

Quality of Working Life and Occupational Stress: A Brazilian Perspective.

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Abstract

This paper refers to the themes: Quality of Working Life (QWL) and Occupational Stress, and it aims to propose an exploratory and bibliographical research carried out to investigate how those themes have been considered in an emerging economy such as Brazil. In this study, it was found that although there is a relationship between occupational stress and quality of working life, this is a field that still lacks studies and a deeper problematization. In Brazil, studies on QWL have been systematically expanded as the 1990s were marked by drastic changes in the country's economy due to its abrupt opening, which led to a productive restructuring and an increase in the competitiveness of companies. An incessant search for goals and results began, generating greater pressure on the work environment, which also resulted in a large number of work accidents, in addition to greater stress on the part of employees. Although there is evidence of the relationship between working conditions and diseases, there are still difficulties to actually understand and analyze this problem. The question proposed in this study is to verify if there is a relationship between quality of working life and occupational stress, and how we can, through the implementation of QWL, ease the stress in the workplace.

Key-Words: Quality of Working Life, Stress, Brazilian Perspective.

1. INTRODUCTION

Working is an activity of vital importance and therefore it has never lost its place as a guiding question for politics, organizations and life projects of people. The current world of work has been marked by scientific and technological advances, by sophisticated working methods that are part of the economy's globalization and have imposed new demands on the people who act in it.

In an attempt to increase quality and competitiveness, companies and professionals in the human resources areas have been looking for new work organization strategies. In this phase, which some name the Third Industrial Revolution, employees are seen as a source of competitive advantage and it is necessary to develop new actions which provide quality of life at work.

Quality of Working Life – QWL emerged in the organizational setting after the second half of the 20th century. QWL is a term that has been widely disseminated throughout the world and also in Brazil. Some scholars point out that its concept gathers certain theoretical imprecision, which gives rise to a series of practices that in their plurality are intended to improve people's working conditions through: economic elements (salaries, benefits, allowances), as well as factors related to physical or mental health or safety, or yet psychological factors such as greater autonomy, control and creativity in relation to the workplace.

Occupational stress is a phenomenon which is famous for the impact it has on people's health, decreasing their productivity and satisfaction. The question proposed in this study is to verify whether there is a relationship between quality of life at work and occupational stress.

This work is relevant for showing that an organizational environment which provides a better QWL can lead to a reduction of stressors. Although there is evidence of the relationship between working conditions and diseases, there are still several types of difficulties for a real understanding of the importance of this problem.

The scientific methodology adopted for the accomplishment of this article was the exploratory research. According to Vieira (2002) this type of research is the first contact with the topic to be analyzed, with the subjects to be researched and with the secondary sources available. The exploratory studies are based on the hypothesis that through the use of relatively systematic methods, one can develop relevant assumptions to a given phenomenon. This methodology uses broad and versatile methods. The methods used include: surveys of secondary sources (bibliographies, documentaries, etc.), experience surveys, selected case studies and informal observation (to the naked or mechanical eye).

The method used to collect data for this article consisted of bibliographical research, since, as Chizotti (2001) points out, it is the basic type for any research, in which a literature review on the investigated subject was performed. This procedure consulted only books and scientific articles, from authors who approached the subject with propriety.

In the next sections, the origin, perspectives and concepts of quality of working life are summarized, as well as the development of QWL in Brazil and its unfolding. After that, stress and its consequences for work were discussed. Afterwards a discussion is made on quality of life at work as a form of combat / minimization of stress. Lastly, in the final considerations, the most significant aspects of the study and its main conclusions are highlighted.

This article aims to relate quality of working life and occupational stress. Our interest is to contribute to the awareness of the importance of workers' health and the study of work factors that contribute to their illness and the possibilities of reversing this situation through quality of life at work.

2. QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE: INTERNATIONAL ORIGINS AND PERSPECTIVES

Analyzing the history of mankind we verify that from the beginning of man's existence on earth we have always been concerned with improving ways of performing work, thereby seeking to minimize the physical effort of the worker.

The concept of QWL was born in the 1950s in England. Eric Trist and coworkers - researchers at the Tavistock Institute - began studies on the trinomial individual / work / organization. These researches gave rise to a sociotechnical approach of work organization, with a concern for the satisfaction and well-being of the worker.

