

Quality of Life and Work Culture

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"Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises."

Samuel Butler, Notebooks, 1912

The 48-hour week may have been an enlightened concept 100 years ago, but it works against family life in the 21st century. The sole male breadwinner is almost an extinct species yet it remains the model on which our system is based. A full-time job is still the ideal held up to women and men who want a rewarding career - regardless of their family responsibilities. But as most young parents soon discover, holding down two full-time jobs and rearing young children has a devastating impact on their quality of life.

Work and the work ethic

Work plays a major role in people's lives. When you think of 'work' there are several definitions depending upon your own experiences and the society in which you live. In Western societies, paid employment is considered to be the most important type of work. Work is socially defined and needs to be understood in particular contexts. Work provides an individual with income, self-identity and status.

- The nature of work has evolved over time. In traditional and subsistence societies, work was necessary to ensure survival. This was often based on gender segregation and the division of labour. Work also depended upon people working co-operatively. Overtime work became specialised and people had to depend upon each other.
- The Industrial Revolution moved the location of work from the home to factories and cities, people moved from the land to urban areas. The central feature of this whole process was the use of machinery and dependence upon technology. Work in factories was divided into specialised tasks and managers controlled workers. Large numbers of workers were concentrated together and gradually workers organised themselves into unions. Work was viewed differently and attitudes to work changed.
- The Protestant work ethic focussed on working hard in order to redeem the soul and the need to save time. Key ideas linked to the work ethic are hard work, independence and saving. Work hours and patterns of work became linked to time and the profit motive. Work became a matter of routine and the worker had little control over the goods they produced and even became reduced to a commodity. The worker sold his labour in return for a wage. The social relationship between the boss and the worker was based upon the ownership of production. This led to unequal power in decision-making and forms the basis of the relationship of the employment contract today. Generally speaking this has led to the institutionalisation of industrial conflict.

Introduction

Whatever definition we give to work we do feel at times the work culture of today instigates us to ask.....Is life worth living? Why? Assume science makes you immortal, what will you then do for eternity? Such questions help us to put into perspective just what is satisfying about life and what we would rather discard. But it also highlights that we would not wish to just repeat the same things over and over again - production line style. Even what we love becomes boring if we are forced to do nothing else, humans need variety in our lives. We can use a form of Kant's categorical imperative to ask "what does what we are doing achieve?" If we all continue doing it for eternity then what benefit is it to us or our world? If the answer is "not a lot" then we may wish to reconsider our options and construct a better lifestyle or 'Quality of Life' and this is what we consider here. Quality of Life is an area of study that has

attracted a great deal of interest over the past ten years, particularly in the areas of health and social services, but increasingly in medicine, education, and others. The study of Quality of Life is an examination of factors that contribute to the goodness and meaning of life, as well as people's happiness. It also explores the inter-relationships among these factors.

The ideological thrust of quality of life study is to promote means for people, within their environments, to live in ways that are best for them. The ultimate goal of quality of life study and its subsequent application to people's lives is to enable people to live quality lives -- lives that are both meaningful and enjoyed

Before Darwin gave us 'natural selection' many theories of fitness had been proposed, these mostly derived from ethics and were variants on the question "what is the good life?". Neo-Darwinism answers this only by saying 'survival', a one-dimensional reduction that trivializes life and cannot distinguish bacteria or virus from human or sequoia tree. Here we will say that fitness or 'Quality of Life' is a multidimensional set of values, unique to each organism, person and context. The higher the complexity of the organism or the more developed the person the more numerous the values or criteria for determining fitness become. This dynamic nature of fitness is very different from the static or fixed criteria previously employed, and reflects the co evolutionary insights arising from complexity science.

- For overall quality of life, Zurich and Geneva rank top; Baghdad scores lowest
- Athens has Western Europe's poorest health and sanitary conditions

Mercer Human Resource Consulting's overall quality of life survey has revealed that Zurich and Geneva are the world's top-scoring cities, with 106.5 points. Geneva moves up from second place last year (score 106) and pushes Vancouver down a place (score 106). This move takes account of Geneva's schools, where standards of education, both in public and private schools, are now rated among the best in the world.

