An Evaluation of the Perceptions and Experiences of Quality of Work Life in Nigeria

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Abstract

The factors affecting quality of work life have substantial roles to play in satiating the needs of the employees. It is about how people can do their work better and also how the work can motivate them to do better. This study evaluates the perceptions and experiences of quality of work life in Nigeria using fifteen indicators of quality of work life and 300 employees in four establishments in Lagos Nigeria. The survey instrument was a questionnaire administered in a field survey spanning two months between July and August 2013. The response rate was 280 (93.3%) of which 152 (54%) were men and 128 (46%) were women.

The results indicate that most of the workers do not give highly positive ratings though some of the indicators had more positive assessments. For some indicators, there were significant gender gaps while others had similar levels of agreement or satisfaction. Organizations must maintain and improve the quality of work life in their establishments. There must be more commitment to investing in human resources who contribute significantly to sustained organization performance. To gain competitive advantage in organizations must be concerned about their human resources who are their most important assets and take consistent and steadfast measures to improve them and employ high-quality work-life experiences.

Key Words

Evaluation, Perceptions, Experiences, Quality, Work – Life.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's business world, international experience has become critically important. Global trends have had an impact on the processes and outcomes of business fortunes even in developing countries like Nigeria; and have caused industrial relation actors to think differently about their

goals. The Nigerian economy has continued to witness renewed and sustained recession, characterized by inflation, unemployment and declining businesses. The recent downturn in the economy has negative effects on engagement levels and this is something every business should be concerned with. While the engaged human resources will not make the recession disappear, they will certainly help organizations get through it with far more success than would otherwise be possible. Employees who have positive perceptions and experiences in their workplaces will have an increased desire, willingness and ability to go the extra mile, will speak more positively of the company and will be more than willing to stay and help out when times get tough.

Consequently, human resource practitioners and managers need to be more strategic and need to support their workers. Quality of Work Life is now an important issue in the management of human resources in an organization. Arising from the force of technological advancement and working conditions work cultures are changing. The basic idea of quality of work life involves employee learning capability and organization environment without which jobs become threatened; there is insecurity, and increased levels of employee dissatisfaction. Quality of work life encompasses working conditions, working time, mode of wage payment, health hazards issues, in a nutshell financial and non-financial benefits and management behaviour towards workers. Workers unrests often have to do with workers quality of life. The work life of workers is as important as their personal lives and their satisfaction and contentment in both aspects of life is very important to keep their lives balanced. Quality of work life is a dynamic multidimensional construct that includes concepts such as job security, reward systems, training and career advancement opportunities and participation in decision making.

Davis (1983) defines quality of work life as the quality of the relationship between employees and the total working environment, with human dimensions added to the usual technical and economic considerations. Nadler and Lawler (1983) opine that quality of working life is a way of thinking about people, work and organisations. Therefore it is not only about how people can do their work better but also how the work can motivate them to do better. Quality of work life also involves betterment of the work, how the management thinks about its people and also how the people think about the organisation.

Quality of work life has significance for workers morale, and affects absenteeism, turnover, and, consequently productivity. Employers aiming to attract and retain scarce qualified human resources need to understand the specific job characteristics and values that are important to workers so that they can design their workplaces to be sensitive to the different needs, values and how employees experience quality of work life. Creating a favourable job environment and ensuring employee job satisfaction is given impetus by an understanding of workers' perception of quality of work life experiences. Fajemisin (2002) observes that quality of work life is important for organization success and competitive advantage because there is evidence indicating that the nature of the work environment is related to satisfaction of employees and work-related behaviours. Dada (2006) asserts that quality of work life affects employees' work responses in terms of organisational identification, job satisfaction, job involvement, job effort, job performance, intention to quit, organizational turnover and personal alienation.

This study examines issues relating to worker's perceptions and experiences of quality work life as well as possible differences in how men and women experience quality of work life. It also looks at the practical implications of these trends for policy makers and human resource practitioners. The study investigates the indicators of job quality and the key gender differences in this regard. An understanding of these is crucial in designing effective human resource management approaches and practices.

II. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to provide evidence on the perceptions and experiences of workers. The emphasis is on understanding the factors affecting quality of working life and the indicators of job quality. It evaluates the reasons behind what employees perceive about high-quality working-life experiences. This study explores how men and women experience the quality of their work life. In particular, it looks at work environments and work relationships which are key aspects of employment that shape the lives of workers to contribute to the effort to provide quality jobs for all.

III. LITERATURE

A. Quality of Work Life

A high quality of work life results in an atmosphere that encourages skills improvement, good interpersonal relations and highly motivated employees who strive for their development. It brings about increased enthusiasm in the work place. Quality of work life is defined as the favourable condition and environment of employees benefit, employees' welfare and management attitudes towards operational workers as well. Davenport (1983) observes that improving the place, the organisation and the nature of work can lead to a better work performance and a better quality of life in the society. Quality of work life is a multidimensional concept which does not have universal definition but it has to do with the well-being of employees.

Ajayi (2008) affirms that the term quality of work life originated from a New York International Labour Relations Conference of 1972 and it is now in the permanent vocabulary of both unions and management. Ford (1973) asserts that quality of work life is an approach or method in which specific techniques and approaches are used for improving work. Davis (1983) defines quality of work life as the quality of the relationship between employees and the total working environment. The concept of quality of work life has been perceived by many academics and practitioners to be an important concept for both the organization and its human resources.

Blair et al (2002) affirms that quality of work life is measured by the level of organization commitment, job satisfaction, empowerment, job involvement and intent to turnover. Loosely collected under quality of work life are quality circles, participation teams, alternative work schedules, wellness in the work place, union -management productivity committees, job restructuring and socio-technical terms. Robins (1990) affirms that quality of work life is a process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work. While quality of work

life is believed to lead to job satisfaction it is different from it.

Sirgy (2001) notes that quality of work life involves the impact of the workplace on satisfaction in work life, in non-work life domains, and with overall life. Danna & Griffin (1999) see quality of work life as a hierarchy of concepts that include non-work domains such as life satisfaction, job satisfaction and more work-specific facets of job satisfaction including such things as pay, co-workers and supervisor.

Quality of work life is of concern and importance to organizations and their human resources both in terms of employee job satisfaction and the ultimate performance of the organization. Understanding what men and women value in a job, how they experience the quality of their work life is important to designing effective approaches to human resource management and in skill development initiatives. Workers whose job conditions are meeting their needs are more likely to be committed and satisfied.

In the same vein, organizations that meet their employees' job expectations develop a reputation as a good place to work. Eurofound (2011) contends that quality of work life has to do with better jobs and more balanced ways of combining working life with personal life. Krahn and Lowe (1998) suggests that in the tradition of scientific management, satisfaction with quality of work life was thought to be solely on 'extrinsic' traits of the job, like salary, safety and hygiene of the workplace and other tangible benefits. In contrast the human relations approach contends that, while extrinsic rewards are important 'intrinsic' rewards are key predictors of productivity, efficiency, absenteeism and turnover. These traits are specific to the 'task content' like skill levels, autonomy and challenge. Krahn and Lowe add that according to 'orientation to work' approach, the focus on both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards is contingent on the person. Their preference is predictable in part by their past histories and occupational cultures, which are indicated in turn by their education, occupation and demographics.

Nadler and Lawler III (1983) observes that quality of work life refers to an individual's perception of, and attitudes towards, his or her work and the total working environment. It is an individual's evaluative reactions to, and satisfaction with, his/her work and the total working environment. A high quality of work life leads to numerous gains. It brings about improved job satisfaction and involvement of employees.

Hackman and Suttle (1977) observes that society as a whole gains from quality of work life because it is useful in assisting government and policy makers combat social problems like unrest in society, mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse and inequitable distribution of national income.

B. Indicators of Quality of Work Life

Organization management is now more complex than ever before. There is stiffer competition to attract and retain quality human resource so as to gain competitive edge and advantage. Quality of work life is an important aspect of work that ensures long term association of

employees with the organization. It involves the favourable or unfavourable aspects of a job environment for people working in the organization. Again, quality of work life encompasses the level to which members of a work organization are able to satisfy human resource needs through their experiences in the organization.

