Quality of Work-Life of Pilots: a Literature Review and Research Agenda

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Abstract

Firms and organizations are constantly seeking ways to enhance the Quality of Work-Life (QWL) so that they can retain and attract skilled employees. Pilots are among employees worldwide who are well paid. However, their work involves a lot of risks, including fatal accidents. Therefore, pilots require the best possible conditions in order to perform their work. Companies that employ pilots need to adopt strategies that support the quality of pilots' work-life. Through answering various questions, this paper seeks to examine the concept of quality of work-life for pilots and proposes five elements of the QWL model including: 1) Safe Working Environment, 2) HRM and HRD, 3) Fairness and Respect, 4) Social Relation, and 5) Work-Life Balance. This paper also discusses an agenda for future research and practical implications in the workplace.

Keywords: quality of work-life, pilots, aviation

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Introduction

Apart from the attempt to seek for ways to decrease operational costs and increase productivity, there are social trends, including legal, ethical, financial, and humanitarian, that have employees in the aviation industry increase their expectations about their personal safety and health, especially the roles of pilots (Federal Aviation Administration,2013). It can be seen that pilots play a crucial part in the aviation industry as they are responsible for lives on board the aircraft. Their performance may have an effect on safe operations. Also, they have to face the challenges of continuous development of improved and more complicated technology and aircraft, large amounts of information, and a steady growth in the amount of daily flying activities (Pilot-psychology). Various studies have identified many factors affecting pilots' performance, such as technical skills and currency, physical and psychological wellbeing, and welfare issues(Civil Aviation Safety Authority,2017). Quality of Work Life (QWL) could subsequently become an invaluable

strategy for industry to promote in order to attract and retain skilled employees. This study aims to propose a model including elements of quality of work-life for pilots. This paper begins with reviewing the existing concepts of quality of work life and working context. It is followed by the proposed five elements of quality of work-life, discussion, and conclusion.

Literature Review

This section provides review on quality of work-life and the working context of pilots.

1. Quality of Work-Life (QWL)

Quality of Work-Life can be traced to the early 1960s but gained momentum after being endorsed by the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD). According to A.S.T.D., Quality of Work-Life is the means by which the management of a company ensures that all of its employees participate in shaping its environment. QWL may be seen as an organizational process or strategy. For instance, (Stephen P. Robbins, 1989) defined QWL as "a process by which an organization responds to employee's

needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work" (p. 207). This is similar to Daubermann, D., and Pamplona, T. V. (2012). and Heidari, R. A., Enayati, N. A., and Hedayati, A.(2010). that considered QWL as a process by which the organization and stakeholders learn how to work better together to improve both quality of their staff and organizational effectiveness (Lau R.S.M ,2000). regarded QWL as workplace strategies, operations, and environment that promote and maintain employee's satisfaction aimed at providing favorable conditions and environments of a workplace that support and promote employee's satisfaction.

Because there are substantial amounts of research on QWL, this leads to various definitions explaining the meaning of QWL (Krueger, P., Brazil, K. Lohfeld, L., Edward, H.G., Lewis, D., Tjam, E. ,2002). Although the QWL concept has not yet finalized, it seems to be an agreement among researchers and scholars that QWL is a multi-dynamic concept that covers many dimensions (Adhikari, D. R., and Gautam, D. K., 2010). Walton, R. E. (1975)

defined QWL through eight criteria which are used to measure the level of QWL, including: 1) Adequate and fair compensation, 2) Safe and healthy environment, 3) Growth and security, 4) Development of human capabilities, 5) Total life space, 6) Social integration, 7) Constitutionalism, and 8) Social relevance (Mirsepasi, N.,2005). suggested that QWL is comprised of two dimensions: objective and subjective dimensions. The objective dimension refers to the actual experiences of workplace including reward systems, work environment, task variety, and safety and health issues. The subjective dimension refers to employees' attitudes of the QWL at their workplace. This could be their perceptions towards organizational fairness, and relationships with supervisors and management.

Later, (Rossi, A.M., Perrewee, P. L., and Sauter, S. L. ,2006) suggested that the concept of QWL may include opportunity for constant learning and development of new skills, and participative decision making.Additionally, several scholars emphasized that the key element of QWL is job security (Hayrol M. S., Jegak, U., Asiah, M., Noor, A. A., Bahaman, A.S.,

Jamilah, O. and Thomas, K.,2010). It is because job security has a direct effect on employees' motivations and performance. Moreover, for employees who perceive that they are treated respectfully by people they are involved with as well as employees who feel proud of their job, their feeling of belonging to the company tends to increase as they feel like they are an asset to the organization. The perception of fairness of employees at the workplace is also crucial. Employees should be treated fairly with dignity and respect regardless of their working level, functions, gender, or age. This particular perception has a direct impact on trust among the employees towards their management and should also have the possibility to appeal any decision made and receive a fair hearing in return, implying that leaders need to be approachable (Burchell, M., Robin, J. ,2011). As a result, they may experience satisfaction with their job and their quality of work-life may be considerably improved (Burchell, M., Robin, J. ,2011,Irene Kerstin Hunker, 2014).

