

## **SESSION II**

### **CHANGES IN WORK LIFE AND ECONOMIC ETHOS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES**

## QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE: BACKGROUND, CONTENTS AND DILEMMAS AS SEEN FROM A WESTERN PERSPECTIVE\*

ELIEZER ROSENSTEIN

### *A. Introduction*

The Quality of Working Life (QWL) concept and the methods by which it can be put into practice have, during the last twenty years, caught the attention of researchers, managers, trade union leaders, governments, politicians and the general public. Coined in 1972, during the Arden House conference of scientists with a strong orientation towards action research (Davis & Cherns, 1975), by both theoreticians and practitioners, QWL has been perceived as an “umbrella” concept for the purpose of describing and analysing important and relatively recent developments which have occurred in Western and some non-Western societies in the areas of work and organizational life. As interest in the topic has gradually grown and the number of projects increased, Quality of Working Life “has come to be loosely used, to indicate a broad spectrum of activities in this area covering a wide variety of programs, techniques, theories and organizational styles” (Delamotte and Takezawa, 1984, p. v). Those who have followed the fast growing literature related to QWL have soon realized that various perceptions and definitions have been offered by researchers as well as by men of action and, perhaps even worse, many have used the term without trying to clarify its most fundamental components.

The purpose of this paper is to present first, some of the common denominators of QWL programs, and then to elaborate on some of the contextual variables—at societal, organizational and individual levels—which have encouraged the development of such programs. Three major approaches to the implementation of the QWL concept will be examined: 1) the integration of the social and technical subsystems in organizations which is associated with the “Socio-Technical” approach; 2) participative aspects of organizational management sometimes associated with the concept of Organizational or Industrial Democracy; 3) selected components of human resources management systems.

Special attention will be paid to the second approach—participation—since, to a great extent it is at the heart of the QWL approach, an essential ingredient, both as an aim for

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itself and as a process (see also Trist, 1983). Some of the dilemmas which accompany the QWL approach and some of its prospects will be examined in the concluding section.

Naturally, no attempt is made in this paper to examine in particular the expressions and impact of the QWL approach within a Japanese perspective. I am confident that Japanese scholars who are interested in that area have been, and will be, much more penetrating than myself in analysing the general developments which have occurred in the QWL field and relate them to the broad social context and to work organizations in Japan (see for example Takezawa et al., 1982; Delamotte and Takezawa, 1984). Still some of the issues that will be examined here are probably of a broad relevance, especially for industrialized countries.

### B. *Comments on the Conceptual Framework*

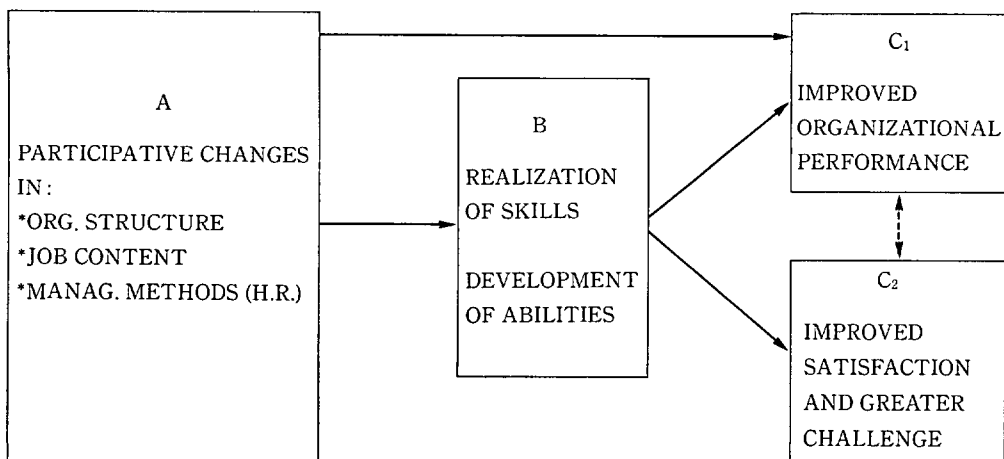
At the conceptual level there is still considerable ambiguity concerning the meaning of the term Quality of Working Life. Moreover, there have been parallel concepts used in non-English speaking countries. Most known among them are "Humanization of Work" in West Germany, "Improvement of Working Conditions" in France, "Democratization of the Workplace" in Sweden, "Workers Protection" in the socialist countries, and "Hatarakigai" in Japan (see Merton, 1977 and Delamotte and Takezawa, 1984). The various concepts are naturally embedded in the different traditions and perspectives of the respective countries, but still they reflect a common emphasis on conceptual and practical innovation. The domain of these innovations is the relationship between the "worker" and his total work environment, and their actual focuses have usually been on valued organizational conditions. Those that stand out among them are: the involvement of employees in organizational decisions which have an impact on their work, enriched, and therefore, challenging jobs, team work, high regard for development and growth of the individual, a relatively high level of autonomy for the individual employee and for work groups. These, and similar, emphases represent a focus on value orientation. It is recognized however by some QWL theoreticians and practioners that "not everyone wants the same values from a work situation and therefore options should be provided to accommodate individual preferences" (Davis, 1984, p. 80). Still, one cannot avoid the feeling that other QWL supporters have adopted a somewhat missionary perspective while assuming that the basic values and preferences of the QWL school, as they have been shaped in the English-speaking and some West European countries, universally represent the desires of employees in industrialized countries.