There are several job characteristics that give a comprehensive look at job quality indicators likely to influence employees' perceptions of what defines a workplace of choice. Akeju (2008) observes that for both employees and employers the ideal workplace: supports healthy and balanced lives among employees; has opportunities for learning and skill development; positive workplace relations; high trust and commitment; and provides challenging, interesting and autonomous work.

Walton (1985) analysed quality of work in term of certain conditions including adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, opportunity to use and develop human capacities, opportunity for career growth, social integration in the work place, constitutionalism in the work organization, work and quality of life, as well as social relevance of work.

David et al (2001) identifies eight areas related to quality of work life namely: co- worker and supervisor support, team work and communication, job demands and decision authority, patient and resident care, characteristics of the organisation, compensation and benefits, staff training and development as well as overall impressions of the organisation.

In the same vein, Fajemisin (2002) identifies certain issues as relevant antecedents of the quality of work life in an organization. One of such is recognition which could be through membership in clubs or association, reward system, congratulations for achievement, job enrichment etc. Next is occupational stress which strains employee emotions and arises out of irritability, hyper excitation or depression, unstable behaviour and fatigue. There is also pay and stability of employment. Added to these is organizational health programmes aimed at maintaining and improving the health of workers. Furthermore, is congenial worker-supervisor relation which results in a sense of belongingness for workers.

There is also alternative work schedule which has to do with flexi times, work at home, staggered hours, part time employment etc. Another is grievance procedure. Instead of settling problems arbitrarily, providing opportunity to ventilate grievances ensures fair treatment for workers. Job Security is also an important issue bringing about higher order quality of work. Also, adequacy of resources enables employees to attain stated objectives. Participative management and control of work is also an issue in quality of work life. Workers often feel that participation in management and decision making improves the quality of work life. Finally, there is seniority and meriting promotions. A criterion for promotion is seniority and merit is considered as the basis for advancement for managerial people.

Walton (1975) proposes eight major conceptual areas related to quality of work life as adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, opportunity for continued growth and security, social integration in

the work organisation, work and total life space and social relevance of work life.

Hackman & Oldham (1980) notes that quality of work life practices involve acquiring, training, developing, motivating and appraising for the best performance of the employees as per organizational objectives. Indeed, core elements of quality of work life include working conditions, employee job satisfaction, employees' behavioural aspects, and employees' financial and non-financial benefits, growth and development, and supervision.

Arising from the foregoing this study identifies key drivers and cluster of elements of quality of work life to include employee motivation ,emotional supervisory support, communication, compensation and reward, career development and growth, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, flexible work arrangement ,occupational stress, organisation culture , organizational support, job security, psychological attachment,

safe and healthy working conditions, recognition which we shall presently discuss.

(i) Employee Motivation: The success of a business is largely dependent on the ability of the mangers to motivate workers to achieve the highest results. Even when an organization is highly automated, human action is still necessary to make it work. To give people's activities desired directions, knowledge of what motivates them is imperative. Individuals need something like a catalyst to propel them to action, as they are dedicated mainly to the extent to which they are motivated. Motivation is the drive and stimulation which enables individuals to perform their work. It is the act of stimulating someone or oneself to get a desired course of action, to push the right button, to get a desired reaction. It involves a process of creating organizational conditions which will impel workers to strive to attain company goals.

Motivation is vital to successful business performance. Motivational factors include pay on performance, productivity bonus or profit sharing, security, good medical services, better conditions of services, praise and recognition. Quality of work life involves a focus on all aspects of working life relevant to motivation and has to do with the well-being of workers. Individuals however have unique motives for working and what motivates employees differ.

(ii) Emotional Supervisory Support: Emotional support at work helps balance work and family roles and contributes to workers energy levels. Discussing family-related problems reinforces the employee's positive self-image by giving feedback. It also reduces stress by showing understanding for the employee's family life. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) observe that such emotional resources assist in boosting work outcomes. Anderson et al. (2002) adds that such support not only combines work and family tasks, it helps employees perform better at work and find a work life fit.

(iii) Communication: King (1992) suggests that quality of work life organizations can be improved by the nature and quality of communication of organization mission and vision using team briefings and employee participation. There should be important business information regularly with organization members communicating clearly and honestly with each other and

bringing diverse opinions to the table. Necessary conflicts must also be raised and addressed.

