

Quality of working life research: VI. Are you on your way up in life—or down?

Søren Ventegodt,^{1,2,3,4,5} Niels Jørgen Andersen,⁴ Isack Kandel⁶ and Joav Merrick^{7,8,9}

¹Quality of Life Research Center, Classensgade 11C, 1 sal, DK-2100 Copenhagen O, and ²Research Clinic for Holistic Medicine and ³Nordic School of Holistic Medicine, Copenhagen, Denmark; ⁴Scandinavian Foundation for Holistic Medicine, Sandvika, Norway; ⁵Interuniversity College, Graz, Austria; ⁶Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Ariel University Center, Samaria, Ariel, and ⁷National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, ⁸Office of the Medical Director, Division for Mental Retardation, Ministry of Social Affairs, Jerusalem, Israel; and ⁹Kentucky Children's Hospital, University of Kentucky, Lexington, United States

Abstract: It is amazingly rare for people to succeed in creating really good lives through their work and making the big dream come true. Surveys carried out by The Quality-of-Life Research Center showed that only one Dane in three is *really* happy in his work. Few people burn for their work, they just burn themselves out. We all have the option of revising what we think of ourselves, life and the world around us. Likewise, we can make adjustments to our habits and our way of life in general. We can all do a lot to feel better, in private and on the job. For some reason we do not do anything about it until we are forced to. But we could easily do something if we decided to do so. There is nothing more delightful than discovering that nature actually created us wonderful, intelligent, attractive, talented and humorous etc. We must stop preventing ourselves from being so. The four issues necessary for a company to really succeed and create real value in the world are; quality of life and job satisfaction, mastery within each individual field of activity, a sense of community with respect to co-operation and management, and finally creating real value. This is an ongoing process that affects revising of values, working procedures, and goals. The company or organization with these qualities will be successful both from the perspective of employees and customers. Such an organization will go one step further and also prove to be valuable to the environment: nature and society. It is this type of development, which will carry companies forward into the 21st century.

Keywords: Quality of Life, QOL, quality of working life, QWL, philosophy, human development, public health

Correspondence: Søren Ventegodt, MD, MMedSci, MSc, Director, Quality of Life Research Center, Classensgade 11C, 1 sal, DK-2100 Copenhagen O, Denmark. Tel: +45-33-141113; Fax: +45-33-141123; E-mail: ventegodt@livskvalitet.org

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INTRODUCTION

Most of us do not grow old gracefully, we become sad and decrepit. What is it that makes some people develop and systematically improve their lives year by year? What are the characteristics of people who understand how to develop?

The basic principles of personal development can be studied thoroughly in a rather special situation, which is when a life-threatening condition becomes terminal. In this situation most of us suddenly experience an immense love of life as well as a very strong motivation to improve life radically while we still can. The fantastic thing about this is that it seems to be possible. It does not even take long to improve life significantly when we are terminally ill—maybe a few weeks or months. We all have great hidden resources.

Nothing is as sensitive to attitudes and conduct as our dealings with others. We are able to create for

ourselves most favorable circumstances provided that we know how to bring to the surface the best in people, if we consider them delightful, talented, constructive etc. Often we can inspire to personal development by observing fine traits in people who have not yet themselves discovered their good points. This is one of the best ways to interact with your friends and colleagues.

Now and then, we meet a very happy person—and they do exist. A feature of very happy people is that they do precisely the work they want to. Look closer and you will find that these people consider themselves hunters or warriors. They fight to make their dreams come true. They are very different from the majority since their efforts are not motivated by duty and mere necessity but by love of life. This love provides an indomitable will to make life come true.

In a flash of profound insight, a lucky moment in which we sense very intensely what life has in store for

us, we suddenly decide to change our lives. When made wholeheartedly, the decision to change our lives is an extremely effective one. Unfortunately, our existence is often so unconnected that the decision is not made in our existential center, in our inner integrity, but in a far corner of the brain. Such a decision has no great and pervasive effect. It can be compared with a decision to stop smoking where you start again after a fortnight.

On the other hand, this is what we have to make do with. The missing discipline must be developed gradually through perseverance. As long as we do our best and a little more, we cannot blame ourselves. What does it matter if we fall back into less fortunate patterns? If we eventually realize what is wrong, we can escape once more. This is exactly the struggle we are involved in, all of us. Such are the tough conditions of life.

Very few people ever develop enough discipline to experience the full strength of a decision made by the whole person. This kind of decision simply changes life from one moment to the next. But again, people who are that disciplined rarely have anything to improve. They have achieved mastery. They have put their life in complete order.