In the following decade, research on QWL was strengthened, leveraged by a greater awareness of the workers and an increase in corporate social responsibility, which sought ways to organize work, seeking to minimize its negative effects and improve overall well-being. This period was characterized by a sociotechnical approach of QWL and was extended until the year 1974.

In fact, the year 1974 is set as a milestone for the development of QWL, according to renowned researchers on the topic, such as Nadler & Lawler (1983) and Huse & Cummings (1985). At this time the major concern was "how to influence the quality of the worker's experiences in a particular job "(Nadler & Lawler, 1983). However, the "energy crisis" and the rising inflation that plagued the more developed countries of the West in the 1970s slowed down the studies on QWL.

Since 1979, studies on QWL have taken a new lease in the United States, mainly due to the loss of competitiveness of American industries compared to their Japanese competitors. Nevertheless, it was only in the 1990s that the QWL movement took a greater breath, especially in countries such as France, Sweden, Germany and Italy, which have evolved in the study of QWL due to the maturation of society (Dessen, 2010).

Through Table 1 it is possible to understand how QWL studies have evolved - from a narrower to a broader perspective - since the 1950s.

Table 1. Evolving Definitions of QWL according to Nadler & Lawler

| Period | Main Focus | Definition |
|-------------------|------------|--|
| 1959/1972 | Variable | QWL was treated as a reaction to work or to the personal consequences of work experiences. |
| 1969/1975 | Approach | QWL emphasized the individual before emphasizing organizational outcomes, but at the same time was seen as a link between cooperative projects in managerial work. |
| 1972/1975 | Method | QWL was the means to enhance work environment and execute greater productivity and satisfaction. |
| 1975/1980 | Movement | QWL as a movement aims to use the terms "participatory management" and "industrial democracy" quite often, innovative as ideals of the movement. |
| 1979/1983 | Everything | QWL is seen as a global concept and as a way to face quality and productivity issues. |
| Future Prediction | Nothing | The globalization of the definition will inevitably lead to the disbelief of some sectors over the QWL term. And for these, QWL will represent nothing. |

Source: Nadler & Lawler, 1983.

Since the second half of the 20th century different researchers have used the expression Quality of working life to describe situations and methods with different objectives. The most well-known approaches which have produced literature on Quality of working life are: Walton (1973), Hackman & Oldham (1975),

Westley (1979), K. Davis and Wether (1983), Nadler and Lawler (1983), and Huse and Cummings (1985). These authors state that it is possible to observe an alternation among the critical factors that are pointed out by these approaches, such as:

- 1) the system of direct and indirect rewards;
- 2) working environment conditions;
- 3) the conception of work and the tasks themselves;
- 4) the autonomy and participation conferred on the individual at work;
- 5) the social image the organization arouses in its employees;
- and 6) the balance between working time, family time and leisure time, which positively influence job satisfaction and, consequently, worker's performance (Dourado & Carvalho, 2006, p.6).

Nadler and Lawler (1983) highlight the types of activities that influence the success of QWL projects in organizations. They are participatory problem solving, work restructuring, reward system innovation, environmental improvement and work.

Walton (1973), one of the main exponents in the study of QWL, points out that:

QWL is based on the humanization of work and on the social responsibility of the company, involving the understanding of the needs and aspirations of the individual through the restructuring of job design and new ways of organizing work allied to training of work teams with a greater power of autonomy and an improvement of the organizational environment.

Walton (1973) proposes a conceptual model of eight categories with the purpose of analyzing QWL in organizations. Below, in Table 2, we can see Walton's criteria for QWL.

Table 2

| Criteria | Indicators | Description |
|---|---|--|
| Adequate and fair compensation | Salary Journey | - It also refers to wages - Working hours |
| Working conditions | Physical environment Salubrity | - It is about ergonomic comfort - No exposition to occupational risks |
| Use and development of human capabilities | Autonomy Esteem Polyvalence Information on job | - Freedom to make decisions - How much the worker is esteemed by their workmates - Specific and general qualification for the duty's exercise - How and how much they are informed about the work |
| Opportunities of growth and security | Career Personal development Job stability | - Movement of professional increase - Performance improvement - Dismissal risk |
| Social integration in the organization | No prejudices Social skill Community values | - Inclusion or exclusion in the workplace - Education and diplomacy - Valorization of tasks by institution |
| Citizenship | Worker's rights Privacy Impartiality | - Pay, vacations, insurance, etc. - Non-invasion of documentation and decisions - Absence of subjectivity and objective decisions |
| Work and total life space | Freedom of speech Privacy in personal life Predictable journeys | - Reveal of opinions - No interference in personal life - Use of personal- professional time |
| Social relevance of work | Institutional image Social responsibility of institution | - Credibility of institution in the community - Environmental preservation, job generation, metaquality |

Source: Walton, 1973.

