

Quality of Working Life in the UK

Ann Denvir

Jim Hillage

Annette Cox

Alice Sinclair

Daniel Pearmain

The Institute for Employment Studies

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Contents

Executive Summary	vi
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Context and rationale	2
1.2 Research objectives	4
1.3 Structure of report	4
2 Literature Review	5
2.1 What is QWL?	5
2.2 Capturing QWL	7
2.3 Elements of QWL	8
2.4 Summary	21
3 Conceptualising QWL	22
3.1 The dimensions of QWL	22
4 QWL Surveys Review	27
4.1 UK surveys	28
4.2 EU single country surveys	35
4.3 Non-EU single country surveys	37
4.4 Comparative surveys	41
4.5 Mapping existing QWL surveys	43
5 Operationalising the QWL Survey	45
5.1 The questionnaire	45
5.2 Survey process	46
5.3 Sample size	47
5.4 Timescale	47
5.5 Alternative ways to generate a sample	47
5.6 Piloting	47

6	Piloting the QWL Survey	48
6.1	The pilot process	48
6.2	Key themes from the results	49
7	Concluding Remarks	55
7.1	Quality of the QWL questionnaire	55
7.2	Quality of the QWL model	55
7.3	A QWL index?	56
Appendix 1: Technical Note		57
	Reliability of prospective scales	57
	Exploratory factor analysis	60

Executive Summary

This project was commissioned by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) in 2007 and is related to the '*Skills Pay*' series of projects, supported by SSDA and a number of government departments and agencies. IES was asked to carry out a review of current knowledge and approaches to the measurement of Quality of Working Life (QWL), and to design and pilot a survey that could be developed for future national use.

Chapter 1 describes the context and rationale for this QWL project and the original research objectives. These were to improve understanding on how employees feel about the quality of their working lives and to develop a robust survey tool to provide a nationally representative picture of the QWL in the UK that could serve as the foundation to monitor and measure trends over time.

Chapter 2 explores the QWL and QWL-related literature to outline the various elements which impact on the QWL such as the way work is organised; policies and practice in the workplace; relations with colleagues and managers; working conditions, pay and job security; and so forth. Elements which impact on QWL were found to be social and individual, objective and subjective, and related to both work and life. Overall, the literature was found to be limited and not without weaknesses.

Chapter 3 contains a conceptualisation and visual model of the dimensions of QWL. Eight broad dimensions (leadership; management; working conditions; rewards; skills and prospects; relations at work; the nature of work; and the organisation of work) were identified and visually represented on a QWL wheel.

Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of the QWL evidence base – ranging from company-level assessments to large EU-wide surveys. These surveys were seen to vary greatly in scope, quality and orientation. Although a number of UK sources provide good evidence on dimensions of QWL and related concepts, few provide a comprehensive picture.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the operationalising and piloting of the IES QWL questionnaire and the headline results of this pilot. This bespoke questionnaire was

administered by telephone and completed by 100 respondents. These respondents were asked to provide information about themselves and their work (including age, gender, salary level, occupation, sector, length of service, hours of work, leave, absence and so forth) and also to evaluate a series of attitudinal statements about their managers, leaders, working conditions, pay, relationships with colleagues, work tasks, and ways of working.

Respondents reported good levels of satisfaction across all dimensions of QWL and seemed to be most positive about relations at work with colleagues and managers and least positive about pay and benefits, skill development and utilisation, work conditions and the quality of their working environment. A relatively higher level of satisfaction was perceived amongst women, those on higher salaries, those not in trade unions and those in smaller organisations.¹

Chapter 7 provides some conclusions regarding the impact of the results of the pilot upon both the pilot questionnaire and the underpinning QWL model. The pilot process was seen to be successful. Some small changes were recommended to the questionnaire and further evidence gathering, analysis and consideration required in advance of any changes to the QWL model.

¹ Although these results should be treated with caution given the sample size of the pilot.

1 Introduction

In 2004, the SSDA, together with Investors in People, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), commissioned the first in a series of studies investigating the links between skills and organisational performance, referred to as the '*Skills Pay*' projects. The first phase looked at the literature on the relationship between investment in skills, employee commitment, high performance work practices, and organisational performance. The second phase developed a framework of capability to enable organisations to consider all aspects of people management, together with their own investment in people and their skills, which was titled the '4A' model of capability.¹ Work was also done on the current measurements of business performance and their applicability to employers' needs, and the potential for investigating links with skills and Human Resource Management (HRM) practices.²

In early 2007, SSDA commissioned IES to investigate an associated theme around elements of HRM and organisational culture that have a specific bearing on an employee's Quality of Working Life (QWL), and the connections these may ultimately have with organisational performance. This project was undertaken at the same time as an accompanying piece of work jointly steered by Investors in People UK (IiPUK), SSDA, University for Industry (Ufi), the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) and carried out by IES in partnership with the Work Foundation. This aimed to populate the 4A model through a survey of employers, and then statistically test the relationship between elements of the model and performance outcomes such as turnover and profitability.

¹ Tamkin P, Giles L, Campbell M, Hillage J (2004), *Skills Pay: The Contribution of Skills to Business Success*, SSDA Research Report 5.

² Tamkin P (2005), *Measuring the Contribution of Skills to Business Performance*, Institute for Employment Studies (IES); Tamkin P (2005), *Measuring the Contribution of Skills to Business Performance: A Summary for Employers*, IES.

This chapter outlines the context and rationale for the QWL project commissioned and details the original objectives.

1.1 Context and rationale

Over the past few years, public policy debate in the UK has increasingly begun to question whether the ultimate aim of government should be to secure economic growth, or whether the well-being or quality of life of the nation's residents should instead be the primary concern. Economic prosperity is just one of the necessary enabling factors for quality of life, alongside a high-quality environment and supportive family and social networks. This debate has raised the question of whether economic growth actually has negative consequences on quality of life, through environmental degradation, longer working hours, increased congestion and other social and environmental costs. Oswald (1997)¹, for example, has argued that economic growth yields little extra 'happiness' for citizens of industrialised countries and that joblessness is the major source of unhappiness and should be the focus of policy. Notably, the New Economics Foundation (NEF) have argued that to achieve real improvements in the quality of people's lives, economic prosperity in the UK has to be accompanied by the mitigation of its environmental and social costs alongside increased efficiency and competitiveness.² More recently, both the Government and the Opposition have begun to strongly advocate an increasing focus on quality of life considerations.³

As this debate has concentrated on the relationship between well-being and economic performance at a UK macro-economic level, an important research question for the 'Skills Pay' report series relates to the role of employment in people's quality of life, and the relationship between this and performance at the level of the individual firm. As the structure and nature of employment has changed, has people's quality of working life improved? Do attempts to enhance the well-being of staff increase staff motivation, commitment, and ultimately, organisational performance? And specifically, what are the relationships between these considerations and other HRM issues represented in the 4As model?

This project takes a first step towards investigating some of these questions – through a literature review of current knowledge and approaches to the measurement of QWL and the design and piloting of a QWL employee survey that could be developed for future national use.

¹ Oswald A (1997), 'Happiness and Economic Performance', *Economic Journal*, 107: pp. 1,815-1,831.

² Shah H, Marks N (2004), *A Well-Being Manifesto For a Flourishing Society*, New Economics Foundation.

³ For example, Gordon Brown MP, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Speech to the UN on Well-being and Quality of Life, 20 April 2006; David Cameron MP, Leader of the Conservative Party, 'General Well-Being Speech', 20 July 2006.

Employers have also shown much interest in the quality of working life in recent years, not least because they increasingly recognise the relationship between the way employees are organised, managed, trained and rewarded at work, their satisfaction, motivation and commitment, and their effectiveness, quality of output and productivity.

As a result, many employers spend time and money measuring employee satisfaction and engagement. However, there is no national measure of the quality of working life that would act as a benchmark for employers, set a measure to inform government policy making and help assess the effectiveness of public and corporate policy alike. In benchmarking employees' attitudes, each employer tends to customise measures for their own purposes.

QWL is widely researched and recognised as a concept in other EU countries and is a particular concern for social partners. Concerted policy efforts to improve dimensions of QWL have, in some of these countries, been reflected in higher employee ratings.¹ However, in the UK, the concept has received much less attention. QWL has neither been tracked between groups (such as those of different sexes, or different ages/generations, or working in different locations or industrial sectors) nor over time particularly effectively. We are able to track changes in different dimensions where questions about specific aspects of working life are repeated in surveys over a period of time, but an overall index of QWL that can be used for longitudinal analysis does not yet exist. We do not know, for example, if the quality of working life varies by age or region, or whether it is increasing or decreasing.

For organisations to improve levels of employee engagement and thereby deliver better performance, they need a mechanism to measure staff engagement, satisfaction and commitment. It must also provide the possibility of comparative assessment against competitors and permit isolation of factors which receive relatively stronger or weaker scores. This would provide a focus for organisations to target in order to achieve optimal performance from their employees. The benchmarking function of a nationally comparable QWL survey could therefore provide an attractive tool to employers.

There is also strong academic argument for a more comprehensive national survey. Having conducted a comprehensive assessment of the current status of QWL surveys, Gospel (2003)² concludes that it would be '*useful to have more internationally comparative surveys*' as well as stating the '*need for longitudinal surveys*'. This initial study is situated in this context.

¹ Gallie D (2003), 'The Quality of Working Life: Is Scandinavia Different?', *European Sociological Review*, 19, 1.

² Gospel H (2003), 'Quality of working life: A review on changes in work organisation, conditions of employment and work-life arrangements', in *Conditions of Work and Employment Series No.1*, International Labour Office, Geneva.

1.2 Research objectives

The aims of this project are therefore ultimately to:

- know more about how employees feel about the quality of their working lives and to understand the relative importance of the different elements of QWL to them
- develop a robust survey tool to provide a nationally representative picture of the quality of working life in the UK that would serve as the foundation to monitor and measure trends over time
- provide a benchmark for individual employers to measure the attitudes and responses of their own employees against the national picture
- develop a set of baseline data to help employers and government develop and test policies to improve the quality of working life and employee effectiveness at work
- enable partner organisations involved in the '*Skills Pay*' research to further investigate these considerations alongside any ongoing work on the 4As model of organisational capability.

1.3 Structure of report

In the chapter which follows, Chapter 2, we review the literature which informs our understanding of QWL. Chapter 3 contains a QWL model and the dimensions of that model as conceptualised by IES. A review of various national and international QWL surveys and QWL survey data is presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 details the choices and decisions taken in operationalising a UK QWL survey, and Chapter 6 contains a report of our pilot survey. Chapter 7 contains conclusions regarding the QWL pilot questionnaire and model. Appendix 1 contains a detailed technical analysis of the results of the pilot QWL survey.

2 Literature Review

The sections that follow contain the results of a brief literature and data search and a review of the conceptualisation and measurement of QWL both in the UK and abroad. We explore some of the key elements of working life and working conditions – and inter-relationships between these elements – which might allow a fuller understanding of employee perceptions and ratings of QWL.

2.1 What is QWL?

Definitions of QWL range from the objective to the subjective and vary according to each author's theoretical perspective. Gallie, for example, notes the historical background to the concept in the sociological literature¹ and the divergent approaches to the understanding of QWL. Despite approaching QWL from different standpoints, he points to the similarity of conceptualisations provided in the literature: *'the remarkable convergence in terms of the aspects of work they considered crucial for well-being'*. Central emphasis, he notes, is placed on *'the scope for initiative in carrying out the job, the variety of work, the opportunities for learning and the ability to participate in decision-making'* and these key variables remain relevant to our understanding of QWL today.

There is very limited research which attempts to map a composite set of QWL indicators. Gospel's 2003 review² provides a useful starting point to any consideration of the topic³. He identifies three broad components – work organisation, employment conditions and working life – which may be either rated from the perspective of the

¹ Gallie D (2003), 'The Quality of Working Life: Is Scandinavia Different?' *European Sociological Review*, 19:1, pp. 61-79.

² Gospel H (2003), 'Quality of working life: A review on changes in work organisation, conditions of employment and work-life arrangements', in *Conditions of Work and Employment Series No.1*, International Labour Office, Geneva.

³ Although not by any means the only synthetic review of QWL, see also, for example, Sirgy, MJ et al. (2001), 'A new measure of quality of work life' (QWL) based on need satisfaction and spillover theories *Social Indicators Research*. Dordrecht: Sep 2001. Vol. 55, Issue 3.

employee or assessed using objective measures to provide an understanding of QWL. Gospel uses the following broad inter-related general categories within which to group evidence on QWL:

1. Work organisation strategies, policies and outcomes (this includes use of technology, ways of working, autonomy, discretion, etc.)
2. Strategies and policies in the area of employment (for example, recruitment and selection, training and development, tenure, pay and benefits)
3. Work and employee relations (for example, the exercise of, and opportunities for, employee 'voice')
4. Social policies (eg family friendliness and also the external work carried out or sanctioned by the organisation).

In his review of the literature and survey data available, Gospel turns in the first instance to the evidence on *objective* measures of these aspects. He illustrates the wide-ranging nature of QWL. He documents changes to work organisation, skills, working time and work intensification and considers the resultant health of the workplace as measured through work-related accidents, injuries and illness or as proxied by absenteeism, turnover and grievances. His focus is largely on the UK. He notes differences in the available data on QWL outcomes according to firm size, occupation, status and sector.

Further aspects of work and working conditions relevant to a discussion of QWL which Gospel highlights are: family-friendly and -unfriendly patterns of work (for example, holidays taken and hours worked); patterns of employment and risks of unemployment/job security (the importance of employment not just for income but for wellness and happiness); and the changing employment relationship linked to job tenure (for example, the debate about the move from relational to transactional employment relationships as evidenced in the growth of flexible contracts and part-time working). Gospel draws out the distinction between objective and subjective measures and in many of these aspects he cautions against confusing the *perception* of change with the *evidence base* for change – employees may feel less secure but there is no support for the increase in the rate of job change or in tenure he notes in one example.¹

Final aspects of work and working conditions which are considered to have a bearing upon QWL are pay and benefit systems (for example, the move to more contingent forms of pay, the growth of pay differentials and changes to core aspects of benefit systems such as pensions); worker dignity; and systems of representation and participation (included in this discussion is the ability to influence decision-making, particularly regarding working lives and conditions of employment and the recorded

¹ This point is also made by Nick Isles in *The Joy of Work?* (Work Foundation, 2004).

decline in trade union membership and the scope of collective bargaining in the UK). Again, Gospel is keen to avoid interpreting changes in these areas as necessarily good or bad but merely to include these themes in his conceptualisation of QWL.¹ He notes that a reduction in trade union membership and a decentralisation of industrial relations may result in the positive outcomes of increasing employee participation and greater control, autonomy or discretion. However, he also points to measures such as increases in strike rates, increases in complaints to third parties and so forth as relevant objective QWL indicators which may contradict a positive interpretation. This example highlights the difficulty inherent in using objective factors to arrive at absolute judgements about intrinsic job quality.

Having considered the elements that make up QWL, Gospel turns to the implications of these variables on employee attitudes. In this respect, the findings of his review are crucial and provide an important justification for this QWL project. Case study data is seen to be too subjective and not comparable, while more quantitative data sources are seen to be scarce and weak – with only limited selections of relevant variables covered by the large, representative, methodologically robust, comparative or longitudinal surveys available.² A review of the available QWL survey data is provided in Chapter 4. In the section which follows, we further explore the key dimensions of QWL in order to devise a conceptual framework against which to measure the available data and from which to develop a bespoke QWL survey tool.