It is often an advantage when a coach can keep you at it and prevent you from taking the easy way out. A coach can observe you from the outside and he or she has excellent opportunities of keeping an eye on you and finding out how you prevent yourself from creating true progress in your life. The ideal coach is a person who is not necessarily a close friend but he or she is somebody you trust and like.

ARE YOU ON YOUR WAY UP IN LIFE—OR DOWN?

When you cannot find any challenge in work: Stress and lack of development

Tanya works in the marketing department. She thinks that her work is strenuous and stressful. Her superior keeps making demands of her and she has difficulty keeping up with these demands. She feels inadequate. Often she doubts whether she has found her niche though she cannot think of something else to do. She wonders why she is always so busy and she can tell from her superior's looks that he thinks she works too slowly and does not do her job properly. Sometimes she believes she is going to wear herself out.

Taking up the fight of life: Developing

Gertrud is developing well in her job and her life. She thrives and grows and has changed completely. It appears that she gets better year by year. She is in full bloom, laughing and joking. She is alive. Gertrud has

made a strange leap. Her posture has changed from a stooped to an erect carriage. Mentally she has changed her attitude toward life to a positive and constructive belief in survival. She is coping. Each day she practices living. And she makes astonishingly good progress.

Developing personal challenges: Developing a great deal

Tea is part of an interesting team in the marketing department. She experiences life as a great personal challenge. Her work is also her hobby. She knows that she does what she is best at and that it corresponds exactly with what she wants to do. Often her work absorbs her for days. Each day brings her something new. She is not worried about working at full speed all day as well as working overtime. She lives for using her life and she loves her work. If she is made redundant, she will continue to fill her life with meaning.

Her colleagues look at her with a wry expression. They say she works like a horse. But Tea does not work for compliments. She works because she is convinced that this work is her purpose in life.

People think they develop because life's panorama changes and because they gradually rearrange their values in accordance with current trends. But the crucial point is that the experience of life as such does not change for the better in most people's lives. If it changes, it usually goes gradually downhill. On the other hand, people rarely become radically happier with living as they grow older. Nor do they radically improve their experience of their working life - although it does happen.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

There is much evidence to indicate that it is possible to become happier (1). Most of us know of some people who have done it, who have improved their lives and acquired a new and more fulfilled working life, leisure life, etc. Rather few people achieve a better working life without improving their life in general. It happens that people find a new job and say without hesitation: I feel so much better at work now. Now the problems, the conflicts, and the bad experiences vanish for a while. But they will resurface if one suffers from such tendencies. *It is amazingly rare for people to succeed in creating really good lives through their work and making the big dream come true.*

It is very important to keep in mind that change itself is not human development. A great deal of change is often superficial whereas the tough reality at the depth of life offers only stagnation and adaptation.

Development takes more than that. It demands a goal-oriented and disciplined effort. It requires us to really want to change. We must want a better life before we start improving our life at work. In order to succeed we must be truly motivated.

When we embark on growth and development as human beings, whether in our private lives or at work, we come against strong, conservative forces. We have developed into egos through a long personal history that has confirmed our perception of reality as taught by parents, teachers and all other adults explaining what reality looks like.

We were given a set of attitudes, a set of habits and behavior patterns drummed into us. Now these more or less permanent attitudes form the backbone of our lives. Such a backbone has to be quite stable, rather rigid, so to speak; otherwise we are too impressionable and dependent - soft as molluscs. Unfortunately, this rigidity makes it difficult for us to develop because development requires certain softness and flexibility, as well as a basic openness to the views of others.

Developing as a human being—improving the experience of life

To push it to its logical conclusion, one could say that what really needs to be developed in us is our somewhat half-finished, coarse and less refined perception of ourselves, of life and of the world around us: This is what gives us unpleasant personalities.

Human development is largely focused on being able to accept oneself as a human being with flaws and weaknesses that we would like to correct. This is followed by years of hard work trying to correct these flaws and weaknesses. When we do not develop, it is because we much prefer to justify ourselves instead of acknowledging our shortcomings and trying to correct them.

Our experience of living, that is to say our joy in life, needs to be developed further since quality of life is a function of this joy. Life experience manifested by good or bad quality of life covers two issues: our perception of reality and the things we do in life. Our perception of reality embraces our attitudes to life and what it brings us. What we do in life is our practice of life, all we do and say, our habits, decisions etc.

Our practice of life mirrors our attitudes and ends up confirming them, be they conscious or unconscious. If we dislike somebody, for instance, we behave accordingly, showing distance and reservation. Such a behavior pattern provokes repulsion. It makes us believe that there are numerous reasons for not liking the

person, despite our own initial bad behaviour.