Walton's (1973) model is a classic, which was studied by several Brazilian authors who used this author and the categories he proposed as a research method for the national scenario.

2.1 Quality of working life in Brazil

Quality of working life can be understood as an indicator of the employee's perception of the work environment. The concept of QWL is associated with some fundamental indicators, such as employee participation, freedom and satisfaction at work; compensation; adaptation of the working environment to the worker's individual needs, among several others.

In Brazil, Bom Sucesso (2002) points out that QWL does not depend only on high salary and many benefits, it is also a result of a human treatment given to the employees by the organizations. The valorization of the human being, the concern with feelings and emotions are factors that make a difference in QWL programs.

Other Brazilian authors, such as Pilatti and Berjarano (2005, p. 89) consider the actions of QWL within institutions have two objectives: "on the one hand, to increase productivity and performance; on the other hand, to improve quality of working life and satisfaction with work". Some believe that the two points are directly linked, yet the connection between them is not always verified, even though they cannot be said to be totally incompatible. The relationship between them may be related to the fact that better working conditions may add to productivity, but this is not always the case. In a similar way, Albuquerque and Limongi-França (1998, p. 41) define QWL as: "A set of actions of a company that involves diagnosis and implementation of improvements and managerial, technological and structural innovations inside and outside the workplace, aiming to provide full human development conditions for and during work accomplishment".

Limongi-França (2010) identifies three schools regarding QWL research and investigations, namely: socioeconomic, organizational and human condition at work. The socioeconomic school is part of the third-track policy context, with QWL linked to the social welfare logic. The organizational school understands QWL as a specific measurement of where production relations take place. The school of the human condition at work considers that the worker is a biopsychosocial entity and, therefore, QWL is based on the person's perception of their position in life, in different contexts.

Several sciences have contributed to the construction of new values related to QWL, which are: health, ecology, ergonomics, psychology, sociology, economics, administration and engineering. Their contribution allows us to perceive two main movements in the philosophy and management of the quality of working life. They are, respectively: the individual level, characterized by the study concerning stress and diseases associated with the conditions of the organizational environment; and the organizational level, which refers to the extension of the total quality concept (Albuquerque & Limongi-França, 1998).

Quality of working life at the individual level is linked to an understanding of the human being in which the person is their body and reveals living conditions and marks of lived and desired experiences. The biopsychosocial approach arises from the studies of Psychosomatic Medicine, which works within an integrated vision of the human being, that is, treat people as a whole. They believe that every individual is a biopsychosocial complex and is seen in three interdependent levels: the biological, the psychological and the social one. This conceptualization presents a broader view of health, where health is not only the absence of disease, but a complete well-being in the three levels mentioned (Limongi-França, 1996; Albuquerque & Limongi-França, 1998).

Still according to Limongi-França (1996), the biological level refers to the genetic or environmental characteristics acquired at birth and during life, such as metabolism, resistance and organs vulnerability; the psychological level refers to the emotional and affective aspects, feelings, intelligence, self-knowledge, among others, which are important for the development of individual personality and their way of standing before life; the social level exposes life history, values, community and the family culture in which the person lives.

Albuquerque and Limongi-França (1998, p. 43) point out that the second movement refers to the expansion of the concept of total quality. Quality of life at work is a progress of total quality, "it is the last link of the chain". One cannot speak of total quality without addressing people's quality of working life.

Barros (2010, p. 63) states that the total quality program tends to improve the performance of the company in three dimensions: "the product itself, from conception to sale; the internal environment; the mobilization of workers".

Fernandes and Gutierrez (1998) also observe that the programs of total quality and consequently of quality of working life do require people who know how to do and mainly who want to do more and better, so they need satisfied employees.

Barros (2010, p.64) highlights that, while on the one hand there are QWL proposals for the humanization of the work environment, it is their interconnection with the total quality programs that QWL seems openly as a tactic aimed at making the "perfect product", perfect in its conception and in all the stages of its elaboration.

