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Improving the quality of disabled people's life at work via iso 9001 standard

Martin Fink, Libuše Ludíková*

Palacky University, Žižkovo nám. 5, Olomouc, 77140, Czech Republic.

Palacky University, Žižkovo nám. 5, Olomouc, 77140, Czech Republic.

Abstract

The quality of life is influenced by many elements. One of them is employment. People with disabilities have a lot of problems at work (if they are so lucky to get one) – starting with adaptation to a workplace and team, through difficulties during the working process or communication between them and the employer. The aim of this paper is to introduce ISO 9001 standard as a suitable element that positively influence the quality of life of disabled people.

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1. Introduction

The current economic situation in the Czech Republic is not ideal for employing people. There is no need to emphasize, that various specifics of people with disabilities makes this category of our fellow citizens (as for as

* Corresponding author: Martin Fink, Tel.: +420 604 489 285

E-mail address: martin.fink@mvso.cz, martinfink107@gmail.com

searching for a job and keeping it) very „vulnerable“. If this person is so lucky to be exercisable in the job market, there comes in many cases certain disillusionment on both sides (employers and employees). So the question is, whether there are any procedures or methods to eliminate the eventual disproportional expectations of both sides. If so, there comes another question. Can there be, as one of the options of elimination or lowering the negative factors influencing the quality of working life, the implementation of ISO 9001 standard? The following text can be understood as a way for searching for the answers.

2. The quality of life

The issue of quality of life infiltrates in the last decades a lot of science disciplines e.g. medicine, psychology or sociology, but the look back to modern history says, that the term quality of life was first used in economy. It was in 1920, when Pigou in his work *The Economics of Welfare* mentions this term for the first time. In this work Pigou also deals with the role of state as a provider of subsidies for underprivileged. It is obvious, that each science discipline applies different point of view to the term quality of life and its use. It makes it then difficult to summarize one universally binding definition of this term. This estate illustrates very well Payne, who says: „There are a lot of definitions of the term „quality of life“ in the literature. But none of them was in the last 30 years generally accepted“ (Payne, 2005, s. 207). From the aforementioned is clear, that the quality of life is a multidimensional category, containing both the objective and subjective perspective of this phenomenon. That is why the approach containing many concepts (theoretical frameworks) of quality of life, with all its dimensions, is the most suitable for description of the topic. One of the most quoted frameworks is the Conceptual QOL framework of Centre for Health Promotion, which works with quality of life in complex. It divides it to three basic and particular domains.

Picture no. 1 Conceptual QOL framework of Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto

Being	who one is
Physical Being	physical health , personal hygiene, nutrition, exercise , grooming and clothing, general physical appearance
Psychological Being	psychological health and adjustment , cognitions , feelings, self-esteem, self-concept and self-control
Spiritual Being	personal values, personal standards of conduct, spiritual beliefs
Belonging	connections with one's environments
Physical Belonging	home, workplace/school , neighbourhood, community
Social Belonging	intimate others , family, friends, co-workers, neighbourhood and community
Community Belonging	adequate income, health and social services, employment, educational programs, recreational programs, community events and activities
Becoming	achieving personal goals, hopes, and aspirations
Practical Becoming	domestic activities, paid work, school or volunteer activities ,seeing to health or social needs
Leisure Becoming	activities that promote relaxation and stress reduction
Growth Becoming	activities that promote the maintenance or improvement of knowledge and skills, adapting to change

Source: Made by author, inspired by The Quality of Life Model (http://www.utoronto.ca/qol/qol_model.htm)

3. The quality of working life and the Quality management system

Even though we can see, thanks to research and application of acquired knowledge, the positive move in the area of quality of life (thereinafter QOL) of people with disabilities (particularly in relation to health or provided

services), there is none or barely some move in the area of quality of working life (thereinafter QOWL) of those persons. One of the limiting factors is limited resources (e.g. financial or human). This fact forces us (willingly or not) to find new innovative approaches, which have, without the need of subsequent expenses, the potential to improve the QOWL of people with disabilities. One of the rather perspective options, how to improve the QOL at work, is the usage of quality management system (thereinafter QMS). QMS is „a system by which an organization aims to reduce and eventually eliminate nonconformance to specifications, standards, and customer expectations in the most cost effective and efficient manner“ (www.businessdictionary.com). There is no space to follow the economic influence of the implemented QMS in the organization like competitive advantage, customer's satisfaction etc. in this paper. It focuses only on expected impact of the implemented QMS on the employees, on their QOWL.

