

Working Environment Factors that Affect Quality of Work Life among Attendants in Petrol Stations in Kitale Town in Kenya

Aloys Nyagechi Kiriago

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kitale CBD Campus

P.O. Box 3419, Kitale 30200

E-mail: aknyagechi@yahoo.com

Prof. Henry M. Bwisa

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, P. O. Box 62000-00200, Nairobi, Kenya.

E-mail: bwihem@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research sought to establish working environment factors that affect Quality of Work Life among petrol station attendants in Kitale town. The objective of the study was to identify working environment aspects that affect Quality of Work Life among petrol station attendants.

This study was an exploratory survey, carried out in 17 petrol stations that are located in Kitale Town, Kenya. The target population comprised 17 station managers and 170 attendants, out of which a sample of 102 respondents was selected: Seventeen (17) Petrol Station Managers using non – probabilistic purposeful sampling and eighty five (85) attendants using simple random sampling. The study used a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. Data collected was both quantitative and qualitative, and analysis was basic descriptive in nature.

The study revealed that poor safety and health, work pressure or stress, and provision of inadequate working tools are environmental aspects that bring about poor Quality of Working Life experiences at petrol stations. In conclusion, the findings were examined and then the implications discussed. General recommendations were made for the improvement of Quality of Work Life among petrol station attendants.

Keywords: Quality of Work Life, Working Environment, safety and health, Petrol station Attendants and Work-Related Quality of Life.

1.0 Introduction

The effects of numerous Human Resource Development factors on business performance have been reported in business research literature in recent years. After years of organizational restructuring and work reengineering, schools of management recognize that a productive

workforce is increasingly important to attain sustainable competitive advantages for business organizations on a global basis. As the composition of workforce continues to change, companies offering better benefits and supportive working environments are expected to gain leverage in hiring and retaining valuable people. In this breadth, how employees perceive their working environment has also gained significance as companies scramble to ensure that employees experience the best possible Quality of Work Life.

Hian and Einstein (1990) have traced origin of the term "Quality of Work Life" (QWL) as first being introduced in 1972, during an international labor relations conference in Rome, though it had been in existence since 1960s. QWL received more attention after United Auto Workers and General Motors Company in the United States of America initiated a QWL program for work reforms to make work pleasant. Robbins (1989) defined QWL as a process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work. The author adds that Quality of work life is specifically related to the level of happiness a person derives for his career. QWL has been well recognized as a multi-dimensional construct and it may not be universal or eternal. Each person has different needs when it comes to their careers; the quality level of their work life is determined by whether those needs are being met. While some people might be content with a simple minimum wage job as long as it helps pay the bills, others would find such a job to be too tedious or involve too much physical labor and would find such a position to be highly unsatisfactory.

1.1 Problem Statement

Oil marketing companies in Kenya are making huge profits because of increasing sales of petroleum products done through their petrol station outlets. According to the Petroleum Institute of East Africa (2011), Total Kenya and KenolKobil, the two major oil marketers in Kenya with a combined market share of 48%, made net profit of Kenya Shillings 349 million and Kenya Shillings 200 million respectively during period of 2010. However, despite making substantial profits, most of these companies are experiencing a high employee turnover at their petrol station outlets scattered around the country. Total Kenya (2011) had a 16% reported turnover of contract employees at their petrol station outlets.

Graham (1998) says that work constitutes the central life interest of individuals. Occupations have become very important in individual lives just because so many needs are satisfied by them. Therefore discontent among employees is most likely attributed to conditions and environments that make up their work place. QWL is measured by the satisfaction or lack of it by employees in their jobs, in that employees want a better working environment and firms on the other and want to improve the satisfaction derived by employees from work to attract, develop, and retain the best people for the organization (Landen, 1982). Therefore establishing working environment factors that affect the Quality of Work Life in petrol stations would enable station management to formulate strategies that will enhance positive Quality of Work Life as a remedy to stem employee turnover.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Meaning of Quality of Work Life (QWL)

As the work culture changes drastically in the recent years, the traditional concept of work to fulfill humans' basic needs are also facing out. Basic needs have continued to diversify and change according to the evolution of the work system and standards of living of a workforce. Seelan and Ismael (2008), note that from the mid-1990s to date, employees are faced with challenges of downsizing and corporate restructuring. As a result Quality of Work Life (QWL) is reemerging where employees are seeking out more meaning in their work. Besides, with rising educational levels and occupational aspirations in today's slow economic growth and reduced opportunities for advancement, naturally, there are rising concerns for QWL.