Albuquerque and Limongi-França (1998) observe that analyzing the development of the phases of human resources management in organizations, the emergence of the quality movement is observed. Values and competencies are contracting new meanings. Transformations happen in the strategic focus, in the management of quality and in the implication of people. Stress is perhaps the most perfect assessment of the

level of well-being achieved or not by the person. Quality of working life is individualized in the subject through their different manifestations of stress.

2.2 Brazilian quality of working life management

In Brazil, as well as in the international panorama, QWL studies have been methodically expanded. Globalization has led to numerous changes in the world scenario and especially in the Brazilian business market in recent years. The 1990s were marked by changes in the country's economy due to the abrupt opening of the economy, monetary stabilization programs, and constitutional reforms aimed at reducing the state's role in the economy (Albuquerque, 1992; Albuquerque & França, 1998; Mônico & Guimarães, 2000). Albuquerque and França (1998, p. 40) point out that:

The Brazilian business environment has become intensely competitive due to the profound changes that have been taking place in the world economy, in social and political relations, in technology, in productive organization, in labor relations and in the insertion of the human element in the social and productive web.

Mônico and Guimarães (2000) point out that in order to face the new challenges of the economy, such as search for processes' improvement, cost reduction and customer's satisfaction increase, Brazilian companies began implementing total quality programs in the 1990s. The implementation of the total quality programs made the companies observe that the process of continuous improvement of the company prevents individuals from being considered mere employees so as to acquire a role of collaborators and it shows that the involvement of people is necessary to reach the goals of the program. Observing that to produce with quality and competitiveness, which increases the level of demands on employees, it is necessary that the agents of this process have quality of life at work. Lacaz (2000) highlights that it is unacceptable to talk about product quality without thinking about the quality of working environments and conditions, as well as the democratization of social relations in the workplace. Limongi-França and Rodrigues (1997, p. 211) conclude that "quality of life is interdependent of quality policy", that is, if one is implemented the other then takes the same direction.

According to Fernandes and Gutierrez (1988, p.29) QWL in Brazil "has aroused the interest of entrepreneurs and managers for the contribution it can offer to raise the level of employee satisfaction and business productivity." They also point out that care must be taken so that companies seek a clear conceptualization and a solid understanding of QWL - based on specific bibliography - thus avoiding it becoming just another "human resource fad".

Limongi-França (1996) state that in Brazil QWL programs and actions are not yet associated with competitiveness, but rather with worker safety and health programs. These programs cannot be associated with the improvement of the organizational climate and the programs of total quality and end up not happening for their lack of strategic positioning.

Limongi-França and Rodrigues (1997, p. 120) state that:

Management reality in Brazil has shown that, in practice, quality of working life has been only partially and incompletely understood. Quality performance directed to people often brings the welfare referential, sometimes meritorious; or, simply, managerial actions ignore Quality of working life in the policies and processes of the companies or in the reparation of human aspects that neutralize risks in the working condition.

Lacaz (2000, p.153) observes that QWL in Brazil is characterized by an entrepreneurial policy that attempts to involve mechanisms of perception and subjectivity control "in order to frame workers through gears that aim to introject the norms and goals of the company."

Rodrigues (2009) cites some researches that have been highlighted in the national scenario – which mainly aim at adapting the foreign model - such as: surveys at EMBRAPA, surveys at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and also at the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

Brazilian Agricultural Research Company – EMBRAPA surveys - carried out by Quirino and Xavier - have performed relevant studies on QWL. The researchers used the following authors as their basis: Herzberg (1968), Walton (1974), Argyris (1975) and Hackman & Suttle (1977).

The Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul has presented some studies and research on QWL. University researchers have used the theoretical models of Werther & Davis (1983) and Hackman & Oldham (1975) in their constructions, operating and adapting them for national companies' use.

The researches at the Federal University of Minas Gerais coordinated by Professor Lúcio Flávio Renault de Moraes, investigate the effects of the worker's QWL automation as well as relations between QWL and other organizational behavior elements such as values, commitment and occupational stress. Using the Hackman & Oldham (1975) model, they "presented to the scientific community a pilot research on worker's QWL in the information technology sector of Minas Gerais state" (RODRIGUES, 2009, p.108).

2.3 Occupational Stress and its organizational and individual consequences

Associated with psychosomatic disorders is stress. Stress is a word derived from the Latin language which was usually used in the seventeenth century to refer to tiredness and fatigue. In the following centuries – 18th and 19th - the term stress was related to the concepts of force, effort and tension. The entry of the word into the scientific environment was conferred by the endocrinologist Hans Selye (Pereira, 2010).