The above value orientation approach within the QWL school does not, of course, portray the complete picture. Another complementary approach puts the emphasis not on the preferred values and processes, but rather on their consequences. Thus, QWL is perceived in such terms as increased worker satisfaction, improved performance, better safety, etc. (for further elaboration of the valued organizational processes and the consequences emphases in the QWL literature see Mohrman and Lawler III, 1984). Eight well known "conceptual categories" of QWL were suggested by Walton (1974). They are: (1) adequate and fair compensation, (2) a safe and healthy environment, (3) the development of human capacities, (4) growth and security, (5) social integration, (6) constitutionalism

and due process, (7) total life space, and (8) social relevance and responsibility. This list of categories has been accepted by many writers on the QWL issue but two comments on them seem to be in place: firstly, there is no differentiation in this list between consequences and processes, and this adds somewhat to the confusion in the field (see also Mohrman and Lawler, 1984); secondly, and more important, these categories should be considered as illustrating the broad framework of activity related to the QWL approach. Actually, in different countries, in different organizations, or even in subunits of organizations, differential emphasis is given to the categories included in Walton's list. Moreover, in some cases additional categories are relevant and needed. Since various components, or "conceptual categories," of the QWL approach have been quite widely implemented in industrialized countries, this non-universal, societal and organizational context approach is of both theoretical and practical relevance. At the theoretical level it may induce the researcher to examine the selection process of the specific QWL components occurring in a country or an organization. At the practical level, it may guide the consultant in considering and suggesting, together with his "clients," those components that will fit the societal and organizational contexts at which he offers his professional services (for further examination of the "societal context" approach see Maurice et al., 1986).

The common denominators of QWL programs are perceived in this paper (see Fig. 1) as participative changes in organizational structure, job content and human resources management (A), which encourage the realization of skills and the development of abilities (B), and are thus expected to increase work challenge and satisfaction ( $C_2$ ), and to improve organizational performance ( $C_1$ ). The intervening variables in this definition are the realization of skills and the development of abilities, whereas the dependent ones are the traditional satisfaction and performance outcome variables. It is perceived, however, at the conceptual level, that there can exist a direct relationship, for example, between certain changes in organizational structure on the one hand, and improved organizational effectiveness on the other, without the intervention of realized skills or developed abilities. Such

FIG. 1. MAJOR VARIABLES OF QWL PROGRAMS AND THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIP



direct impact is more plausible in relation to changes in organizational structure but, usually, less in relation to job content and perhaps even to several aspects of the management of human resources that will be discussed later.

Before turning to the examination of these variables, attention should be paid to some major components of the broader societal context which have encouraged the theoretical and applied interest in the QWL approach.