According to Lawler (1982), the term Quality of Work Life (QWL) was introduced in the late 1960s as a way of focusing on the effects of employment on health and general well-being and ways to enhance the quality of a person's comfort on the job experience. The author further states that Quality of Work Life is much broader and more diverse than organizational development, in ensuring adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, opportunities for personal growth and development, satisfaction of social needs at work, protection of employee rights, compatibility between work and non-work responsibilities and the social relevance of work-life. A more recent definition by Serey (2006) on QWL is quite conclusive and best describes the contemporary work environment since it is related to meaningful and satisfying work. The definition elaborately states that QWL includes an opportunity to exercise one's talents; an activity thought to be worthwhile by the individuals involved; an activity in which one understands the role the individual plays in the achievement of some overall goals; and a sense of taking pride in what one is doing and in doing it well.

2.2 Constructs of QWL

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition (EWON) (2002) carried out a number of surveys to determine the nature and constructs of QWL. The dimensions of QWL selected by the foundation are health and well-being, job security, job satisfaction, competence development, the balance between work with non-work life and nature of the work itself. Later, the foundation expanded the constructs of QWL to include nature of the job itself and working environment. Subsequently major constructs of QWL are discussed in this review based on EWON's guidelines.

2.2.1 Health and well-being

Health and well-being of QWL refer to physical and psychological aspects of an individual in any working environment. Serey (2006), examined the direct and indirect effect of computerization on workers health and well-being. Their results indicated that higher job demand leads to higher strain work environment; hence, it affects workers' health and well being. An unstrained work environment ensures good health and psychological conditions which enable the employees to perform job and non-work related functions without inhibitions.

2.2.2 Stressed by work

Kavalu (2009) Data analysis from the research revealed the presence of stress. About 25% of employees were found to be stressed by work. It was discovered that this stress is not solely contributed by the amount of work, but by factors that cause the work to accumulate and pileup. Such factors included equipment that is in bad condition, such as damaged computers and photocopiers. Accumulation of work was also caused by absence of stores such as printing papers and ink. It was recommended that reduction of lengthy and bureaucratic procedures be ironed out so as to enable employees enjoy their work environment.

2.3 Critique of the Existing Literature Relevant To the Study

In summary, where it has been considered, authors differ in their views on the core constituents of Quality of Working, however it has generally been agreed that Quality of Working Life is conceptually similar to well-being of employees but differs from job satisfaction which solely represents the workplace domain. In that perspective this research adopts four constructs of Quality of work based on Van Laar *et.al.* (2007) Work-Related Quality of Life scale (WRQoL) and The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition (EWON) (2002) as the main independent variables under study. These are working environment, reward, interpersonal relationships at work and job satisfaction.

3.0 Research Methodology

This research is an exploratory survey, which examined factors that affect the quality of work life in petrol stations in Kitale town. In this type of research, the investigator typically observes the variables under study without manipulating them (Cohen and Manion, 1992). The design was appropriate for the study because it did not allow for the manipulation of variables. The study employed the use of a questionnaire, which gave the researcher an opportunity to discover the relationship between the two variables; Quality of Work Life and factors that affect the Quality of Work Life.

3.1 Research Design and Target Population

Target population refers to a group of people or subjects that have similar characteristics that the research is interested in. This study targeted two groups of subjects in petrol stations; station managers and attendants. Station managers were assumed to be persons in charge of all operations at the petrol stations (who are not station owners) but also partake to the duties of serving clients at the petrol pumps, while attendants were all employees under the direction of the managers and whose prime duties involve servicing clients at a petrol station. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2011), there are 17 active petrol stations in Kitale town employing a population of 187. Therefore the target population for this study comprised 187 employees of 17 petrol stations to be found in Kitale town, who specifically comprised of station managers and attendants. Table 1.1 below gives a summary of the target population for the study.

Sampling is a procedure of selecting a part of the population on which research is to be conducted. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) state that with a larger population where time and resources allow, a big sample should be taken, as this will enable findings to be a true representative of the whole population. The authors further say that the sample size should not be less than 30% of the target population. Therefore, from a target population of 187 petrol station employees, the researcher selected a sample of 102 respondents.

The following sampling techniques were used for each stratum of target population: Some 17 Petrol Station Managers; the researcher used non – probabilistic purposeful sampling because the managers were assumed to occur only one per station therefore representing 100% of their targeted population. Some 85 Attendants were selected from their various stations at a rate of 50% of their total population using simple random sampling. That is 5 attendants randomly selected, as they were found working per station. The researcher used the duty roster to pick the five by selecting the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th person on the list.

Data was captured using questionnaires whose results were summarized coded and classified into categories. The data collected was quantitative and qualitative, and its analysis is basic descriptive in nature; using tabulation, frequencies and percentages. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to carry out analysis. Data is presented in percentages.

4.0 Research Findings And Discussions

4.1.1 Gender and Age Group

The findings indicate that the majority of petrol station attendants in Kitale town are female (52.2%) and male respondents (47.5%) were the minority. The findings further indicated that respondents (58.6%) were between 18 and 29 years old while 32.2% were between 30 and 39 years and 9.1% of them were between 40 and 49 years.