(iv)Compensation and Reward: Contingent rewards constitute a major factor in attracting workers to an organization, persuading them to remain and inducing them to contribute positively to the achievement of corporate goals. It is also important in building workers loyalty and commitment to the employer, increasing satisfaction and reducing turnover, absenteeism, complaints and grievances. Hackman and Oldhams (1980) affirms that personal needs are satisfied when rewards from the organization such as compensation, promotion, recognition and development meet workers expectations and in so doing results in an excellent quality of work life. Employees who are satisfied with their pay and benefits and are motivated to work productively. They also tend to view their workplaces positively where conditions like reasonable demands, high intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, good social support, influence over workplace decisions, and available resources to do the job exist in the workplace. The level of support created

by the compensation structure is an indication of the quality of in an organization.

(v) Career Development and Growth: This involves helping people maintain the skills they need to remain viable in the job market. A high-quality work life is seen as one in which there is an opportunity to develop close personal ties and achieve career goals with an absence of excessive job stress. The entire organization must buy into the culture of employee development.

(vi) Job Satisfaction: Job satisfaction is one of the central variables in work and is seen as an important indicator of work life quality determining the extent to which the employee is satisfied or is enthusiastic about his job. Locke (1976) defines job satisfaction as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Job satisfaction is an affective or emotional response toward various facets of one's job and it has been a topic of interest to researchers and practitioners in a wide range of fields. Job satisfaction is important because of its implications for job -related variables.

(vii) Organizational Commitment: When employees are committed they remain with the organization for longer periods of time, have a stronger desire to attend work and a more positive attitude about their employment. Fostering employee commitment is therefore significantly and inversely related to employee turnover. Walton (1985) affirms that commitment has a significant and positive impact on job performance and workforce retention. The more committed employees will perform better at their jobs.

(viii)Flexible Work Arrangements: Flexible work arrangements contribute to job

motivation and dedication and enable workers employ time more efficiently. While flexible work arrangements pay off with workers who have heavier family demands for which they need time and energy to balance multiple roles, it has disadvantageous side effects because it can blur the boundaries between family and work, thus increasing work-family conflict. More women than men place a high value on flexibility and the ability to balance work and personal life, no doubt

reflecting the greater responsibility that women tend to assume for childcare and household work.

(ix) Occupational Stress: Stress is a result of incapability between an individual and his/her environment. It is a perceived threat. Some aspects of the work environment are stressful e.g. lack of appropriate skills, frustrated aspiration, work load, repetitive and monotonous work, role ambiguity, low self-esteem etc. Any imbalance between a person's real environment and his expectations of the environment may lead to inability to cope and result in manifestations of distress. A worker can be trained to cope with stress but where the coping mechanism leads to psychological reactions such as worry, tension, depression, lowered performance capacity, cling and alcohol abuse.

Ireti (2007) observes that sex differences abound in occupational stress and that working women have more daily stress, more marital dissatisfaction, more ageing worries, more occupational mobility and more job and line of job changes. The dual roles of family and job put excessive demands on working women.

(x) Organisation Culture: Culture is the environment that surrounds a workplace at all

times. It is a powerful element that shapes work enjoyment, work relationships, and

work processes. Culture involves the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, attitudes, and behaviours shared by a group of people. It is the behaviour that results when a group arrives at a set of - generally unspoken and unwritten - rules for working together. An organization's culture is made up of all the life experiences each employee brings to the organization. The more an organization can change its climate to support its workers, the more it will receive in pay back from their work. The culture of an organization especially in respect of work and family roles combination is important for employees who want work-family balance. With a supportive work environment employees receive emotional resources, such as understanding, advice, and recognition. Where an organization is empathetic with employees who combine work and family roles, such employees may not be anxious of career opportunities where arising from the demands of family responsibilities they reduce their working hours. Muse et al (2008) observes that a family-responsive culture is more appropriate for workers with substantial family responsibilities while the enrichment approach tends to be most effective for those who have less family resources.

