

Quality of Life at Work - QVT: A case study with employees of the specialized reference center for social assistance - CREAS in the city of Fortaleza

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the Quality of Life at Work (QVT) of employees of the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS) in Fortaleza, highlighting its importance for the provision of essential public services. The research seeks to contribute to the understanding of QVT in the context of social assistance and related areas.

Keywords: Quality of life, Public servants.

INTRODUCTION

The need for quality of life has become increasingly clear to organizations and individuals, as evidenced by studies on Quality and Life at Work – QVT, which is gaining ground due to the relevance of the topic within the organizational context. Companies are paying closer attention to the relationship between favorable working conditions and employee productivity.

The first questions about quality were only about the quality of the product offered, to meet the expectations of external customers. Over the years, companies began to realize that internal customers also deserved quality, offered through actions focused on employee well-being (Vasconcelos et al., 2011).

Recent data show Brazil in 67th place in an index that measures quality of life. The Social Progress Index – SPI is the global indicator that evaluates more than 50 parameters that make up the quality of life of citizens. In 2024, Brazil scored 68.90 points on the general average, on a scale of 0 to 100 points. The country fell 21 positions compared to 2014, going from 46th place to 67th, a result that reflects the worsening levels of social and economic inequality in the country (Gouveia; José, 2024).

Achieving QVT is yet another challenge among many others that people face daily in their work environment, regardless of the type of organization and its area of activity. This case study is inserted in this context, a time when QVT has been studied by several authors, due to its importance in the academic and organizational area. Thus, the research was carried out at the

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Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance - CREAS, in the city of Fortaleza, a public facility, belonging to the social assistance policy, in a specialized scope. The importance of the role played by CREAS employees in providing vital services to users is undeniable since the facility is a public and state-owned unit that offers specialized and ongoing services to families and individuals in situations of threat or violation of rights (physical, psychological, sexual violence, human trafficking, compliance with socio-educational measures in an open environment, etc.). The provision of specialized and ongoing care must prioritize the family and the situation experienced. This specialized care focuses on the family's access to social assistance rights, through the enhancement of resources and protection capacity (Brazil, 1993).

Therefore, given the important role in caring for families and providing essential services to society, associated with the lack of studies on the QVT of professionals in the area of social assistance, the theme investigated in this research corresponds to: "Quality of Life at Work – QVT of Public Servants". To direct the studies, the research was guided by the following theme delimitation: "Quality of Life at Work – QVT from the perspective of employees of the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance – CREAS, in the city of Fortaleza – CE".

OBJECTIVE

As mentioned, there is a lack of Brazilian studies aimed at investigating the QVT of these professionals. Due to this reality, the factors that motivated this research must consider the undeniable role of these professionals in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

The aim of this work is not to exhaust the discussions on the phenomenon; however, given the above and the content expressed in the following pages, it is hoped that this investigative process will contribute to the collection of social assistance policy and other areas of social sciences, in addition to sparking reflections on the subject studied.

METHODOLOGY

As for the methodology, the study is characterized as exploratory-descriptive research according to the objectives, and bibliographical according to the procedures. This is a single case study of a quantitative nature, whose data collection was carried out through a closed questionnaire applied to sixteen employees of the organization under study, using indicators based on the categories of the Walton Model.

DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE WORK CATEGORY

Work is the most valued social activity in current times; it can be said that people live in the world of work. However, when beginning studies on the work category, it is important to know its etymological meaning.

It originates from the Latin *tripalium*, although other hypotheses associate it with the *trabaculum*. *Tripalium* was an instrument made of three sharpened sticks with which farmers beat wheat, corn cobs, and flax to tear and fray them (Albornoz, 2012, p. 83).

A considerable number of dictionaries state that *tripalium* consisted of an instrument of torture. Although *tripalium* was originally used in the work of farmers, the use of this instrument as a means of torture gave rise to the meaning of the word for a long time. The semantic content of suffering went from that of striving, laboring, and working. The first meaning would have lasted until the beginning of the 15th century, and this evolution of meaning would have occurred at the same time in other Latin languages, such as *trabajo* in Spanish, *Trabalho* in Catalan, *travail* in French, and *Travaglio* in Italian (Albornoz, 2012).