### *C. Contextual Components and the Interest in QWL*

The interest of men of letters in adding the human dimension to the usual technical and economic dimensions of organizations has a relatively long history. The Human Relations school, which developed in the 1920's and 1930's, emerged to a great extent as a reaction to the sterile Scientific Management principles. It moved the pendulum from the Weberian bureaucratic model and the rationalistic approach of Taylorism which aimed at increased efficiency towards the consideration of human needs and preferred modes of supervision such as consideration, recognition of group norms, communication and participation. The Human Relations school has adopted, to a considerable extent, a manipulative dimension. Managers were instructed to consider the worker as a "whole man" and to create a "sense of satisfaction" among subordinates. As Miles (1965, p. 149) notes, "the key element in the human relations approach is its basic objective of making organizational members feel a useful and important part of the overall effort. This process is viewed as the means of accomplishing the ultimate goal of building a cooperative and compliant work force." The more recent school of Human Resources represents, according to Miles, a "dramatic departure" from traditional concepts of management. It rejects the manipulative element mentioned earlier and views all organization members as a reservoir of untapped resources.

The early, and present, writers within the QWL school have adopted, of course, the basic assumptions of the Human Resources school but they have added to it the emphasis on the importance of the content of the job as a motivating factor as well as the action research orientation. Altogether, "the philosophy of QWL is strongly rooted in theory and research which dates back decades. Until recently [1970's] the conditions of change simply were not present and as a result theory was not converted into practice" (Mohrman and Lawler, 1984, p. 255).

At present the growing QWL literature consists of two major parts. One is the description of projects, including sets of techniques, which are often impressionistic and atheoretical. The second part is of an academic nature and has been concerned with defining the various aspects of the field and developing theory as well as research methods. Some of the most important contributions to the QWL field have been made by people who succeeded in combining in their own careers the theoretical with the applied activity. Good examples are E. Trist in the U.K., L. Davis in the U.S.A., E. Thorsrud in Norway, and others.

Although the first projects which were associated with systematic theoretical thinking already took place in the early 1950's in coal mines in the U.K. (Trist, 1981), it was only in the mid 1970's that QWL started to attract the attention of consultants and researchers on a larger scale. Much of the conceptual development was done in the Work Research

Institute in Oslo, followed by a diffusion process in Scandinavia and other European countries, as well as in the U.S.A., Canada and Australia. The extent to which QWL projects in Japan have been influenced by the experiences in Western countries is not clear to this writer. There is information, however, that particularly the 1960's and early 1970's was the period when accelerated efforts were made in Japan by management and unions jointly to improve the working lives of employees, and that the improvements probably embraced more aspects of work related life than in Western countries (Takezawa et al., 1982).

In the United States, Canada and, to a much lesser extent, in a few European countries such as Sweden, some of the more notable QWL achievements have been in new plants (or what is often called in the QWL literature "Greenfield Sites"). L. Davis, who reviewed in the early 1980's his 30 years of organizational research, and 15 years of the design of new organizations, claims that the experience "indicates that the development and the testing of concepts required for building organizations that are both highly effective and provide a high quality of working life are mostly taking place in the design of new forms of organization. Redesign, on the other hand, is providing important new learning about processes and requirements of organizational change" (Davis, 1983, p. 67). Still, it is naturally easier to start from scratch in an entirely new facility than to change established attitudes and structures in an existing plant.

In several European countries, governments have developed a keen interest in QWL. In the U.K., France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, state agencies have promoted QWL programs. In Norway legislation requires companies to design production systems in accordance with principles of participative management. A French law passed in 1982 obliges companies to enable the expression of employees (see Jenkins, 1981). Often QWL projects, both in Europe and North America, involve the unions as most important partners (for a most interesting discussion, see Bluestone, 1983).

The growth of interest in QWL concepts and projects in industrialized countries during the last 20 years or so naturally raises the question as to the societal context variables which have encouraged that growth. Much has been written about the societal and individual trends and values which have created the need for a reconsideration of the relationship between the individual and his work organization (see for example, Trist, 1981, 1983; Davis and Cherns, 1975; Thorsrud, 1983). A rather simple but effective way to present the contextual conditions was suggested recently by Mohrman and Lawler (1984). They attribute the depth and intensity of the interest among managers in management systems which prevail in Japan and, more recently, in successful American and European companies, to the convergence of a number of changes in the nature of the contemporary workforce and in the trends in international business.

Major changes in the workforce in North America and Europe, which set the stage for QWL innovations, are:

- (1) Increased proportion of graduates of institutions of higher learning. A high level of education often increases the expectations from work and thus encourages steps towards higher quality of working life.
- (2) Contemporary employees, especially the better educated and the young, are less willing to accept decisions and orders just because they are given by people in authority. More and more people at work do not like the idea that they are, and will remain, at the receiving end. Participative methods seem to provide an effective answer to

such an attitude.

