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Research Article

PROMOTING QUALITY OF LIFE AT WORK AND PREVENTING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how self-efficacy associated with the quality life approach at work influence the management of the adaptation of human and organizational change to prevent psychosocial risks. The data were collected base on a biographical approach to the personal and professional history of 10 workers who have been exposed to psychosocial risks. It results that high or low self-efficacy protects them from the occurrence of psychosocial risks, or exposes them, and that managers' management style strengthens this self-efficacy. These results indicate that human functioning must be understood as the result of a dynamic and ongoing interaction between cognitions, behaviours and environmental circumstances.

Keywords: Work, work life's quality, psychosocial risks, self-efficacy, worker.

INTRODUCTION

Psychosocial risks (SPR) emerged in 1980. According to the French National Institute for Research and Safety at work (INRS), they correspond to work situations where the following are present, either combined or not: stress, internal violence committed within the company by employees, such as moral or sexual harassment; exacerbated conflicts between individuals or between teams; burn-out; cardiovascular disease; musculoskeletal disorders; anxiety-depression disorders; and sometimes suicide. SPR can be induced by the activity itself or generated by the organization and relationships at work. Their causes can be found in employment conditions, work organization and working relationships. According to recent estimates published by the International Labour Organization (ILO), each year 2.4 million deaths are attributable to occupational diseases, and 374 million are victims of work accidents and non-fatal occupational accidents and diseases. In Africa, a study conducted in several countries such as Benin, Tunisia and Cameroon showed a prevalence of SPR of around 53%. In Benin, a study of stress among healthcare workers in two hospitals in Cotonou by Hounkpè (2007) showed that the prevalence of stress among healthcare workers was 69.5%. In Tunisia, a study by Amamou et al (2014) on the high prevalence of burnout in psychiatric units caring for patients at the end of life showed that 35.8% of the 66 participating doctors and nurses had a moderate level of burnout. In Cameroon, on the other hand, a study conducted by Négueu et al (2019) on burnout among care professionals at Yaoundé Central Hospital found a prevalence of burnout of 63% among care workers in four care units at Yaoundé Central Hospital. The study by Cathébras et al (2004) on burnout among general practitioners showed a prevalence of burnout of 42.4% among general practitioners in Douala. Taking account of PSR has become a major concern for companies, trade unions and public authorities.

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In 2012, Cameroon's Prime Minister decided to include the issue of Health and Safety Committees (HSC) on the roadmap of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MINTSS). It should be remembered that since this institution was set up by decree 039/MTPS/IMT of 26 November 1984, laying down general health and safety measures in the workplace, the majority of companies subject to the law have not been in a hurry to create them. As a result, suffering at work continues to occur when the pressure is too intense, the uncertainty is too great, and the psychological and physical strain is too significant and chronic. In 2012, this psychological suffering affected more than three (03) women at work out of a hundred and more than one (01) man at work out of a hundred. With this in mind, the legislator made it compulsory for all employers to have an occupational physician within their structure, through Decree No. 79-96 of 21 March 1979 setting the terms and conditions for the practice of occupational medicine; Order No. 039/MTPS/IMT of 26 November 1984 setting general health and safety measures in the workplace; Articles 98 and 99 of the 1992 Labour Code on occupational health; and Order No. 000198/MINTSS of 4 February 2020 on the creation, organization and operation of Private Occupational Risk Prevention Centers. All companies and establishments must provide medical and health services for their employees. Employers are directly responsible for applying all prevention, hygiene and safety measures designed to protect workers' health. However, our fieldwork revealed a different reality. Only one of the five companies in our study area had a nurse. The nurse is responsible for providing first aid to employees with physical health problems. As for mental health, none of the companies visited had a specialist in this area. Workplace health and safety committees as recommended by MINTSS were simply non-existent. Thanks to the interviews we conducted and the perceived stress scale, we were able to detect workers who were stressed, burned out and unable to reconcile their different spheres of life. We observed a certain amount of psychological suffering among these workers, probably due to continuous exposure to PSR. It was this combination of factors that led us to raise the issue of workers' psychological fragility in relation to their quality of