According to Marx (1994), work stands out as an ontological category, a founding component of social being and human sociability. Through work, human beings transform nature and interact with their peers, building networks of social relationships. Individuals' freedom of choice is the basis of the relationship between nature and man, mediated by work; this freedom is alienated and fetishized in capitalist sociability, where the distinction between those who own the means of production – the capitalists – and those who lack such means – the workers – is presented. Thus, the workforce is considered a commodity and the class that lives from work, in turn, is subjected to a process of exploitation, aimed at social reproduction in exchange for wages, generating surplus value, a source of wealth for capitalists.

Therefore, work has been a basic concern of humanity since its origin, because as daily life throws up a series of adversities, human beings are led to the need to create survival strategies through their work.

It is worth noting that employees need the motivation to achieve a favorable level of performance in their work, therefore a good interpersonal relationship is configured as one of these factors directly interfering with productivity levels.

In this way, it can be stated that labor relations arise from social relations of production, constituting uniquely the integration between social agents that occupy opposite and complementary positions in the production process, on the one hand, the workers and on the other, the employers. The patterns of labor relations in the organizational context are defined

based on macropolitical-economic aspects corresponding to social movements, the government, and the market; and from internal aspects, represented by human resources management, that is, by its ability to order, assign, and build organizational identity (FLEURY and FISCHER, 2000).

QUALITY OF LIFE AT WORK – QVT

In recent decades, QVT has undergone considerable transformations, from essentially operational and legislated practices to strategic corporate actions. Such changes refer, in large part, to changes in the world of work and people's needs, culminating in the structuring of QVT activities in companies (Limongi-França, 2012).

Over time, the expression QVT has received different connotations, as research related to the topic is developed, transformations are made and new visions and perspectives are presented. In order to demonstrate the vision of different authors and periods, Merino (2004) cites authors such as Guest (1979), Davis (1981), Fernandes and Becker (1988), Fernandez (1989) and Vieira and Hanashino (1990), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – The Evolution of the Concept of Quality of Work Life (QWL)

AUTHOR	CONCEPT
GUEST (1979)	"[...] a process through which an organization seeks to reveal the creative potential of its personnel by involving them in decisions that affect their work lives. A striking feature of the process is that its objectives are not merely intrinsic, focusing on improving productivity and efficiency in themselves; they are also intrinsic in terms of what the worker sees as self-fulfillment and self-enhancement."
DAVIS (1981)	"Favorable or unfavorable conditions of a work environment for employees."
FERNANDES & BECKER (1988)	"To bring together all experiences related to the humanization of work and guide them based on what has conventionally been called industrial democracy."
FERNANDEZ (1989)	"Relates motivational factors linked to performance (Maslow and Herzberg) – QWL exists when individuals can satisfy their important personal needs through the organization in which they work."
VIEIRA & HANASHINO (1990)	"[...] the improvement of working conditions – extending to all functions of any nature at any hierarchical level, considering behavioral, environmental, and organizational variables that, along with appropriate Human Resources policies, humanize employment to achieve satisfactory results for both employees and the organization. This means mitigating the existing conflict between capital and labor [...]."

Source – Merino, 2004, p. 17. (adapted by the author)

It can be seen in the initial concepts of QVT that one of the main purposes was to increase productivity, consequently, aiming for greater profits. Over the decades, other focuses were incorporated, aiming at the well-being of the worker in the face of several values such as self-esteem, the importance of the work performed, and greater participation of the worker in decision-making within the company.

The humanization of work relations in the organization is a constant pursuit of QVT, maintaining a close relationship with productivity and with the satisfaction of the workers in their

work environment (well-being, health, and safety) (Merino, 2004, p. 16).