- (3) It seems quite likely—as Mohrman and Lawler claim—that the media attention that has been given to participative management, gainsharing plans, job enrichment, and other new approaches to management, contributed to the rising expectations of the workforce in regard to working conditions.
- (4) In the U.S.A., for example, the greater diversity in the work place (more women, blacks, immigrants) has increased the demand from managers and supervisors to pay more attention to organizational communication as a basic process of the management system.
- (5) Also, in the U.S.A., equal opportunity legislation seems to have sensitized employees to fairness, equity and due process.
- (6) Employees are more inclined at present than in the past to question the justification for the difference between their status as citizens where they can exert influence on the rulers by means of election and political activity, and their status as employees where, except by trade union adversary action, they have little impact on their superiors.

On the whole, the commitment of the work force to contemporary organizations cannot be taken for granted at all. As a result, management in industrial countries must be more responsive than in the past to the “higher” needs of a growing part of the work force (see also Wilson, 1979; Thorsrud, 1982).

Strong international competition combined with a slowdown or stagnation in productivity in some Western countries put into question the viability and effectiveness of American and European management practices. The growing interest in QWL programs in the U.S.A. especially has often been explained by the Japanese business success: “Specific examples, such as Japanese firms buying American manufacturing facilities and dramatically improving them, as well as Japanese firms beginning to successfully manufacture in the United States, have been commonly cited as ‘proof’ that QWL approaches should work in the United States” (Mohrman & Lawler, 1984, p. 223; see also Ouchi, 1981). Japanese consensual management methods are often considered in Western countries as accounting, to a great extent, for the outstanding economic progress of Japan. Naturally, what follows is a keen interest in management circles in many Western countries to learn them and consider their adaptability to local circumstances. Quality circles are probably the most widespread example in that respect in recent years.

#### *D. The Socio-Technical Approach*

The joint optimization of the social and technical subsystems of which organizations consist has been the primary endeavour of the socio-technical approach, both at the theoretical and applied levels. The assumption is that when these two subsystems are arranged optimally, outcome variables are improved: “the organization runs more smoothly than when they are not, output is higher, employees’ needs are satisfied better, and the organization remains adaptable to change” (Pasmore and Sherwood, 1978, p. 3).

The socio-technical approach is mainly oriented towards organizational change and design. The field work is embedded in a theoretical approach. The design and change of organizations within the socio-technical framework is a rather complex process that re-

quires the understanding of:

1. The theory of the open system, the essence of which is the interaction of the organization with its changing environment from which it procures its resources and to which it disperses its goods and services. The relative importance of the various components of the environment is neither uniform nor static (see for example Emery and Trist, 1965; Jayaram, 1978).
2. The social processes which take place within organizations, and the theories and methods related to the functioning of people in their work roles. Organizational behavior, human resources management and labor relations are, therefore, the most appropriate fields of study in this respect.
3. The technological processes which are used, or can be used, by organizations and the extent to which they constitute a constraint on the design of the individual job, on the work group and on the internal division into subunits. A basic research-based conclusion of the socio-technical school in this respect is that technology does not have a deterministic impact on the organization's structure and on its internal division of work. Thus, technological change opens a variety of options.
4. The methods of organizational design and change. Naturally, most often socio-technical planning makes use of expert knowledge in both behavioral sciences and technology. Also, the employment of outside and/or inside change agents is often very crucial in the change process of existing organizations. The successful process of change depends, according to the socio-technical approach, on the use of participative principles at both the diagnostic and the change inducing stages. This includes the sharing of knowledge, the design of new patterns of work and the evaluation of the change. Actual intervention in organizations which follows the socio-technical patterns is usually a slow, tedious and time-consuming process. Ups and downs are often part of the process, but so is the continuous learning which takes place at all organizational levels (see also Thorsrud, 1984).

