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In the next Quality Newsletter

The next Quality Newsletter we focus on Workpackage 6 Scenario Training and the results from partner countries

CEFOS



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Organisations, Just How Healthy are They?

Project Quality examines service sector organisations in partner countries

What are the characteristics of healthy organisations in changing European contexts? This was the question addressed by the Quality team in case studies based on interviews with employees in 5 hospitals (in Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK) and 3 private sector organisations (in Hungary, the Netherlands and Portugal.) We began with a broad definition of healthy organisations as those that are effective in what they do and meet the needs of the workforce. This recognises that individual and organisational health is interdependent. There was widespread agreement in the organisations studied that this is a useful way of categorising healthy organisations. In hospitals, for example, attention to employee health and well being was considered essential for providing the best patient care, although staff did their best even in less ideal contexts. More specific characteristics of healthy organisations identified included: good internal communication, the provision of opportunities for self

development and training and opportunities to use skills and qualifications, good social and interpersonal relationships, predictable working time, job security, and supports and resources to enable people to derive satisfaction in a worthwhile job. Above all, in healthy organisations, employees feel valued and respected.

These aspects of healthy organisations are similar to the factors associated with employee quality of life in the analysis of the Quality survey.

A number of other important organisational characteristics emerged from the case studies. In particular, a healthy organisation is described as a fair and equitable one. Both procedural and distributive justice was important. Employees felt more valued if they were consulted or involved in decision making and felt that their views were listened to. Perceived fairness of rewards and outcomes were also crucial. Perceptions of unfair treatment on the other hand undermine quality of

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A glimpse at Project Quality's Dissemination activities in 2007

*Quality team members attended 19 different academic conferences on three continents and presented 31 conference papers.

*Quality team members produced 37 scientific articles, books or chapters in books and 22 working papers.

*Quality team members participated in 24 seminars, lectures discussion groups or other media contacts.

*Quality website receives about 170 unique visits each day.

Welcome to Project Quality's Newsletter

Welcome to project Quality's second Newsletter. As promised, in this issue we present some exciting results from workpackage 4 concerning Healthy Organisations and the different national contexts that facilitate or block employers, managers and employees efforts to build healthy organisations. Also in this issue a report from workpackage 1 using an existing data source - EQLS to operationalise project Quality's research questions. The report from Quality management confirms that project Quality is well underway to meeting its goals. Finally, we preview our next issue with a brief look at scenario thinking.

If you have comments about our newsletter, we invite you to contact us at our website www.projectquality.org

Margareta Bäck-Wiklund

Healthy Organisations from page 1

working life. For example, in the Portuguese case study employees felt resentful that the growing financial success of the company had not been reflected in any financial rewards or recognition for the staff that had made this happen. Another important aspect of fair and equitable organisations is the equitable treatment of women and men and broader valuing of diversity. Here it is not just equal opportunities or diversity policies that matter to employees, but actual working practices. Healthy organisations do not tolerate any forms of discrimination and promote a general ethos of respect. A healthy organisation is also one that supports the integration of work and personal life. In particular, employees in healthy organisations have reasonable workloads and reasonable pace/tempo of work so that they do not feel exhausted at the end of the working day, but has energy as well as time for other things.

A number of crucial challenges to healthy organisations emerged in the case studies. In the hospitals common challenges included financial pressures and resources issues, work intensification, haste and stress, and communication issues. Gender issues were also important. Deep seated assumptions about gender roles and competencies were often

unchallenged and in some cases there was also more overt discrimination. There was more explicit awareness of gender issues in the Swedish and British hospitals than in the other hospitals where this was often more hidden, but this did not mean it was always tackled. Gender issues, in terms of occupational segregation some stereotyping can undermine healthy organisations although the discourses tend to be that things are getting better. Policies to support “work-life balance” were frequently undermined by work intensification. Work intensification was identified as a major barrier to “work-life balance” and to healthy organisations more generally in the private sector case studies. Other challenges included the need to survive in a highly competitive market as well as team and interdepartmental issues and problems of internal communication.

The case studies were followed up by innovation groups in which the national Quality teams worked with the organisational participants to consider innovative ways of addressing some of the challenges to becoming or remaining healthy organisations.

Suzan Lewis

For more details see deliverable 4.2 Consolidated Report- Case Studies of Healthy Organisations. The innovation groups will be discussed in Deliverable 4.3

When and How do Working Conditions Affect the Quality of Life? The societal context seems to have a systematic affect

One of the objectives of the QUALITY project is to investigate how working conditions, such as job security, physical and psychological work characteristics and work-life balance, influence the quality of life of European citizens.