A more recent interpretation of QVT is seen in the view of Limongi-França (2013), who assumes the position that people's quality of life can be defined as the perception of well-being about individual needs, the socioeconomic environment and people's life expectancy, while QVT values working conditions, care for the physical structure offered to workers and satisfactory interpersonal relationships. Thus, based on the aforementioned authors' theoretical framework, we can conclude that the term QVT has broad meanings, changing according to the historical moment. And that companies, as a way of implementing improvements in the QVT process, must have in-depth knowledge of the profile of their workers. Thus, through a diagnosis, organizations can identify the characteristics that interfere with the life and work of each employee, and then create action plans in order of priority.

Profile of Respondents

As a starting point, in order to identify the sample, personal and professional data of the respondents were used. The personal characteristics correspond to: age range, gender, and level of education. The professional characteristic used was: time in the company.

The questionnaire applied has four alternatives with intervals of the following age ranges: 18 to 25 years; 26 to 35 years; 36 to 45 years and over 45 years. After tabulating the data, we were able to infer that 56% of the respondents are over 36 years old, therefore, this CREAS unit, for the most part, is composed of more mature employees; while 44% of the respondents are younger employees, people between 18 and 35 years old.

Regarding the gender of the respondents, we noticed a predominance of the female gender. Of the 16 respondents, four were male (totaling 25%) and twelve were female (totaling 75%). This difference is probably because historically/culturally in the division of labor according to gender, social work was considered an activity only for women, with men being responsible for work that used force. However, over the years, this dichotomy has been overcome, since men have been gradually entering the social area.

Regarding the level of education, five answer options were used: complete high school; incomplete higher education; complete higher education; incomplete master's or doctorate, and complete master's or doctorate. After tabulation, we found that one respondent only completed high school, while four are studying higher education and eleven have already completed higher education. None of the respondents has or is studying for a master's or doctorate. The respondents' concern regarding academic education is noticeable since this is a specialized job that requires higher education for most positions. However, it was found that 6% had not yet

started higher education.

The time at the company factor was also considered, with four alternatives being provided, namely: less than 1 year; 1 to 5 years; 6 to 10 years, and over 10 years. Fourteen respondents stated that they had been at the company for less than 1 year, while one respondent had been there for 1 to 5 years, one respondent had been there for 6 to 10 years and none stated that they had been there for over 10 years. The predominance of respondents with less than 1 year at the company, totaling 88%, is due to the type of hiring, which in this specific case corresponds to a Public Selection, of a temporary nature.

Analysis of the Variables of the QVT Study

The variables and their respective dimensions are arranged according to the Walton Model. Table 2 summarizes the categories and respective indicators of the Walton Model.

Table 2: Walton's Model – Categories and Indicators - WALTON'S MODEL

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS
I. Fair and Adequate Compensation	a) Adequate income for work) Internal equity) External equity
II. Working Conditions	a) Working hours) Safe and healthy physical environment
III. Utilization and Development of Capacities	a) Autonomy) Task significance) Task identity) Skill variety) Feedback
IV. Opportunities for Growth and Security	a) Career possibility) Personal growth) Job security
V. Social Integration within the Organization	a) Equal opportunities) Relationships) Sense of community
VI. Constitutionalism	a) Respect for labor laws and rights) Personal privacy) Freedom of speech) Norms and routines
VII. Work and Total Life Space	a) Balanced role at work) Work entry and exit time
VIII. Social Relevance of Work in Life	a) Company image) Social responsibility of the institutions) Social responsibility towards employees) Social responsibility towards products and services

Source: Oliveira, 2006, p.39 (adapted by the author).

I. Fair and Adequate Compensation (-): Predominance of dissatisfaction, with 15% of respondents being satisfied, while 83% show some level of dissatisfaction.

Table 3. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Fair and Adequate Compensation

INDICATORS	Adequate Income for Work	Internal Equity	External Equity
RESULTS	Results were negative, with 94% signaling some level of dissatisfaction. Respondents stated that the compensation received is not aligned with the responsibility and importance of the work performed.	Negative results, as aspects such as working time and experience are not considered for financial incentives.	Negative results, with 94% stating that the compensation received is inconsistent with what is paid in the market for professionals in the same category.