2.2 Capturing QWL

A major problem with capturing QWL derives from the paucity and weakness of its conceptualisation in research literature to date. Studies often focus on a limited number of dimensions of QWL, rather than attempting to compile a holistic measure of all its facets. Similar problems exist with the data available on QWL – although principally because quality of working life is only a secondary focus in such surveys, as they are instead primarily focused on related issues like skills demand or employment relations. As a result, we have no indication of which dimensions of QWL are more or less important, or even which factors should be included or excluded in a QWL model. There is also little integration between literatures from different fields which illuminate QWL. This is important because of the lack of

¹ As noted by P Bradon of Best Companies, Gospel struggles with the concept of objective and subjective measures throughout. Interestingly, Bradon reports that where Best Companies have analysed relations between the two (albeit with a limited population) they have found that where objective measures have an influence these measures are generally small and confused.

² Gospel reviews the following national surveys: the General Household Survey (GHS), the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS), the Employment in Britain Survey (EIBS) and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) surveys. He also reviews various European Foundation national and comparative EU-wide studies on gender, working conditions and working hours.

clarification of links between objective and subjective dimensions and between inputs, outputs or outcomes of QWL. For example, individual studies examine the contribution of particular factors to organisational commitment or job satisfaction but it is then necessary to trace a path between organisational commitment and overall QWL. The relationship between employee perceptions such as job satisfaction and overall subjective states of well-being measured in psychology are also poorly specified.

Contextual changes and attitudes to the nature of work provide the backdrop for measuring QWL. Fox (1980) argued for two competing interpretations of work to workers, suggesting it was either of central importance to individual growth and development or simply a means of economic survival.¹ Research evidence shows that this is an oversimplification in that workers attach multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings to employment. Survey data shows that ratings of subjective factors are not always consistent with objective measures. Gospel points to issues around attachment to work, centrality of work, differing expectations and preferences (eg for leisure time) and differences across countries which may impact upon perceptions of QWL (an interesting example is that variations in attitudes towards work across different nations cause work to be understood as a burden, a responsibility, a constraint or a social contribution).

A major international study showed that work centrality also appears to increase with age and varies according to gender, with men attaching greater importance to work than women (MOW, 1987).² However, this may stem from societal divisions of domestic labour. Recent studies of new forms of work, for example, in call centres and the software industry, show increasing pressures on workers through evidence of both tighter control, increased volume of work and extended working hours alongside the apparently contradictory trends of optimistic career aspirations and prioritising of family above working life (Baldry et al., 2007).³

2.3 Elements of QWL

2.3.1 Nature and organisation of work

This is a broad category which includes the nature of the job, the degree of control – over tasks, methods, effort – and related feelings of autonomy and responsibility. Both dimensions may be influenced partly by occupation, sector and use of technology but

¹ Fox A (1980), 'The Meaning of Work', in Esland G and Salaman G (eds.) *The Politics of Work and Occupations*, OUP, pp.139-191.

² MOW International Research Team (1987), *The Meaning of Working*, Academic Press.

³ Baldry C, Bain P, Taylor P, Hyman J, Marks A, Watson A, Gilbert K, Gall G and Bunzel D (2007), *The Meaning of Work in the New Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan.

are also significantly affected by management choice (eg Wilkinson, 1983¹). Various studies suggest that the bundling of tasks into jobs and the amount of discretion that employees have in doing their work is important to their job satisfaction, health and well-being. High job demand and low job control, particularly in the absence of social support at work, has been found to lead to '*fatigue, anxiety, depression and physical illness*'.² Research by the Work Foundation categorises those jobs with a lack of control over pace and key decisions, which have repetitive or monotonous tasks and which allow limited task discretion (in combination with other factors) as 'bad jobs'.³

There is, however, also an important subjective aspect to this dimension. Gospel, for example, points to evidence of a decline in direct supervision in the UK such that one would expect an increase in reported empowerment (and in the autonomy element of QWL), yet task discretion is reportedly falling in the UK workplace, resulting in a rise in 'work strain'.⁴

Gallie et al. (2004) also use data from the Employment in Britain Survey of 1992 and the Skills Survey of 2001 to show falling proportions of employees reporting discretion over how hard they work, which can be further updated by data from the 2006 Skills Survey (Felstead et al, 2007).⁵ A total of 70.7 per cent reported having a great deal of discretion in 1992, compared to 50.6 per cent reporting having a great deal of discretion in 2001, which increased slightly to 52.5 per cent in 2006.

Proportions of people reporting a great deal of influence over tasks done dropped from 42.4 per cent in 1992 to 30.5 per cent in 2001, which fell slightly to 28.6 per cent in 2006, while those reporting a great deal of influence over how to do tasks dropped from 56.9 per cent in 1992 to 42.8 per cent in 2001, which remained stable at 42.7 per cent in 2006.

¹ Wilkinson B (1983), *The Shopfloor Politics of New Technology*.

² Norden Rusli et al. (2008), *Working Conditions, Self-perceived Stress, Anxiety, Depression and Quality of Life*. BMC Public Health.

³ Coats D (2005), *Healthy Work, Productive Workplaces*. The Work Foundation.

⁴ Felsted, Gallie and Green (2002), *Work Skills in Britain*; Green (2004), 'Work Intensification, Discretion and Decline in Well-Being at Work'. *Eastern Economic Journal*.

⁵ Felstead et al. (2007), *Skills At Work 1986-2006*. ESRC Centre SKOPE at Oxford/Cardiff universities.

Results from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) 2004 are mixed: 36 per cent of employees reported having a lot of influence over the tasks in their job, 37 per cent reported having a lot of influence over the pace at which they worked, and 49 per cent reported a lot of influence over how they did their work.¹

It is interesting to consider the reasons behind these trends in the data. Gospel, for example, hypothesises that control has, in part, been displaced onto peers and payment systems so autonomy is still constrained, although the site of control has changed. This highlights the complexity of capturing QWL and the inter-relationship between the various dimensions of QWL and perceptions of these (reward, control and work intensification and relations with management in this instance).

2.3.2 HR policies and practices

Although QWL conceptualisations may go beyond an individual employer², it is important to situate employee well-being and employee attitudes in the context of workplace policies and practices. The choices an employer makes about management practices are significant and, as Gospel acknowledges, allow an employer some capacity to improve QWL or employee perceptions of QWL.

Workplace policies and practices impact on perceived QWL through feelings of job security, satisfaction and commitment. Positive attitudes seem to be particularly associated with effective mechanisms for involvement and participation. Two further elements of HR policy and practice which are documented as particularly important to QWL ratings are pay/reward and skills development and career opportunities. These feed into QWL, particularly through the concept of job satisfaction, to which they are key contributory elements (Rose, 2005). Satisfaction with pay is a problematic element of QWL to measure. Objective measures may include whether employees receive a satisfactory 'living wage' that maintains their standard of living above any notional measure of poverty. However, individual perceptions of pay satisfaction will often draw upon comparisons made with one or more reference groups such as peers, family and friends, the labour market and perceptions over time (Brown, 2003).³ It is

¹ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007). The author(s) acknowledge the Department of Trade and Industry (now the Department of Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform), the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Policy Studies Institute as the originators of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS, 2004) data, and the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service as the producers of the tabulations used in this work. None of these organisations bears any responsibility for the author's (authors') analysis and interpretations of the data.

² For example, in considering the 'life' element of the dimension 'work-life balance'.

³ Brown M (2003), 'Unequal Pay, Unequal Responses? Pay Referents And Their Implications For Pay Level Satisfaction', *Journal of Management Studies*, 38, 6, pp. 879-896.

entirely possible to be very highly paid and dissatisfied with one's pay. Complex trade-offs between high pay and poor work-life balance (or vice versa) are also likely to interact to contribute to QWL perceptions. Questions asking about satisfaction with pay tend to produce more negative responses than most other dimensions of QWL. For example, data from WERS 2004¹ shows that 40 per cent of workers are dissatisfied with pay.

Training and career development opportunities are important to satisfy personal desires for growth, challenge and advancement within organisations. Fifty per cent of workers surveyed in WERS 2004 were satisfied with the amount of training they receive.² However, amounts of training received (except Health and Safety training) are relatively low: 36 per cent of employees had received between one and five days training in the past year, with an equal percentage receiving none at all, and only 18 per cent receiving more than five days.³ We also know that the extent to which workers have access to these opportunities varies according to seniority, managerial/non-managerial status and sector/occupation. Even measures of training commonly used in assessments of high performance work practices use a relatively low indicator of training intensity, often around five days per year. The nature and type of training must also be scrutinised, since much training focuses on induction, health and safety and the acquisition of routine or firm-specific skills, rather than the general transferable ones which will have a greater impact on workers' career prospects (Grugulis, 2006).⁴

According to Felstead et al. (2007)⁵, around 25 per cent of employees in 2006 'very much' wanted training in the future and a further 40 per cent wanted it 'a fair amount'. Over half wanted to gain new skills or qualifications in the future. Employees are commonly expecting to gain higher pay and immediate job satisfaction from training but smaller numbers expect training to lead to promotion. This may reflect employer focus on training for improved performance in the current job rather than to provide career ladders for employees (Beynon et al., 2002).⁶ This is in contrast to quantitative data from the large-scale Change in Employer Practices Survey 2002

¹ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), *Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section* [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

² Department of Trade and Industry (1999), *Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section* [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

³ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), *Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section* [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

⁴ Grugulis I (2006), *Skills, Training and Human Resource Development*, Palgrave.

⁵ Felstead et al. (2007), *Skills At Work 1986 -2006*. ESRC Centre SKOPE at Oxford/Cardiff universities.

⁶ Beynon et al. (2002), *Managing Employment Change*, Oxford University Press.

which suggests that UK organisations have sought to emphasise the provision of career ladders, internal recruitment for high-level posts and an increased number of job layers (White et al., 2004).¹ Moreover, the survey results indicate that both employees and employers believed more opportunities for progression were available in 2002 than ten years previously, especially in expanding sectors and growing medium-sized organisations (op. cit.).

There is significant debate on the kind of HR policies and practices that are argued to improve organisational performance and whether they benefit workers. Much of the early research on so-called High Commitment Management or High Performance Work Systems was supportive. For example, Guest (1999) concluded from a national telephone survey that UK workers 'like' HRM.² However, critics have questioned whether HR policies and practices achieve higher productivity and organisational performance at the expense of employees' QWL. White et al. (2003)³ find that high performance HR practices have negative spillover effects from job to home life, and add to tensions between the pursuit of high levels of employee performance while simultaneously satisfying employee priorities of work-life balance. Ramsay et al. (2000)⁴ compare explanations for positive impact of High Performance Work Systems on organisational performance as being either due to positive benefits to workers eliciting higher commitment and engagement, or negative pressures and job strain. Their model provides equivocal results, and fails to endorse the win-win scenario for managers and employees that proponents of High Performance Work Systems have argued. Of course, it is possible for employees to welcome the benefits of greater job interest and variety available from interesting and challenging work, but resent the pressure from long working hours and high levels of effort that can be sought under high commitment management techniques. Godard (2004)⁵ calls attention to the need for institutional influence and regulation of individual employer practices to guide and moderate the way in which they are applied in the workplace.

Recent research is becoming more precise in its specification of the components of high performance work practices which encourage commitment and have a positive impact on employees and organisational outcomes. A report by Ashton and Sung for

¹ White M, Hill S, Mills C and Smeaton D (2004), *Managing to Change? British Workplaces and the Future of Work*, Palgrave.

² Guest D (1999), 'Human resource management-the workers' verdict', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 9: 3, pp.5-25.

³ White M, Hill S, McGovern P, Mills C and Smeaton D (2003), 'High-performance Management Practices, Working Hours and Work-Life Balance', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41: 2, pp.175-195.

⁴ Ramsay H, Scholarios D and Harley B (2000), 'Employees and High Performance Work Systems: Testing Inside the Black Box', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38, 4, pp.501-531.

⁵ Godard, John (2004), 'A Critical Assessment of the High-Performance Paradigm'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 42: 2, p.349-378.

BERR¹, for example, divided 35 working practices into three broad areas: commitment, reward, and human resource practices. This conceptualisation brings involvement, empowerment and discretion together with teamwork, communication and leadership under the umbrella of commitment practices. Capital investment and skill formation and utilisation are linked with formal and informal feedback in their discussion of human resource practices. Finally, reward practices include not just pay and benefits but flexibility (in hours, location, job description etc.).

2.3.3 Industrial relations and voice

Voice is conceived as a key factor in the QWL literature. Voice opportunities may exist on a number of different levels and vary dramatically in scope and impact and so it is important to distinguish between general information and consultation rights at a strategic level and decision-making opportunities which influence the daily work experience. Voice also has an important individual and collective dimension to it. Despite trends in the reduction of trade union membership and influence, in the scope of collective bargaining, and a general trend towards a decrease in collectivism and a rise of individualism in UK workplaces, good evidence of employee attitudes to these developments is lacking.

In terms of indicators of opportunities for representative voice, WERS 2004 is a useful source for the UK working population. Data from this survey shows that 36 per cent of workplaces contain some union members, and one-third of employees in all workplaces with ten or more employees were union members (Kersley et al., 2005).² Unsurprisingly, union density is higher in workplaces where management attitudes to unions are reported to be favourable. The prevalence of non-union representative voice mechanisms in the form of joint consultative committees has declined markedly from 20 per cent to 14 per cent (Kersley et al., 2005). There has been a marked decline in the proportion of workplaces with a recognised union which have a lay representative (shop steward) from 55 per cent in 1998 to 45 per cent in 2004 (Kersley et al., 2005). This raises questions about the possibilities for union members to voice views in practice, even where the union is recognised by managers. Employees themselves are sceptical about the utility of unions. WERS 2004 reports that most feel they would best represent themselves in dealing with managers for gaining training, a

¹ Sung J and Ashton D (2005), *High Performance Work Practices: linking strategy and skills to performance outcomes*, BERR.

² Kersley B, Alpin C, Forth J, Bryson A, Bewley H, Dix G and Oxenbridge S (2005), *First Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, Department of Trade and Industry.

pay increase or making a complaint.¹ Over half of employees surveyed were not, and had never been, trade union members.²

In contrast, there is evidence of continued growth in direct employee involvement and participation techniques between 1998 and 2004 (Cox et al., 2007:8).³ Use of team briefings (91 per cent of workplaces), newsletters (45 per cent of workplaces), problem-solving groups (21 per cent of workplaces), and flow of information through the management chain (64 per cent of workplaces) have all grown. However, opportunities for direct influence over immediate working practices remain confined to a minority of organisations, in contrast to downward communication by management. When job satisfaction components are measured through WERS, satisfaction with involvement in decision-making receives one of the lowest scores, with 38 per cent of workers reporting being satisfied or very satisfied with opportunities in this respect (Kersley et al., 2005).

2.3.4 The employment relationship

A further dimension of QWL is the perception of the employment relationship. This is a broad over-lapping category (relations with management, procedural justice and respect at work) which may be more difficult to capture but there is evidence from the literature that the perceived nature of the employment relationship does shape expectations and behaviour in areas such as work effort, relationships, absence, motivation and performance. Coats⁴, for example, includes aspects such as an effort/reward imbalance and limited 'social capital', which comprise elements of the employment relationship, in his 'bad jobs' concept.