The early developments of the socio-technical approach and the very concept arose as is stated by Trist (1981) in conjunction with the first of several field projects undertaken by the Tavistock Institute in the British coal mining industry in the early 1950's. The first projects gave the researchers "a first glimpse of the emergence of a new paradigm of work in which the best match would be sought between the requirements of the social and the technical systems" (Trist, 1981, p. 9). Additional projects in India, and especially in Norway, in the 1970's and in greenfields in the U.S.A. and Canada in recent years, have focused the attention of socio-technical researchers and practitioners on the following four levels:

- 1) The individual job where emphasis is put on responsiveness to such attributes as reasonable effort, variety, autonomy, interaction, knowledge and skill, responsibility.
- 2) At the group level—semi-autonomy to the work group as well as cross-training of individuals which enables a multi-role rather than mono-role system (for implementation in the shipping industry see Rosenstein, 1986; see also Baily, 1983).
- 3) At the total organization level the socio-technical efforts have been focused on the developments of new forms or alternative forms of organizations, many of which have a high capability of adapting to new and unpredictable circumstances. These are organizations consisting of "integral self-maintaining units that are structured and supported to act as self regulating mini organizations" (Davis, 1983, p. 84). Levels of hierarchy are often



decreased, decisions are moved down, and status differences are greatly reduced.

- 4) Several attempts were made to introduce meaningful changes along the socio-technical principles at the community and industrial level—the Jamestown project in New York State, and the shipping industry in Norway (Thorsrud, 1984) are interesting examples. Recently an attempt was made to illustrate the socio-technical foundations for a new social order, even at the societal level (Emery, 1983).

The conceptual innovations and their application at the above four levels have not been mutually exclusive. Rather, the introduction of change, or of new designs, at the broader level usually assumes that similar organizational principles have been applied at the lower or narrower levels. This assumption is one of the manifestations of the systemic approach which is so central in the socio-technical perspective.

The socio-technical principles and methods have caught the attention of scholars, union leaders, managers and consultants in many Western countries during the last two decades. This growing attention is reflected in the growing theoretical and applied literature, and by actual projects which have taken place in a variety of countries (for a good review see Jenkins, 1983). However, the most commonly asked question about work innovation at the various organizational levels is: "How can an organization maintain QWL as an on-going dynamic process on a permanent basis?" (Guest, 1982, p. 3). The 1970's, he claims, saw hundreds of programs initiated with enthusiasm but ended in failure because dynamism was lost. From the point of view of the supporters of the socio-technical approach this is naturally a hard question for which no simple answer is available. It is clear that a continuous learning process takes place in the successful cases, since change is a constant phenomenon in contemporary organizations. Still, to preserve the dynamic nature of the socio-technical innovations, various structural designs have been introduced (Guest, 1982).

### E. *Participative Aspects of Organizational Management*

Participation of subordinates in the management process is at the heart of the QWL approach and constitutes one of its essential ingredients. Its centrality is expressed by its being both an end in itself and a method through which desired organizational innovations are introduced, maintained and modified.

Participation, as well shall soon see, has a wide spectrum of patterns. Taken as a whole the interest in participation of employees in management processes has increased extensively since the Second World War. The growing scientific and applied literature on the subject as well as informative surveys (as for example those published periodically by the International Labour Office; see for instance ILO 1981, 1986) indicate that the idea of "workers participation" has been examined and even put into practice in a great number of countries, both developed and developing, democratic and non-democratic, in the Western sense. Still, whereas interest in the subject has been growing among managers, trade unionists, government officials and academicians in many parts of the world, the level of accomplishment has often been disappointing. Evidently there seems to be a gap between the theoretical and ideological elaboration of the subject on the one hand and its successful implementation on the other (see Derber, 1970; Locke and Schweiger, 1979; Rosenstein et al., 1987).

"Participation" is a "tired" concept. It has had a long career and has been differently used in various contexts. Even in the fields of management and labour relations it does not convey one definite meaning. Various actual designs are associated with the term but all of them are aimed at enabling subordinates to influence managerial decisions at least in areas related to their immediate work. "Influence" is the essential ingredient but its scope, intensity and form may vary considerably. For the purpose of such and similar "outcome" definitions of participation, a certain simplification of the real authority structure is needed, the constant element being the bilaterality of the organization that consists of "managers" and "workers."

Three major criteria can assist us, I believe, in comparing the various programs of participation. They are: the aims of the program, its design, and its impact on the individual and organization. We still have at present more systematic knowledge concerning the first two than about the third criterion. The understanding of the impact of participative designs naturally involves continuous empirical research, sometimes on a broad scale.