Further, (Mohammad Hossein Nekouei, Mumtazah BT Othman, Jariah Bt Masud and Aminah Bt Ahmad,2014) categorized the concept of QWL into three dimensions: 1) Structural dimension, which encompasses the aspects of job characteristics and work conditions covering benefit and rewards, safety in working environment, job security, and attraction and retention, 2) Managerial dimension, which is a concern among professionals in different areas, such as quality of management and supervision, opportunity for training and professional development, feedback about the function, and participation in decision making, and 3) social dimension, which emphasizes the satisfaction with the quality of relationship between individuals and the total working environment including tasks, physical work environment, social environment administrative system, and work-life balance (Cunningham, J. B., and T.Eberle, 1990). Numerous studies have shown the positive relationship between QWL with desire outcomes, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour, employee ownership quotient, service quality, reduced turnover and

absenteeism, role stress, and growth and organizational profitability.

QWL has been an important tool in all human resources departments of numerous companies. Therefore, Quality of Work-Life of pilots may be viewed as the creation of a favorable environment that enhances the work of pilots (Ilkhanizadeh, S.,and Karatepe, O.M. ,2017). The desirable conditions should include a safe environment for pilots, suitable working time, appropriate compensation, and adequate health care for pilots (Srivastava, S.,and Kanpur, R. ,2014).

In general, companies pay attention to the quality work-life of pilots because it leads them towards economies of scale. Companies are likely to benefit significantly in all their dealings when they do this. These include increasing productivity, attracting and retaining qualified and skilled pilots, and minimizing accidents caused by pilots' mistakes. According to (zJayakumar,A., and Kalaiselvi, K.,2012).,implementation of work-life measures is essential in preventing a significant number of accidents in any industry.

2. Working Context of Pilots

A pilot's work is one of the most prestigious jobs in the world. A pilot's work was ranked among the top 20 professions in the world in 2006 (Thompson, M.N., and Subich, L.M. ,2006). The profession is characterized by an adequate, if not huge, salary. However, pilots experience the risk of not spending adequate time with their families. Pilots who work for commercial airlines travel from the main operating airport to various destinations. These destinations are in different countries around the world.

Pilots usually have many complicated tasks to perform; these are shared between the main pilot and the co-pilot. The workload varies during the flight but mostly becomes complicated during communication breakdown and adverse weather conditions (Gentili, R. J., Rietschel, J. C., Jaquess, K. J., Lo, L. C., Prevost, C.M., Miller, M. W., ... &and Hatfield, B. D.,2014). During high workload, pilots are vulnerable to errors, which sometimes psychologically break them down (Dorneich, M. C., Passinger, B., Hamblin, C., Keinrath, C., Vašek, J., Whitlow, S. D., and Beekhuyzen, M.,2011). According to a research by Wiegmann, D. A., and Shappell, S. A.,2017), a significant

number of pilot errors occur due to the complexity of the cockpit, which significantly contributes to airline accidents.

Further, the work environment of pilots involves all physical aspects of work that determine the performance of pilots (Maurino, D. E., Reason, J.Johnston, N., and Lee, R.B.,2017). Such working environments include safe high-technology and a program which requires a lot of knowledge and training from the pilots. Apart from the mentioned factors, family lives, colleagues at work, and the opportunity for career growth also influence the overall performance of pilots.

Due to their demanding work, lack of efficient work-life schemes may lead to mental health problems in pilots. This risk involves pilots experiencing stress, depression, and even having suicidal thoughts. According to Otto, J. L., and Webber, B. J. ,2013) ,pilots risk suffering from clinical depression, which is common in people working in high stress occupations. More so, due to the prestigious status of pilots, they mostly suffer from stigma, which prevents them from coming forward and seeking help for their mental problems. Consequences of these risks can be well explained by the German wings crash in 2015. In this case, the flight was deliberately brought down by co-pilot Andreas Lubitz, killing all the passengers on board. It was later revealed that the co-pilot suffered from stress, depression, and was even treated for suicidal thoughts (Von dem Knesebeck, O., Mnich, E., Angermeyer, M. C., Kofahl, C., and Makowski, A. ,2015).

Additionally, airline accidents are almost always fatal and the chances of pilot survival after the accidents are so low. According to(Gibb, R., Ercoline, B., and Scharff, L. ,2011), airline and pilot fatalities result in life-changing moments to pilots and other survivors. This is because the pilots end up with severe physical injuries. Pilot fatalities are mostly caused by numerous flight risks, such as bird strike risk, risk of failure of command and control centers, and risk of experiencing adverse weather conditions.