Indicators of perceptions of the quality of employment relations in the workplace are available from WERS. These show that 60 per cent of employees judge relations with managers to be good or very good, with only 16 per cent rating relations as poor or very poor. What is of concern is the gap between managerial and worker perceptions, since 93 per cent of managers rate relations with employees as good or very good (Kersley et al., 2005, p.35).

More substantive indicators of the state of the employment relationship are whether employees are using formal channels to voice dissatisfaction. Managers in 15 per cent

¹ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

² Ibidem.

³ Cox A, Marchington M and Suter J (2007), 'Embedding The Provision of Information and Consultation in The Workplace: A Longitudinal Analysis of Employee Outcomes in WERS 98 and 2004', *Employment Relations Research Series*, (DTI: HMSO).

⁴ Coats D (2005), *Healthy Work, Productive Workplaces*. The Work Foundation.

of workplaces reported that at least one employee had raised a grievance using a formal procedure in the past year, according to WERS 2004, the largest proportions of which were in connection with pay and conditions and fair treatment by supervisors.¹

A further important element of QWL which relates to the employment relationship is the degree to which employees perceive they are treated with dignity and respect in the workplace. Evidence from a study of 70 organisations by Hoel and Cooper (2000) reveals that around ten per cent of staff have been bullied at work but rates vary depending upon measures used. Beswick et al. (2006)² report an incidence of between one to three per cent across Europe. Examining positive indicators of management-employee relationships as an alternative proxy for dignity of treatment in the workplace, WERS 2004 shows that 55 per cent of employees agree or strongly agree that managers treat them fairly, with 19 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.³

2.3.5 Management, supervision and leadership

There is a lack of information available on relations with, and perceptions of, managers and leaders in relation to employee QWL.⁴ As managers implement and mediate a large range of workplace policies and practices, this is a critical gap. WERS 2004 data provides some limited information. Fifty-seven per cent of employees surveyed believed that managers support people to develop their skills, in contrast to 17 per cent who disagreed or strongly disagreed. According to the CIPD engagement survey of 2006⁵, 47 per cent of employees agreed or strongly agreed that leaders have a clear vision of where their organisation is going but only 37 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they had confidence in their leaders. Thirty-three per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had confidence in organisational leaders. Surprisingly, only a minority of employees received feedback on how they were performing and had the opportunity to discuss training and development needs.

¹ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), *Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section [data file]*. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

² Beswick J, Gore J and Palferman D (2004), *Bullying at work: a review of the literature*, (Health and Safety Laboratory, Crown Copyright).

³ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), *Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section [data file]*. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 26 September 2007).

⁴ See Tamkin P and Denvir A (2006), *Strengthening the UK evidence base on management and leadership capability*, (IES, Brighton) for a discussion of the limits of the evidence base.

⁵ CIPD (2006), *How Engaged Are British Employees? Annual Survey Report 2006*, (CIPD, London).

2.3.6 Stress and health at work

There is an interesting body of literature on work and well-being which highlights the impact of 'bad jobs'. This literature suggests that ill-health is an outcome of poor QWL. For example, studies by Marmot¹ and colleagues link the health of employees to their status: those in lower paid jobs are more likely to experience poor working conditions, lack of control over their workload, a lack of job security, limited support, and exposure to physical hazards. They suggest that improvements in the quality of work and working conditions could help in the reduction of health inequalities (Siegrist and Marmot, 2004).²

Stress is one manifestation of poor QWL noted which, together with working conditions and the work environment, may lead to physical and mental ill-health. However, it is a difficult concept for which to develop indicators, and a number of other factors can contribute to it. These may include relationships with colleagues and managers, the organisation and nature of work and the state of the working environment. Marmot's research suggests that those in 'top jobs' which may be considered stressful may have control, status and social support to avoid ill-health which those in lower-paid and lower-status jobs may not.

There are no objective or agreed criteria for the definition or measurement of any clinical syndrome of 'stress', and stress is variously understood to relate to the (vulnerable) person or to the job ('job stressors'). Job stressors include role demands, task demands, physical demands and interpersonal demands, and it can be seen that stress is therefore also related to many other dimensions of QWL, eg working hours, intensification of work, work/home balance and so forth.

Data from WERS 2004 reveal that 15 per cent of employees report their job making them feel tense most of the time and 41 per cent reporting their job makes them feel tense sometimes, with 39 per cent reporting that this occurs only occasionally or never.³ However, 49 per cent report that such indicators of stress are confined to the time spent at work, since they either disagree or disagree strongly with the statement that they worry a lot about work outside working hours. Work volume causes greater problems for employees, with 39 per cent either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they never seem to have enough time to get their work done, and only 29 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. A large majority, 74 per cent, agree or agree strongly that their job requires that they work very hard. In a CIPD survey of 2000

¹ Marmot M (2004), *Status Syndrome*. Bloomsbury Publishing and also, notably, the Whitehall studies.

² Siegrist J (2004), 'Psychosocial work environment and health: new evidence'. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.

³ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

employees, 22 per cent reported that their job was very or extremely stressful, while 38 per cent described it as moderately stressful (Truss et al., 2006:8).¹

More objective evidence of ill-health published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that two million UK workers suffered from an illness during 2005/2006 that they believed was caused or made worse by work, and approximately 24 million working days were lost in this period due to work-related ill-health, with a further six million lost to workplace injury. Stress, anxiety or depression affected just under half a million employees in 2005/2006. Taken together, musculoskeletal disorders and common mental health problems like anxiety and depression account for approximately 75 per cent of those suffering from work-related ill-health.²

Barmby et al. (2003)³ analyse Labour Force Survey data from 1984 to 2002 and show that worker sickness absence rates fluctuate marginally but remain fairly consistent at around three per cent. The CIPD reports data showing that the average level of absence is 3.7 per cent of working time in their 2007 survey of around 800 organisations.⁴ Absence rates are reported to be consistently higher in public sector organisations and also vary according to geographical area, with higher rates in the North East of England and lower rates in the South East.

2.3.7 Job security

Job security, or the feeling of it, is also documented as an important aspect of any subjective assessment of QWL. It may derive from the broader context of the work environment, such as the sector and type of work/occupation/contract. Managerial action and leadership may also influence the performance of the organisation, which in turn will affect employee perceptions of relative job security.

Sixty-four per cent of employees surveyed in WERS 2004 believed that their job was secure in their current workplace⁵, slightly more than the results from CIPD (2006), where just over 50 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with their job security. However, we should be aware that the relative importance that employees attach to job security (and other factors) may vary over time. In the case of job security, Clark

¹ CIPD (2006), *How Engaged Are British Employees? Annual Survey Report 2006*.

² HSC, Health and Safety Statistics, 2005/2006, using data from the Labour Force Survey.

³ Barmby T, Ecolani M and Treble J (2003), 'Sickness Absence in the UK: 1984-2002', paper prepared for presentation at The Economic Council of Sweden's Conference "Sickness Absence: Diagnoses and Cures".

⁴ CIPD (2007), *Absence Management – Annual Survey Report 2007*.

⁵ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), *Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section* [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

(2005:381)¹ reports its decreasing importance to workers based on his analysis of British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data.

2.3.8 Employee attitudes

Concepts of satisfaction, morale, commitment and engagement occur in most of the QWL and QWL-related literature. These concepts are often ill-defined and conflated. A detailed discussion of them is beyond the scope of this study; they are, however, important to our understanding and theorisation of QWL. It is often assumed that they can work as indicators or replacements for QWL measures, but the relationship is not straightforward. It is conceivable, for example, that those with high levels of commitment or engagement could work to damage aspects of their own QWL.

Job satisfaction is referred to as '*one of the classic subjective concepts in the area of worker attitudes and well-being*', usually captured as a self-report measure of a single or a set of perceptions. Conventional measures of job satisfaction usually include satisfaction with aspects of work such as pay, training, hours of work and the nature of work itself (see Clark, 2005 and Rose, 2005² for a discussion). The relationship with QWL is a complicated one. Rose notes explicitly that '*asking about the work itself is presumed to elicit responses within a frame of reference centred upon intrinsic rewards, primarily those having to do with QWL*' (2005: 464) but notes problems with building a composite measure of job satisfaction from different facets and argues that changes in one dimension may impact on others.

Gospel refers to the UK evidence from a variety of data sources that a majority of UK employees express high levels of job satisfaction; however, a significant minority remain strongly dissatisfied. This is endorsed by data from WERS 2004 where 71 per cent of employees surveyed reported themselves either satisfied or very satisfied with the work they do and 69 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the sense of achievement they received from their work.³

It also varies significantly between workers of different ages, in different sectors and from different countries. Clark (2005) uses BHPS data to show that UK workers are more dissatisfied than those from other countries, that older workers are more satisfied than younger workers, men are less satisfied than women, and married workers are more satisfied than unmarried. There is also evidence of decreasing

¹ Clark, Andrew E (2005), ' "Your Money or Your Life": Changing Job Quality in OECD Countries', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 43: 3, pp. 377-400.

² Rose M (2005), 'Job Satisfaction in Britain: Coping with Complexity', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 43: 3, pp. 455-467.

³ Department of Trade and Industry (1999), Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004: Cross-section [data file]. Tabulations provided by the ESRC-funded WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service (accessed 20 September 2007).

worker job satisfaction over time, comparing data from 1992 and 2002, in particular satisfaction with the quality of work itself (Clark, 2005).

2.3.9 Organisational commitment/alienation

There is a large literature on organisational commitment in its own right, the study of which is, again, beyond the confines of this project. This variable captures the degree of identification with goals and values of the organisation. Organisational commitment is likely to be related to a complex combination of QWL dimensions including the nature and meaning of work, management/leadership (who may critically communicate or mediate organisational values), relationships with colleagues, and prospects for career development within the organisation. The evidence available suggests that organisational commitment is an important predictor of attachment or intention to quit.

Organisational commitment is generally accepted to be made up of three components: affective commitment or the degree of emotional attachment to the organisation; continuance commitment – willingness to remain working for the organisation rather than any other and normative commitment; and compliance with the cultural norms of the organisation. Sixty-one per cent of workers surveyed in WERS 2004 agreed or strongly agreed with a composite indicator of organisational commitment made up of measures of sharing organisational values, feeling loyalty towards the organisation and being proud to say they worked for their employer (figures calculated from Green, 2006). Green finds a small but statistically significant increase in the results since the previous survey of 1998 (Green, 2006).¹ Labour turnover rates, which can be used as a proxy measure for an element of organisational commitment, are reported to be around 18 per cent by the CIPD's survey of 905 organisations for 2006.²

2.3.10 Employee perceptions of social initiatives and corporate responsibility

A further element of perceived QWL is that of the social activities or social citizenship of the organisation which may impact upon levels of commitment and satisfaction. This dimension relates to debates in the literature about meaningfulness and includes aspects of pride in the contribution of one's work and identification with the values of one's organisation. Again, as noted by Gospel, there is little published on the polling of employee attitudes in this area.

¹ Green F (2006), '*Leeway for the Loyal: A Model of Employee Discretion and Organisational Commitment*', WPEG Conference, University of Kent, Canterbury, July.

² CIPD (2007), *Recruitment, retention and turnover – Annual Survey Report 2007*.

2.3.11 Performance

The relationship between QWL and a number of personal and business outcomes is an increasingly important theme in the literature.¹ Although the contribution of QWL, or aspects of QWL, to business success is a key assumption there is, to date, little research establishing this link.

It may be useful, therefore, to consider the nature of QWL in looking for evidence of tangible measurable outcomes. There is now considerable research that suggests that skills and other HR inputs are associated with higher levels of productivity, which is an area that is being further explored in the 'People and the Bottom Line' project in the 'Skills Pay' series. It is therefore interesting to question the relationship of QWL, as one possible indicator of how well people are managed in their workplaces, to individual performance and company success.

Other studies in the 'Skills Pay' series are of particular note. Although the focus is largely on the role of skills within broader people management practices and the links with organisational performance, a number of issues are covered of more specific relevance to QWL. The second phase of the 'Skills Pay' work in 2005 included a literature review exploring the relationship between skills investment, employee commitment and high performance workplaces. This study², by Tamkin et al., reported that HR practices may indeed have a positive link with organisational performance (depending on their combination and strategic alignment). Critically for the study of the impact of QWL, this project also found that the engagement and involvement of the workforce appears to be an essential part of the success of implementing such practices, often mediated by the capability of the managerial workforce. Both investment in employees and management relations matter.

A subsequent phase generated the 4A model³ to aid measurement and people investment decisions. Although this model explores broader issues around HRM and firm behaviour, it contains dimensions encompassing the development through to the use of capability in an organisational context such that many aspects of QWL may successfully be situated within the model: for example, discrimination-free recruitment; the provision of feedback and support in the workplace; and training and progression opportunities.

¹ Albeit addressed in quite a patchy manner across the EU. See, for example, Tony Huzard, *The convergence of the quality of working life and competitiveness: a current Swedish literature review*, National Institute for Working Life, Stockholm.

² Tamkin P (2005), *Measuring the Contribution of Skills to Business Performance*, IES.

³ See Tamkin P, Giles L, Campbell M, Hillage J (2004), *Skills Pay: The Contribution of Skills to Business Success*, SSSA Research Report 5.

The 'People and the Bottom Line' study¹ has attempted to build on this earlier work to test the validity of a range of HR practice measures (as conceptualised and organised by the 4A model: access, ability, attitudes and application) and their beneficial link with organisational performance. Results suggest there may be sizeable business benefits from a strategic investment in people and a strategically consistent HR environment. Links with performance had a strong attitudinal dimension pointing, as the authors suggest, to the potential key importance of workforce satisfaction and engagement.

2.4 Summary

- There are objective and subjective, and also input, output and outcome, dimensions of QWL explored within the literature, and no existing agreed definition of the factors that should be included or their relative significance.
- Pay and benefits, skill utilisation and training, voice opportunities, management and leadership, working conditions/environment, workplace relationships, and the nature of work and work organisation are all important elements of working life.
- The relationship between QWL and psychological states or factors such as job satisfaction, commitment and employee engagement is a complex one.
- There is still a debate over the relationship between High Performance Work Practices and QWL.

¹ Tamkin P et al. (2008), *People and the Bottom Line*, IES Report 448.

3 Conceptualising QWL

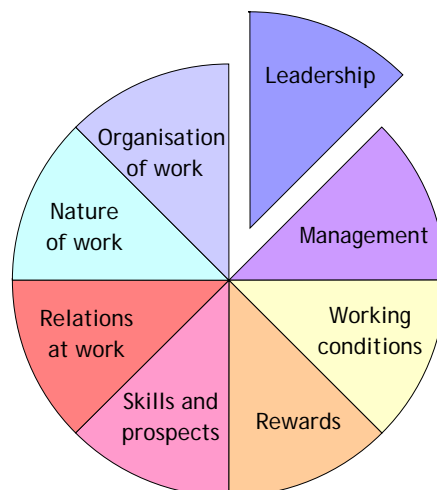
3.1 The dimensions of QWL

Drawing from the themes explored in the literature, we suggest that there are a number of dimensions to QWL and have created a visual representation below. In essence, QWL is a multi-faceted concept and issues relating to an individual employee's pay and benefits, their relationships with their manager and colleagues, the nature of their work, the way it is organised and so forth all – albeit to varying degrees – have an impact on perceived quality of working life. In the sections which follow, aspects of each dimension are outlined.