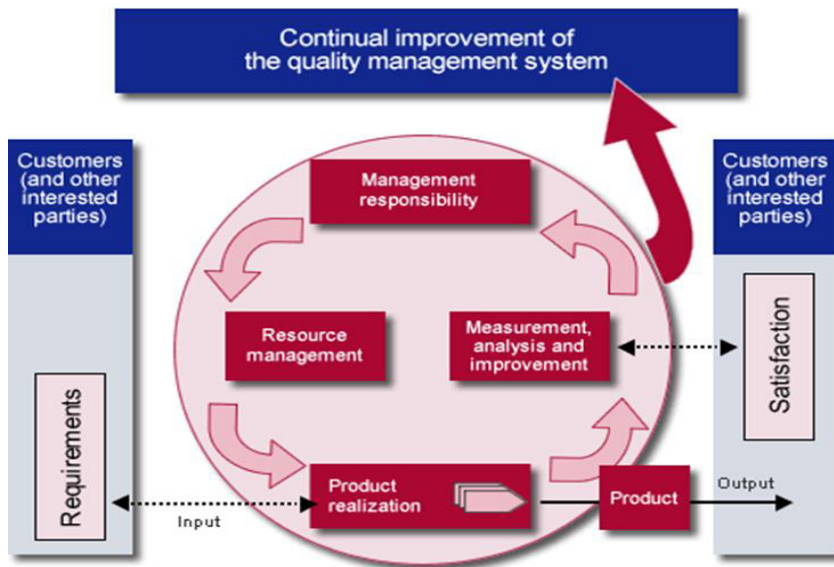
3.1 People with disabilities and the quality of life

„Person with disabilities is a person, whose physical, sensual and/or psychical abilities or sanity is different from the typical estate of appropriate age and therefore it is legitimate to assume that this unfavourable estate lasts longer than 1 year. The difference from the typical estate according to appropriate age must be of that kind or range, that it usually makes barriers or even makes it impossible to socially assert the person.“ (Novák, Kalnická, 2008, <http://panda.hyperlink.cz/cestapdf/pdf08c6/novak.pdf>). This definition was determined by the interdepartmental working group in connection with the first statistical survey about people with disabilities in the Czech Republic (2007). Its aim was to find out, what kind of barriers in the process of improvement of QOL is possible to eliminate. The health handicap influences not only the daily life of the person, but also the process of education, self-realization and last but not least his/hers professional assertion (Finková, 2012, s. 44). Even though Finková deals in her work only with people with visual impairment, it is possible to generalize this thesis to most of other disabilities.

3.2 ISO 9001 Standard

This standard is not the only way to implement and maintenance QMS, but it was chosen by the author on purpose. It is the most used one. There is no need to know the standard in details, only the basic principles of it for a better orientation will be described in the paper.

One of the crucial attributes of the standard is the accent on procedural approach: *„An advantage of the process approach is the on-going control that it provides over the linkage between the individual processes within the system of processes, as well as over their combination and interaction* (ISO 9001, 2009, s.11) For a better illustration, there is a model of the procedurally oriented QMS in the picture no. 2

Picture no. 2 ISO 9001:2008 Model – The Systems Approach (QMS)(Source: http://www.technopeers.co.uk/?page_id=246)

It is possible to apply the Deming PDCA cycle for all the processes.

Picture no. 3 PDCA cycle (Source: Made by author)

Plan: Recognize an opportunity and plan a change.

Do: Test the change. Carry out a small-scale study.

Check: Review the test, analyse the results and identify what you've learned.

Act: Take action based on what you learned in the study step: If the change did not work, go through the cycle again with a different plan. If you were successful, incorporate what you learned from the test into wider changes. Use what you learned to

plan new improvements, beginning the cycle again. (ASQ, 2013:<http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/project-planning-tools/overview/pdca-cycle.html>)

The advantage of the standard is its universality: „All requirements of this International Standard are generic and are intended to be applicable to all organizations, regardless of type, size and product provided“ (ISO 9001, 2009, s. 15).

Basically, the standard provides „manual“ how to maintain through the process management the best results. When first seen it could be said, that the standard focuses only on outside, on customers. But when we look deeper, we can see the cohesion of all processes, so it is only logical, that the standard deals also with inner area of the organisation.

The standard is formally divided into eight chapters; in most of them the links on activities that directly influence the employees could be found. Chapter no. 6. 2, Human resources, apply itself on employees directly:

„6.2.1 General

Personnel performing work affecting conformity to product requirements shall be competent on the basis of appropriate education, training, skills and experience.