Cities in Europe, New Zealand, and Australia continue to dominate the top of the rankings: Vienna shares third place with Vancouver (score 106), while Auckland, Bern, Copenhagen, Frankfurt and Sydney are joint fifth with a score of 105.

Dynamic Fitness

Complex systems grow, they change over time, and humans are one of the most complex systems on the planet. The shifting balance between components, whether in cells, minds or societies, makes a static evaluation of fitness invalid, so we must use a dynamic measure. This measure must take into account not only the effects of actions on the organism but also what effects they have on the environment (including other people). Additionally we must consider effects at different levels, e.g. drugs may be psychologically beneficial but damage our cells. A further complication is that effects vary with time, this can work in many ways, e.g. euphoria today, hangover tomorrow or pain this week, fitness next week.

Quality of Life is often defined in a very negative way, simply as the absence of health threatening hazards from the environment or as the absence of disease or medical problems. Even if we take a more positive approach and consider the advantages the environment offers (e.g. in arts, schools, natural beauty, access and so on) this is again a static viewpoint and assumes that a body that is functioning at its optimum in an optimum environment is somehow also optimised. Nothing could be further from the truth, a vegetable could perhaps say that - but not a human.

Optimising Needs

We saw earlier that our human needs group into many areas, but initially we will take for granted the measurable external Primal (survival) and Social (environmental) needs and concentrate on those higher psychological needs that actually comprise our humanity and what they can contribute to our 'Quality of Life' (QOL). We saw that these needs are implemented at an abstract level, they do not relate to the physical world, thus our evaluation of them (in ourselves or in others) is problematical - we cannot measure beauty, or love or understanding using any

instrument. Despite this lack of a quantitative absolute measure, we can still easily measure these things in a relative way (e.g. as we do in eye tests - is this lens better than that ?) and for a dynamic fitness evaluation this will suffice.

If we weight (hypothetically) all these needs over a fitness range of 0 to 1, we can see that an optimum fitness could be obtained in multiple ways, there is no 'right' way of living (we are accepting here that we cannot maximise all possible activities at the same time). Similarly, we can see that concentrating exclusively on just one need to the exclusion of others cannot optimise fitness, since having two needs at 0 can't be compensated by a single need going from, say, 0.5 to 1, all three at 0.5 would be fitter. Thus the trend in modern society to specialise could be regarded as fitness reducing to the individual (unless compensated by other areas). The lack of independence between needs results from many causes, a prime one being time (e.g. doubling the time we spend playing golf must take that time from somewhere else, perhaps our family life).

Attitudes to Life

In many respects life is what we make it. It is our personal psychological attitude that defines our abstract level satisfaction or otherwise with our lives. Thus if we are an optimist we will see the good aspects of our environment, whilst a pessimist will only see the bad - thus the same environment is perceived differently. This means that environmental or material change is a poor method of optimisation, it is a crude global change that can make life seem worst for some - even if most like the change. Thus our concentration here on the psychological aspects of fitness should prove beneficial, in the fulfilment of those personal goals that lies behind most definitions of Quality of Life.

If a woman wants to work part-time and have a career - as opposed to just a "job" - she has to learn how to disguise it. Working parents who try to balance their work and family lives face entrenched discrimination. Very few employers provide genuine career paths for part-time workers - either male or female. Part-timers are relegated to the "mummy-track" or the "daddy-track" where they are stuck in low-status jobs and denied opportunities for promotion

Focusing on the abstract aspects of reality gives us considerable scope. The mind (unlinked to material) is totally free, and this freedom means that all of state space is available to us (if we can avoid mental wall building). Thus our options are very much wider than generally believed, assumptions of a static world and a powerless me are invalid. This vast unexplored state space is what we often encounter in dreams (day or night) - new free form combinations of existing concepts and variants on them. The world is dynamic and our views are as powerful as we choose to make them. They will be heard if what we say is sensible (and we collectively repeat it often enough !).