3.1.1 Leadership and the organisation

Aspects of leadership conceptualised to have an impact on QWL include confidence in the leaders of one's organisation, having shared values, feeling that the organisation is a good employer and values its employees, having pride in one's company, and feeling that the work carried out for the organisation can make a positive difference to society. Many of these elements relate to aspects of meaning which employees may attach to their job but also to issues of identification with, and confidence in, their employer.

Figure 3.1: Leadership



Source: IES, 2008

3.1.2 Management

The management dimension of QWL contains aspects relating to one's immediate or line manager. It includes the nature of the working relationship, respecting one's manager and in turn feeling that one's manager does not discriminate, feeling supported, and receiving feedback and encouragement from one's manager.

Figure 3.2: Management

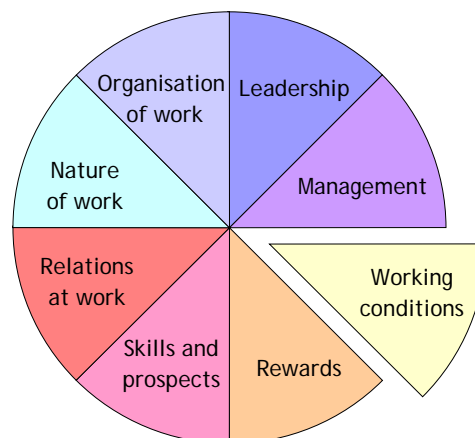


Source: IES, 2008

3.1.3 Working conditions

The aspects of working conditions and the work environment conceptualised to have a bearing on QWL include working hours, the balance between home and work-life, job security, the nature of the work environment and its impact on health, and the importance attached by the employer to health and safety.

Figure 3.3: Working conditions



Source: IES, 2008

3.1.4 Rewards and fairness

Rewards and fairness covers all aspects of pay and benefits relative to colleagues and other comparators and relative to outgoings in a broad sense, and so aims to capture feeling fairly paid for the work carried out and considering one's pay to be sufficient for one's needs.

Figure 3.4: Rewards



Source: IES, 2008

3.1.5 Skills and prospects

This dimension captures the opportunities to utilise skills and abilities at work, the possibilities for learning new skills, and progression or promotion prospects.

Figure 3.5: Skills and prospects



Source: IES, 2008

3.1.6 Relations at work

This QWL dimension covers relationships with colleagues and includes fair treatment and a workplace free from harassment and bullying, the quality of relationships with colleagues, and the ability to rely on colleagues at work.

Figure 3.6: Relations at work

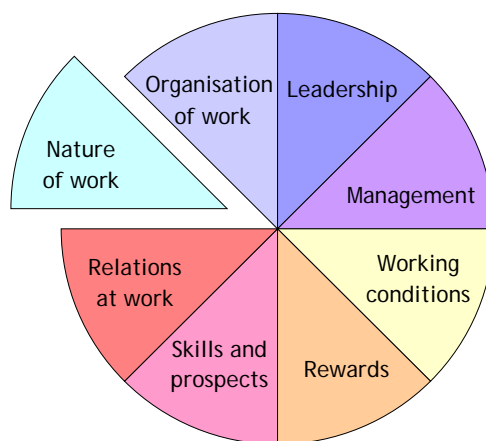


Source: IES, 2008

3.1.7 Nature of work

This is a broad category attempting to capture job type and intensity and covering elements such as the pace of work, the time available to complete tasks, the pressures of work, the monotony of work, and the sense of accomplishment achieved.

Figure 3.7: Nature of work



Source: IES, 2008

3.1.8 Organisation of work

This dimension refers to the responsibility, autonomy and control aspects of the way one's work is organised, and includes feelings of involvement and influence such as scope for, and involvement in, decision-making, opportunities for creativity, job discretion, and the ability to control the way one's work tasks are organised.

Figure 3.8: Organisation of work



Source: IES, 2008

4 QWL Surveys Review

The concept of QWL is broad and far-reaching. There are no consistently agreed definitions or boundaries. QWL can be conceptualised as a measure of the job and organisation or can go beyond this to the work and life experiences of the individual. Aspects of QWL can be captured using objective or subjective data, with a variety of methodologies, aims and priorities. The data sources detailed in the section which follows cover different groups, at different levels, using different understandings of QWL, over different time frames and in different countries.

There are a number of UK studies which are relevant to QWL from a management perspective or at the level of the sector or establishment. Included below are examples from the Royal Bank of Scotland, a sectoral NHS study carried out by IES and various studies carried out by UK membership and research institutes. These have different purposes, cover different samples and survey different aspects of QWL.

There are also many UK surveys which touch on aspects of QWL and cover or indicate relevant areas of questioning. WERS, the National Employer Skills Survey (NESS), and the British Social Attitudes (BSA), Work Skills in Britain and the Best Companies Survey are included as key examples below.

Finally, there are also a number of non-UK single country surveys which may provide lessons for the development of a UK QWL survey and index. These surveys and details of comparative work on aspects of QWL carried out by the European Foundation are outlined to conclude this brief review.

4.1 UK surveys

4.1.1 Royal Bank of Scotland

Many UK companies assess aspects of QWL through regular employee attitude surveys (carried out in-house or externally/independently).¹ One published example of such an evaluation within an organisation is provided by the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS). RBS state that employee engagement is key to company success. They define satisfaction as whether 'things are liked', commitment as whether employees 'want to be here', and engagement as 'how much do I want to/actually do improve our business results'.

They survey staff in 28 countries (using external consultants) to capture opinions and engagement levels and analyse this data with HR data on absence, turnover and productivity on an annual basis. The information is also used to benchmark against rival companies.

4.1.2 ASE

NFER-Nelson (2001) market a QWL psychometric questionnaire developed for ASE², a specialist HR consulting firm, based on a norm group so that individuals, departments and organisations can compare where they stand on seven scales.

This survey tool measures workers' assessment of their working conditions – although not the importance they place upon them – using a five-point Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The questionnaire contains 53 items exploring support from manager; freedom from work-related stress; salary and additional benefits; job satisfaction, challenge, use of skills and autonomy; relationships with work colleagues; involvement and responsibility at work; and communication, decision-making and job security.

4.1.3 IES

QWL or aspects of QWL are also occasionally examined at sectoral level. IES, for example, devised a QWL survey used in 2003 to gauge the opinions of NHS Trust staff. Employees were asked to provide information about themselves and their views about their job including communication; pay and benefits; performance and appraisal; feeling valued and involved; training, development and career; job satisfaction; commitment; management; co-operation; colleagues; stress and work

¹ It is beyond the scope of this study to examine a broad range of employer staff surveys. The RBS survey is provided as a case study and may not be representative of approaches taken by other organisations.

² By Angus McDonald.

pressure (strongly agree to strongly disagree); training; Health and Safety; equal opportunities; transport and accommodation; and intention to stay or leave.

4.1.4 Chartered Management Institute

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) conducted a study from 1997 to 2000¹ with the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) tracking changes to working life in corporate Britain. Five thousand managers were surveyed and 1,516 responses obtained.

The focus was on organisational change and its impact on employees, and interviewees were questioned about aspects including restructuring, employer/employee relationship, the commitment of the organisation, work/life balance, workload and the impact of technology.

Size of organisation was seen to be an important influencing variable – managers from larger companies in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors reported the greatest decline in the quality of their working life, whilst those in small firms were the most confident about their future quality of life.

A recent survey, carried out in 2006, contained some tracking questions from this earlier study, with an increased focus on motivation and productivity, and there are a further number of other CMI publications based on surveys of their members which cover broad aspects of QWL.

4.1.5 The Work Foundation

The Work Foundation has also produced work on QWL and notably on ‘good work’ – a strongly related although not identical concept.²

Their Workplace Trends Survey³, which was carried out between 2004 and 2006, aimed to: *‘build up a cumulative picture of strategy, practices and trends in the UK; allow organisations to compare strategies, policies and practice; identify which factors influence business performance; and provide insights into future pressures, concerns and responses of UK companies’*. Respondents are HR or strategic managers. The 2004 survey was carried out by IFF, by telephone, covering 1,000 organisations.

¹ Worrall and Cooper, 2001.

² See, for example, the work of D Coats (*Healthy Work: Productive Workplaces*), who makes a public health case for higher quality performance and discusses the relationship between health, work and productivity. See also the *Joy of Work* by N Isles, which makes the link between work and well-being and points to the centrality of work.

³ See S Bevan, M Cowling, L Horner and also Fauth, B, 2007.

Although surveying aspects of relevance to our knowledge of QWL, the focus is on organisations rather than individuals and policies, practices and strategies rather than employee needs and perceptions. Information is gathered on business context; business strategy; HR strategy (and drivers); HR objectives; HRM in practice – internal communications, pay and reward, employee relations, training and development, work-life balance, HR practices and productivity; HR and business strategy links, performance, and future challenges.

4.1.6 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) also survey in the area of QWL, for example, through the CIPD Employee Well-being and the Psychological Contract 2004 survey carried out by David Guest, the 9th survey on the employment relationship carried out with NEF, and other surveys which cover relevant dimensions of QWL. CIPD have most recently published in the related area of dignity at work.¹

As a membership organisation, the needs of their members is obviously important in deciding upon the focus, scope and methodology of these surveys. A key aim is to provide a consistent baseline to allow UK organisations to benchmark their own employment relations.

The NEF survey of 2005 looked at control, support, workload and job demands, and reported that 39 per cent of UK employees are in 'good jobs'. A good job is defined as one which is exciting but not too stressful; otherwise this will be negatively reflected in lack of commitment, underperformance and satisfaction.

4.1.7 Workplace Employment Relations Survey

The Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) is an establishment survey which examines employment relations in workplaces throughout Britain. The latest WERS was carried out in 2004, covering 2,200 workplaces with five or more employees. Earlier, slightly smaller, WERS surveys were carried out in 1998, 1990 and 1984.

The sample for all the WERS surveys has been derived from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) maintained by the National Office of Statistics (ONS). Data is collected through face-to-face interviews with managers with day-to-day responsibility for HR or employment relations, worker representatives and, since 1998, with employees (through an employee questionnaire).

The focus of WERS is on employee relations and as such there is some limited relevance to the study of QWL perceptions and experiences – particularly in the

¹ See J Philpott chapter in *Dimensions of Dignity at Work* edited by Sharon Bolton.

survey of employees. Managers are questioned about employment relations (ER) policies and practices, decision-making and involvement, recruitment and performance assessment and so forth. Areas investigated with employees include communication, information and involvement; work organisation, change, skill development and utilisation; influence; relations with supervisors/managers and satisfaction with this; trust; management approach to family responsibilities of employees; and responsiveness and fairness of managers.

WERS also gathers factual data about the establishment and various ER indicators (industrial action, tribunal claims, illness and injury, use of grievance and disciplinary procedures) and some working conditions details (eg hours of work, flexible contracts used etc.). The latest WERS (2004) also collected financial information through a Financial Performance Questionnaire.

4.1.8 Best Companies

Best Companies run the annual Sunday Times Top 100 survey. A 70 item questionnaire is completed by employees and a company questionnaire by any organisation who chooses to take part in the Best Companies competition. There are currently more than 500,000 individual records in their database and over the past four years approximately 1,200 organisations have taken part.

Their survey measures eight broad workplace factors:

- leadership
- my manager
- my team
- my company
- well-being
- personal growth
- fair deal
- giving something back.

On a four page questionnaire, employees provide the following demographic information: sex, age, education, region, home responsibilities/situation, job grade/level, role, salary, years of service, employment status, hours worked (contracted and actual), and working from home.

Respondents are then asked to rate 70 statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree (using a seven-point scale) including the following key ones:

1. I have a great deal of faith in the person leading this organisation.

2. This organisation is run on strong values/principles.
3. Senior managers of this organisation do a lot of telling but not much listening.
4. I am under too much pressure at work to perform well.
5. My health is suffering because of my work.
6. My manager cares about how satisfied I am in my job.
7. My manager helps me to fulfil my potential.
8. My team is fun to work with.
9. Working in this team gives me a buzz.
10. I feel I receive fair pay for the responsibilities I have in my job.
11. Profit is the only thing driving this organisation.
12. My organisation makes a positive difference to the world we live in.
13. I feel proud to work for this organisation.
14. I love working for this organisation.
15. My work is stimulating.
16. I am bored with the work I do.

Finally, the questionnaire asks the respondent to pick a number on a scale of 0-99 to reflect how they feel about working for their organisation (0 = couldn't imagine working for a worse place; 99 = couldn't imagine working for a more fantastic place) and 'what makes this a great workplace?' and 'what would make this a better workplace?'.

This is combined with a company-level questionnaire which gathers data on the organisation, its employees, and various terms and conditions such as pay, holidays, sick leave and flexible working.

Although the Best Companies survey captures a range of attitudinal items of great relevance to an assessment of QWL from the perspective of employees, it gathers information from those in organisations seeking to enter the Best Companies competition – the sample is thus self-selecting rather than random, and therefore not representative of the UK average. Random surveying is carried out within those organisations who enter, and the sample is sufficiently large to be statistically meaningful; but the self-selected nature of the sample makes it problematic to generalise results any wider than the population of Best Company entrants.

4.1.9 British Social Attitudes

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) carries out a series of annual surveys charting continuity and change in British social, economic, political and moral values in relation to other changes in society. Each year up to 3,600 respondents are asked about their attitudes and opinions on a wide range of issues, some of which are covered every year, others less often.

Questions that have been periodically asked which relate to QWL cover the following topics:

- Working hours – preferences and how hours are decided, whether job has flexible working hours, whether job gives opportunities for lots of leisure time.
- Feelings about work, covering job satisfaction, satisfaction with amount of training and opportunities for promotion, whether proud of type of work done, any desire to change type of work.
- Feelings about organisation – whether would work harder for its success, whether proud to work for current employer, whether would turn down a pay rise elsewhere to stay.
- Autonomy at work – whether can work independently.
- Relevance of past education, work experience and skills, whether these are used, frequency of learning new skills, prospects for advancement.
- Whether job is secure, whether worry about losing it, ease or difficulty of finding another acceptable job, whether seeking a job in the next year.
- Intrinsic value of work – whether job is interesting, whether job helps other people, whether job is useful to society.
- Unpleasant features – whether come home exhausted, whether have to do hard physical work, whether work is stressful or boring, whether working conditions are dangerous.
- Relations between employees at work, relations between employees and managers at work.
- Factors determining fellow workers' rates of pay, whether income is high.

4.1.10 The National Employer Skills Survey

The National Employers Skills Survey (NESS) maps skills shortages and workforce development activity across England. It is an establishment-level telephone survey with management respondents. At the time of writing, the latest NESS was carried out in 2005 and covered just under 75,000 establishments. Previous surveys were carried

out in 2004 and 2003 and earlier related Employer Skills Surveys were conducted in 2002, 2001 and 1999. The 2007 survey is expected to report in mid-2008.

As would be expected given its purpose, there is a limited cross-over with some aspects of QWL – for example, exploring why some vacancies are hard to fill and gathering information on training provision, formalisation of work organisation, and performance assessment procedures.

4.1.11 Work Skills in Britain

This survey measures the skill requirements of jobs and the distribution of broad skills in Britain. It aims to provide evidence on skills trends over time. An explicit aim is to provide a benchmark for comparison with the past and possible future surveys. The series dates back to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Social Change and Economic Life Initiative surveys carried out in 1986 and the Employment in Britain Survey of 1992.