Selye (1965) defines stress as the state manifested by a specific syndrome consisting of all non-specific changes induced within a biological system. The concept of homeostasis - how the body, through hormones, preserves the state of balance of the organism - comes to add to that of stress and helps in its understanding. The psychologist Walter B. Cannon (1932) first coined the term homeostasis. To Selye (1965), the organism, when exposed to an effort triggered by a stimulus perceived as threatening to homeostasis, being it physical, chemical, biological or even psychosocial, has the tendency to respond in a uniform and specific way, anatomically and physiologically. Such responses constitute a syndrome.

This set of nonspecific reactions occurring in the body is named by Selye (1965) as the General Adaptation Syndrome, which is separated into three phases: alarm reaction, resistance phase and exhaustion phase. It is not necessary for the body to develop the phase until the end for the stress to happen; only in the most severe situations is that the last phase is reached - of exhaustion.

In the alarm reaction the organism prepares itself for the fight or flight response, to preserve life. The alarm reaction is characterized by:

Increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, increased red blood cell count, increased blood sugar concentration, blood redistribution, increased respiratory rate, bronchial dilatation, pupil dilatation, increased white blood cell count, anxiety (Limongi-França & Rodrigues, 1997, p.28).

After the first phase, if stress remains indeterminate, the resistance phase begins. At this stage a sensation of exhaustion and fatigue arises. The resistance phase is characterized by:

Increased adrenal cortex, atrophy of some structures related to the production of blood cells, ulcerations in the digestive tract, irritability, insomnia, mood changes, decreased sexual desire (Limongi-França & Rodrigues, 1997, 27).

The presence of the stressor continuously in an organism without strategies to deal with the generated stress exhausts the reserves of adaptive energy, triggering the phase of exhaustion, period in which serious diseases can appear. The phase of exhaustion is characterized by: "partial and brief return to the phase of alarm reaction, failure of adaptation mechanisms, exhaustion by physiological overload, death of the organism" (Limongi-França & Rodrigues, 1997, p.28).

The term stress itself cannot be understood as good or bad and it is impossible to eradicate it. Selye believed that stress could have two sides - the positive and the negative - which calls successively Eustress and Distress. Selye (1965) defined eustress When the stress intensity is positive and/or brief, and the mild and controllable stress responses could be stimulating and exciting to the individual, enabling growth, pleasure, emotional and intellectual development. On the other side, distress is characterized when the stressor has a negative character, it is more prolonged or denotes greater severity. We could say that distress occurs when stress exceeds a certain limit, which may differ from organism to organism, or depending on the losses and disorders the threaten entails.

From a biopsychosocial perspective, stress can be defined as A particular relationship between a person, their environment and the circumstances they are subjected to, which is assessed by the person as a threat or something that requires more than their own abilities or resources and which endangers their well-being.

Hurrell Jr. and Sauter (2011, p. 213) define occupational stress as a "damaging physical and emotional responses that occur when the demands of work do not match the capabilities, resources, and needs of the worker."

As consequence, occupational stress has attracted interest from researchers around the world. Much of this interest is due to the impact of stress on workers' health and the organizational impacts it causes, such as: increased expenses with medical care and leave, and a decrease in worker efficacy (Jex, Cunningham, Rosa, Broadfoot, 2009).

For a short time, occupational stress can change a person's attitudes and behaviors, but when it sets up for a longer time these effects can be felt negatively. According to Jex et al. (2009) the triggering of stress can lead to three common types of outcomes: physiological, psychological and behavioral.

Physiological effects can be noted through increased clinical consultations and withdrawals by medical leave. Settings of somatization and psychosomatic symptoms become frequent and range from low back pain, gastritis and irritable colon, to a greater risk of cardiovascular diseases or hypertension, coronary syndromes, headaches and even alteration of sleep and libido. Psychological effects are observed through frustration, anxiety, and negative attitudes towards work. Mood swings from dysthymia to severe depressive symptoms, often leading to suicide. The most common nosological conditions have been anxiety and panic disorders. The

behavioral effects cause a change in the conjugal relationship quality and in family life, increase of absenteeism, use of psychoactive substances, reduction of performance and withdrawal from work (Guimarães & Freire, 2004; Jex *et al.*, 2009; Zular, 2011).