Or maybe we were trained in inept behavior during our childhood by not being taught actively to search for knowledge, etc. and are now in trouble in our adult life because we have come to regard ourselves as untalented. Or we feel that we are not good-looking, intelligent, admirable, courageous or whatever.

We have learned to picture ourselves in terms of the number of words available to us in our language. To each quality or feature is attached a detailed behavior. We contain a huge amount of behavior patterns, taught by vocation and thousands of repetitions. Our concept of the state of things is confirmed by experience during a lifetime, even though we were the underlying reason for what happened. We create our own experiences through our attitudes and life practice, often without knowing it! We suffer from a dreadful tendency to be unaware of what is happening in our lives.

But logically, the solution is within reach. When we become attentive, we overcome many of the barriers that keep us fixed at a certain level through life. An increasing awareness of our personal likes and dislikes makes us reconsider our motives. Not until we realize that we do have an opinion on life can we discover the wide range of alternative attitudes. Furthermore, we discover that our behavior is an expressed attitude, which leads to different ways of doing things, some of which may be better than others.

In fact, comprehensive development is not compatible with a wish to achieve development within a few areas, privately or professionally. It is our whole attitude to life and our corresponding behavior that creates our lives. All the way through life we must be attentive and do our best. We must take up life's challenges and train ourselves, be totally attentive and to do our best.

To be attentive and make an effort corresponds to a solution where you act according to your true convictions. Bear in mind that being attentive is not something you do; it is something you are. In a way you have to change something deep inside your existence in order to start developing. This is a barrier that deserves respect and must be overcome through persevering, active and goal-oriented effort.

Most people find it hard to believe that inside of us we possess all the wisdom needed to lead a good life. To most people it sounds preposterous that we just need to surrender to life and trust it. To modern western Europeans it seems naive and romantic to listen to the soul hidden beneath the busy and confused surface.

To improve your life is quite complicated when you try. When taking up the challenge, try testing the simple

idea that life is full of wisdom that can be located and expressed in many ways, provided that you have faith in yourself while you listen to your inner self. It requires courage to recognize and live out your innermost dreams and longings. But we will not become harmonious and happy beings until the day we start asking for and doing what we really want to do (2-6).

Ability to function and age

There is a sinister curve regarding the state people find themselves in. It is the curve showing the correlation between people's age and their ability to function. This ability to function comprises issues such as ability to manage one's job and one's social obligations and is directly related to health. Research results show that people reach their peak activity between 20 and 40 years. After this they decline, at first very slowly, then faster later on.

Around 60 years of age, most people have deteriorated to such an extent that they are of very little value on the job. At present, the average retirement age is 61 years. At this age most people have acquired their first chronic disease. Normally it is not a harmful disease, just a slight attack of arthritis or dementia.

But the decay accelerates and around the age of 75 most have reached the end of the road.

The results of research done in Denmark (Quality-of-Life Survey, 1995) have revealed interesting but worrying facts and patterns that seem to relate strongly to our ability to function in relation to age.

The results revealed that most Danes do not really feel very good or very bad during their lives—they live in a 'lukewarm middle-group', revealing the following characteristics:

- Almost every other Dane does not have a close friend.
- Every fourth Dane does not have a girlfriend or boyfriend.
- Of those with a partner, one in three women and one in four men have sex problems.
- Only one Dane in three feels very good at work.
- 94% of the population suffers from a health defect.
- Half of the population suffers from chronic conditions.
- One in twenty contemplates suicide from time to time.
- There is no correlation between happiness and annual income.
- Happiness is clearly and closely connected with the quality of personal relationships.

- Those who feel bad on the job feel worse in life than unemployed people do.

The surveys have also shown that the Danes are one of the most contented populations in Europe. At the same time they have the second highest suicide rate in Europe as well as one of the lowest life expectancies.

The most interesting feature about this curve is that a small proportion of the population does not seem to follow the curve. A few percent get better year by year and become rounded, soft, warm, valuable, and highly appreciated human beings. They are the ones who end up as wise, old people who are highly esteemed and vital until their last day. They often die within 24 hours at a very advanced age. These exceptions do exist. Could this picture of the Danish culture be true of other western cultures too?

However, most of us do not grow old gracefully, we become sad and decrepit.

What is it that makes some people develop and systematically improve their lives year by year? What are the characteristics of people who understand how to develop?