Individuals in employment (between the ages of 20 and 65) are chosen on a random basis and interviewed in their homes about various aspects of their working lives. Some of the areas surveyed are indeed relevant to our understanding of QWL (eg job characteristics, skills and qualifications, work attitudes, work organisation, task discretion, pay, skill changes, past and future perspectives, and demographic data).

4.1.12 The British Household Panel Survey

The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) is carried out by the ESRC UK Longitudinal Studies Centre with the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex. It began in 1991.

The survey aims to increase our understanding of social and economic change at the individual (approximately 10,300) and household (5,500 households) levels in Britain.

Although the focus is more on household than employment issues, some areas of investigation are relevant to the study of QWL. They include, for example, questions relating to aspects of current employment and satisfaction levels (details are collected on the organisation, promotion, education and training, pay and satisfaction with pay, job security, actual work, hours worked and 'all things considered ... how satisfied with present job', likelihood 'over the next 12 months' of a) getting a better job with current employer; b) taking up any work-related training; c) starting a new job with a new employer; or starting up your own business). The survey also goes beyond the current job, asking for information on previous employment and reasons for leaving that employment. A self-completion questionnaire on general mental health is included in the survey.

4.2 EU single country surveys

A number of EU countries publish national QWL surveys. These vary in focus, size, timing and methodology. A small number have been detailed in the section which follows.

4.2.1 Finland

QWL surveys have been used for 25 years in Finland, measuring traditional themes such as absenteeism, gender equality, working hours and workload. Working conditions surveys of 1977 and 1984 became the QWL surveys of 1990, 1997 and 2003. These surveys cover the entire employee population of Finland (salary and wage earners between the ages of 15 and 64) and involve between 3,000 and 6,000 hour long face-to-face interviews.

The surveys have been carried out in connection with rounds of the monthly Labour Force Survey. A set of core questions – physical work environment, psychic and social factors in work environment, health and stress symptoms, labour market position and family and background variables – have been supplemented on each occasion by a special theme. The 1984 survey added questions on technological change, the 1997 survey on time pressure, and the 2003 survey on gender equality, workload, aging, new forms of pay, and absenteeism.

4.2.2 Spain

In Spain, an annual QWL has been carried out since 1999 by the Spanish ministry of labour and social affairs (ECVT).¹ The survey covers approximately 6,000 employees aged 16 or over (based on a random representative national sample stratified by regions and municipal size) and asks factual questions about daily work activities and working relationships, flexibility and type of employment, stress and satisfaction and so forth, in addition to questions about values and attitudes and personal evaluations of work. Interestingly, information is gathered on the employee's family structure, and a reported criteria for participation is that employees 'live in a family setting'. Interviews are carried out face-to-face in the employee's home. Information on 'social capital' and community participation is also gathered.

4.2.3 The Czech Republic

A QWL survey was funded by the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (published by the European Foundation in 2005). This survey was designed by Mercer HR Consulting to capture details of working conditions and employee perceptions of

¹ Requena (2002), *Social Capital in the Spanish Quality of Working Life Survey*, Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2002.

their working conditions. It was designed with the expectation that productivity could be predicted through an awareness of six factors: people; work processes; managerial structure; information and knowledge; decision-making; and rewards. The aim was to create a survey tool that individual companies could also use for monitoring HRM and working conditions at company level.

Face-to-face interviews were carried out in homes with those employed, aged 15 to 69, who had worked for their current employer for a minimum of three months. Quota sampling was used and 2,007 interviews in total were carried out, each lasting 30 minutes.

The survey contained 172 questions and covered work performance, motivation, job satisfaction, internal communication and consultation, resourcing, autonomy (ability to influence the order of tasks, work methods, and speed or rate of work) and the nature of work (monotonous, tedious and tiring, creative thinking required, high degree of expertise required).

Levels of job satisfaction were also gathered (very/fairly) as were various aspects of job satisfaction (organisation of work day; length of working time; working conditions (light, heat, noise); interest of work; relations with direct supervisor; trust between management and employees; managerial competency; workload; same opportunities for men and women; job security; salaries and wages; business information provided by management; social welfare; benefits; training and re-qualification; and opportunities for advancement).

Of note, this survey also asked employees to assess individual aspects according to their importance (eg pay, people you work with, treated with respect, providing good service, nature of work, work-life balance, benefits, bonuses, flexible working arrangements, learning and development, long-term career potential, promotion opportunities) in order to capture key drivers of motivation and commitment.

4.2.4 Others

A variety of other articles and studies detail aspects of QWL in other European countries. Some of these studies use data and theories from other EU countries to explore QWL issues within their own country, others attempt partial comparisons. For example, research published in Sweden¹ emphasises the importance of applying a coherent approach to the concerns of working life, growth, employment and the notion of quality in work, and discusses the elements of the Swedish Government's 'working life policy'. QWL is seen to be influenced by factors relating to the work environment, labour law, work organisation, skills development and learning, diversity and non-discrimination.

¹ *Working Life Policy in a Swedish and European Context* (2001), Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications.

4.3 Non-EU single country surveys

4.3.1 US

Two major national QWL surveys were carried out in the US. A 1977 Quality of Employment Survey was followed by a 2002 General Social Survey (GSS) to assess the quality of work life in America. The GSS is a biannual, nationally representative, personal interview survey of US households conducted by the National Opinion Research Centre and funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). In 2002, the NSF agreed to add a special module proposed by the National Institute for Occupation Health and Safety (NIOSH).

NIOSH produced 76 questions that dealt with a broad range of work organisation issues, such as hours of work, workload, worker autonomy, layoffs and job security, job satisfaction/stress, and worker well-being. Fifty per cent of the questions were taken directly from the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey in order to allow comparisons of worker responses over a 25 year period, measure how work life and the work experience have changed since the earlier Quality of Employment Surveys and establish benchmarks for future surveys. The final dataset contained responses from 2,765 individuals.

Employees were asked to strongly agree to strongly disagree with statements. The details of the areas covered are as follows:

- job level (41 items), eg workload, autonomy, pay/pay equity, skill utilisation, participation, job future, repetitive work, resource adequacy, reward/recognition, skill utilisation, supervisory behaviour, co-worker relations, promotions, variety, occupation, job tenure, training, layoffs, teamwork, role clarity, role conflict, staffing, and health and safety
- culture/climate (11 items)
- safety climate, discrimination, harassment, respect, trust, management relationship
- health outcomes (nine items), eg physical health, mental health and injuries
- other outcomes (six items), eg performance, satisfaction, intent to leave and job commitment
- hours of work (six items)
- work at home, overtime, flexibility
- work/family (four items)
- supervision (three items)
- benefits (one item)
- union (one item).

A number of QWL studies based on particular sectors (eg the IT workforce), regions, and on occupational (eg family physicians) and employee groups (eg women and BMEs) in the US have also been published in addition to numerous QWL-type company-level case studies. Themes explored include job demands, work-family conflict, training opportunities and development activities, career advancement, discrimination, corporate fit, flexibility of work practices, rewards and satisfaction with income, work relationships, influence over management decisions, turnover, job titles and responsibilities, job security and so forth.

4.3.2 Australia

Research conducted in Australia¹ aimed to provide a national benchmark on the QWL issues that concern Australian workers. The Australian Quality of Work Life (AQWL) survey was conducted in June 2001. The survey was conducted by telephone with employees at their home. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents reflecting the national workforce in terms of geography, gender and age. The opinions and attitudes of over 1,000 employed persons aged 15 and over were gathered.

The survey measured workers' perspectives on 14 key items that affect QWL:

- fair and reasonable pay compared to others doing similar work
- concern over losing one's job in the next 12 months
- sexual harassment or discrimination at the workplace
- trust in senior management
- interesting and satisfying work
- people at the workplace getting on together
- recognition of efforts by immediate manager/supervisor
- career prospects over next two years
- amount of control over the way work is done
- health and safety standards at work
- balance between the time spent at work and the time spent with family and friends
- immediate manager/supervisor's treatment of staff
- amount of work to be done

¹ Considine and Callus (2002), *The quality of work life of Australian Employees – the development of an index*, Working paper 73 and various other ACIRRT papers.

- level of stress experienced at work.

Respondents were also asked to define the most important issue impacting on the overall quality of working life to allow the development of an overall QWL index¹ (to take into account small differences in levels of satisfaction and to allow a national benchmark to be created against which different groups within the survey could be measured). QWL differences were found according to organisation size, earnings level, gender, union membership and particularly age (which led the authors to emphasise the life-cycle aspect of QWL and, accordingly, the need for employers to adopt a life-cycle approach to their policies and practices in order to improve QWL perceptions).

QWL, according to those involved in the development of this survey, is a 'dynamic multi-dimensional construct' which goes beyond measuring employees' experiences within a particular organisation and encompasses a wider value set specific to individuals. Walton's eight conceptual categories (reward, health and safety, use and development of human capabilities, growth and security, social integration in work organisation, constitutionalism, work life space, social relevance) informed their thinking.

Our understanding of the AQWL survey is aided by the publication of a number of academic articles considering the survey and the conceptualisation of QWL. Burgess, for example, suggests that the *'measures to include [were] not without controversy'* pointing to the subjectivity of QWL and the absence of a 'prior comparator' in Australia. In a general comment, in line with the UK literature on QWL, he notes that we can *'assess job quality for the job, the individual performing the job, the workplace at which the job is carried out and the organisation in which the workplace is located'* and so the assessment of QWL is *'always going to be subjective and any formal assessment will run up against conceptual, measurement and evaluative problems'*. He also points to some advantages of the AQWL method – it asks employees their views and it encompasses a broader set of experiences beyond the immediate employer.

A variety of case-study, sectoral or occupational studies which explore aspects of QWL in Australia are also available. One example is qualitative research carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2002 exploring QWL for nurses through focus groups in Victoria and New South Wales.² Topics surveyed included work organisation, change/certainty, physical environment, job content, job control, workload and pace, social environment, management and supervision, feedback, participation,

¹ See Considine and Callus (2002): The index is calculated by aggregating sample scores of each of the items and converting each item score to reflect a value out of ten. Each item score was weighted to derive a total index out of 100. For each of the items that were indicated as being the 'most important' to an overall positive work experience, the weightings were doubled for the value of each of the scores. Item scores were then summed to provide an index score out of ten.

² Ellis N and A Pompili (2002), *Quality of Working Life for Nurses*, PWC.

development, promotion, and individual family situations and personality factors. Data was also gathered, for example, on blood pressure, sleep patterns, alcoholism, absenteeism and injury rates, and turnover. Factors which were seen to contribute to job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction were identified in addition to those which were perceived to have the greatest impact on health and well-being (eg relationships at work and levels of autonomy).

4.3.3 Others

A number of other single-country surveys which cover aspects of QWL are also available for analysis. Details are more readily available on the content rather than the sponsorship, timing or sampling strategies employed. The Mexican QWL survey includes factors such as justice, burn-out, empowerment and social embeddedness. The Peruvian QWL survey covers organisational climate, commitment and intention to stay. Brazil has carried out a 'best companies' survey inspired again by Walton's eight conceptual categories. Managers and employers completed a questionnaire (4,000 questionnaires were sent out by the Hay Group to 'companies, chairmen and businessmen all over the country'). Following this, a small number (130 organisations) were chosen and HR managers and employees completed QWL questionnaires. A shortlist of 30 companies was then drawn up and HR policies analysed and in-depth interviews held to complete the competition.

Studies in Japan have investigated the relationship between production strategies and QWL, focusing on the importance of job control. Relevant published research in New Zealand focuses on elements of QWL, eg workplace reform and QWL through the use of company-level case studies exploring work intensification versus greater autonomy and flexibility. A QWL-type telephone survey was also carried out in the Auckland area in 1995, exploring the attitudes of private sector employees towards workplace change (including pay, terms and conditions, and training provision). In Canada, published research¹ drawing from Statistics Canada, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, the Survey of Work Arrangements, the General Social Survey and the National Population Health Survey discusses 'good work' and criticises the emphasis in Canada on the labour market rather than the work environment. The paper outlines seven key dimensions of job quality (pay, benefits, satisfaction with hours of work, work schedules, job security, physical well-being at work, the human/social work environment) and notes trends and the availability of indicators for each of these factors.

¹ Jackson A and P Kumar (1998), *Measuring and Monitoring the Quality of Jobs and the Work Environment in Canada*. Centre for the Study of Living Standards Conference. Jackson has also published studies looking at the unhealthy workplace and working conditions as determinants of health.

Finally, as in the UK, many small-scale studies have been published on aspects of QWL such as the impact of long working hours, occupational stress, work-life balance and flexibility.

4.4 Comparative surveys

4.4.1 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

The European Foundation publishes a wide range of information on aspects of working life relevant to the study of QWL. Some of their publications are based on original empirical research (for example, the European Working Conditions Surveys [EWCS] series) and some based on national reports of workplace trends across the EU or on the analysis of EU data sources.

A recent report 'Quality in Work and Employment', for example, gives an overview of EU-level data on four dimensions of quality in work and employment which they consider to be 'key': career and employment security, health and well-being, skills development, and work-life balance. Data is analysed from the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), the European Community Household Panel, the EWCS, Continuing Vocational Training Survey, European Statistics on Accidents at Work, the General Population Survey and specific data collections provided by Eurostat. The limitations of the study reflect the limitations of the datasets and the emphasis is on factual or objective aspects of QWL rather than employee perceptions of QWL.

The European Working Conditions Surveys constitute an important series on QWL in EU member states. Surveys have been carried out in 1990/1991, 1995/1996, 2000 and 2005, based on interviews with over 30,000 individuals in employment. Interviews are face-to-face and currently with 1,000 employees (a representative sample of the total active population) in each of the EU25 (600 in five smaller member states).

The questionnaire is detailed and gathers information on a variety of issues including: household data; nationality; title of main paid job; how old when stopped full-time education; years in paid employment since; years in company; employment contract and its duration; activity of company; number of employees; number of staff under the respondent's supervision; hours worked; days per week; workplace hazards; working environment; travel to work; night and weekend working; contentment with employment status/hours; shifts and how arrangements are set etc.; fit with family and social commitments; repetitiveness of tasks; high speed, tight deadlines; outside of control; interruptions; monotony; learning new things; precise quality standards; decision-making/problem-solving; self-choose order of tasks; methods of work and work rate/speed; sufficient time; support; apply own ideas; intellectually demanding; emotionally demanding; decide own breaks and days/holidays off; get the feeling of work well done; skills required; division of tasks; team work; fit of skills; training received in past 12 months; discrimination, threats or harassment in past 12 months;

performance assessment; boss a man or woman; perception of risk to health and safety and how health affected; absence; very satisfied, satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with working conditions in your main paid job; might lose job; well paid for work done; good prospects for career advancement; feel at home in organisation; opportunity to learn and grow; very good friends at work; income and what remuneration includes. It can be seen that the survey captures factual data and attitudinal data.

A number of other surveys are also of relevance, for example, a recent survey on Living Conditions and Quality of Life in 28 European countries which includes aspects of QWL broadly defined and their Employee Direct Participation in Organisational Change (EPOC) surveys which examine direct participation in organisations (albeit with managers as respondents). The European Foundation also operates a European monitoring centre on change which focuses on employment, skills, management and work organisation issues during restructuring and EurLife – an interactive database on living conditions and quality of life in Europe which draws from data gathered by the Foundation's own surveys and from other published sources. Information is available in EurLife on issues such as hours of work, control over work, job satisfaction and security, skills, education levels and so forth. Finally, they also operate a European industrial relations observatory (EIRO) online which provides regular news and analysis on national and EU-level developments (eg on skills, human capital and work organisation).