It is possible to observe that physiological symptoms that trigger stress are common for most stressors and affect individuals equally. However, there are differences in psychological and behavioral responses, people react differently, and responses depend on the stress situation, which causes different outcomes in the organization. Some surveys reveal that different types of stressors can lead to different results and that some stressors can lead to positive results. Since stress can be considered an evolutionary necessity that forces the human being to change and always improve. Extinguishing stress completely of a person's life would be fatal (Jex *et al.*, 2009; Zular, 2011).

Hurrell Jr. and Sauter (2011) observe that occupational stressors are usually placed in three broad categories: job / tasks demands, organizational factors and physical conditions.

In the job/tasks demands category we find: work load, shift and rotation work and also limited tasks. Studies by Niosh (2004) show that excessive work - excessive workload - causes physiological, psychological and behavioral tension, can lead to increased injury rates, higher morbidity and mortality due to cardiovascular diseases, besides being related to a poor health perception. Rotational work can also cause physical health problems associated with cardiovascular and gastrointestinal problems (Hurrell Jr. & Sauter, 2011).

Shift work can cause health, social activities, and safety problems. Health is impaired due to interruption of the physiological circadian rhythms, which impair alertness and sleep capacity. Reduced alertness makes employees more prone to errors and increases the likelihood of accidents, as well as cause disruption between work and family and social life of workers. The limited, fragmented, immutable and short cycle tasks are considered discouraging, which do not require specific skills and creativity, they are also considered occupational stressors (Hurrell Jr. & Sauter, 2011).

Hurrell Jr. and Sauter (2011) highlight the following problems in the group of organizational factors: role conflict, organizational climate or organizational culture, imbalance between effort and reward and interpersonal relationships.

Role conflict occurs when employees face conflicting demands from two or more sources, between two or more roles. The most common form of conflict is between family and work, when the demands of labor interfere with family roles. In order to address the conflicting demands of family and work life, many companies have noted the need to establish family-friendly environments as a way to minimize the negative health and work-related effects that may be associated with work and personal life conflict (Hurrell Jr. & Sauter, 2011, Zimmerman, Hammer & Crain, 2011).

Each company is a unique place with unmistakable characteristics, called organizational culture. The culture of an organization shapes people's behavior and attitude and influences well-being or stress in employment. Organizational cultures with various management styles, which present partial or total intolerance of worker participation in decision making - which is directly related to low self-esteem, low level of job satisfaction and general problems of physical and mental health - , with excessive restrictions on worker behavior, are considered stressful cultures. Studies show that when the employee can participate in decision-making, they demonstrate greater job satisfaction and the company has lower employee turnover, better manager-subordinate relationships, and greater productivity. The imbalance between effort and reward occurs when the financial, career, and esteem rewards are below the level of the employee's effort, which can lead to a state of tension and health problems (Hurrell Jr. & Sauter, 2011).

Hurrell Jr. and Sauter (2011) affirm that unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships at work caused by bad leadership, aggression or violence can lead to tension problems. Employees who have abusive superiors have low levels of satisfaction and commitment to work, dissatisfaction with life, greater possibility of family conflicts and psychosomatic symptoms and psychic suffering.

In the physical conditions category, we highlight environmental conditions such as: excessive noise, extreme temperatures, improper ventilation and lighting, inadequate ergonomics, which are conditions associated with complaints of physical and psychological health of the employee, as well as problems related to attitude and behavior (Hurrell Jr. & Sauter, 2011).

2.4 QWL as a way to fight or minimize occupational stress

Lacaz (2000) shows that QWL can be associated with the intrinsic characteristics of the inserted technologies and their impact, as well as economic elements (salary, benefits, bonuses) or factors related to the individual's physical health and well-being related to employment and how this experience is rewarding, satisfying, devoid of stress and other negative results.

Even though there is no harmony among QWL researchers about what their dimensions are, studies have shown that more and more people look for recognition, challenges and achievement at work, possibilities for progression, satisfactory interpersonal relationships and a balance between work and life. These aspects

seem to influence the well-being of individuals within organizations and consequently the decrease of stress (Lacaz, 2000; Jex *et al.*, 2009; Zimmerman, Hammer & Crain, 2011).