The aims of participative programs are not always specified by their initiators, and therefore must be deduced sometimes from the nature of the programs themselves. It seems that the following aims portray a good picture:

- (1) Increased satisfaction of the subordinate. This aim refers to the "feeling" dimension.
- (2) Improved performance, which refers to effectiveness and efficiency and can be measured by quality, quantity, savings, reduced manpower and absenteeism, etc.
- (3) Promotion of "industrial peace" at the labour relations departmental or plant-company levels.
- (4) Qualitative change of the existing social order on a societal scale (as is the case in Yugoslavia, and to some extent in West Germany) or at a sectorial level (as is the case, for example, of the "Workers Economy" in Israel\*\*).

The aims of participative designs which were briefly presented here are, again, not mutually exclusive. The frequency of their appearance seems to parallel the order in which they have been presented above.

The major intellectual sources of these aims are, on the one hand, the scientific schools of Human Relations and Human Resources which have developed in the U.S., and the socialist tradition (especially the "Utopian" and syndicalist traditions, the guild socialists' school and the evolutionary tradition) which developed in Europe.

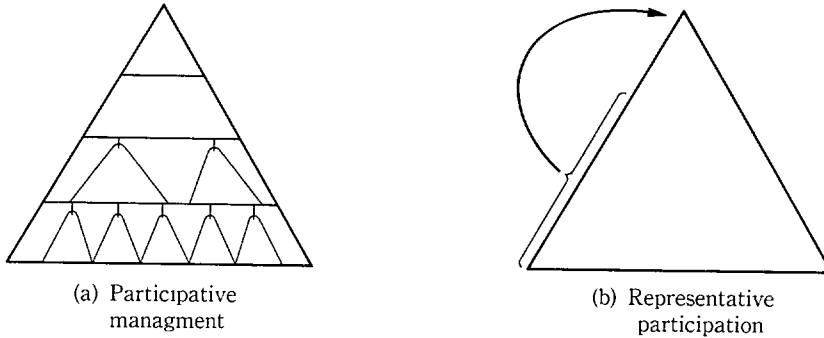
The concepts and aims of participation have raised a wide range of formats by which subordinates' influence upon managements can be channelled. Various dimensions have been offered for their classification (see for example King and van de Vall, 1978; Locke and Schweiger, 1979; Industrial Democracy in Europe—IDE, 1981; Tarrab and D'Aragon, 1986). A major distinction can be drawn between two broad models of workers' participation.

(a) The "participative management" model, which is often called "direct," "informal" or "shopfloor" participation. Employees Involvement is another close term. It associates

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\*\* The "Workers Economy" in Israel is part of the Histadrut—The General Federation of Labour in Israel, which was founded in 1920. The Histadrut ("organization") is a unique multifunctional organization which includes both a powerful trade union section and an extensive economic section, as well as a broad network of consumers' and producers' cooperatives, welfare services and cultural-educational activity (for further information see Avrech and Gileadi, 1973; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1967).

FIG. 2. MAJOR FORMS OF WORKERS PARTICIPATION



the term participation with a specific kind of managerial style. The focus of this kind of participation is at the level of relationship between superiors and their immediate subordinates, although some plant and company-wide characteristics usually accompany them. The main expressions of the participative management form are consultation and participative delegation, which apply to the individual worker or to a group of workers. The model is applicable at all organizational levels. Individual consultation and delegation, team work, group discussions, quality circles, semi-autonomous work groups, are all specific participative designs within this broad model. The introduction of such and similar designs is usually not based, at present, on formal laws, collective bargaining agreements and written rules and regulations. They are rather initiated by top management, gradually penetrate into the hierarchy and become part of the organizational culture.

(b) "Participation through elected representatives." This model is associated with formal institutions in which elected representatives of the workforce and, sometimes, appointees of the trade unions, take part. Together with the representatives of management (rarely with the direct representative of the owners) they constitute a formal body, the aim of which is to consult management or to jointly decide about various management issues. Releasing of information by management to this body is, naturally, an important aspect of its functioning. The representative model, unlike the participative management one, is anchored in formal rules like laws, collective agreements or internal company rules. The major designs which exist within this model are:

- (1) Joint consultation committees often focusing on productivity, safety, etc. They exist on an ad hoc or permanent basis in many of the Western countries, including the U.S.A. (Siegel and Weinberg, 1982), and in some non-Western countries. Often the role that such committees play is particularly outstanding during the time of war or economic crisis.
- (2) Joint-management bodies. An important subdivision in this form is between: a) participation at the board of directors level, as is legally provided in a considerable number of European countries (Scandinavia is an old and good example) and in a growing number of developing countries, and b) participation at the functional top management level. Such cases are rare; West Germany being the best known example, Israel is another one.
- (3) Self-government is the third and most extreme submodel. It has been introduced in the early 1950's in Yugoslavia where it constitutes one of the major characteristics of the Yugoslav conception of socialism as against the centralized Soviet model.