4.4.2. Work Orientations II, 1997, from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) is a continuing annual programme of cross-national collaboration on surveys covering topics important for social science research. In the second survey on this topic (the first took place in 1989), a large number of countries participated. These included Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.

The work orientations module focused on the areas of general attitudes toward work and leisure, work organisation, and work content. Respondents' views were sought on issues such as their preferences for more work or more leisure time, the value of work in general, and how important factors such as job security, high income, opportunities for advancement, job interest, independence, and value to others were to the respondent. Other questions focused on what factors should determine how to pay two people doing the same kind of work, the effects the introduction of new technologies (computers, robots, etc.) would have on the workplace, attitudes about self-employment, size of the workplace, public versus private sector employment, and full-time versus part-time work. Respondents were also asked how easy or difficult it would be to find an acceptable job, how they felt about their present job, and how

they viewed their working conditions (eg if they came home exhausted from work, amount of stress and possible danger on the job, working hours, place of work, whether their status was temporary or permanent, how their present job made use of their skills, and how they acquired these skills). Additional questions elicited information on relations in the workplace between management and employees and between workmates, how satisfied respondents were with their job, how they felt about their organisation, how many days they had been absent (excluding vacation) from work in the past six months, how likely it was that they would try to find a new job within the next 12 months, and how much they worried about the possibility of losing their job. A special group of questions focused on respondents who were not currently employed. Demographic variables include age, sex, education, marital status, personal and family income, employment status, household size and composition, occupation, religion and church attendance, social class, union membership, political party, voting history, size of community, region and ethnicity.

4.5 Mapping existing QWL surveys

The chart below provides a visual reminder of the scope of the major UK surveys of aspects of QWL against the dimensions of the IES QWL model.

Table 4.1: Mapping major surveys of aspects of QWL in UK against IES QWL model

Survey	Working conditions (and work environment)	Rewards (and fairness)	Skills and prospects	Relations at work	Nature of work	Organisation of work	Management	Leadership (and the organisation)
CIPD					Some coverage	Some coverage	Good coverage	Good coverage
CIM				Some coverage	Some coverage	Some coverage	Good coverage	Good coverage
WERS	Some coverage	Good coverage	Some coverage	Good coverage	Good coverage	Good coverage	Good coverage	Some coverage
Best Companies	Good coverage	Good coverage	Good coverage	Good coverage			Good coverage	Good coverage
NESS						Some coverage		
Work Skills in Britain		Some coverage	Good coverage		Good coverage	Some coverage		
European Working Conditions Surveys	Some coverage	Some coverage	Some coverage	Some coverage	Some coverage	Some coverage	Some coverage	Some coverage

Good coverage	Good coverage
Some coverage	Some coverage
Little or no coverage	Little or no coverage

Source: IES, 2008

5 Operationalising the QWL Survey

An aim of this study was to develop a new bespoke QWL survey tool. In devising this questionnaire, thought was given to the longer-term operationalising of the survey as the chosen mode inevitably impacts upon the ideal form and structure of the questionnaire devised.

This chapter describes the initial phases of developing a pilot questionnaire and considerations regarding the longer-term survey process and generation of a sample.

5.1 The questionnaire

The final pilot questionnaire was based upon the IES QWL conceptual construct detailed earlier which is, in turn, informed by the literature and survey data available. On a seven page questionnaire, employees were asked to provide information on length of service, sector, employer, number in workplace, job title, aspects of job, contracted and actual hours of work, overtime, leave, absence, trade union status and various personal characteristics. Respondents were then asked to agree or disagree (using a five-point scale) with a range of positive and negative statements about their relationships at work, their working conditions, their skills and prospects and so forth.

Both paper-based and online approaches were initially considered. However, in both cases it was considered that it would be difficult to generate the desired random sample of working adults without risking very low response rates. If the survey was being conducted among a closed population (eg employees within an organisation), such modes would have been considered more appropriate.

Thought was also given to a face-to-face option. Although effective for this type of survey and likely to achieve the best response rate, it was not thought that a face-to-face approach was likely to be financially feasible. A decision was therefore taken to pilot a telephone survey. The questionnaire was accordingly developed for such an approach.

5.2 Survey process

In examining the feasibility of conducting the survey with a nationally representative sample of employed adults¹, IES approached two organisations (Ipsos-MORI and the National Centre for Social Research – NatCen) and had discussions about how best to develop a sample and conduct the survey.

Both organisation run ‘Omnibus surveys’, ie regularly conducted surveys of the population which ask a standard set of classificatory questions and then a range of other questions which will vary depending on the interests of those who have bought space in the survey. Some form of omnibus survey could be used to:

- a. generate a sample of employed adults who would be willing to take part in the survey, although the cumulative response rates can diminish as respondents have to agree to be re-contacted and then respond to the follow-up interview
- b. operate as a vehicle for asking the questions directly (perhaps over a number of survey waves), but there might be a restriction in length (maximum 15 minutes).

5.2.1 Ipsos-MORI

Ipsos-MORI run a series of omnibus surveys which could be appropriate:

- **Face-to-Face Capibus** – runs every week and has a sample size of 2,000 GB adults (aged 15+). The approximate penetration of people who work is 50 per cent.
- **Telephone Omnibus** – also weekly but the sample size is 1,000 rather than 2,000, so it would take twice as long to get the numbers as the Capibus.
- **A face-to-face omnibus** – run monthly among 2,000 GB adults.

5.2.2 NatCen

The NatCen Omnibus is run every month and is based on a random probability sample design, the favoured approach for high quality government social surveys. Each wave has an achieved random sample of around 1,600 adults aged 16 or more in Great Britain (including an estimated 750 employees). The questionnaire includes a core set of socio-demographic classification questions (including age; gender; ethnicity; employment status; occupation; workplace sector; hours of work and income). These are largely based around the harmonised questions and concepts and include standard employment questions and SOC coding.

¹ We are proposing to exclude the self-employed.

5.3 Sample size

We roughly estimate that the minimum number required to achieve a nationally representative sample would be 1,000 (which would give a maximum error of around 3.1 per cent at 95 per cent confidence limits). The problem with a sample of this size is breaking it down to small units; thus analysis by ten sectors would reduce the reliability significantly (to plus or minus 14 per cent). A sample of 5,000 would reduce the overall maximum error to 1.4 per cent (with an error rate of 6.42 per cent if splitting the sample in ten).

5.4 Timescale

The lead-in time to these surveys is quite short (ie a couple of weeks) but obviously it would take longer to generate a sample and run a stand-alone survey.

5.5 Alternative ways to generate a sample

Other possible ways to generate a sample include:

- Random Digit Dialling – using a telephone methodology to randomly contact people, select those who are in work and ask if they would be willing to carry out a short interview. There may be a potential sample bias with this method (ie towards people who have telephones, answer the telephone at the time contacted and are willing to take part in the survey).
- Using an existing database of employees – although the availability of an up-to-date source which could be representative of a population of employees may be problematic.

5.6 Piloting

A pilot phase was designed to test the feasibility of using the QWL questionnaire outlined above with a random selection of employed adults.

An initial option was to pilot the questionnaire through one of the Omnibus surveys outlined above. However, the set-up costs were considered to be prohibitive, ie to develop a CATI script. A decision was therefore taken to conduct a pilot over the telephone using paper-based questionnaires (with the data then entered into Excel/SPSS for analysis).

IES proposed that 100 pilot interviews be conducted using a research firm, Employment Research, with whom IES has a long-standing working relationship. Details of the piloting phase and the outcomes in relation to the survey process and the QWL survey tool are outlined in the chapter which follows.

6 Piloting the QWL Survey

This chapter describes the piloting phase. The aims of this phase were:

- to test the process of conducting the survey by telephone and highlight any difficulties
- to briefly explore the results of the survey carried out amongst 100 employees in terms of key themes/findings
- to check the robustness of the QWL questionnaire devised and consider any changes to the pilot questionnaire.

6.1 The pilot process

6.1.1 Response details

Employment Research used CPM Mailing to provide a database of 2,000 contacts.¹ The overall response rate was 15 per cent but this increased to about 30 per cent once pensioner households and incorrect numbers were removed from the sample. Based on this Employment Research estimate, a response rate of approximately 40 per cent may be achievable if inappropriate households were to be removed.²

6.1.2 Interview schedule

Overall, Employment Research reported that the survey went well with few issues or problems. The majority of questions were answered and felt to be understood. Where,

¹ This was the home telephone numbers of all the population. An alternative was 20-55 age groups but it was felt this would exclude important groups from this pilot phase.

² A caution was that response was biased towards older women (who tended to answer the telephone) and so if this approach was to be adopted, a quota sampling approach by gender and age group would be advisable.

for example, respondents did not disclose an actual salary level, they were willing to place their salary within a given band.

It was felt that it was slightly more time-consuming achieving an interview than originally expected by Employment Research but the interviews themselves were slightly shorter than the 15 minutes planned (13 minutes on average). An issue of note was that most interviews needed to be carried out in the evening or at weekends.

6.1.3 Issues arising from administration of questionnaire

Interviewers at Employment Research reported just a small number of issues with the administering of questionnaires. It was felt that there were too many attitude statements and that respondent fatigue became an issue towards the end of the questionnaire. Those carrying out the telephone interviews would also have liked more 'don't know' or 'refused' options available on the questionnaire.

Comments/recommendations in relation to specific questions were:

- Annual leave entitlement and sickness absence for those working part-time could be misunderstood and could be clarified. For example, if off sick for one month, how does this translate into number of days for part-time?
- Options for question: What is the average total time you spend travelling both to and from work every day (where this varies)?
- A not applicable/refused option for the attitude statements if, for example, the interviewee works alone regularly, is about to leave their job or has only recently started.

Issues which have arisen from the IES analysis of the results of the questionnaire are elaborated upon in the Technical Note contained in Appendix 1.

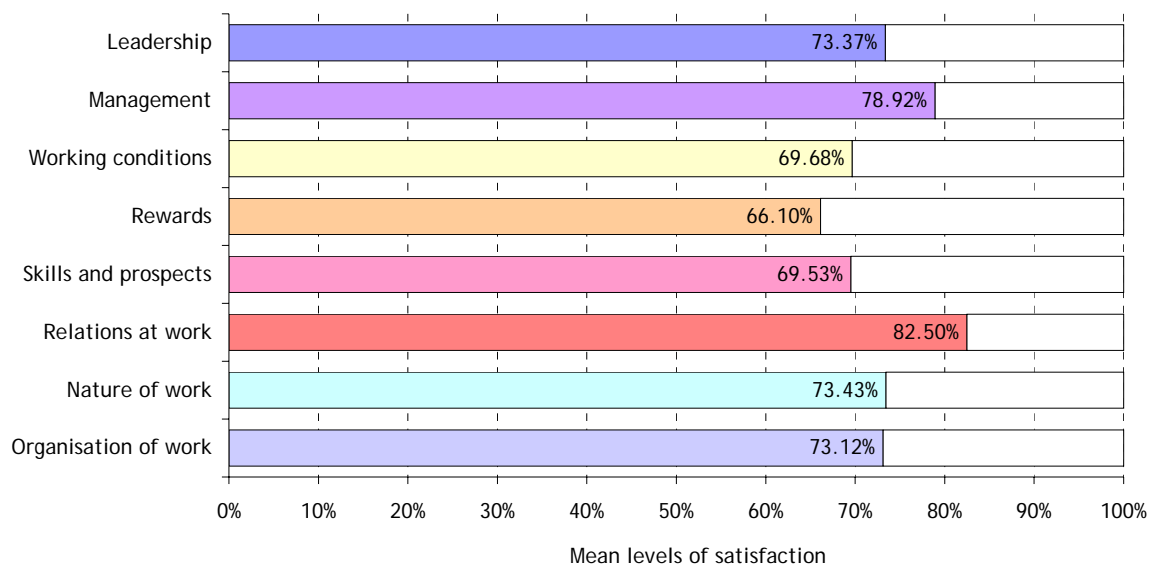
6.2 Key themes from the results

Results from the pilot survey were analysed to explore two fundamental questions: the first was 'What does QWL look like?'; the second was 'Who has a good QWL?' Given a larger and more representative sample, numerous interesting areas of analysis potentially open up. Some relevant QWL literature and survey data and their conclusions could be interrogated and the concept of QWL better refined. Differences in QWL perceptions according to gender, pay, sector and so forth could also be examined in a more robust way. Ultimately, as envisaged in the original aims of this project, policy makers and employers could gain a tool to aid the measurement and improvement of QWL.

The sections which follow outline the results which emerged from the pilot survey. As the questionnaire was piloted amongst only 100 employees in the UK, these findings should be interpreted with some care.

Overall, good levels of satisfaction with all the dimensions of QWL were found amongst the 100 respondents. A relatively higher level of satisfaction was perceived amongst women, those on higher salaries, those not in trade unions and those in smaller organisations. The figure below shows how levels of satisfaction varied by dimension: although all values are quite high, respondents seemed to be most positive about relations at work with colleagues and managers and least positive about pay and benefits, skill development and utilisation and with work conditions and the quality of their working environment.¹

Figure 6.1: QWL satisfaction rates of 100 pilot respondents



Source: IES, 2008

6.2.1 Note on the QWL index

In order to aid presentation and understanding of the overall results, a QWL index was produced by creating a cumulative score of the items on the questionnaire that created variables measuring aspects of the quality of working life. Since there were 47 questions on a five-point Likert scale, the maximum value for the QWL index was 235. As categories of questions did not have exactly equal weighting in the questionnaire (due to different numbers of questions), it was preferable to keep this quality of life index score cumulative. This way, each question had an equal contribution to the QWL index regardless of category.

The QWL index was made up of eight categories (and one sub-category) believed to represent the most important constituents of QWL as identified in the literature (see

¹ To present these results, percentage scores were calculated instead of using an index value, due to there being an uneven number of questions in each category. By calculating a mean percentage score for the questions of each category, a basis of comparison between categories was possible.

Chapter 3 on Conceptualising QWL).¹ Due to missing values on some of the questions it was only possible to derive an accumulative QWL score for 85 of the 100 participants (without replacing missing values). However, no item particularly stood out as generating non-responses, with at least a 95 per cent response rate on all questions and a significant majority generating 100 per cent response rates. The range of the QWL index was between 118 and 229, with a standard deviation of 23.93 and a mean of 165.28.

6.2.2 The sample

The pilot sample consisted of 100 participants, of which 56 per cent were male and 44 per cent female. The majority worked within the private sector. The age range was between 20 and 66 with a mean age of 48.3.

The mean salary was between £20,000 and £29,999 (constituting 28 per cent of the sample). Another 28 per cent earned between £10,000 and £19,999. Two per cent of the sample were in the highest salary band of £70,000 or more. Only 56 per cent of respondents were prepared to state their salary directly, although only four per cent refused to give a band indication of salary.