6.2.2 Competence, training and awareness

The organization shall

a) determine the necessary competence for personnel performing work affecting conformity to product requirements,

b) where applicable, provide training or other action, to achieve the necessary competence

c) evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken,

d) ensure that its personnel are aware of the relevance and importance of their activities and how they contribute to the achievement of the quality objectives, and

e) maintain appropriate records of education, training, skills and experience“ (ISO 9001, 2009, s. 20-21).

The standard, particularly its requirements makes it easier for the employee to orient him/herself in the organizational structure (supervisor, colleagues, and responsible person) or communication thanks to perfectly described situations. Without the standard the employee would be forced to improvise. And it is not the only advantage of this standard.

The aforementioned facts implies, that the employee in the organization, where the standard ISO 9001 is implemented, could be in his/hers job more satisfied so there is an assumption, that his/hers QOWL could be also higher. The question, whether is this assumption corrects, remains. The next lines are dedicated to show the planned research on the topic.

3.3 Research

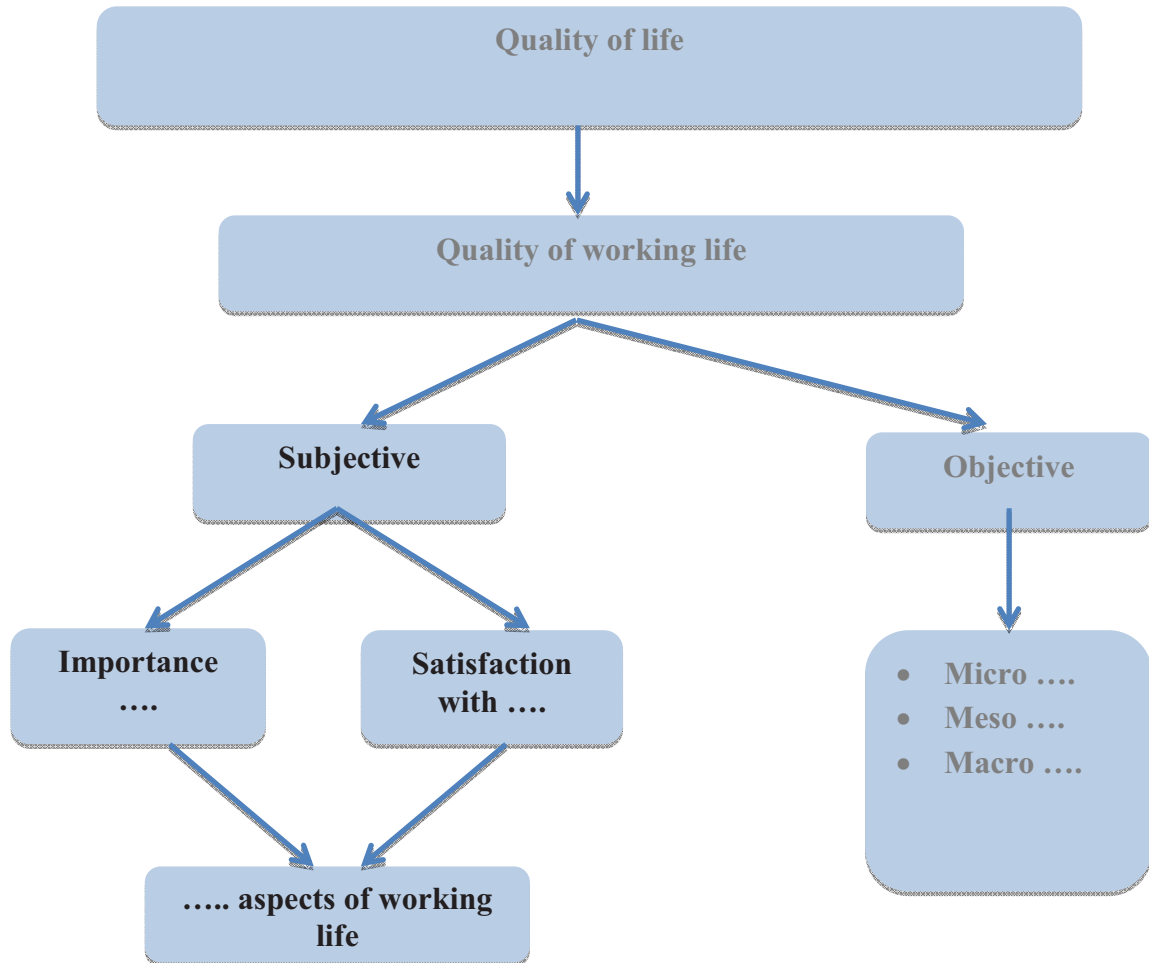
The design of the research, or more precisely its pilot phase, is not difficult. The needed data would be achieved by a questionnaire. There will be two respondent groups. The first one will contain people with disabilities working in organizations, where the standard is not implemented. The second one will contain people with disabilities working in organizations, where the standard is already implemented. The results will be compared.