Jex *et al.* (2009) and Lacaz (2000) point out that one of the elements that solidify the definition of quality of working life is control - which brings together the autonomy and power employees have over work technologies - including health issues, safety and their relations with work organization. Having control over the conditions and organization of work implies the possibility of being an active subject in the situation, which avoids the negative feeling of repudiation by the company for feeling manipulated and belittled and not respected and motivated.

An important factor for the discussion of QWL as a possible occupational stress reliever is the organization theme (tasks, time, space division) and work planning. Lacaz (2000) observes that it is not only the role of the manager to think and plan, the subjects of the process should participate in the discussions and remodeling. People who participate in decision-making have higher levels of perceived satisfaction and achievement and less perceived stress, which determine people's QWL (Jex *et al.*, 2009).

Zimmerman, Hammer and Crain (2011) state that the creation of an organizational culture to support the family in the work environment can act as a means to mitigate the negative effects of conflict between family and work, leading to lower levels of stress. This would also allow employees to feel more comfortable receiving support and seeking help if family concerns arise.

One of the important dimensions of QWL is the respect for people's time, the journey duration, the workload, the right to vacation. Studies indicate that the lack of balance between the personal and professional spheres potentiates stress. Society has undergone major transformations in the last 50 years regarding communication systems, organization of work and family. This variable has increased the value of rest and relaxation for human health. Modern life has substantially altered its natural timing, increasing the speed of action and thought, and impairing rest. Rhoden (2011, p. 155) emphasizes the importance of "idleness and leisure, which are experiences of rupture, rest and introspective states," as healthy possibilities for combating stress and promoting life quality.

In Brazil, Limongi- França and Rodrigues (1997) point out that companies can implement actions on three fronts for the reduction of stress and consequently the improvement of QWL, which are: physical, psychological and social. In the physical strategies they emphasize the importance of relaxation techniques, proper nutrition, regular physical exercises, rest, leisure and fun, sleep and if necessary medication. In the psychological area, they reinforce the need for psychotherapeutic methods, favoring self-knowledge, encouraging the development of new techniques to deal with stress, structuring free time with well-being activities, and finding less conflictive coexistence with peers and groups. In the social actions field, they emphasize the importance of new forms of work organization, such as changes in the power system with the abolition of coercive methods, motivation strategies and greater participation at work, improvement of socioeconomic conditions, investment and training in personal and professional formation and collaborative planning of economic, social and health actions.

Limongi-França and Rodrigues (1997) highlight that strategies for stress reduction and QWL when implemented in companies should follow principles and acts designed to get to know individual, group and organizational needs in detail. Only then QWL actions achieve success and credibility.

Limongi- França and Rodrigues (1997), Lacaz (2000), Jex *et al.* (2009) state that it is imperative that organizations which have occupations with adequate characteristics provide their employees with good working conditions which favor their personal and professional development. It is important that companies enable balance between work, family and leisure. They should also encourage the existence of satisfactory social relations in the workplace.

3. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded through the present investigation the importance that quality of life at work can have on the reduction and frequency of occupational stress. Organizations which care about the well-being of employees, placing them in a work context that encourages the existence of positive interpersonal relationships, have adequate working conditions, is concerned with the development of their careers and facilitates the conciliation of work, family and leisure, act to reduce and minimize occupational stress.

Concerns about QWL emerged in the world scenario in the second half of the last century, gaining strength from the 1970s onwards with the loss of competitiveness of American companies and a depletion of labor organizations. Nevertheless, it was only in the 1990s onwards that the QWL movement took a greater breath in many developed countries.

The Brazilian business environment began to care about quality of working life from the 1990s onwards with the opening of the economy and increased competitiveness. However, it was possible to observe that in Brazil most of the academic production is of applied nature, through a reinterpretation of the foreign QWL models - highlighting the Walton model as one of the most used ones.

It was observed that, although the relationship between occupational stress and quality of life at work is obvious, this is a field that still needs studies in order to be effective in practice. It is important that the two problems - quality of working life and occupational stress - are treated together, which does not always occur in the literature as verified during the research.

Finally, at the end of the research, it is important to admit that a long way must still be taken to ensure that QWL actions are actually implemented in organizations and that they are recognized as an effective human resource practice for the promotion of worker health and minimization of stress. Nevertheless, one can see that it is worth studying and investing in a more positive view of work. According to Jex *et al.* (2009, p. 136), "healthy workers and healthy organizations constitute a vision of hope for the future."

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