Elements of Quality of Work Life for Pilots

Based on the reviewing of the literature, the elements of the Pilot's QWL have formed the basis of a long and

detailed body of research on the QWL together with the working context of the pilots.

Figure 1 presents the five elements of quality at the workplace for pilots.
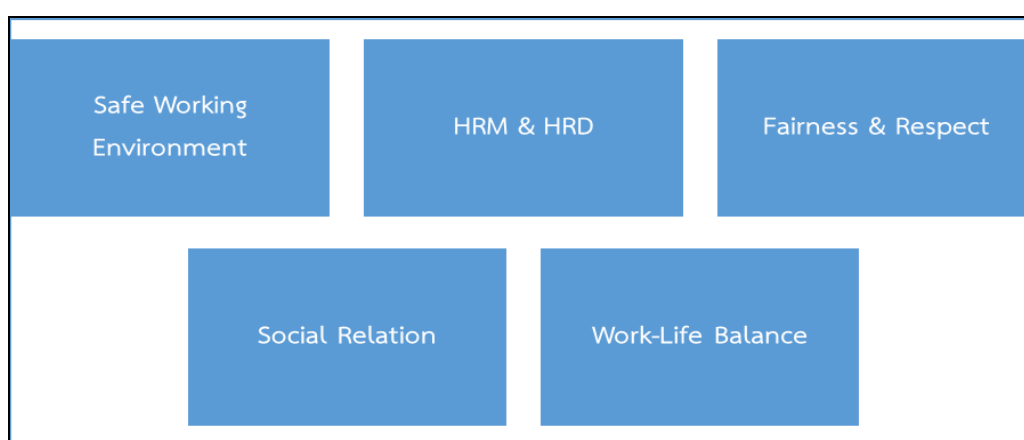

Figure 1. Five Elements of Pilot Quality of Work-Life

The five elements are described as follows:

Safe Working Environment: This dimension emphasizes the airworthiness of equipment, crews, and the relevance of the maintenance of the physical workplace and workers. This also includes safety awareness of individuals who are involved in the duty.

Human Resources Management and Development: This dimension emphasizes a sense of pilots' feeling secure about their own financial situation that relates to

the assurance of pilots to keep their job and opportunities to grow within their organization. This sense is derived from adequate compensation and benefits, financial incentives, salary progression, and saving programmers provided by an individual's organization. These are the reflection of their organizational visions, career development policy, and professional learning and development plans.

Fairness and Respect: It refers to the perception of fairness among pilots,

whether their policies, process, and procedures initiated by their organization are fair and shared within the organization openly and transparently. It also includes the perception of pilots on the treatment of how their management and related stakeholders treat them.

Social Relation: This refers to how pilots perceive themselves being accepted by other organizational members as part of their team or special community. It also includes their perception of receiving support and trust from other organizational members through a process of socialization.

Work-Life Balance: It refers to pilots' perception of being able to manage the amount of time they have for work and other aspects of their lives including family, personal interests, and health promotion activities. It refers to an individual's perception of being healthy through organizational health promotion activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The phrase quality of work-life has historically developed its meaning up to now. Quality of work-life of pilots simply implies providing the necessary conditions that enable pilots to balance their profession and personal life. From the research, it is evident that pilots' work is associated with lots of risks that hinder pilots from having a quality work-life. Pilots' work is characterized by a relatively adequate salary and prestige in the society. However, the risks associated with pilots work are dangerous. Stress and depression are the most common risks involved with pilots. As reported by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), stress and fatigue significantly contributed to pilots committing mistakes in the cockpit. Pilots working for commercial airlines that travel from one country to another always fly for long hours. It is at this point that they develop clinical depression, which is associated with long hours of working.

Furthermore, this paper reveals that there are certain factors that influence the quality of work-life of pilots. The combination of these factors with the risks mentioned above leads to severe effects that may affect the pilots in their late years. Mostly, pilots are paid fairly. But due to their scarcity in nature, they are

mostly faced with huge workloads and unfixed work schedules. In addition, the frequent technological advancement in the aviation industry means that the pilots' working environment is ever-changing.

Therefore, strategic measures, such as flexible time schedules and reduced workloads, go a long way in ensuring that pilots enjoy a quality work-life. Companies can adopt other measures but the measures should solemnly focus on the pilots' state of work.

This research was limited to identify QWL dimensions for pilot professions and provide recommendations for organizations to develop their quality of work-life promotion strategies. It may be interesting to investigate the relationship between the level of perception of QWL among pilots and other variables, such as happiness, organizational commitment, and accident and incident rates. Further, the model of pilots' QWL may be used as a foundation for future research to statistically test it. The model may be suitable for different work functions in the aviation industry.

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