The complicated phase in the described survey was the search for an appropriate tool – questionnaire. There was a discussion, whether to trace both levels of the QOL, which means the subjective and the objective one, or to focus only on one of them.

According to the range of various specifics resulting from various types of health disabilities, we decided to use only the subjective QOWL level for the survey. We assume that this approach would better illustrate the given estate. To explain it, we introduce here a practical example. The lightning in the workplace corresponds with all the legislative requirements – objectively we can say, it corresponds with quality standards. But the person with visual impairment can subjectively perceive this situation as not sufficient – he/she is not satisfied, which implies lower QOWL. For the questionnaire, the concept of subjectively perceived QOWL designed by the Institute of Sociology of the Academic of Sciences of the Czech Republic was chosen.

Picture no. 4 The conceptualization of subjectively perceived quality of working life

(Source: Made by author, inspired by Vinopal (Vinopal, 2011, s. 943))



The concept for measuring the subjectively perceived QOWL is based on three basic pillars: (1) Dual conception of QOWL, (2) the conceptualization of subjective perceived QOWL as a combination of two dimensions – importance and satisfaction, (3) the definition of structure of material domains and aspects of quality of life and its coverage by adequate indicators (Vinopal, 2011, s. 939). The questionnaire itself consists of two batteries containing 18 questions. In the first battery the respondents evaluate the satisfaction with existing aspect, in the second one its importance. The aspects by detail are written in the picture no. 5.

Picture no. 5 The questionnaire

DOMAINS	ASPECTS
SALARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • salary • justice • nonfiscal benefits
SELFREALIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • independency • education • interesting rate
RELATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with colloquies • with supervisors • bully
TIME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distribution of working hours • time demandingness • Reconciliation with free time activities
Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equipment • cleanness • safety
Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • type of employment • assurance of having the work • chances on the labour market

Source: Made by author, inspired by Vinopal (Vinopal, 2011, s. 945)

Data from each battery could be evaluated separately, or together as an overall QOWL index. (If you are interested in getting more information about construction of this empirical tool see Vinopal 2006, 2009, 2011). The comparison of obtained data (the organization with and without implemented standard) should confirm the assumption of positive influence of the standard on employees or more precisely on their satisfaction (subjectively perceived QOL). But the validation of this assumption (in which we hope) is not enough from the point of view of usage of this fact. It is completely legitimate to ask, whether the expected results of the survey have also the potential of practical use. The answer to this question is, by our meaning, positive. One of the options of the practical use of our surveys results is to create methodics (based on the standard) that would help the current or future employers of people with disabilities in various areas of working life to increase the satisfaction of their employees (and with that also better the production rate of their own company). The second and even more important option is to refer to readiness of the organizations with implemented standard to employ people with disabilities. The provable data can help to break the barriers and stereotypes in the mentality of employers, who are afraid to employ person with disabilities. For a lot of organizations it would be contribution disabilities without the need of significant changes and to satisfaction of both sides. This approach than makes the to get to know, that by implementing the standard and its adherence to it, they would be able to employ the person with need of special programmes, customization of a work place, specialized experts on communication etc. irrelevant.

4. Conclusion

Today's dynamics forces us to think in wider circumstances. It forces us to search for innovative solutions, to use the synergy of seemingly not connected science fields. This paper works on the same bases. Its aspiration is to search for new methods and approaches to increase the QOL of people with disabilities. Limited fiscal resources give us no other chance. Even though the most of the text is focused on subjective perceive of QOL, it would be a

mistake not to mention in this conclusion also the point of view respecting the objective dimension of QOL. „The only scale of QOL (observed in general macro social point of view – not seen the subjective factors of experience) of a group or a single person with disabilities is the ability and willingness of the major society to redistribute a piece of produced social product for saturation of the objective needs of this group of people!“ (Michalík in *E-pedagogium*, 2009, s. 96). So there we are, back in the level of resources and still searching for a solution – not only flashy, but particularly effective.

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