The basic principles of personal development can be studied thoroughly in a rather special situation, which is when a life-threatening condition becomes terminal. In this situation most of us suddenly experience an immense love of life as well as a very strong motivation to improve life radically while we still can. The fantastic thing about this is that it seems to be possible. It does not even take long to improve life significantly when we are terminally ill—maybe a few weeks or months. We all have great hidden resources.

Apprehension and life practice

For a long time Lisa felt she was ailing. It seemed as if her life would not work out properly. She thought of life as hard, painful, and weak. As if it contained no value—and it was useless to start fighting.

In a way, she felt life a bit unreal. Nor was she content with the world around her. It did not seem to offer her the proper opportunities, it was hard and unyielding; you could not even scratch it with a nail. She could not help feeling that she did not comply with life's demands. She did not feel bright and attractive; at times she felt ugly and unloved. She thought, all in all, that she was rather useless and tired of life.

Her life had gradually turned into a routine. She had come to terms with quite a few symptoms from stomach-aches to insomnia. She had come to accept that things would not work out for her at work, where she felt

excluded when colleagues chatted among themselves and left her out of it, even maybe behind her back. She refrained from confronting executives and colleagues, her friends and her boyfriend with her opinion of the situation. Instead she chose, not really wanting to, the role of the victim. Understandably, no one really liked her. She was not an easy person to care for.

Try to plot Lisa in the attitudinal questionnaires below: We know from research that statistically, quality of life correlates strongly with answers in the left-hand column.

How do you perceive life, yourself, and your environment?

Put a circle around a number in each line - between the two statements. The numbers mean:

- 1: You agree 100% with the statement to the left
- 2: You agree more with the statement to the left
- 3: You agree or disagree with both statements
- 4: You disagree more with the statement to the right
- 5: You agree 100% with the statement to the right

Perception of Life

Life is full of joy	1 2 3 4 5	Life is full of pain
Life is full of meaning	1 2 3 4 5	Life is meaningless
Life is enhanced through fighting	1 2 3 4 5	It is useless to fight

Self-Perception

I am

Loved	1 2 3 4 5	Unloved
Extroverted	1 2 3 4 5	Introverted
Headstrong	1 2 3 4 5	Weak-willed
Competent	1 2 3 4 5	Incompetent
Courageous	1 2 3 4 5	Cowardly

Perception of environment

The world is soft and malleable	1 2 3 4 5	The world is hard and unyielding
The world contains all I need	1 2 3 4 5	The world cannot satisfy my needs
My personal achievements matter to the world	1 2 3 4 5	My personal achievements are unimportant to the world

Then Lisa gets breast cancer, like innumerable other women. The prognosis is bad. Feeling the pressure of the short time left to her, she discovers a new love of life that changes her attitude and mental outlook. Now she finds that life is valuable and good and full of meaning and fighting spirit. She gives the matter a great deal of thought and reaches the conclusion that everything important in life is caused by something and that nothing happens by chance. She is forced to improve her marriage and her working life as well as the way she is using her friends. She discovers, finally, a great freedom to shape her life and her reality the way

she wants. The opportunities are far more extensive than she ever imagined.

Lisa finally experiences a new love for herself. She accepts herself as she is, weak and vulnerable. In the midst of this openness she discovers life itself to be strong and that she has far more strength than she thought. She experiences an intense blossoming accompanied by many declarations of love. She opens up to life and people around her in a touching whirl of events that change her life completely. At one point she can say honestly and in the middle of disease and misery: 'I never felt so good in all my life'.

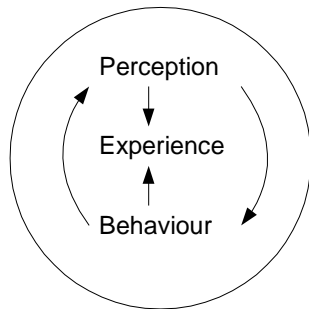


Fig. 1: Our behavior (Life practice) is defined by our conception (Sense of reality), which is again confirmed through the response from life and the surroundings caused by our conduct. We end up being caught in a self-affirmative bubble, the truth and value of which we are quite sure of, even though it may be in deep conflict with life inside us. The whole construct, the life we have created, can only be valued by a single parameter, which is our experience of life, our quality of life

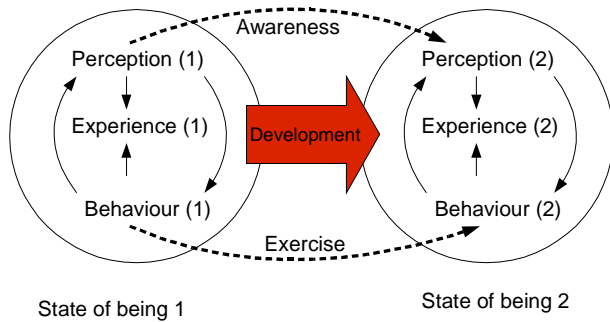


Fig. 2: Human beings develop when they become attentive to attitudes which are more in accordance with life and when life simultaneously is restructured and rearranged in favor of expressing more constructive and positive attitudes. You can either jump from one state to another, or you can develop by making a decision to improve your life, practicing alertness and making your best efforts at living.

