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**QUALITY OF LIFE AT WORK IN STATE PUBLIC SERVANTS:  
A STUDY CARRIED OUT IN A NORTHEASTERN HEI**

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**ABSTRACT**

Studies on Quality of Work Life (QWL) have been standing out in recent years by organizations and the general concern with well-being. This study aimed to identify how professionals in a public institution perceive QWL and how they are affected within the organizational context, and to verify if the Walton (1973) model is adequate to evaluate the perception of QWL. This was a descriptive study that combined a quantitative step (n=337) with a qualitative step (n=31). Quantitative data were statistically analyzed, while qualitative data were treated by means of content analysis. The quantitative analysis of the data showed that there was no total understanding of the respondents about the questions on QWL. This nonconformity can be explained by the fact that Walton's (1973) scale, which is widely used in several QWL studies, measures only opinion, not perception.

**Keywords:** Quality of life; Work; Servers.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the first studies on Quality of Work Life (QWL) carried out in the 1950s in England by Eric Trist and his team of researchers, the main focus was the triad of individual, work and organization relations (Trist; Banforth, 1951). This scope was later expanded and the studies on QWL have been standing out in recent years by organizations, seeking to offer the worker good working conditions, including behavioral aspects, the development of their tasks with satisfaction and welfare (Limongi-França, 2004).

For Walton (1973), the QWL studies incorporate the physical, socioeconomic and psychological aspects, and are the most prominent for the restructuring of tasks:

- a) Improve job autonomy and satisfaction and compensation systems that value work more fairly;
- b) Promote the inclusion of workers in decisions that affect the performance of their duties;
- c) Customize the work environment based on the individual needs of the worker and job satisfaction.

According to Araújo (2006), in a more systemic vision, a better QWL does not only mean the individual's satisfaction in the work environment and their motivations, but also the way the organizations count on new resources to meet the individual's needs and aspirations. Consideration should also be given to encouraging the practice of health in the work environment, creating new forms of organization and leading to a series of changes in professional life, always coupled with the humanization of work and corporate social responsibility.

Given this situation, it is important for public and private organizations to understand and pay more attention to QWL, in order to offer a healthy and pleasant working environment for their workers. As a consequence, these benefits provide a high level of productivity, reduced turnover, job satisfaction, increased motivation and worker performance, etc. (Nadler; Lawer, 1983).

However, these actions of initiative of the organizations are not always perceived by the professionals who work in them. This is even clearer in public institutions, where these actions are mostly viewed with some discredit by professionals. In this sense, the following question is asked: What is the perception<sup>1</sup> of professionals from the

State University of Ceará (UECE) about QWL and what is the level of adequacy of Walton's (1973) instrument for the evaluation of the perception of QWL?

Thus, this study aimed to identify how professionals in a public institution perceive QWL and how they are affected within the organizational context, and to verify whether the Walton (1973) model is adequate to evaluate the perception of QWL.

It becomes relevant to analyze the perception of professionals from public institutions about the QWL generated by the organization in which they work, as the results may offer benefits that will strategically be added to the workers of that institution. In this sense, the involvement, improvement and interaction with the institution are fundamental to improve the performance and strengthen the commitment of these professionals to the objectives of the organization.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The coining of the term QWL first occurred at General Motors in the 1960s, when a program that advocated for employee participation in business decisions when referred to working conditions was implemented.

According to Padilha (2009), from the implementation of this program, employees began to systematically pursue joint objectives. For Ferreira (2006), a humanist movement began with a focus on product and personnel quality. These first studies, which comprise the initial cycle of research on QWL, lasted until the mid-1970s (Nadler; Lawler, 1983). During this period, the works of Walton (1973), Hackman and Oldham (1975) and Westley (1979) should be highlighted.

The model proposed by Walton (1973) is the most widespread in the literature, being considered the most forceful and comprehensive on QWL. For this author, an organization is humanized when it assigns responsibilities and autonomy to its employees, whose level varies according to the position. There is also the focus on the personal development of the individual, thus providing better performance within the institution.