6.2.3 Key findings

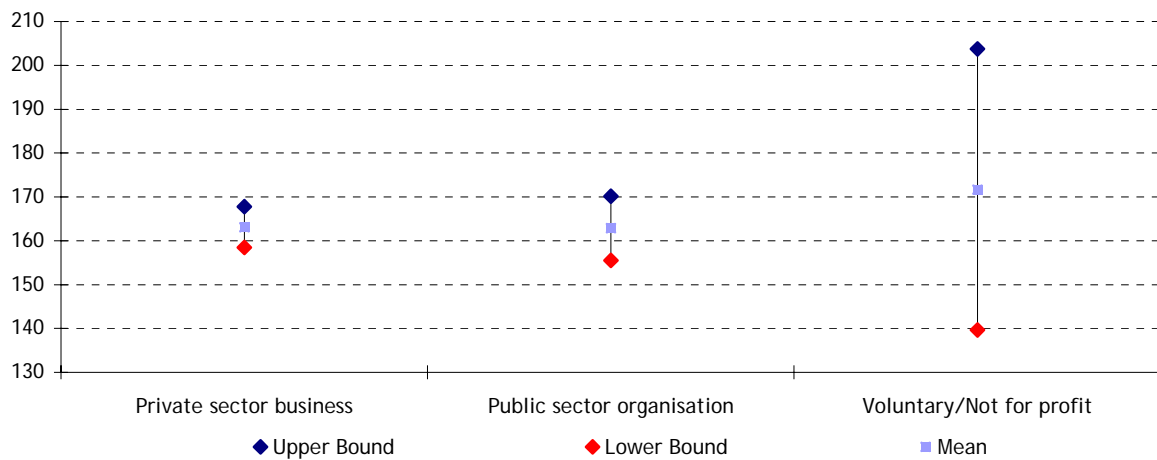
Due to a relatively small sample size and the diversity of the questionnaire, there were few *significant* findings that distinguished groups on the basis of demographics or discriminating questions in relation to an overall quality of working life measure. There were, however, some interesting observable differences between particular groups/organisations and the overall quality of working life score as detailed briefly below.

Type of organisation

There was very little difference and certainly no significant difference between mean scores in quality of working life between private and public sector groups. It appears that there may be a better quality of working life for people that work within voluntary and not-for-profit organisations but this cannot be discerned due to the small number of people in that group (N=3).

¹ These included: 'Autonomy/Responsibility/Control' (six questions); 'Pay and Benefits' (two questions); 'Leadership' (six questions); 'Workplace Relations' (four questions); 'Nature of Work' (five questions); 'Work-life Balance' (this was conceptualised as a sub-set of working conditions and contains five questions); 'Working Conditions' (four questions); 'Manager' (seven questions); 'Training/Development/Career' (four questions); and checking questions on 'Quality of Life' (two questions) and 'Quality of Working Life' (two questions).

Figure 6.2: Type of employer

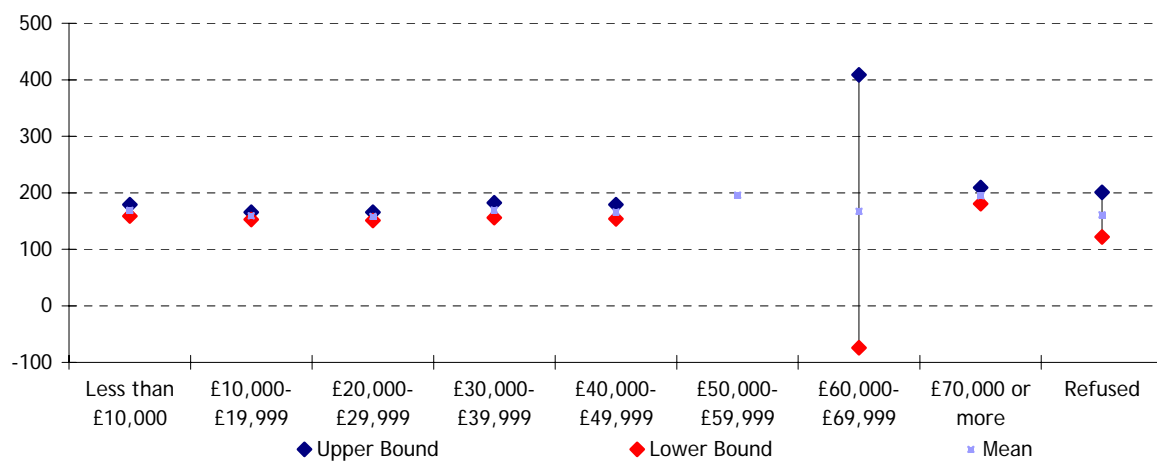


Source: IES, 2008

Salary

It would appear that, in general, there is a trend between reported quality of working life and increasing salary level, with those working within some of the higher salary bands above £50,000 indicating a QWL score noticeably above the mean (171) compared with those receiving lower salaries. This effect is not significant, but again this is probably due to the small sample size of the pilot.

Figure 6.3: Salary

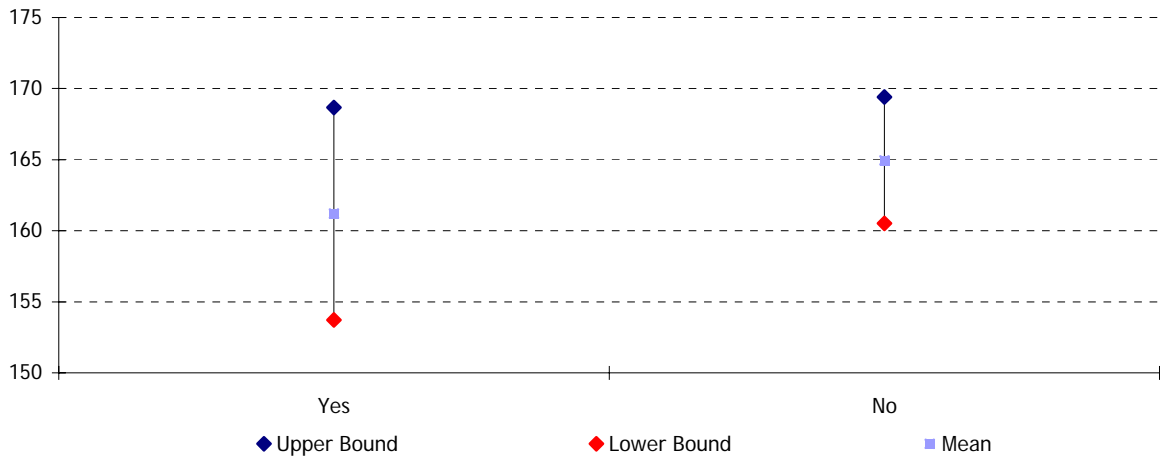


Source: IES, 2008

Membership of trade unions

Looking at the responses, it would appear that being a member of a trade union slightly decreases the perceived quality of working life. Again, this finding may become significant with a more appropriate sample size.

Figure 6.4: Member of trade union

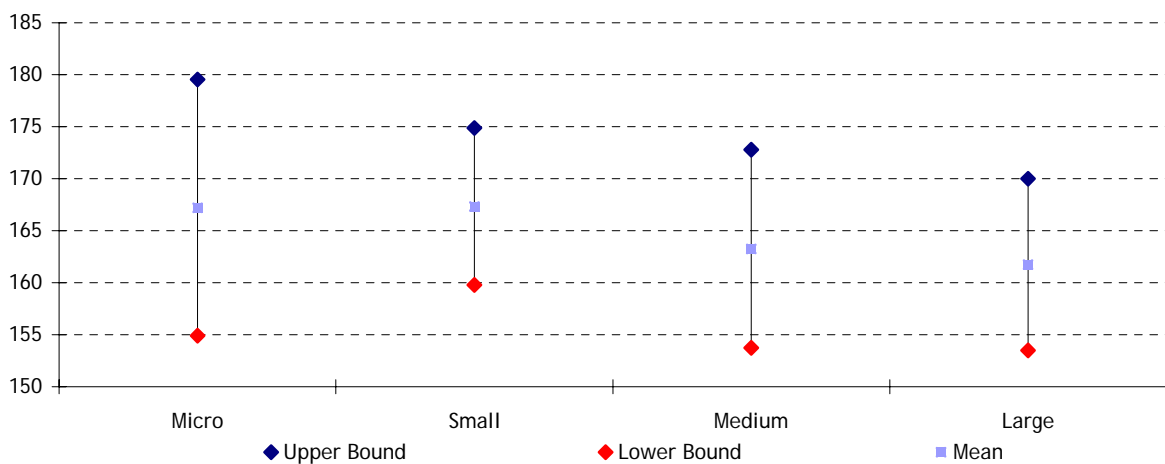


Source: IES, 2008

Size of organisation

Although not significant, it is suggested there is a more positive experience of work in micro or small organisations (0-49) compared with medium or large organisations (250+).

Figure 6.5: Size of organisation



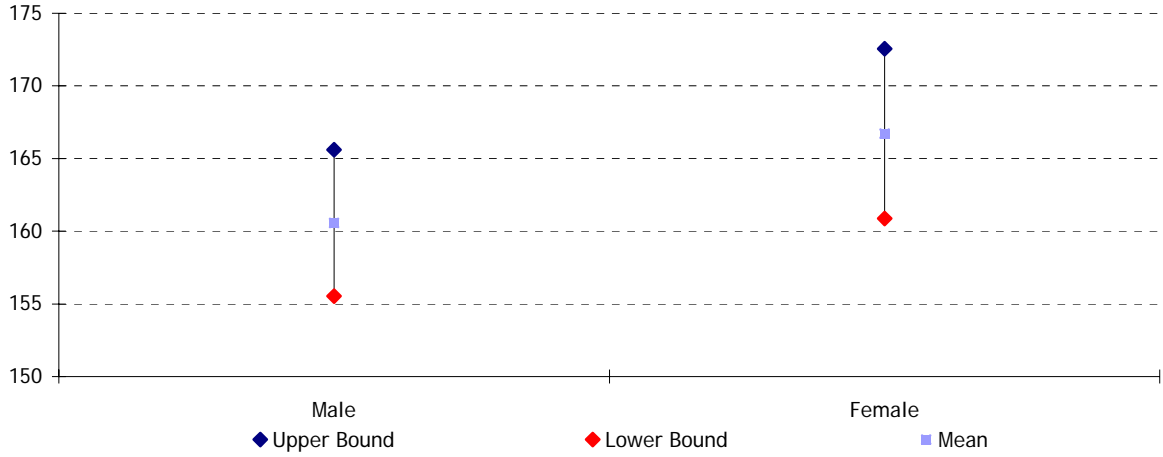
Source: IES, 2008

Gender differences

From the pilot sample it would seem that there may be a difference between the experience of the quality of working life for men and women. It can be seen that women report a better quality of working life than do men as measured by the QWL index. It may be worth investigating this area further to see if it is the type of work,

number of hours worked, or simply a different experience of similar working environments that produces this difference.

Figure 6.6: Gender



Source: IES, 2008

Number of hours worked

Interestingly, there was no discernable pattern to the effect of number of hours either contracted or actually worked on the QWL index. This is probably due to the sample size limiting the potential to observe any kind of trend or significance to this kind of correlation. The question was broken down into contracted and actual hours worked per week. Examining the discrepancy between these two and effect on QWL may be an interesting area to explore on a larger scale.

7 Concluding Remarks

This concluding chapter briefly outlines the implications of the pilot survey in terms of the content of the questionnaire and the quality of the underpinning theoretical model. A final section considers the development of a QWL index.

7.1 Quality of the QWL questionnaire

Overall, the QWL pilot questionnaire operated well. In terms of administering the questionnaire it was seen to be successful on aspects of timing, flow, comprehension, and response and completion rates. It was felt that the questionnaire would, however, benefit from fewer attitudinal questions and some minor amendments to clarify the collection of data by telephone, and both of these aspects deserve some further attention.

A number of statistical tests were carried out to explore the relationships arising from the pilot findings and to examine the robustness of the questionnaire and its underlying conceptual framework (see Technical Note in Appendix 1). Attention is drawn in this detailed technical section to aspects of the questionnaire which may need further refining and clarifying; for example, it is suggested that the 'ease of travel to work' question be re-phrased. However, it is important to exercise caution given the relatively small pilot sample size; thus, careful consideration of the implications of this analysis is necessary. The analysis carried out upon the results also points to interesting areas of investigation in any future survey work in this area.

7.2 Quality of the QWL model

A further aim of piloting the questionnaire was to assess the quality of the QWL dimensions contained in our conceptualisation. As detailed earlier, these dimensions were informed by the literature and data available in the field which asserts that certain aspects, eg pay, work-life balance and so forth will be relevant in influencing QWL and thus need to be captured in order to understand or rate QWL.

The analysis of the results of the pilot did allow an initial consideration of the dimensions of QWL. Overall, the factors identified were seen to bear a reasonable resemblance to the categories originally identified. The small sample size would have played a part in the non-significance of some of the demographic findings and the mean age of the sample was skewed towards older workers, so may not be entirely representative of the working population. Of the original categories relating to the QWL index, most of them proved to be reliably measuring an independent dimension of the quality of working life, at least after the possible removal of certain variables from the scale.

Some elements within each dimension were seen to overlap (for example, between the nature of work and the organisation of work) and some dimensions were strongly related (for example, management and leadership). These are not surprising findings and may be useful as triggers for further analysis and research rather than dismissed as flaws. The manager may indeed act as the proxy for the leaders of some organisations and it may be difficult in practice to disentangle the elements of various related dimensions. Instead it is suggested that this model remains a working one which adequately covers (and through the pilot questionnaire captures) the researched elements of QWL.

There is an important relationship between the survey tool and the survey model which underpins and informs it. It is important to capture the complexity of QWL and to fully explore the questions raised by this relationship between concept and evidence. Further analysis of the most recent thinking and findings on these dimensions and the elements contained within them would be useful in the future, and essential before any radical revision of the proposed QWL model.

7.3 A QWL index?

This study aimed to improve our theoretical understanding of QWL and, in time, the QWL evidence base. It also aimed to allow a better understanding of the nature and components of QWL according to the perceptions of employees in British workplaces, and to explore the relationship between QWL and demographic factors to see what might influence QWL and where QWL might reside. It was originally envisaged that a robust survey tool could be developed that could be used to inform policy and practice at national and company level and over time.

In order to achieve some of these goals – benchmarking QWL, capturing QWL over time, and facilitating comparison by sector, salary etc. – we have presented the findings of the pilot survey in index scores and recommend that further consideration be given to the development of an appropriate and readily-understood QWL index in future work.

Appendix 1: Technical Note

This note details findings from reliability and factor analysis tests on the results of the pilot questionnaire and contains some observations regarding the improvement of the questionnaire. It is important to note that these have been conducted using a small sample and so the results that follow can only indicate possible areas of weakness.

Quality of rating

All respondents were asked to rate the attitudinal statements in the QWL questionnaire using a five-point Likert-scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. From examining the frequency responses, it appears all the questions within the sample had a reasonably diverse distribution, without too much clustering around any particular response in any question.

Reliability of prospective scales

To examine whether the theoretically based constructs that produced the categories within the QWL index were valid in practice, reliability tests were run on the sub-scales. There were eight dimensions with a further sub-dimension – work-life balance – which was conceptualised as largely contractually based and a subset/aspect of working conditions in the QWL model but treated separately for this reliability analysis because of the relative size of the sub-category and in order that the robustness of the sub-category be explored:¹

- organisation of work (six questions)
- rewards (two questions)
- leadership (six questions)

¹ Work-life balance was seen to relate to 'nature of work' and 'organisation of work' dimensions in addition to 'working conditions' dimensions in this analysis. See 'Factor 2' below.