We used the data from the first European Quality of Life Survey 2003 (EQLS) to examine how subjectively perceived characteristics of the job affect the life satisfaction of employed population in eight European countries included in the QUALITY project. We take subjective overall life satisfaction as an indicator of people’s quality of life. Working conditions are measured in terms of a dangerous or unhealthy working environment, stress, time pressure, perception of financial rewards, job security, job autonomy, career prospects and work-family balance.

The EQLS data reveal significant differences in working conditions among the countries, with post-socialist Bulgaria and Hungary plus Portugal in the first cluster, and other Western European countries in the second cluster. Respondents in Bulgaria, Hungary and Portugal work in many respects under worse conditions than their counterparts in other countries included in the study, with Bulgaria as an extreme case affected by high job insecurity as well as demanding and stressful jobs. Similar groupings of countries emerge when examining the differences in subjective well-being, defined as overall satisfaction with one’s life. Bulgaria with an exceptionally low life satisfaction score of 4.7 (on a ten-point scale), is followed by Hungary

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Comments on Healthy Organisation fieldwork

Germany

The German team conducted their interviews in the accident and emergency department of a hospital. Both nurses and a few physicians were interviewed. The nurses had job tenures of up to thirty years and were able to provide rich descriptions of how they experienced work intensification over time. One of the nurses stated that when she started working thirty years ago, she thought about quitting the job because she found it so boring. She claimed that she and her co-workers spent hours of waiting for the next patient, while nowadays even official staff meetings must be held outside of working time because the tight shift schedule allows little personnel overlap. This intensification was attributed to the fact that the number of patients and tasks have increased while the nurses’ headcount remained nearly the same.

Finland

In Finland healthy organization case study was implemented in an emergency policlinic of central hospital. This policlinic provides special health care for more than 250,000 people. At the time of interviews new facilities were under construction, new staff was hired, new working procedures introduced and more mergers were around the corner. The interviews brought out the role of small changes for the health of organizations. Respondents felt that they had little influence on the pervasive organizational reform; it was smaller changes in practical arrangements, such as in room design, work ergonomics, computer and security systems that they considered significant.

>>Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. This can be achieved through a combination of: improving the work organisation and the working environment, promoting active participation encouraging personal development<<

Luxembourg-Declaration, 1997

Working conditions from page 2

and Portugal (6.1 and 6.2 points, respectively). The range in the other countries is between 7.4 points (Germany) and 8.2 points (Finland).

It is often assumed that poor working conditions, i.e. work stress, job insecurity, lack of autonomy or poor physical working conditions lead to poor quality of life by lowering life satisfaction. We indeed find some support for these hypotheses, but the relationship is more complex than suggested by the spillover theories. It seems that the impact of specific working conditions on life satisfaction is strongly mediated by the context. Let us examine, for example, how job insecurity in various country contexts affects life satisfaction. Job insecurity has a negative effect on satisfaction with life in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Germany and Hungary. Although it is in Bulgaria where job insecurity is by far the highest among all participating countries, the fear of losing one's job has no significant effect on life satisfaction. Perhaps the very prevalence of job insecurity in the labour market makes people less susceptible to see it as a personal crisis. Also, gender dif-

ferences in the effect of job insecurity on life satisfaction are revealing: in countries where differences in gender roles are more pronounced and women's participation in the labour market follows a different logic than men's employment, job insecurity is particularly detrimental for men's well-being, as it threatens their role as (primary) breadwinners. For women, job insecurity significantly lowers life satisfaction only in Hungary, Bulgaria and Finland, i.e. in countries where female full-time employment prevails and is expected.

Another interesting example is work-family balance as an important predictor of life satisfaction. In some countries, this is clearly a women's issue, whereas in other countries the relevance of this factor for overall well-being is more balanced and affects both men and women. In Germany, Finland and Hungary, work-family balance is an aspect of working life that is particularly pivotal for women. In Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, work-family balance seems to play an equally important role for both men and women. Furthermore, in Bulgaria we find no gender difference in this relationship and the effect is not significant, and in Portugal work-

family balance is a concern for male but not for female employees. These and similar findings show that the relationship between working conditions and the overall well-being, as well as gender differences in this relationship, can only be understood when examined in a broad economic, social and cultural context. Societal context seems to systematically mould the experiences of individuals at work and their spillover to overall life satisfaction and quality of life.

Sonja Drobnič

Download the Comparative Cross-National Report at www.projectquality.org

EQLS – European Quality of Life Survey

Funded by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, EQLS looks at the views of Europe's citizens on living conditions, their subjective well-being and their assessments of the society in which they live. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityof-life/eurlife/index.php>

Progress Report from Quality Management Team

The research project QUALITY, financed by the EU Commission, aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. Eight countries are involved: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and Bulgaria. The project runs from March 2006, up to March 2009. We have recently entered our final year, and the results of the work are getting more and more visible.