Perception, behavior, experience

Our experience of life is defined by two basic parameters in life: our perceptions or attitudes and what we do and say to express these perceptions. A complicating feature in human beings is that we find confirmation of our initial attitudes and opinions in the reactions that come to us from life and our surroundings. Figure 1 depicts the situation.

Our perception and our behavior provide us with our experiences. Furthermore, our perception gives us an attitude, which leads to a response from our surroundings, which in turn inevitably confirms us in our beliefs.

What happens to Lisa, when she is confronted by the death sentence is that she experiences her life structure, all she believed in and her way of life, as a failure. Put together, her attitudes and behavior have not caught up with life and expressed love of life. She becomes attentive to a whole new set of beliefs and a whole new perception of life, which corresponds to a new practice of life. Concurrently with rearranging her life, she achieves a far better experience of life. She stops opposing life and finally finds herself close to life and alive according to the original meaning of her life as illustrated by figure 2.

Do I have a talent for this task?

Rasmus is trainee clerical assistant and not very good at his job. The secretaries perceive him as somewhat misplaced. He does not think of himself as talented. In general, he appears lazy and unmotivated. He does not have the curiosity toward the profession, which is typical of good trainees and he prefers to avoid the difficult tasks.

At a particular point, the head of section makes it clear to Rasmus that he has to change his attitudes if he wants to stay with the company. Rasmus experiences a crisis in which he finds himself in serious doubt as to whether he really wants to work in an office or whether he should try manual work.

Pressed by circumstances, he is in doubt as to whether he has a talent for office work at all. He ends up concluding that he does have talent but is not good at utilizing it. As he does not try and does not do his best, he cannot expect to get better at his job. Rasmus radically changes his attitude to the job and decides to remain in the profession and give it all it needs. Soon after he begins to make progress and in time he becomes very valuable to the office and very happy in his job. Try to plot in Rasmus' attitudes before and after the crisis according to the list below:

Attitudes toward becoming really good

I have many important talents	1 2 3 4 5	I have no specific talents
When I work on improving my skills, they improve quickly	1 2 3 4 5	When I work on improving my skills, they improve only slowly
I love challenges and continually look for new tasks that will force me to develop	1 2 3 4 5	Challenges stress me. I try to hold on to what I am used to do
I am a person who succeeds, in general	1 2 3 4 5	I am a person who does not really succeed
I have big dreams of mastering my profession and create genuine value	1 2 3 4 5	I have no dreams about mastering my profession to become really valuable

Meeting people

Anders was very fond of his small favorite bar. He did not go there all that often but when he did, he really let go. One day, when dropping by, he met a big nasty guy. The big guy was the kind of person who hit people for no cause and carry a gun in their inside pockets, Anders thought. He ordered a beer, but had not had a drop before the stranger started bothering him with stupid remarks.

Anders was very fond of his small favorite bar. One day at the bar he met a customer he had not seen before, a big, strong guy with square features. He ordered a beer and after awhile he was talking to the stranger. It appeared that he had just moved into town and did not yet have any friends. Anders could provide the stranger with useful information and they ended up getting on fine.

The way we meet people, our attitudes and prejudices as well as our behavior will always decide the quality of our human relations. Some people are incredibly good at meeting other people whereas others systematically make trouble for themselves. Nothing is as sensitive to attitudes and conduct as our dealings with others.

We are able to create for ourselves most favorable circumstances providing that we know how to bring to the surface the best in people, if we consider them delightful, talented, constructive etc. Often we can inspire to personal development by observing fine traits in people who have not yet themselves discovered their good points. This is one of the best ways to interact with your friends and colleagues.

Attitudes toward others, toward co-operation and management

I like other people	1 2 3 4 5	I do not like other people
I believe that other people like me	1 2 3 4 5	I do not count on other people liking me
I am sure that my colleagues can perform just as well as I can	1 2 3 4 5	I do not have confidence that my colleagues can do the job as well as I can
The best thing is to create results together with others	1 2 3 4 5	The best thing is to create something on your own
Managers are a steady help and support in my development	1 2 3 4 5	You cannot make friends with your manager - there are too many differences

At times things are not perfect and we are obliged to change the situation because we are the best placed to do so. Our place of work, for instance, is managed by an authoritarian and out of date board, which acts as a barrier to any development, including creating genuine values. In this situation, it is important to start fighting in order to create order.