life at work. It is important to note that while PSR has repercussions on the physical and mental well-being of individuals, it also has repercussions on the productivity and performance of companies. Reconciling the company's objectives with those of its employees becomes a categorical imperative, hence the emergence of the concept of quality of life at work. The latter is defined by Vassily (1944) as a global approach aimed at preventing the appearance of ills that could be generated by the organization and, beyond that, at creating the conditions for workers to develop in all their dimensions, because putting people in a position to make their own choices is a fundamental condition for respecting their dignity. The quality of life at work approach, based on the principles defined in the 2013 National Interprofessional Agreement (ANI), not only leads to social improvements, but also to greater involvement of individuals in the creation of values. So how can the promotion of quality of life at work (QWL) prevent SPR? In other words, what meaning should be given to the psychological fragility of workers in relation to their quality of life at work? In order to better operationalize this problem, a number of hypotheses have been suggested, with a view to defining the QWL approach. To this end, it was thought that self-efficacy, associated with the QWL approach (clarity of work content, promotion of health at work, workers' professional skills, professional equality, participative management and relations at work or the social climate), are effective responses to the problem of workers' psychological fragility, and hence to the prevention of SPR. Such an approach is doubly interesting in that it makes it possible not only to ensure the well-being of workers and the performance of the company, but also to optimize the performance of the company and its employees, who will henceforth be working with full awareness, having acquired their psychological empowerment. In order to take account of the problem of workers' psychological fragility, this article has been structured in two main parts. The first is devoted to the theoretical and methodological framework of the research. This will make it easier to understand the concept of quality of life, and to present some of the developments to which it gives rise in the literature, in the first instance, and in the second, to present the method that made it possible to encircle the concept of QWL. The second part highlights the links between the prevention of SPR and the need to promote a quality of life at work approach.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

This section is devoted to a brief review of the literature on the concept of quality of life at work, a presentation of the theory of self-efficacy, which served as a grid for interpreting the data, and finally the methodological system used to produce and exploit the data.

Quality of life at work: a multidimensional concept

QWL is a dynamic concept, as its definition has been constantly evolving since 1972, depending on the author (Sojka, 2014). Developed on the basis of research into working life and debates between social partners, the notion of QWL encompasses many aspects of working life (Larouche and Trudel, 1983). It is perceived as a complex, multidimensional and generic concept (Hsu and Kernohan, 2006), because it refers to multiple elements relating to employees (job satisfaction, health at work, motivation and happiness) and the organization (Larouche and Trudel, 1983). Better still, according to Seashore (1975), it concerns the company, the employee and the community, for whom it is a result of "professional effectiveness".

Context and challenges of quality of life at work: QWL is a concept that has been gradually asserting itself since 2012, at a time when the development models of companies and organizations are beginning to face up to a number of political, social and economic limitations. The QWL is one of these innovative proposals, set up with the aim of envisaging new balances in the social performance models of companies and organizations, but also of workers. It is an effective approach that requires us to move from a logic of obligation (meeting the employer's legal requirements) to a genuine strategic choice aimed at transforming work into a source of fulfilment and good physical and mental health. The effects of quality of life at work are broken down into four dimensions: - Psychological (motivation, job satisfaction, etc.); - Health (well-being, stress reduction, preservation of physical integrity, etc.); - Economic (performance, productivity, innovation, etc.); - Behavioral (commitment, involvement, creativity, etc.). We find this perspective in the ANI of 2013 with a definition of QWL as a feeling stemming from experience at work: "Quality of life at work can be conceived as a feeling of well-being at work perceived collectively and individually which encompasses the atmosphere, the company culture, the interest of the work, the working conditions, the feeling of involvement, the degree of autonomy and empowerment, equality, a right to make mistakes granted to everyone, recognition and appreciation of the work done". The negotiators of the ANI defined a field that refers to the determinants of quality of life at work in the form of a list of ten points: the quality of everyone's commitment, at all levels of the company; the quality of information shared within the company; the quality of working relations; the quality of social relations, built on active social dialogue; the quality of the ways in which work is organized; the quality of the content of work; the quality of the physical environment; the possibility of personal fulfilment and development; the possibility of reconciling professional and personal life; and respect for professional equality. The emphasis here is on action, and will instead highlight the socio-organizational levers and means of action that make it possible to achieve QWL, whether this involves enriching and broadening tasks, co-designing work, overhauling the remuneration system and profit-sharing policies, developing career plans tailored to expectations, setting up a participative organization, and reconciling time. This conception of quality of life at work as a lever is explicit in the ANI: "The QWL designates and groups together the recurrent provisions dealing in particular with the methods of implementing work organization making it possible to reconcile the methods of improving working and living conditions for employees and the collective performance of the company. It is one of the building blocks of supposed corporate social responsibility. Finally, most definitions place QWL in a participative approach. The ANI establishes a general principle: "The definition, management, and evaluation of QWL are issues that must be placed at the heart of the development of social dialogue."