4.1.2 Duration respondents have worked for company

From the findings above, 4% of the respondents have worked at the petrol station for less than one year, 18.2% have worked at their respective stations for 1 to 2 years, 67.7% have worked there for 3 to 5 years and 10.1% have worked with the stations over five years. This means that a good number of respondents have a recommendable working experience at the stations and therefore have been exposed to factors that affect Quality of Work Life at the petrol stations in a way.

4.1.3 Respondents best work schedule

It was evident from the findings that 73.7% of the respondents preferred day shift as their best working schedule, 9.1% preferred afternoon shift, and 15.2% preferred night shift working schedule while only 2% of the attendants preferred to work on irregular shift. It therefore

means that the majority of the petrol station attendants prefer to work during the day and a significant number during the night shift.

4.1.4 Safety and health conditions

From the findings, 4.0% of the station attendants reported that they were very comfortable with safety and health conditions at the stations, 26.3% indicated they were comfortable, 13.1% were unsure of their safety and health conditions at the stations. The majority of the respondents (53.5%) reported that they were uncomfortable with the conditions, while 3.0% were very uncomfortable. This therefore indicates that the majority of petrol station attendants are uncomfortable with the safety and health condition of the petrol stations. As Lawler (1982) pointed out, Quality of Work Life should enhance an employee's comfort on the job experience in terms of health and general well-being. The aspect is considered vital, and in the case of this study it affects the employees negatively.

4.1.5 Work Pressure

From the findings it was evident 7.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that they work under pressure from the stations management, 68.7% agreed that they work under pressure. Some 2% of them were not sure of the aspect, while 20.2% disagreed that they were working under pressure and a further 2.0% of them strongly disagreed that they work under pressure. The responses given therefore indicate that the majority of respondents feel that they work under pressure from the petrol station management and clients.

4.1.6 Provision of adequate tools

Only 1% of the respondents strongly agreed that they are provided with adequate tools to perform their duties. A further 27.3% agreed to the aspect, while 3% indicated that were not sure if the tools they were provided with were adequate for them to perform their work. However two sets of respondents disagreed with the fact of provision of tools for work. Some 41.4% of the respondents disagreed that they are provided with adequate tools to perform their duties and another 27.3% strongly disagreed with the insinuation that they are provided with adequate tools for work. These findings indicated that petrol station attendants felt that their employers were not providing them with adequate work tools, a factor that negatively affects their Quality of Work Life at the stations.

5.0 Summary, Conclusions And Recommendations

5.1 Summary

Cascio (2005) says that in mechanical service jobs, employees (25- 44 years) have to the highest positive impact of productivity. It therefore implies that the majority of the petrol station attendants fall in productive age brackets. Most petrol station employee, 53.5%, reported that they were uncomfortable with the safety and health conditions, therefore indicates that the majority of petrol station attendants are uncomfortable with the safety and health condition of

the petrol stations. While 68.7% of respondents said that they work under pressure from the management and clients. It was also reported by 41.4% of the respondents that they felt they weren't provided with adequate tools to perform their duties. 41.4% of attendants aged 18-29 were uncomfortable with the safety and health conditions at the petrol stations. Significantly 16.2% of those aged 30-39 were comfortable with the safety and health conditions as were all those aged 40-49 at 1.0% and 8.1%. It therefore shows that safety and health, work pressure or stress and provision of adequate working tools are some of the environmental aspects that bring about poor Quality of Working Life experiences at petrol stations.

5.2 Conclusions

The result of this study concluded that working environment aspects affect Quality of Work Life among petrol station attendants. Poor safety and health conditions that were reported to be present at petrol stations negatively affect the Quality of Work Life among employees. It was also concluded there is poor Quality of Work Life at the stations because most of the employees work under pressure from the stations' management and clients. The poor Quality of work life is also aggravated by lack of adequate tools that are required by attendants to perform their duties effectively. It was further concluded that the more advanced in age the attendants are, the more satisfied they were with safety and health conditions at their work stations. Also it was concluded that male respondents were not affected by the state of safety and health conditions at the stations, unlike female attendants who were not comfortable with health and safety conditions of the petrol station and therefore experiencing poor quality of work life.

5.3 Recommendations

There is need to improve the working environment at the stations by ensuring that employees work under safe and healthy conditions. This can be achieved by developing highly professionalized occupational safety and health policies that guarantee the safety of all employees at work. Alongside that, employees should be given a stress free environment, which can be achieved by enriching their jobs by allowing them to choose and plan for a work schedule that fits their convenience. Employees should also be provided with adequate tools that will enable them to perform their work efficiently. The management of petrol stations should create an environment that is sensitive to women employees so that they are able to enjoy their work life.

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