A debateable conceptual issue in the literature of participation is whether collective bargaining which takes place between labour and management at national, regional, industry, company or plant levels, should be considered as a form of participation. Some writers have labelled collective bargaining as "conflictual participation," a brilliant term which in itself reflects a great conceptual difficulty.

The direct and representative broad forms of participation do not in principle contradict each other. Still, comparative studies reveal that in many European countries emphasis has been traditionally put on the representative model, which is associated with the political notion of power sharing. Whereas in the U.S.A. the major emphasis has been on the direct (participative management) form, associated with the "human relations" and "human resources" schools, both of which focused on managerial effectiveness (see also Bass and Rosenstein, 1978).

The evaluation of the impact of participative designs on the individual and organization is a rather complex matter. Some comments are appropriate:

1. On the whole participative management designs seem to result more often in increased satisfaction than in improved performance. The importance of satisfaction should not be underestimated since dissatisfaction often predicts an intention to leave the organization and accounts for turnover and absenteeism. Besides, there have been studies and experiments which detected a positive relation between participation designs and better performance. Some of the positive findings are: increased acceptability of management ideas, contribution to improved decisions, cooperation between members of management and subordinates, acceptance of changes, productivity, commitment to organizational goals, reduced grievances, tension and stress (see, for example, Singer, 1974; Tarab and D'Aragon, 1986; Mohrman and Lawler, 1984).
2. At the present state of knowledge about participation in management processes, the important and interesting question is not whether participation "works" but, rather, under which conditions does it work better? In methodological terms, the meaningful question is that of specification. Relevant categories of conditions (or mediating variables in methodological terms) are, for example, characteristics of the individual employee, job content, job level, culture.
3. Representative models of participation had only limited success (Strauss, 1962), more often in promoting communication, industrial peace and societal change than in the areas of satisfaction and performance of the rank and file. The major potential problematic areas in these models are: the sub-optimal functioning of the joint bodies themselves, the lack of meaningful communication between the representatives and the rank and file and, in some cases, the tension and even rivalry between the shop stewards and the representatives of the workforce at the joint bodies. Still, in a well known cross-cultural research of representative participation schemes in 12 European countries (Industrial Democracy in Europe, 1981) it was found that the various representative bodies in each country do have some moderate influence in particular over important medium-term decisions. The quest for representative democracy seems, though, to support the conflict approach to industrial democracy. It can be described most adequately according to the IDE study as a "zero-sum game" between top management and subordinate groups (Teulings, 1986).

## F. *Selected Components of Human Resources Management*

The inclusion of certain areas of human resources management in the QWL framework is not very customary in the literature. Such an inclusion seems appropriate, however, in view of the subjective importance that employees often attribute to some of the policies and methods available in that field.

Human resources management is a very broad field which has been dealt with in different ways in the vast professional literature. The similarity in what directors of human resources actually do is probably greater than the variety which characterizes the presentation of the field in the professional literature. In essence, the direction of human resources in work organizations relates to the planning, organizing, directing and controlling of the following operative functions (see, for example, Flippo, 1984): (1) Recruitment—planning, recruitment, selection and induction; (2) Development—training, evaluation and promotion; (3) Compensation—regular pay, incentive pay, fringe benefits; (4) Integration—communication, discipline, motivation, labour relations; (5) “Maintenance”—welfare services of various kinds; (6) Separation—preparation for retirement, contact with those who retire.

This is indeed a broad and diversified field of managerial activity. Some of its areas are more related to the QWL concept than others. The problem is, however, that no universal rules exist as to the appropriateness of any of the operative functions to the QWL framework. The probable impact of any of these functions on the quality of life perceived by employees depends largely on the social and organizational contexts.