- relations at work (four questions)
- nature of work (five questions)
- work-life balance (five questions)
- working conditions (four questions)
- management (seven questions)
- skills and prospects (four questions).

Additionally, two sets of two checking questions formed part of the questionnaire that related to 'quality of working life' directly and 'quality of life' in general.

Reliability of initial scales

Organisation of work

This scale consisted of six items and a Cronbach's alpha score¹ of 0.757 was recorded, which indicates good inter-reliability of the scale. This could not be improved by the deletion of any items on the scale and is thought to be a good indication that the scale reliably measures the same variable.

Reward

The Cronbach's alpha score of 0.674 is reasonable as there were only two items. The factor analysis confirmed the plausibility of this scale as it identified the two questions relating to pay and benefits as stemming from the same underlying, unique factor. This will be discussed in more detail later in the analysis.

Leadership

The six questions that comprised the scale of leadership within the QWL index produced a Cronbach's alpha reliability score of 0.776 and therefore it can be confirmed that these items are appropriately grouped together and measure a consistent variable. However, it is notable that if the question: 'I feel my work makes a positive difference to society' was removed, the reliability of the scale improves to 0.816.

¹ The Cronbach's alpha rating gives an indication as to whether the items on a scale are correlated closely in terms of generating a similar pattern of responses and hence believed to be measuring the same underlying variable. A value of around 0.7 to 0.8 is generally considered acceptable, but it has been argued that this could be reduced to 0.65 (Field, 2005). It is worth noting that the number of items in a scale increases the potential for a high alpha rating, so an acceptable value for some of the following scales may be even lower than 0.65.

Relations at work

The Cronbach's alpha score of 0.548 suggests that there is some indication that these questions pertain to the same variable, but this is not reliably certain. Whilst the score is not particularly high it should be noted that there are only four items within it and the sample studied is relatively small (N=100). It is also worth noting that the two positively phrased questions, 'I can rely on my colleagues to help me out at work' and 'I enjoy good relationships with my colleagues' were more closely correlated to each other than the questions that addressed discrimination, 'I am treated unfairly at work' and 'My work environment is free from harassment and bullying'.

Nature of work

Initially, the alpha reliability score for this scale of 0.446 is low and implies that there may not be a reliable linkage between items. However, if the question: 'I find my work boring' is removed from the scale, Cronbach's alpha improves to 0.690. It is therefore fairly certain from the results of this pilot sample that 'I find my work boring' is not correlated with the 'nature of work' category of items within the QWL index and could be re-phrased to better capture the monotony of tasks or possibly placed within another dimension for analysis.

Work-life balance

The reliability score for this sub-scale is particularly low with an alpha score of 0.32. This improves to a score of 0.45 if the question 'I can choose to work from home if I want to' is removed; it is further improved to 0.573 if the question 'I find it easy to travel to work' are removed. This leaves a three-item scale consisting of: 'I find it difficult to balance my work and home life', 'my personal life suffers because of my work responsibilities', and 'I can change my working hours when I need to'. The relationship between these remaining variables seems fairly intuitive and oriented towards the flexibility of work and effects on life, whereas, 'I find it easy to travel to work' and 'I can work from home if I want to' are more directed towards external parameters of work-life balance. However, to remove two of five items on the scale and still remain with a fairly unconvincing alpha score suggests that this sub-category may need revising.

Working conditions

The working conditions category had an inter-reliability score of 0.586. This was significantly improved if the question, 'I feel secure in my job' was removed from the scale to give a reliability score of 0.647, with the three remaining items.

Management

This scale had a very good reliability score of 0.897, which indicates that all the items closely resembled all the others in terms of the responses generated and it is therefore assumed that all items related to the same variable. This scale consisted of six items and would not be improved by the removal of any of the questions.

Skills and prospects

This scale had a Cronbach's alpha reliability score of 0.561, which could not be improved through the removal of any of the four items. This does not constitute a strong indication that the scale is reliably measuring the same variable but there is some evidence that the items are related.

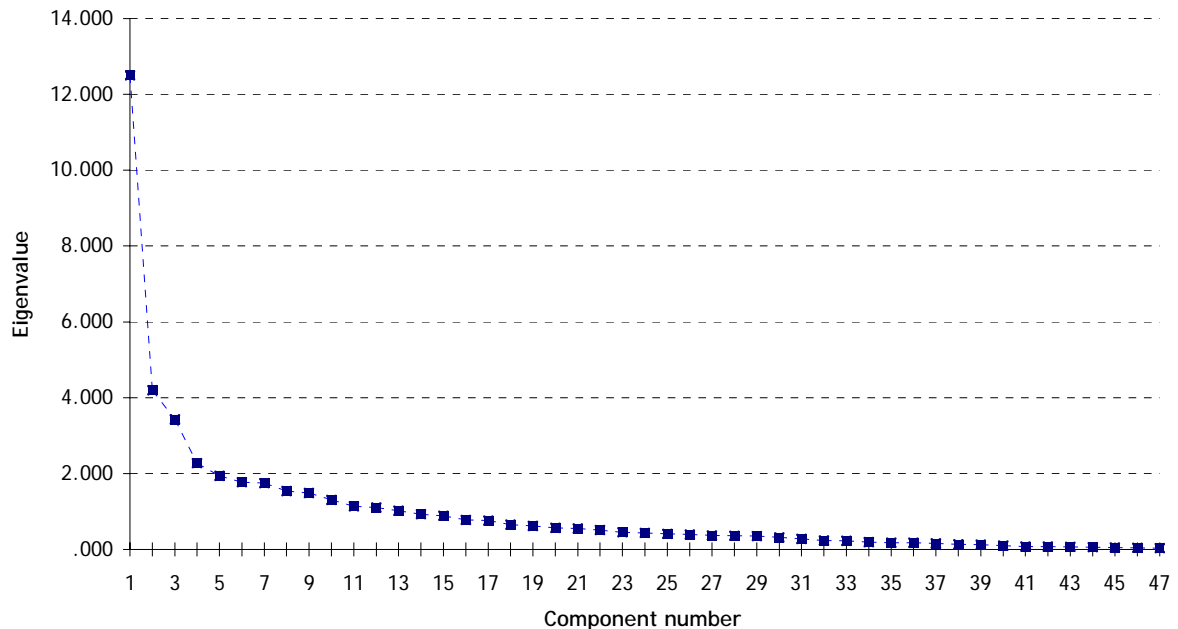
Exploratory factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was carried out to see which variables clustered together within the QWL scale. This served two purposes. The first was to explore the suitability of the existing theoretical categories used, since not all the categories originally posited resembled strongly identifiable scales in the reliability tests. The second purpose, which is intrinsically linked to the first, was to determine whether the groupings of variables that constituted principal components created alternative meanings or categories to those originally identified. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy statistic of 0.748 indicates that factor analysis was appropriate as the patterns of correlations should be relatively compact. Effectively, this statistic indicates that each variable contributed relatively uniquely to each corresponding component identified in the factor analysis, rather than correlating with lots of components at once. Therefore, each factor identified is relatively distinct in its contribution to the quality of working life from any of the other factors and something meaningful can be said about it.

Through an initial examination of the Scree Plot (Figure A1.1), the factor analysis revealed that the 47 variables broke down into at least five factors. The number of identifiable factors is distinctly larger (N=13) if the alternative criteria of taking any factor with an Eigen value larger than one is used. Therefore, it could be said fairly conclusively that there are somewhere between 5 and 13 factors that constitute separate categories in the 'QWL index' within this sample. However, a more thorough examination of the Scree Plot reveals there is a noticeable drop-off in the proportionate variance of responses accounted for in the dataset after five factors are identified, with a further dip in variance explained after seven factors have been identified. As the initial mapping of the QWL index consisted of eight categories identified from the literature, the recognition of seven distinct factors from the principal components analysis is plausible and appears appropriate from the Scree Plot. However, to determine whether the categories initially identified bear any

resemblance to the seven factors identified in the principle component analysis, some more detail is required.

Figure A1.1: Scree plot



Source: IES, 2008

Factor 1: Management-leadership-values

The first and most influential factor identified as a component of the variance in the QWL index is labelled 'management-leadership-values', which is explained below. It consisted of the following questions, with the original category labels identified:

- My manager supports me when things go wrong (management).
- My manager treats me with respect (management).
- I respect my manager (management).
- My manager discriminates against me (inverse – management).
- I have a poor working relationship with my manager (inverse – management).
- My manager encourages me to do well in my role (management).
- I have confidence in the leaders of my organisation (leadership).
- My manager lets me know how I am doing in my job (management).
- My work environment is free from harassment and bullying (relations at work).
- I share the values of the organisation I work for (leadership).

These nine questions have a Cronbach's alpha reliability rating of 0.885, indicating that they are successfully measuring the same underlying factor. As most of the items that load onto this factor were initially identified within the 'management' category of questions, this factor adds more credence to the original category labelling and supports the literature that created it. However, what is interesting is the specific meaning that the other items loading onto this factor give this 'management' category.

Factor 2: Work pressures and the individual (work-life balance)

The second strongest factor that was identified as a component of the quality of working life in this sample is labelled 'work pressure', as the items are thought to be strongly related to aspects of this. The reliability of these items if taken as a scale is 0.792 and is a good indication they are reliably measuring the same variable. The items on this factor consist of:

- I do not have enough time to complete my workload (nature of work).
- The pace of my work is too fast (nature of work).
- My personal life suffers because of my work responsibilities (work-life balance).
- I feel unable to cope with the pressure at work (nature of work).
- I find it difficult to balance my work and home life (work-life balance).
- My work has a negative impact on my health (working conditions).

It can be seen that this factor relates to the 'nature of work' original category labelling, but that the meaning of this factor specifically relates to the experience of highly pressurised work environments and the subsequent effects on health and work-life balance. Although the reliability rating for the sub-category 'work-life balance' was poor, when these questions are placed in a relevant context in this factor loading, they become significant and meaningful: 'my personal life suffers because of my work responsibilities'.

Factor 3: Autonomy-fulfilment

The third factor identified relates to autonomy and the capacity to experience fulfilment through working life. Although not all of the items came from the autonomy (an element of the organisation of work) category of quality of working life, there are several items from it that load onto the factor, and the items from other categories are similarly related to aspects of the autonomy concept. If treated as a scale, this grouping has a reliability rating of 0.830 that indicates all the items are measuring a similar underlying variable. The items that loaded onto this factor are as follows:

- I get a feeling of accomplishment in my job (nature of work).

-
- I feel able to voice my ideas and opinions (organisation of work).
 - I can be creative in my work (organisation of work).
 - I use my abilities fully at work (skills and prospects).
 - I regularly have the opportunity to use my skills (skills and prospects).
 - I have enough choice over the order of my tasks (organisation of work).
 - I find my work boring (inverse – nature of work).
 - I get a chance to develop new ways of working (organisation of work).

Looking at this list of variables, it can be seen that the 'nature of work' and the extent to which skills are developed and utilised are closely linked. Further, it may indicate that acting autonomously and maximising skill use (with 'voice' at work) leads to a perception that work is more interesting and fulfilling. This is indicated by the inverse loading of the variable 'I find my work boring' in relation to the other items on the factor.

Factor 4: Pay and benefits assessment of work (and work-life balance)

Factor four consists primarily of variables relating to pay that have an effect on the quality of working life. However, this factor includes other variables related to rewards and costs more generally. The reliability rating for this factor (if treated as a scale) is only 0.601, so the strength of the relationship between the variables as dimensions of the underlying factor is not as strong as in some other factors. Nevertheless, some observations can be made about the variables that loaded onto this factor:

- I am paid fairly for the work that I do (pay and benefits).
- My pay is sufficient for my needs (inverse – pay and benefits).
- I can change my working hours when I need to (work-life balance).
- I can choose to work from home when I want to (work-life balance).

The two pay items loaded most strongly onto this factor, in which the two questions measure perceptions regarding the actual sufficiency of pay and also perceived appropriateness of the level of pay. It is interesting that two items from the 'work-life balance' category are also included on this factor. It may be that being able to work from home and flexibility in working hours are associated with a feeling that the level of pay received is more appropriate.

Factor 5: Pride in organisation: general perceptions of workplace

This factor consisted of four items that cover more general aspects of perceptions of the workplace and the employer. The reliability of items for the four items is 0.608, although this is improved to 0.683 if the question 'I find it easy to travel to work' is removed. The factor consisted of the following items:

- I find it easy to travel to work (work-life balance).
- My organisation is a poor employer (inverse – leadership).
- I am proud to work for my company (leadership).
- My work environment is unpleasant (inverse – working conditions).

The last three items relate to more general perceptions of the employer. These are related to leadership, or the effects thereof: 'my work environment is unpleasant' as inversely related to 'I am proud to work for my company' seems to suggest that where there is pride in the workplace/organisation, the work environment is experienced as more pleasant. Similarly, it may also be that experience of the work environment as unpleasant leads to evaluations that 'my organisation is a poor employer', since an unpleasant experience of the work environment is unlikely to lead to positive evaluations of the employer. However, it is not clear how the first item loads onto this factor, 'I find it easy to travel to work', unless the question has been interpreted as 'I feel motivated to travel to work' rather than 'I find the journey to work difficult'. The fact that this ambiguity exists may need some attention.

Factor 6: Happiness and progress

Factor 6 comprised items that primarily relate to job and life satisfaction, although there are also some lesser weighted variables on this factor that have an interesting contribution to how happiness may be conceived in the quality of working life. The reliability of these items if treated as a scale is 0.673, which indicates there is a reasonable level of certainty that all the items correspond to the same underlying factor. The following variables were included:

- I feel my work makes a positive difference to society (leadership).
- I am happy in my life at the moment (life).
- I feel dissatisfied with my life at the moment (inverse – life)
- There are good opportunities for progression within my organisation (skills and prospects).
- In my job, I rarely learn new skills (inverse – skills and prospects).

It is worth noting that the first three variables, particularly the first two, have a much larger weight of loading onto the factor identified, with the last two variables that are

from the 'skills and prospects' category having a much less significant weighting. It is interesting that feeling happy or content in general is correlated with feeling that 'my work makes a positive difference to society'. Tentatively, it may be considered that feeling happy and satisfied with life in general leads to more positive evaluations of work, leadership and organisation. The second interesting part of this factor relates to satisfaction with the quality of working life, happiness and its relationship to developing new skills, or more simply, career prospects. It could be that where people feel more happy and content, either they are within organisations that provide more skills training and progression opportunities, related to autonomy and fulfilment, or that simply there is a relationship between happiness and the perception of these possibilities. While these later factor loadings are weaker, it is nevertheless interesting that contentment with life is related to the opportunity to develop new skills and progress and that these variables may also be related to the sense that a positive contribution is being made to society.

Factor 7: Intention to leave

This factor was interesting in that it yielded only one variable, 'I have no plans to leave my job at the moment', which was put in the questionnaire as a way of a checking question to identify perceptions of the overall quality of working life and engagement more generally. The other checking question, 'I feel I have a good quality of working life', which was also designed to measure this general sense of the quality of working life, was not loaded onto any of the seven final principal components used. Therefore, it may be seen that these questions served their purpose as they retain independence from other variables. However, it is interesting that the intention to leave is such an influential part in the make-up of the quality of working life that it constitutes a factor in itself. It is an important finding that no other variable within the QWL dimensions identified seems to correlate with the intention to leave and this question may need attention.