First of all, the cross-national dataset has been completed. Although many datasets are available with respect to quality of life in an international comparative way many of these datasets do not cover all the countries under study. Moreover, they often lack information on both quality of life and quality of work. It has therefore been of utmost importance to have our own survey; in four service organisations in each country employees filled in the same written questionnaire. The large scale data set shows that both demands and

resources in the workplace and at home do influence quality of life in each country. Important for the quality of life is the support provided at the workplace, both by the supervisor and colleagues. Good social relations also improve the perceived quality of life, as do high autonomy at the workplace. Job insecurity and high work pressure decrease the perceived quality of life. Interesting to note is that in the Eastern European countries under study the effect of supervisory support and of long work hours on quality of life is less than in the Western European countries under study. The institutional context in terms of political, cultural and economic development might be due to these differences. Although a growing similarity exists between the policy regimes of the different countries, Eastern European and Western European countries do have their own history. The coming months more analyses will be performed to study more closely and more precisely these relations.

Secondly, almost all partner countries have performed their own innovation groups in firms, and the results show the importance of group discussions between employees and supervisors about necessary changes within the organisation in order to increase the quality of life. Challenges for healthy organisations that derive from the interviews and innovation group meetings are amongst others financial pressures, constant change, rising demands and intensifications of work, resource and relationship issues.

Thirdly, in a number of the partner countries high level expert meetings have already been organized. The focus of these meetings is on possible scenarios to increase quality of life. The coming months all partner teams will be busy with elaborating on these scenarios in order to provide recommendations to national and European policies.

In this final year of the project, a quality of life instrument will be developed which

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Training Day in Scenario Thinking Quality partners learn to use a 'new' innovative tool

Work package 6 of project Quality focuses on quality of life and future trends. In an earlier stage of the project all partner countries mapped the future socio economic trends in their country relevant for the quality of life and work. The next step was to think beyond known trends and to ask high-level national experts to think about possible future scenarios. To become familiar with scenario thinking and to be able to perform a scenario workshop with high-level experts in each country, a training day on scenario thinking was held in Utrecht, January 25. The two trainers Frans Spierings (Rotterdam University) and Hanneke Hermsen (Dutch tax department) explained how we could use scenario thinking to stimulate experts to think beyond known trends such as an aging workforce, fertility issues, flexibility in the labor market, and to consider uncertainties, such as integration issues and geo-political relations, that can have a major impact on the quality of work and life if they occurred. The method of scenario thinking used was that originally developed by Shell Oil. We applied this tool to the following question: what are the major challenges societies (region/coun-

Management report from page 3

employers and employees can fill out to test whether they work in a healthy organization and with a high quality of work. Moreover, more detailed attention will be given to gender differences. Men and women report differently to issues of quality of life and the impact on quality of work thereby.

Finally the website of the project (www.projectquality.org) has been in operation for over a year and at present is the projects window to the international community. We have enjoyed an increasing number of unique visitors since the website opened. The website is a work in progress and it is our ambition to continue improving the quality of the site throughout the life of the project. Visit our website if you are looking for more information and/or publications of the QUALITY research project!

**Tanja van der Lippe &
Els van Kampen**

try) faces in the next ten years when it comes to quality of life and quality of work?

We learned about scenario thinking by engaging in a strategic discussion. During the training session we practiced the method. Working in small groups, we started by identifying the major uncertainties for the quality of work and life. Based on our discussions each group identified two factors or trends that were highly uncertain but if they would occur would have a major impact on the quality of work and life, for instance, global integration versus global segmentation or the loss of technology (energy crisis, worldwide virus) versus extraordinary growth of technology. These are considered to be driving forces underlying future scenarios. Based on two driving forces, a 4-scenario model was constructed. Next step was to discuss how these possible future world look like and what the chain of events would be for such a future to happen. Each group developed two future scenarios.

Based on this training day we developed a manual for a scenario workshop with high-level experts in each country. These are now taking place. The results of the workshops done so far are indeed very promising.

Laura den Dulk

“Scenario-based exercises are more than just a fun way to address serious problems. They are a unique way to gain insight, explore new ideas, and get people thinking.”

“Scenario planning is, in the end, a very structured and purposive way to tell stories about the future.” - Lawrence Wilkinson in Club Wired

For information on scenario thinking:
K van der Heijden (2005) Scenarios: The art of strategic conversation: Wiley

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