Impact of quality of life at work on employee performance and health: Performance at work refers to the ability of a company or an employee to mobilize the individual and collective resources at his disposal to achieve his objectives. A feeling of effectiveness at work is a source of balance,

satisfaction and motivation, so feeling useful and competent is good for mental health. A good QWL at work encourages professional performance, as QWL is a process that develops over time, and performance is closely linked to data analysis, collective intelligence, and creative and participative management. There is a strong connection between QWL, performance, and employee health. Indeed, improving working conditions for employees not only helps to maintain their mental health but also prevents PSR. QWL also fosters individual and collective commitment, by stimulating motivation, creativity and a sense of belonging. Gupta (2014) concludes that QWL has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. His results are confirmed by numerous research studies which have shown that improving QWL fosters organizational commitment (Birjandi *et al.,* 2013; Fattahi *et al.,* 2014). Employees who are satisfied with the QWL offered by their company are more involved and more loyal to it than those who are not satisfied (Gupta, 2014). Moreover, some dimensions of QWL such as working conditions, relations with the group and the hierarchical superior, as well as the characteristics of the company are taken up by the authors as being antecedents of organizational commitment, and hence of the dual performance of workers and the company (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990).

Self-efficacy as an interpretative framework

According to Bandura's socio-cognitive theory, self-efficacy is a factor that determines human behavior. It refers to an individual's beliefs about his or her ability to organize and carry out the actions required to produce the desired performance. Self-efficacy relates to what the individual believes he or she can do in a variety of circumstances. According to Bandura (2007), self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, which drive the individual, are two distinct concepts. While self-efficacy refers to the individual's beliefs about his or her ability to perform, outcome expectations are linked to beliefs that the performance will produce effects, either positive or negative. Bandura (2007) clearly illustrates the distinction between these two terms with this example: the belief that a worker (computer scientist) can successfully set up high-performance, secure information systems is linked to self-efficacy. If expectations of results are positive, he anticipates social recognition and rewards. If, however, result expectations are negative, he anticipates disappointment from the manager and the fact that he won't be rewarded.

Linked to the regulation of motivation, self-efficacy enables individuals to determine what they are capable of doing in relation to various activities, while taking into account the possible results that may result. Following this reflection, the individual sets goals and decides how much effort he or she wants to put into achieving them. In addition, self-efficacy enables individuals to self-regulate their emotional states. For example, a worker with low self-efficacy beliefs experiences more negative emotional states than one with high self-efficacy beliefs when faced with an anxiety-provoking situation. This type of worker with low self-efficacy beliefs will be more inclined to suffer stress episodes, as their lack of motivation and optimism exposes their mind to the occurrence of SPR. Self-efficacy theory suggests that self-efficacy beliefs are based on four modifiable and educable sources: active experience of mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physical and emotional states (Bandura, 2007). The individual must necessarily weigh up and process the information from the sources, using the information integration process. Ultimately, this information is useful when the individual weighs and processes it to form his or her self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2007). Some individuals will process the various pieces of information additively. In this case, if all the information is positive, the individual will consider adding it up and draw a positive conclusion. If, on the other hand, the information is negative, the individual will interpret this addition as negative.

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Self-efficacy beliefs have an effect on thought patterns, self-regulation of motivation, self-regulation of emotional states and the choices people make. These effects can, in turn, influence self-efficacy beliefs, producing a feedback loop. Consequently, a high sense of personal effectiveness (SEP) of the workers, within a responsible work environment that rewards successes, fosters aspirations, productive engagement in activities, and a sense of personal achievement. Bandura believes that social systems that nurture people's skills, provide them with useful resources, and leave plenty of room for self-direction, give them a better chance of achieving what they themselves want to become. This type of system protects the worker "in extenso", shielding him or her from the occurrence of PSR.

METHODOLOGICAL DATA FROM THE STUDY

Presentation of the sample and its characteristics

We interviewed ten workers, including three (06) women and two (04) men, on the basis of the following selection criteria: department managers. To find this type of worker, we conducted an interview with the human resources managers, as we felt that they were the ones with overall knowledge of the company's personnel. They enabled us to activate the snowball technique, by directing us towards the heads of departments that had been exposed to PSR. The anonymity of the respondents has been preserved by using fictitious first names to refer to them in this article.

