete, leading to a tally of 250 valid questionnaire. The sample included 156 (62.4%) male and 94 (37.6%) female academicians. In terms of age 199 (79.6%) were below age 40 and 51 (20.4%) were between above 40 years of age. In terms of qualification, 107 (42.8%) were Ph.D. holders and 143 (57.2%) were Post-graduates in various disciplines that included M.Tech, LLM, MBA etc. In terms of job title, 17 (6.8%) were Professors, 24 (9.6%) were Associate Professors and the rest 209 (83.6%) were Assistant Professors. 134 (53.6%) respondents worked in Private Universities and 116 (46.4%) worked in Government Universities including a Central University. Among the sample respondents, 129 (51.6%) had served with a current university for 1 to 5 years and 121 (48.4%) had worked for more than 5 years.

Results

1) The Association Between Employee Engagement and (QWL)

In order to achieve the first objective of the study, Pearson correlation was run on the data. According to the correlation analysis, Employee Engagement had a significant relation with QWL ($r = 0.609$, $p\text{-value} = .000$), a significant relation with all the dimensions of QWL was also confirmed "respect to laws at work" ($r = 0.465$, $p\text{-value} = .000$), "Work conditions and work life balance" ($r = 0.533$, $p\text{-value} = .000$), "regarding use of capacity" ($r = 0.547$, $p\text{-value} = .000$), "social relevance at work"

Table 2

Correlation Between Employee Engagement and the Dimensions of Quality of Work Life

	Respect to Laws at Work	Working Con- ditions	Use of Capacity	Social Rele- vance	Fair Salary	Social Inte- gration	Employee Enga- gement	QWL
Respect to Laws at Work	1	.388** .000	.584** .000	.482** .000	.473** .000	.434** .000	.465** .000	.786** .000
Regarding Working Conditions	.388** .000	1	.482** .000	.413** .000	.336** .000	.333** .000	.533** .000	.646** .000
Regarding Use of Capacity	.584** .000	.482** .000	1	.499** .000	.575** .000	.336** .000	.547** .000	.797** .000
Social Relevance	.482** .000	.413** .000	.499** .000	1	.369** .000	.445** .000	.360** .000	.716** .000
Fair and Appropriate Salary	.473** .000	.336** .000	.575** .000	.369** .000	1	.303** .000	.391** .000	.753** .000
Social Integration at Work	.434** .000	.333** .000	.336** .000	.445** .000	.303** .000	1	.391** .000	.634** .000
Employee Engagement	.465** .000	.533** .000	.547** .000	.360** .000	.391** .000	.391** .000	1	.609** .000
QWL	.786** .000	.646** .000	.797** .000	.716** .000	.753** .000	.634** .000	.609** .000	1

($r = 0.360$, $p\text{-value} = .000$), "fair and appropriate salary" ($r = 0.391$, $p\text{-value} = .000$), "social integration at work" ($r = 0.391$, $p\text{-value} = .000$). However, the strength of the correlation is the highest for the use of capacity at work and for work conditions and work life balance.

In order to explain more on the relationship between QWL and Employee Engagement, Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was run on the data. The result indicates that 41.2% of the variance is explained by the dimensions of QWL, (R square = 0.419, Adjusted R square = 0.412).

Table 3
Regression Analysis for QWL and Employee Engagement

Model Summary			
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
.647	.419	.412	5.72212

The beta coefficient indicates the relative importance of each individual variable. The analysis reveals that standardized coefficient of three dimensions i.e. use of capacity is 0.338, working conditions and work life balance is 0.312, and social integration are 0.173, the F-value being 59.145 and $p\text{-value} = .000$, less than 5% level of significance.

Table 4
Regression Analysis for QWL and Employee Engagement

Coefficients					
Model	Un-Standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-value	p-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	32.569	2.763		11.786	.000**
Regarding Use of Capacity	.623	.104	.338	5.965	.000**
Regarding Working Conditions	.622	.113	.312	5.503	.000**
Social Integration at Work	.640	.195	.173	3.285	.001**

Findings of Multiple Regression Analysis indicate that there is a positive relationship between the independent variable i.e. QWL and the dependent variable i.e. employee engagement. An improvement of QWL will contribute in increasing the engagement levels. However, three dimensions have maximum predictable ability. Use of capacity at work explains the maximum of the employee engagement, closely followed by work conditions and work life balance.

2) To examine the difference between the QWL among the faculty members of private universities and government universities an independent T-test was conducted.