We shall not examine here the areas of ergonomics, fringe benefits, welfare services, work environment (in terms of noise level, heat level, aesthetics), and safety, not because they are not relevant to our discussion, but because their relevance is self-evident. There are, however, several additional areas of human resources management which have been identified lately by both “management” and “workers” as contributing to a higher quality of working life. We shall examine some of them very briefly:

- 1) Entering and leaving the organization—most people in Western countries enter and leave organizations more than once during their work life. Thorough recruitment and induction processes seem to be important contributors to good quality of working life. The same applies to job security and meaningful advice and help in the case of redundancy. Organizations realize more and more their responsibility in providing appropriate preparation for retirement and in keeping meaningful contacts with those who have already retired.
- 2) Working time—flexible time seems to be an important ingredient of better quality of working life, so is the five-day work week which is sooner or later accompanied by the reduction of the number of working hours. Some European trade unions have mobilized much support and energies in order to achieve these aims.
- 3) Development and careers—investments in training and development of employees result not only in increased knowhow but also in enabling employees to “grow” and develop their careers within the organization. In Western countries there has been in recent years a growing interest on the part of both employees and managements in the provision of career opportunities based on training and counselling. In addition,

participative methods, like the Management by Objectives, have gained interest and popularity.

The above three areas are important examples for the contribution of the human resources management to a higher quality of working life. Their relevance and form may vary in different countries and organizations. Nevertheless, it seems that they are here to stay as contributions to the QWL in view of the rising expectations of employees, at least in industrialized countries.

### G. *Concluding Remarks*

An attempt has been made in this paper to: (1) examine the concept of Quality of Working Life (QWL) as it has developed during the last two decades, (2) to relate it to the social and organizational contexts of Western industrialized societies and, (3) to examine the principles and applications of three partially overlapping broad methods—socio-technical, participation and aspects of human resources management—through which QWL principles have been put into practice.

It is evident that the issues related to the QWL have earned the interest of scientists and practitioners in industrialized countries, but the field itself still faces dilemmas and difficulties.

The vague meaning of the term itself and the fact that it has been perceived in both a broad and narrow manner, constitutes a conceptual problem. In the English-speaking industrialized countries, as well as in Scandinavia and several other countries, emphasis has been placed on the specific methods of participation and of job and organizational reform. This reflects a rather narrow approach when compared to the broad one which encompasses the total labour problems of each society and their countermeasures, as suggested, for example, by Delamotte and Takezawa (1984). The advantage of this broader approach is its emphasis on the social context perspective. Resting in essence on a non-convergent approach it suits well the purpose of cross-country comparisons.

Another difficulty concerns the application of QWL change. There is still not enough knowledge available about the societal and mainly organizational conditions which contribute to their initial success and continuity over time. Evidence from the field indicates that many attempts to apply QWL methods are still made in existing organizations. Many of these "projects" do not "take off," and many of those that do are short lived. This situation calls, naturally, for a closer link between theory and practice. Research should focus more not on single case studies, but rather on comparative, longitudinal and evaluative investigations.

Understanding and cooperation between the employer and the trade union at the national or regional levels, and between management and "workers" and their representatives at the company/plant levels, are probably a major condition for successful application of QWL measures, but such understanding and cooperation do not often exist. This calls for educational efforts directed at the parties concerned.

As to the prospects of the QWL approach, either in its narrower or its broader meaning, it seems that the conditions which have encouraged the interest in the specific QWL measures discussed in this paper, and in additional countermeasures to work problems in indus-

trialized countries, do not tend to weaken. Growing expectations of the workforce and international economic competition do not seem to decline but rather to rise and diversify. With them will probably grow the need to respond to higher human needs at work and to raise productivity. It is not surprising, I believe, that in many Western countries QWL measures have gained much attention in the high-tech companies. These organizations are characterized by a sizeable percentage of highly educated employees and by quick adjustments to the changing market conditions.

Has the QWL approach discussed in this paper constituted a social transformation in the world of work in Western industrialized societies? I doubt it. Social transformation in this respect means not only the emergence of new needs and problems in the field of work, but also the institutionalization, on a big scale, of new suitable approaches and methods in the management and performance of work. The promising QWL methods discussed here are innovative and, but for certain representative participation schemes, have not been very widely institutionalized. Will the success stories lead the way and serve as pioneers of a social transformation? I personally hope that they will, but let us examine it again in the early part of the 21st century.

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