Data collection tool and analysis method: The life story, a useful tool for capturing the phenomenon of PSRs through thematic content analysis

The data were collected on the basis of a biographical approach to the personal and professional history of workers who had been exposed to psychosocial risks. The data collected was analyzed using a thematic content analysis.

Subject	Gender	Age	Enterprise	Level of study	Position held	Type of risk
Christelle	F	33 years old	Gamma Gesellschaft	Bachelor's in development and environment	Technical advisor in cross-border cooperation	Burn out
Rose	F	36 years old	Group lambda	Bachelor's in Human Resource Management	Human Resource Manager	None
Quentin	M	49 years old	True alpha bank	Master's in economics and management	Director of permanent operations control	None
Mireille	F	29 years old	Cabinet Beta Afrique	Bachelor's degree in accounting and management	Accountant	Internal violence
Laura	F	25 years old	Group lambda	Bachelor's degree in business and administration management	Manager	Burn out
Alfred	M	32 years old	Gamma Gesellschaft	Master's in computer systems and networks	Director of information systems	Stress
Christine	F	33 years old	Cabinet Beta Afrique	Master's in accounting and management	Chartered accountant, statutory auditor, partner	Burn out
Laurent	M	37 years old	Gamma Gesellschaft	Master's in architecture	Draftsman	Internal violence
Celia	F	31 years old	Group lambda	Master's in financial law	Compliance director	Stress
Roland	M	38 years old	True alpha bank	Master in business law	Director of investment research	Stress

Source: personal data

Consequently, several categories of analysis, relating to the promotion of health at work, workers' professional skills, professional equality and participative management, were counted in order to assess their impact on the various life stories collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

QWL is first and foremost a way of constructing and conducting collective action that makes it possible to link the objectives of improving working conditions with those of providing a quality service to users. It is a framework for action that makes it possible to determine, collectively and on a shared basis, the specific subjects of work and to commit to particular themes, such as management, teleworking, the prevention of professional risks, the management of absenteeism, actions to promote job retention and the prevention of SPR. The QWL approach therefore helps to enrich the analytical skills of the players involved and to encourage high-quality dialogue. The accounts gathered on the basis of the determinants of QWL, in other words, the factors and levers that act positively or negatively on QWL, have enabled us to discover the means of effective prevention that can alleviate the problem of RPS, and hence the psychological fragility of workers.

A collective approach to jointly improve working conditions and service quality, by clarifying work content and maintaining health in the workplace

Implementing a QWL approach requires an approach based on actual work situations, taking into account the multiplicity of professionals involved, the skills and professional gestures applied, and intra- and inter-departmental regulations. This facilitates the distribution of activities and the strengthening of work collectives. While each employee's perception of the content of their work remains individual, the service provided to users and the quality of that service are the result of the activities of a working group. Given this state of affairs, having clear work content, such as clear instructions, autonomy in work, effective means of carrying out the work, activity management and workload distribution, helps to prevent RPS and promotes health in the workplace.

Christelle tells us that, at one point, she was no longer in control of the nature of her role, because she realized that she was performing several tasks at the same time. The worst thing about this new situation imposed on her by her company was that she was given work instructions at the last minute, and in the end she was always criticized for not doing a satisfactory job. She began to feel a lack of respect, and gradually she started to lose it and really suffer at work, eventually having to go to the doctor to regain her psychological stability. (Extract from an interview conducted on 03 September 2024)

In his model "reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction", Karasek (1979) tells us that it is important for employers to put in place genuine policies to prevent RPS. He believes that the lack of autonomy granted to an employee can be a source of stress, because those who have no control over their work or their environment will develop significant stress and possibly certain psychological disorders or illnesses. And yet, preserving the physical and mental health of employees is a central dimension of QWL. Working conditions must prevent health risks in order to promote well-being at work, which is a fundamental right for employees.

An approach based on the development of skills and professional equality: matching objectives and resources

The company must enable employees to develop their skills and progress in their careers, so that their sense of involvement and well-being at work are sources of gains and profitability for the organization. This can take the form of training, mentoring programs and stimulating projects. Equality between employees must also be the order of the day, as workers must feel that they are being treated fairly, in terms of pay, promotion and opportunities. In addition, they must have the opportunity to reconcile their different spheres of life. Reconciling work and personal life raises a number of issues relating to the demands of the job, organizational constraints, the individual situations of employees and the characteristics of the area (transport, lifestyles, etc.). A QWL approach can help to promote a better reconciliation of time, in particular by drawing up a time and management charter for information and communication technologies, by a concerted reflection on the implementation of possible teleworking, but also by implementing a policy of support for job retention or social action in favors of employees.