No significant difference was found in the QWL among the faculty members of government and private universities, mean values being 88.7845 and 86.0896 with standard deviation of 12.23483 and 13.36693 respectively. The p-value being .097, which is more than 5% level of significance. However, a high significant difference was found in the working conditions and work life balance between the government and private universities (p-value = .000). The findings do not support our hypothesis.

2) To examine the difference between the engagement level among the faculty members of private universities and government universities an independent t-test was conducted

Work engagement level of the faculty in government universities was found to be higher than their counterparts in the private universities. Mean value being 68.4397 and 66.3507 with a standard deviation of 7.19817 and 7.57644 of the government and private universities respectively. P-value being .027 which is less than 5% level of significance. There was a significant difference in the vigor and dedication the p-value being 0.003 and 0.025 which is less than 5% level of significance, though no significant difference was found in the absorption level between the two types of universities. The finding support hypothesis H_3

Table 5
Independent Sample T-test Measuring the QWL Among Private and Government Universities

Dimensions	University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Respect to Laws at Work	Private	134	3.5995	.81217	.653	.515
	Govt	116	3.6695	.88410		
Regarding Working Conditions	Private	134	3.6256	.60194	4.437	.000**
	Govt	116	3.9641	.60105		
Regarding Use of Capacity	Private	134	3.3881	.63581	1.614	.108
	Govt	116	3.5259	.71411		
Social Relevance	Private	134	3.9005	.63274	1.867	.063
	Govt	116	3.7471	.70830		
Fair and Appropriate Salary	Private	134	3.1144	.97428	.687	.493
	Govt	116	3.2040	1.08728		
Social Integration at Work	Private	134	4.0498	.60284	.649	.517
	Govt	116	3.9943	.74857		
Quality of Work Life	Private	134	3.6138	.51866	1.664	.097
	Govt	116	3.6841	.58006		

Table 6
Independent T-test Measuring the Engagement Level Among Private and Government Universities

Vigor	Private	134	22.3060	3.03916	2.993	.003**
	Govt.	116	23.4310	2.87485		
Dedication	Private	134	20.4179	2.87927	2.253	.025*
	Govt.	116	21.2155	2.68589		
Absorption	Private	134	23.6269	3.34185	.401	.689
	Govt.	116	23.7931	3.18288		
Employee Engagement	Private	134	66.3507	7.57644	2.225	.027*
	Govt.	116	68.4397	7.19817		

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Realizing the importance of fully engaging the employees for better work performance and competitive advantage especially with professionals in academia, the present study examines the relationship between Quality of Work Life (QWL) and employee engagement and subsequently the difference between the engagement level and QWL among the private and government faculty members in higher education sector. Findings of the study indicate the following :

First, QWL has a high positive relationship with engagement of professionals in academia. Out of the dimensions analyzed, "use of capacity and opportunity at work", "working conditions and work life balance", "social integration at work" have the most positive and significant relationship with employee engagement. Therefore, it may be stated, irrefutably that a high QWL will lead faculty members to get more engaged. The study of Bakker *et al.*, 2007, Kantan *et al.*, 2012 and Salanova *et al.*, 2014 also confirm the results deduced in this study. The study of Gupta *et al.*, 2015 on academics in Indian higher education confirmed the relationship between supervisory support, employee engagement and performance.

Second, this study found that there is no significant difference between the level of QWL among the private and government universities. Tabassum *et al.* concluded in her study on private and public banks in Bangladesh that there was a significant difference in their QWL.

Third, a significant difference has been found in the engagement levels of faculty members of private and government universities. The engagement level of faculty members of government universities is higher than their counterparts in the private universities. Hakeem *et al.* in a study indicated that the faculty members of higher education in Kashmir are highly engaged, augmenting the result presented in this research.

Some limitations of the study which can be observed are, firstly, the data comes from a cross-sectional analyses. However, Salanova *et al.*, 2014 in their longitudinal study on secondary school teachers has claimed that "job facilitators" which are more organizational in nature, promote ability to perform; positively impact the engagement level and also improve the belief in one's capability (self-efficacy). Secondly, the study is based on self-report questionnaire and common- method bias may have limited the conclusion. However, this limitation would have reduced to a certain extent due to the

authenticity of the data that was personally collected by interacting with the faculty members of various universities. Thirdly, the data is limited to the State of Uttarakhand and hence, generalizations would be difficult to make.

Findings of the study have important implications for educationists and HR planners of various educational departments in terms of quality of work life they are proposing to offer to their employees, that would have a direct relationship on their engagement levels and on the quality of education they provide.

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