(xi) Organizational Support: The quality of work-life in an organization is often shown by the level of support offered by the organization. Organizational support has to do with how much employees feel that the organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing. It constitutes a significant issue that affects employee commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, and general quality of work life. Akeju (2006) in a study of the relationship between organizational support and work-life quality of workers indicates that organizational support positively affects organizational commitment, employee performance and job satisfaction.

(xii) Job Security: Workers who feel secure in their jobs are more productive than those who do not. Sirota and Mischkind (2006) observes that of the three sets of goals that the great majority of workers seek from their jobs the most basic is to provide workers with a sense of security in an environment in which they do not fear that their jobs are at risk where their performance is not perfect and where layoffs are considered an extreme last

resort and not just another option for dealing with hard times.

(xiii)Psychological Attachment: Psychological attachment or commitment to the organization has to do with employee loyalty and develops as a result of increased satisfaction. Satisfaction results from a process of internal evaluation, and if an employee's expectation level is met or exceeded, then satisfaction grows. Psychological attachment then develops into a generalized emotional attitude towards the organization. In other words, the more satisfied an employee is regarding his or her working environment, the more likely that he or she will develop a sense of commitment towards the organization in general. Employee attitudes towards the organization then give rise to the behavioural component of psychological attachment. An employee who has developed affection for the organization is more likely to demonstrate loyal behaviours and work towards the overall goals of the organization, such as improved productivity, greater efficiency, and a high-quality service orientation to customers. Ireti (2007) asserts that a larger share of women than men place a high value on the

psychological aspect of employment, specifically commitment and respect.

(xiv)Safe and Healthy Working Conditions: Safety activities in industries should include modification of the environment using alternative procedures such as containing hazard; limiting exposure to hazards by reducing time of exposure; using protective devices e.g. heating suit, glasses, ear protector, cooling suit; health education to generate workers awareness of health related issues; continuous monitoring; pre-placement examination and periodic examination of workers.

(xv) Recognition: Job recognition could be in the form of special awards or promotion, provision of staff buses and canteen services to mention but a few.

C. Gender and Quality of Work Life

The 'gender gap' in employment is a feature of most economies with men often having better incomes and career prospects than women. The gender gap is however narrowing on several fronts. Fapohunda (2012) indicates that in Nigeria the male-female wage gap has narrowed and employment patterns of younger women reflect the male pattern of full-time and continuous work. In addition, women have made significant gains in prestigious professions and in fact more women than men are now graduating from universities. There are however gender differences in workplace values and what is regarded as a desirable job. The work situations of women and men continue to diverge particularly with women's higher rates of part-time work and their segregation into low-paying and traditionally "female" occupations. While there is growing

convergence in the labour market characteristics of women and men with their experiences becoming more alike, there are important exceptions to this, most notably the persistent segregation of women and men into different occupations and the much higher rates of part-time work for women. Both women and men, irrespective of education however have the desire for interesting work but there are gender differences in job expectations and assessments.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The sample size used in this study was 300 workers in four establishments in Lagos Nigeria. The survey instrument was a questionnaire administered in a field survey spanning two months between July and August 2013. Arising from the literature review sixteen quality of work life indicators were selected for the study .The response rate was 280 (93.3%) of which 152 (54%) were men and 128 (46%) were women. The survey sought information on perceptions and experiences of quality of work life using variables and indicators of quality of work life. A pilot study was conducted among with 30 respondents and a few modifications were carried out.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha and Pearson correlation. The reliability co-efficient of the modified instrument after the pilot survey yielded an r = 0.734 Cronbach's alpha while Pearson correlation was 0.724 (p<0.001) indicating that the instrument was reliable.

V. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study analyses the perceptions and evaluations of female and male workers of specific quality of work indicators. The results generally indicate that most of the workers do not give highly positive ratings.