This fight is the ultimate test. Only when we are involved in confronting challenges of this size can we see the direct benefit of personally developing into a better and more influential person. You only develop when you are forced to. To accept the big challenge is to place yourself in a situation that leaves you with no choice but to do your best and to do it quickly.

Attitudes toward creating real value

At work I get the good feeling that I create value for others and myself	1 2 3 4 5	I do not give much thought to how valuable my work is to customers and others
I feel that I realize some of my most significant values and dreams within the organization	1 2 3 4 5	I do not feel that I can realize my true values within the organization
My values are in line with those of the organization	1 2 3 4 5	My values are very different to those of the organization

The purpose of the exercises above is to draw your attention to your own attitudes and the way these attitudes are expressed. By paying attention to your attitudes and continually trying to develop and train these, you may ensure a better experience of life and a more valuable existence. The above lists are examples found in the tools for improving working-life quality. The tools are organized in such a way that it makes it easy for you to analyze your attitudes and find out what problems you cause for yourself in various situations at work. Everyday examples, like those provided by Lisa and a lot of other people, show that human beings have within them many more hidden resources than we think.

We all have the option of revising what we think of ourselves, of life, and the world around us. Likewise, we can make adjustments to our habits and our way of life in general. We can all do a lot to feel better, in private and on the job. For some reason we do not do anything about it until we are forced to. But we could easily do something if we decided to do so.

There is nothing more delightful than discovering that nature actually created us wonderful, intelligent, attractive, talented, and humorous, etc. We must stop preventing ourselves from being so.

Now and then, we meet a very happy person—and they do exist. A feature of very happy people is that they do precisely the work they want to. Look closer and you will find that these people consider themselves hunters or warriors. They fight to make their dreams come true. They are very different from the majority since their efforts are not motivated by duty and mere necessity but by love of life. This love provides an indomitable will to make life come true.

Happy people squeeze all they can get out of life. They fight to make life succeed. The willpower to fight uncompromisingly provides them with a special capacity for living and they develop a certain competence in life. When we meet people of this kind, we often think they were privileged by birth. Unfortunately, it seldom occurs

to us that they may have developed and shaped their lives individually and finally achieved mastery.

Get started—personally and within the company

The Churchill Dairy's bottom line is in the red. Employees seek jobs elsewhere and everybody has a feeling that the company is a sinking ship, though this is not obviously the case. Milk, butter and cheese are always in demand and the dairy's products are not significantly poorer than those of other companies. Still, sales are declining. It has proven difficult to contact the customers. There are cliques; there is trouble and quarrelling. The employees blame the situation on management, who respond by pointing to shortcomings and lack of efficiency as well as lack of flexibility among the workers, many of whom are elderly. They are poorly educated and have problems handling the latest technology. In general, the bad and uninspiring atmosphere makes it hard to attract young people.

An attempt to understand what is wrong is made by measuring the level of job satisfaction at the dairy. The evaluation shows that all four dimensions of working-life quality are low: personal quality of life, mastery, sense of community and the creation of genuine values. There is no particular point of failure but generally, the dairy's working-life quality is 50%-60% of its potential—in the so-called red area, the consultant says. Such a company runs at only half speed or less and is hardly able to compete. The consultant recommends quick implementation of a radical cure to raise the company to the orange area (60%-70%). The green area, above 70%, will take a few years to attain. However, the dairy may succeed, provided the trend of development takes a turn for the better.

Management presents the analysis at a staff meeting where the connecting principles are discussed concerning the bottom line and working-life quality. Agreement is reached that lack of information and lack of responsibility and commitment to the company are the main reasons for

poor efficiency. Furthermore, poor communication between sections, lack of team spirit among the employees and conflicts between management and employees are other reasons for inefficiency.

The cheese and some of the other products could be better, too. The customers complain about lack of consistency as well as fluctuating quality. Though it is not clear how production is supervised, it is obvious that improvement is needed through a better working environment, personal, commitment and job satisfaction.

When you have improved your skills in solving problems on the job, you will discover a general upgrading of your skills in troubleshooting. This may benefit your private life as well.

It works both ways: if you try hard to solve private problems, the effects will be positive on the job as well.