Rose, HR manager, tells us that in her organisation, women have a lot of difficulties compared to their male colleagues,

even though they are equally competent. They are the ones who regularly receive letters of observation, even though they are very competent, because they have great difficulty reconciling their spheres of life. As a result, excuses such as "I was at the doctor's with the children or I was delayed by the child's teacher" are very common but rarely acceptable. In her opinion, most of these women take on more family responsibilities than they should, and the lucky ones get away with a few late arrivals and absences, while the unlucky ones end up depressed.
(Extract from an interview conducted on 03 September 2024)

While the issue of reconciling private and professional life is still considered by management to be a women's issue, the trend among parents is changing (Bailyn, 1997). Men are now questioning their exclusive devotion to the workplace. Some want to reclaim their place in the family and exercise their role as fathers, not just as providers (Benoît, 2005).

An approach to improving management with a view to fostering a high-quality social climate

Implementing a QWL approach requires company managers to review their management practices. To this end, the following process can be adapted:

- Explicitly display a project to improve working conditions: this improvement must cover all aspects of work.
- Re-examine and promote the notion of quality of service: the starting point for QWL is the link between quality of life at work and quality of service provided.
- Disseminate the "QWL spirit", in other words, have a global vision and share it with everyone, by integrating practices that encourage more participative management.
- To be part of a continuous improvement process, dealing with issues according to their priority.
- Take ownership of change projects as early as possible, in order to organize participative and experimental mechanisms for managing transformations.
- Develop room for maneuver for those in charge by creating spaces for employees to express their views on work content and organisation.
- Proposing tools and methods that can be adapted to the realities of the organisation, to facilitate the management of the process, the construction of engineering, diagnosis, on-board evaluation, etc. They are intended to be used in a participative framework, but also as a basis for developing new projects.
- Encouraging collective learning

The development of a QWL approach cannot be established without a strong desire to introduce or develop quality social dialogue. Upstream, the implementation of an approach requires agreement on how this new process is to be rolled out.

Quentin says that his close relationship with his Human Resources Director gives him confidence in the way he carries out his tasks. All his ideas for improving his work are received in the right way, as he was informed of the work strategy in good time, and information on the changes was given in advance, which helped to clarify his mission. He also says that if he has any difficulties in carrying out his duties, he knows he can confide in any of his colleagues, because relations at work are healthy, and each worker is involved in such a way that the company comes out the winner. This is the dynamic implemented by our Human Resources Director, who is an excellent manager," he says.
(Extract from an interview conducted on 04 September 2024)

While some employees appreciate the participative management of their managers, others deplore their lack of humanism, decrying their dictatorial attitude.

This is the case with Roland, who feels that his manager is not up to the task he has been given. He's always in a bad mood and doesn't set clear objectives. He has created a climate of competition within the company, so everyone is suspicious of his colleague. He ends by saying that he's looking for another job because it's hard for him to work under these conditions, and if he stays there he risks becoming neurotic himself
(Extract from an interview conducted on 04 September 2024).

Any project for change or improvement within the organization evolves the content of work and affects the quality of life at work by impacting working conditions. Occupational health being a key element of quality of life at work, requires that the QWL approach promotes the consideration of occupational risks from the initial phase of an improvement or transformation project. As a result, the QWL approach enables the implementation of primary prevention actions, that is to say: to prevent and avoid.

Conclusion

What meaning should be given to the psychological fragility of workers, in terms of their quality of life at work? This was the concern of this research. Following the logic of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as an interpretative framework, illustrated as a solution for avoiding the occurrence of PSR, other rationales were implemented with a view to preventing the occurrence of these risks, in particular by promoting a quality of life approach within the company. With regard to the analysis of the levers or factors which act positively or negatively on QWL, we were able to determine that the maintenance of the physical and mental health of workers is not only held by managers, more precisely by their mode of management, but also and above all by the workers. We have observed that social systems that maintain people's skills by providing them with useful resources leave a lot of room for self-direction. The contribution of this research therefore lies in taking into account the worker as a key element of the company and of benevolent management to enable a culture of alert and of taking weak signals into account, because a healthy work collective is one where individual errors, fatigue or deviations are stated, assumed and resolved precisely by the collective.

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