Metaneeds

Assuming that there is nothing basically wrong in our life (in other words our Primal and Social need structures are in place) what fitness enhancing actions can we take ? Most of us go through life in a repetitive way, we do the same things over and over again, like passive machines. Yet we are not machines, so can readily break free from this outdated deterministic Newtonian model. Even our media and educational systems are locked into this narrow repetitive world - the full diversity and beauty of knowledge and of our world is hidden by a fear of being different, of going beyond the lowest common denominator.

The move towards multiple TV channels, towards online information, towards virtual reality breaks down the stranglehold over information that has steered (and manipulated) our societies over the centuries. New information is itself fitness enhancing, since it provides choice, new options in state space. It also allows us to counter misinformation, to challenge the views that we have had imposed upon us by those holding power (by whatever means). This freedom is itself a major component of Quality of Life.

Social Needs

Returning now to the real world, we must recognise that with all the will in the world we cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. If the world in which we live is actually a bad one in

some respects, then we are unwise to persuade ourselves that it is good. This tends to invalidate many forms of psychotherapy, which attempt to make us believe that this is 'the best of all possible worlds', and if we cannot accept that then we must be 'faulty' and need 'reprogramming'. Our world today is far from perfect, and the negative effects on our quality of life is obvious - whether as a result of the need to commute for hours a day, suffering arrogant and insensitive leaders, of intrusive noise or all the other obstructive and restrictive practices that comprise our societies.

This level of needs relates strongly to the structure of our society, to the cultural norms that we invent to simplify our interactions. And make no mistake, we do invent these ideas, the values we put on things, on position, on fame or money are arbitrary. Many alternative value systems are possible and many of these will give a better quality of life. We need to carefully re-evaluate all these social attitudes and behaviours to specify just what benefit or fitness they provide, and to be prepared to discard those that have no benefit. We should augment or add alternatives that are more appropriate to a modern interdisciplinary and multidimensional view of quality.

Primal Needs

Mankind has failed dismally in even meeting the first stage of our species' survival needs. Despite all our technological superiority millions die from starvation, from disease, from flood and from natural disasters every year. Due to the insensitivity of the rich few (their inability or unwillingness to consider fitnesses other than their own) the vast majority have their quality of life reduced. Can any aware person say their fitness is maximised if they know of people dying from neglect elsewhere? Clearly a fitness-maximised world would not tolerate this problem.

Socio-cultural environment (censorship, limitations on personal freedom)

Control of nature was one of the early ideas behind science. Despite a rather human centered domination ideology, we now have the ability to seriously raise the quality of life for millions, perhaps billions of the inhabitants of this planet. Given that we are connected nowadays more than ever before, this would considerably increase the fitness of the complex system of which we are a part. Like most aspects of fitness maximisation this isn't to do with material world limitations but with psychological ones. It is a problem of attitude and needs to be addressed initially from the abstract level. Quality of Life, essentially is again all in the mind.

Conclusion

Nature is passive, humans are not. That message means that the value of our lives is a fluid quantity. It depends upon many dynamic aspects, relating not only to our own attitudes but to those of our society and our physical or environmental context. As a species we have far more say in our own Quality of Life than other creatures, indeed since we base much of our perceived social fitness on abstract ideas of worth we are in a position to change this fitness globally, almost overnight. What is required to maximise Quality of Life is largely awareness. Awareness of options, of alternatives, of the different attitudes than can be taken, of the limitations of conventional thought processes.

Many of our essays and the complexity ideas behind them relate to the re-evaluation of our thought patterns, of our way of treating the world. In essence this means a move from a static mechanical and materialistic perception of reality to an organic multilevel perception of a dynamic and changing reality. In the latter we are all connected parts of one global ecosystem, interdependent and interrelated. What we do affects other people, it affects their Quality of Life - their fitness and they in turn (in coevolutionary fashion) affect ours. Taking these interactions into account is the key to maximising fitness both as individuals and as a species. This is a multidimensional task, there are many values, at many need levels and many social groupings. This web of diversity comprises our Quality of Life.

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