We have now examined the four issues necessary for a company to really succeed and create real value in the world: quality of life and job satisfaction, mastery within each individual field of activity, a sense of community with respect to co-operation and management, and finally creating real value. This is an ongoing process that affects revising of values, working procedures and goals.

The company or organization with these qualities will be successful both from the perspective of employees and customers. Such an organization will go one step further and also prove to be valuable to the environment: nature and society. It is this type of development, which will carry companies forward into the 21st century.

How to start developing

We all have resources, hidden as well as obvious, to improve our lives. We have the resources to ameliorate our actions. But how do we get started? Traditionally there are two ways. The first and ordinary way is the most difficult one to implement: we discover that we are to die within a short time and that we love life immensely and this makes us rearrange our limits. This is the method for those given a death sentence by their doctor. The situation is highly effective if you confront it properly, although naturally this situation could never arise artificially. Consciousness about death and the fighting spirit to remain alive are gifts we receive unexpectedly and often undeservedly.

The second method is always at hand. In a flash of profound insight, a lucky moment in which we sense very intensely what life has in store for us, we suddenly decide to change our lives. When made wholeheartedly, the decision to change our lives is an extremely

effective one. Unfortunately, our existence is often so unconnected that the decision is not made in our existential center, in our inner integrity, but in a far corner of the brain. Such a decision has no great and pervasive effect. It can be compared with a decision to stop smoking where you start again after a fortnight.

On the other hand, this is what we have to make do with. The missing discipline must be developed gradually through perseverance. As long as we do our best and a little more we cannot blame ourselves. What does it matter if we fall back into less fortunate patterns? If we eventually realize what is wrong, we can escape once more. This is exactly the struggle we are involved in, all of us. Such are the tough conditions of life.

Very few people ever develop enough discipline to experience the full strength of a decision made by the whole person. This kind of decision simply changes life from one moment to the next. But again, people who are that disciplined rarely have anything to improve. They have achieved mastery. They have put their life in complete order.

It is easier to decide if more people want the same thing. Joint inspiration and support is an advantage when running a development project in the company in order to improve life.

It is often an advantage when a coach can keep you at it and prevent you from taking the easy way out. A coach can observe you from the outside and he or she has excellent opportunities of keeping an eye on you and finding out how you prevent yourself from creating true progress in your life. The ideal coach is a person who is not necessarily a close friend but he or she is somebody you trust and like.

ABOUT WORKING-LIFE QUALITY: A TOOL FOR EMPLOYEES AND EXECUTIVES

The Working-Life Quality tool has been developed in order to help you acquire the inspiration and discipline needed to develop personal working-life quality. It is not very difficult to use this tool but it commits you to being alert and effecting changes.

The tool attends to the four aspects of good work: quality of life, mastery, sense of community, and creating authentic value. Furthermore, the tool comprises an understanding of what is needed for people to develop and grow, i.e. the perception and practice of life that must be developed analogously and brought in harmony with our inner lives. Finally, it supplies a form (including a chart for checking yourself) for exercises that may motivate the discipline needed. If you do not try, you will not improve. Our attention to

positive attitudes as well as proper behavior is what opens us up and gives us access to our hidden resources.

The tool is an instrument to help make a difference in your working life. A combination of disciplined effort and understanding of the principles of development, a focus on better attitudes plus adjustment of less satisfactory conduct, which acts as an impediment, may lead to significant development.

WORKING-LIFE QUALITY—THE TOOL

The tool itself guides you through a course lasting 15 weeks during which you improve the four central issues at work: your relationship to yourself, to the tasks you work with, to those you work with and to those you work for, customers and your environment. It is a workbook of 160 colored pages with exercises and various examples. The material is collected in a folder including a 12-page questionnaire about working-life quality, as well as an inspirational brochure, which informs you about the basic ideas. The folder also contains a floppy disc with a program (Windows operating system) showing your personal profile of working-life quality, which will help you to realize what particular efforts may be required on your part in order to improve.

You can use the tool on your own. It may, however, be a good idea to ask your company to take initiative and to start a development project with the purpose of improving the working-life quality of the employees and the executives.

Supplementary to the individual folder, you can get a company analysis program (QOL Working-Life Quality - Company Profile) which provides you with a profile of the whole department or organization with regard to its working-life quality. At the moment, reference values from six Danish companies and their employees are included in the programs in order to give you an idea of your company's standing or rating.

If your company reaches the conclusion that they want to address working-life quality, they should earmark 1-2 hours weekly for 15 weeks for each employee (spread over 4-8 months, for instance) to train and do the exercises.