Source: Prepared by the author.

II. Working Conditions (-): Predominance of dissatisfaction, with 73% of respondents dissatisfied, and only 23% satisfied.

Table 4. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Working Conditions

INDICATORS	Working Hours	Safe and Healthy Physical Environment
RESULTS	Predominance of satisfaction, totaling 75%. Respondents stated they are not required to work beyond the stipulated hours for their category.	75% expressed dissatisfaction in this dimension, mainly due to the insecurity in carrying out their activities, often in risky areas, coupled with workload overload and lack of materials and equipment for performing their tasks.
Source: Prepared by the author.		

III. Utilization and Development of Capacities (+): Balanced aspects, but with a concentration of dissatisfaction: 55% are dissatisfied, while 43% are satisfied, and 2% are moderately satisfied.

Table 5. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Utilization and Development of Capacities

INDICATORS	Autonomy	Task Significance	Task Identity	Skill Variety	Feedback
RESULTS	Indication of dissatisfaction, totaling 75%, shows that equipment management does not encourage employee initiative, meaning they lack autonomy to solve work-related issues.	Predominance of dissatisfaction, totaling 75%. The high dissatisfaction rate regarding the meaning of their work possibly comes from the limited autonomy, as described in the previous dimension, which can lead to employee demotivation.	55% satisfaction. Respondents consider the tasks they perform important.	100% satisfaction, indicating that CREAS encourages the acquisition of additional skills beyond those related to daily tasks.	High dissatisfaction, totaling 76%. Possibly, the information flow within the company does not contribute to smooth service operations and better employee performance, which could harm the QWL.
Source: Prepared by the author.					

IV. Opportunities for Growth and Security (-): Results show higher dissatisfaction rates: 80% dissatisfied, and 14% satisfied, with 6% moderately satisfied.

Table 6. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Opportunities for Growth and Security

INDICATORS	Career Possibility	Personal Growth	Job Security
RESULTS	100% dissatisfaction. All respondents showed dissatisfaction with career growth opportunities at CREAS, likely because hiring is done through public selection, which specifies the contract's validity and the employee's dismissal date.	The institution lacks incentives for the permanent education of its professionals.	Predominance of dissatisfaction, totaling 81%. Respondents feel insecure and lack job stability due to temporary contracts via public selection.
Source: Prepared by the author.			

V. Social Integration within the Organization (+): Higher satisfaction rates, totaling 79%, against 17% dissatisfaction. 4% opted for a neutral stance.

Table 7. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Social Integration within the Organization

INDICATORS	Equal Opportunities	Relationships	Sense of Community
RESULTS	94% satisfaction. A significant portion of respondents is satisfied and does not identify discrimination related to appearance, lifestyle, gender, race, or religion, which improves QWL levels.	Predominance of satisfaction, with 75% indicating positive relationships. Interpersonal relationships among employees are mostly positive, which is essential for QWL, although some minor disagreements exist.	69% satisfaction. Companionship is an important aspect of interpersonal relationships and is considered mostly good at the company, enhancing QWL.

Source: Prepared by the author.

VI. Constitutionalism (-): High dissatisfaction rate: 38% satisfied, 56% dissatisfied, and 6% moderately satisfied.

Table 8. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Constitutionalism

INDICATORS	Respect for Labor Laws and Rights	Personal Privacy	Freedom of Speech	Norms and Routines
RESULTS	The predominance of dissatisfaction, with 88% negative responses. The high dissatisfaction rate is likely due to the type of hiring (public selection), which doesn't guarantee the same labor rights as regular contracts.	A positive result, as 56% expressed satisfaction. A significant percentage of respondents feel that the organization respects their privacy, which contributes to their well-being and positively affects QWL.	63% satisfaction. The majority of respondents feel they have the freedom to express opinions about work-related matters, which is a positive aspect for QWL, as lack of freedom can harm employee well-being and performance.	Predominance of dissatisfaction, with 62%. Most respondents are dissatisfied, likely because company norms and routines are not clear or accepted by all employees, which may affect QWL.