TABLE 1 - JOB QUALITY INDICATORS

Job Indicator	Men %	Women %	Gender Gap
Employee Motivation	48.3	52.2	3.9
Emotional Supervisory Support	53.6	51.3	2.3
Communication	34.6	32.5	2.1
Compensation And Reward	47.4	38.3	9.4
Career Development And Growth	46.7	38.4	9.3
Job Satisfaction	26.5	32.7	6.2
Organizational Commitment	31.7	33.4	1.7
Flexible Work Arrangements	29.6	23.4	6.2
Occupational Stress	28.6	24.5	4.1
Organisation Culture	18.9	23.1	4.2
Organization Support	22.6	16.4	6.2
Job Security	30.7	25.5	5.2
Psychological Attachment	15.8	19.7	3.9
Safe And Healthy Working Conditions	25.8	18.6	7.2
Recognition	18.2	16.0	2.2

For instance, only 34.2% of them strongly agree that they enjoy good organization support. However, quality of work indicators like compensation and rewards, communication and psychological attachment had more positive assessments. As regards gender gap, in some of the cases, women and men had similar levels of agreement or satisfaction with the job quality indicators. For indicators like supervisory support, communication, compensation and reward, career development and growth, flexible work arrangements, occupational stress, organization support, job security men seemed to have higher levels of agreement.

However, for other indicators such as: motivation, job satisfaction, organization commitment, organization culture as well as psychological attachment women had higher levels of agreement. The study also found that men have more privileged positions in the organizations. 21% of the men as opposed to 13% of the women held supervisory and managerial positions. 32% of the men indicated that they had received training paid for by the employer compared with 20.6% of the women.

As Harbison (1973) rightly puts it human resources are the energies, skills and knowledge of people which are or which potentially can be applied to the production of goods and the rendering of services. Harbison observes that human resources not capital or income or material resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Thus, the wealth of a nation or organization can be expressed in terms of the development and utilization of human energies, skills, and knowledge for useful purposes. Of all the resources an organization or nation requires, human resources are the most important.

In the same vein Giwa (1990) suggests that human beings make things happen and efficient human beings make things happen efficiently. While, capital and natural resources are indispensable, unless they are related intelligently to people who must operate and care for them, its usefulness is rapidly and steeply degraded. Consequently, while other factors of production are important, human resources are more crucial to production than any other factor. Employees constitute the soft assets and are the hidden value of an organisation.

There are consequences to gaps between actual and desired job features. Quality of work life deficits affects both individual and organizational outcomes. Such deficits also impact on employers' human resource goals. Higher numbers of quality of work life deficits impact significantly on job turnover, levels of unionization, workplace morale and also result in job dissatisfaction and higher levels of absenteeism among others for both men and women.

In today's business world consumers are more demanding. The lifestyle expectations have increased and they continue to rise. With higher expectations and more choice, the individual consumer is less tolerant of poor products and services and is more vocal in expressing dissatisfaction. The industrial consumer is less willing to condone failure. There is also increased pressure to deliver shareholder value. The need to gain competitive edge in this highly competitive environment, has given rise to various strategies and management techniques for effectiveness and efficiency. Organizations respond to challenges and demands for greater performance with various programmes designed to overcome obstacles and enhance business

performance.

Consequently there is need for human resource practitioners and organization management to address the job quality deficits in their organizations since such has mutual benefits for both the workers and the organization to be successful and to achieve their organizational objectives.

Quality of work life experiences significantly affect desired organizational outcomes, such as reduced rate of absenteeism, turnover, tardiness frequency and health care utilization and reduced health care costs as well as increased job performance and productivity. Ensuring a high quality of work life is imperative because maintaining competitive advantage can only be achieved and maintained through high quality human resources rather than capital, technology or long-lived products. The central growth, viability and survival of any organization depends on the effective acquisition, utilization and maintenance of its human resources since human resource is seen as the most important resource available to an organization.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study identifies key issues in the quality of work life, as experienced by workers and assessed the perceptions and experiences of quality of work life in organisations. The results generally indicate that most of the workers do not give highly positive ratings. Some of the quality of work indicators had more positive assessments. Again, in some of the cases, there were significant gender gaps while in others women and men had similar levels of agreement or satisfaction with the job quality indicators. Organizations must maintain and improve the quality of work life in their establishments. There must be more commitment to investing in human resources who contribute significantly to sustained organization performance. To gain competitive advantage in the marketplace organizations must be concerned about their human resources who are their most important assets and take consistent and steadfast measures to improve their quality of work life and employ high-quality work-life experiences.

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