It is important to stress that QWL had its connection with the process of "humanization" of the work, accord-

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1 [1] Perception is the "organization of the information transmitted by the sensations that allows to know the reality. External factors (movement, intensity and contrast of the stimulus) and internal factors (biological ones, such as hunger and sleep, and

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psychological ones, such as motivation and expectations) intervene in this organization. Although this organization gives rise to phenomena of perceptual constancy in which perceptions coincide with reality, hallucinations or illusions can occur, which are perceptual disturbances" (Mesquita, 1996, p. 159).



ing to the study conducted by Elton Mayo (Scopinho, 2009; Fleury; Fischer, 1992). Padilha (2009) explains that between 1950 and 1970 the first theoretical formulations on QWL occurred, receiving strong influence from behaviorism, where new ways of managing individuals were sought, always reaching the results and organizational objectives.

QWL studies conducted in the first half of the 1980s showed that business productivity was directly related to workers' well-being.

According to Goulart and Sampaio (2004), it was during this period that the theoreticians of the schools of Scientific Administration and the School of Human Relations tried to analyze the working conditions in a more critical and systematic way, from a vision based on science. The works of Werther and Davis (1983); and Nadler and Lawler (1983) stand out.

Since the 1990s, there has been a rise in the number of studies on QWL with the replication of the various models for its evaluation, such as those of Walton (1973), Hackman and Oldham (1975), Westley (1979), Werther and Davis (1983) and Nadler and Lawler (1983). These papers sought to validate QWL measurement scales, as well as to conceptualize QWL in the academic environment. From these studies, the concept of QWL gained more comprehensive dimensions.

These studies have given rise to a number of definitions for QWL. However, there is a convergence in the definition of the term that understands it as a set of initiatives adopted by the organization, in order to add improvements in terms of innovation and technology, contributing to the achievement of organizational welfare. QWL is also linked to the increase in productivity rates, while it is involved in establishing the necessary conditions to meet the needs of individuals (Scopinho, 2009; Fleury; Fischer, 1992).

It is important to highlight that QWL is associated to the worker as an individual, while Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is tied to companies. In this sense, Camargo (2009) adds that the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Administration in the Third Sector (CEATS – *Centro de Empreendedorismo Social e Administração em Terceiro Setor*) conceptualizes CSR as a management methodology based on ethics and transparency, and to determine organizational goals correlated with sustainable development, associating itself with the preservation of environmental and cultural resources to ensure these assets for future generations.

On the relation between productivity and QWL, Martin and Silva (2004) state that productivity is directly relat-

ed to the living standards, because, through productivity, more goods and lower costs can be available and can interfere with the well-being of individuals. In this perspective, for Hackman and Oldham (1975), QWL should rely on the strength of the worker's need for growth, the perception of the meaning of the task and the variety of skills and identity of the task. This set results in higher productivity.

Although QWL deals with the best working conditions for workers, some authors criticize it severely. Among these authors, one states that QWL practices are used as a "means" rather than an "end" within organizations. In general, these practices in organizations are summed up in activities such as workplace gymnastics, games, dances, and other relaxation exercises. However, such conduct refers to welfarism, masking the real problems associated with working conditions (Padilha, 2009; Ferreira, 2006).

Limongi-France and Arellano (2002) show that current organizations do not have a specific area that is responsible for QWL. Thus, these practices are tied to the area of human resources. Moreover, the study showed that only one third of the organizations surveyed had formal QWL activities.

Padilha (2009) and Scopinho (2009) wrote that QWL brings as an approach the issue of time balance, that is, the obligations and eventual stresses derived from the work environment that should not interfere in personal relationships. However, this balance is difficult to achieve, especially with the advent of flexibility that is given to the worker, making it difficult to make a separation between professional and personal life. In this sense, quality in products and services cannot be achieved without considering the issue of the working environment, defending the idea of the democratization of social relations in the working environment. This democratization refers to the freedom of expression given to workers (Lacaz, 2000).