Source: Prepared by the author.

VII. Work and Total Life Space (+): High satisfaction rates: 66% satisfied, with 28% dissatisfied. 6% are moderately satisfied.

Table 9. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Work and Total Life Space

INDICATORS	Balanced Role at Work	Work Entry and Exit Time
RESULTS	69% of respondents indicate a balance between work commitments and family life.	The predominance of satisfaction, with 63% indicating positive aspects in this dimension.

Source: Prepared by the author.

VIII. Social Relevance of Work in Life (-): Higher dissatisfaction rates: 67% dissatisfied, 28% satisfied. 5% are moderately satisfied.

Table 10. Results of the Indicators in the Category: Social Relevance of Work in Life

INDICATORS	Company Image	Social Responsibility of the Institution	Social Responsibility towards Employees	Social Responsibility towards Products and Services
RESULTS	62% dissatisfaction. The majority of respondents do not feel proud to work for the company, indicating dissatisfaction with the organization. The company should prioritize actions to improve its image.	69% dissatisfaction. A significant portion does not recognize the company's social responsibility or support for community projects, contradictory to CREAS's role.	High dissatisfaction, with 82%. Many respondents have a negative image of the company.	The predominance of dissatisfaction, with 56% dissatisfied. Respondents are dissatisfied with the quality of services provided, likely due to the lack of proper infrastructure to perform their work effectively.

Source: Prepared by the author.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

QWL is directly related to motivation. The more motivated an employee is, the higher their level of self-esteem will be, and consequently, they will be more willing to generate positive results in their work. Therefore, the challenge for companies, as well as the goal of QWL, is to

promote conditions that meet people's needs, such as a comfortable and safe work environment so that employees can perform their activities without risking their health and are more motivated.

The case study focused on measuring the QWL of employees at a CREAS, a social welfare facility in the city of Fortaleza. Analyzing the data as a whole, it can be seen that 38% of respondents are satisfied according to the model and variables used. However, it is worth noting that the majority of respondents are not satisfied. Of these, 58% are dissatisfied and 4% opted for an intermediate position.

The variable responsible for the highest percentage of satisfied respondents was "Social Integration in the Organization," with 79% satisfaction. It was found that a considerable portion of respondents indicated that there is no discrimination in the company related to appearance, lifestyle, gender, race, or religion; that there is respect and camaraderie among coworkers and integration outside of work, while the rest of the respondents disagreed with this opinion.

On the other hand, the variable responsible for the highest percentage of dissatisfied respondents was "Fair and Adequate Compensation" with 83% dissatisfaction. It was found that the majority of employees are not satisfied with the salary received, nor with internal and external equity, while a minority agrees. According to the results of the survey, we can conclude that possibly the high percentage of dissatisfied respondents is due to the type of hiring to which they are subject - Public Selection - which, unlike the Public Examination, has a lower salary, and is set equally for all professionals with higher education, regardless of their academic background and time of experience in the area of activity.

Once the data analysis is complete, it is possible to state that when applying the QWL variables according to the Walton Model, in the company studied, it is possible to see that the respondents were dissatisfied with all the variables. That said, it is worth highlighting that this work acquires relevance in the social sphere because it brings to the academic environment a real contribution through research in the context of healthcare in Ceará, regarding concerns about QWL, and to the context of CREAS, an academic research that verifies how employees perceive QWL in the facilities. Therefore, considering that the results of this research are configured as a collaboration for the implementation of a quality-of-life program; it would be opportune for the institution to extend this study to its entire staff, that is, to all six CREAS existing in the city of Fortaleza, aiming to obtain a broader and more detailed panel, in addition to identifying the other factors that influence the perception of its employees regarding QWL, thus defining, from a perspective of qualitative study, the guidelines for the formulation of an effective quality of life program within the social assistance facilities of the city of Fortaleza. For

future research, it is recommended that the researcher propose improvements, based on the results achieved, that support administrative measures that can change possible deviations not identified in day-to-day activities, as well as intensify the positive aspects highlighted through the investigation.

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