In appendix A you will find references and addresses of public information centers, consultants as well as the Danish Research Center in Copenhagen that can provide help and support for measuring working-life quality and quality development projects based on working-life quality.

You will also find information on where to purchase the tools and questionnaires.

Today, most company executives have come to realize that job satisfaction and commitment are significant parameters for quality assurance and efficiency. To an increasing extent companies need people who can find individual challenges on the job. More than ever independent-minded, creative, conscientious, and resourceful employees are needed. Such people are rare and the companies will have to develop such capabilities themselves. To this end, projects of this type may be applied.

It is no secret that the general unofficial retirement age of 61 constitutes an increasing drain on the cost of keeping the labor market going. It is hardly natural for most people to become so decrepit at the age of 61 that they are mainly a burden on the job. On the contrary, many people are still active, very much alive, loved, respected, and visited at the age of 87.

But let us face it: They are not the ones who for 30 solid years went on doing things they did not like or take an interest in what they were doing. They are not the ones who were bored with their work from the age of 30 to the age of 60. Such a way of living is a prelude to a life of mental decline, cancer, and heart attacks at an early age.

Many companies may be interested because of a wish to retain their employees for the company and keep them healthy.

If you can succeed in starting a developing process, which makes people grow and prosper and have fewer accidents, instead of becoming worn-out and decrepit slowly but surely, your company will gain an incredible advantage.

Furthermore, it would be to everyone's advantage if management and employees were equally convinced of the benefit involved in embarking on the exercise. This will make the organization a forum for the discussion of ideas, in respect of their substance and their viability.

Another suggestion is to let management take the lead in the development process in order to build up consecutive steps of motivation and guidance for the employees.

But one must beware of romanticizing the project of improving working-life quality. There are many obstacles to initiating the process. However, once the basic idea of human development is accepted and the necessary self-discipline is established, the exercises will be much easier to cope with.

When we are about to embark on personal development, the greatest challenge is believing that we are in fact able to make a change for the better in our lives. We have to convince ourselves. But we do not believe it until we see it. And we do not start until we

believe.

Consequently, we are faced with a dilemma that necessitates a firm decision. A decision such as, 'I will do it, for I intend to improve my life as well as my working life' cuts through the doubt and uncertainty. Once this decision has been taken, we need no longer wait for a life-threatening situation to impel us forward. We can start our development process right away, either within the community of the organization or alone. We can also do it together with a friend or a coach. It is much more pleasant to do it together with someone else. But when it comes to our personal development, we must always realize that when engaged in the most significant struggles we are on our own. As individuals we are our own greatest and most dangerous enemies in the process of development. But when love of life is with us we have a fair chance of success.

We wish you good luck with the improvement of your working-life quality.

DISCUSSION

There are many ways stating to improve the quality of working life in the company. But every improvement starts with yourself. It is almost impossible to change other people; just reflect on the sad fact that it is very hard to change yourself. To change and develop you needs a strategy that immediately pays off. Hard discipline in combination with doubtful results is only for the few God have chosen to be great examples for the rest of us. We need to walk a path that is immediately rewarding. And personal development of quality of life, mastery and fellowship can be that path. If only the project is managed well. Self-leadership is for the inspired ones, and development without pain for the prophets and saints. The rest of us needs to be pushed by suffering to change our attitudes and become self-reflective. The leader or employee that wants to introduce the concept of quality of working life and personal development in his company most therefore be extremely aware that everybody will resist development. Even the best of ideas will receive fierce resistance. So bring your idea forward, but do not despair, when the people around you do not follow. Just continue to say and do what you find appropriate. Speak the truth, keep your heart warm and open; do good, and serve your friends, colleagues, costumers and mankind.

When we are about to embark on personal development, the greatest challenge is believing that we are in fact able to make a change for the better in our lives. We have to convince ourselves. But we do not believe it until we see it. And we do not start until we

believe. Consequently, we are faced with a dilemma that necessitates a firm decision. A decision such as, 'I will do it, for I intend to improve my life as well as my working life' cuts through the doubt and uncertainty. Once this decision has been taken, we need no longer wait for a life-threatening situation to impel us forward.

Surveys carried out by The Quality-of-Life Research Center showed that only one Dane in three is *really* happy in his work. Few people burn for their work, they just burn themselves out. But work is our great chance to develop our quality of life; it calls for personal development and a critical revision of our attitudes, as well as a change of our daily routines.

You have working-life quality when your work is an extension of what you want in life, when you develop and become master of your particular field, when you experience fellowship with colleagues and managers, when you are proud of your place of work, and when you are useful to the world and able to deliver products and services of high quality in a responsible manner

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