In view of the above, the discussion on QWL is recent and has been increasingly explored in order to understand the individual situations of workers in their working environments (Timossi, 2009). Moreover, for broader studies, the Walton (1973) model is the most accepted and used by researchers in Brazil, and is being applied in several studies. This model is composed of factors that affect people in their work and that may come to emphasize the factors of influence on QWL (Timossi, 2009).

Walton's (1973) model consists of eight factors that affect QWL: fair and adequate compensation, safety and health conditions at work, capacity utilization and development, opportunities for continuous growth and safety, social integration in the organization, constitutionalism, work and life effort, and social relevance of life at work.



The eight dimensions are related and form a set that enables the researcher to understand the positive or negative points perceived by workers of their working conditions. Walton's study (1973) was the one selected to support this research, as it presents one of the most complete concepts for QWL and is one of the most used in research on the subject, even after almost four decades of its publication.

### 3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF RESEARCH

This study is articulated in a theoretical-empirical way by means of a descriptive type of research. According to Vergara (2007) this type of research aims to present characteristics of the phenomena studied and the establishment of correlations between the variables in order to identify and define their nature. This type of research is characterized by contemplating clear objectives, being formal and structured and focused on the search for solutions or analysis of alternatives to the problem studied (Yin, 2001; Gil, 2002; Godói, 2006).

This is a case study on the perception of QWL of professionals working in the UECE. According to Godói (2006, p. 127) the case study is "especially indicated when one wishes to capture and understand the dynamics of organizational life, both in terms of activities and actions formally established and those that are informal, secret or even illicit". Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2001) state that, in the case study, the construction of theories may emerge from comparative analyses between various phenomena and/or organizations, and it is not possible to manipulate their relevant behaviors.

The present research had as its locus the UECE and its eight campuses: Faculty of Education, Sciences and Letters of Iguatu (FECLI), Faculty of Philosophy Don Aureliano Matos (FAFIDAM), Faculty of Education of Crateús (FAEC), Faculty of Education, Sciences and Letters of Sertão Central (FECLESC), Faculty of Education of Itapipoca (FACEDI), Faculty of Education, Sciences and Letters of Inhamuns (CECITEC), Center for Humanities (CH) and, finally, the central campus UECE/Itaperi. These last two are located in the city of Fortaleza. The professionals who are part of UECE total 1,802 people, divided into the following categories: permanent teachers (789), temporary teachers (286), administrative technicians (248) and outsourced workers (379).

The research sample was non-probabilistic. Based on Pasquali (2005), according to which at least five respondents should be obtained per variable, the minimum

sample required for this study was calculated, yielding a result of 337.

The data collection took place in two different moments, both having as guide the script indicated in Walton's work (1973). Initially, a five-point Likert Scale questionnaire was made available on the UECE website, and it should be answered only by professionals connected to the University. The first module of the questionnaire was aimed at gathering a set of demographic information to characterize the respondents, while the next module included questions related to QWL. Finally, the level of satisfaction with QWL in the institution was questioned, from an increasing scale of ten points, where 1 is attributed to the highest level of dissatisfaction and 10 to the highest level of satisfaction. The data collection took place between November 2015 and May 2016.

In the second moment, in order to identify possible misinterpretations of the questionnaire questions, 31 interviews were conducted, also with professionals from the three segments (permanent, temporary and outsourced). During the interviews the resources of the recorder and the simultaneous annotation were used. The script of the interviews followed the same questions as the form made available on the institution's website; however, the respondents were free to comment, build the argument of their answers and remove possible doubts about them.

As regards the data treatment and analysis plan, a quantitative and qualitative analysis was undertaken. For the quantitative analysis, the data collected through the questionnaire made available on the UECE website were used, and they were treated in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0. Initially, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to obtain the constructs that were later confronted with those found by Walton (1973). Afterwards, analysis of variances was performed using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test.

The qualitative analysis of the data was performed from the data from the semi-structured interviews. In this analysis, it was sought to extract more detailed explanations from the respondents that justified the answers of the likert type questionnaire of the quantitative phase. The objective was to comprehend the degree of understanding of the respondents about the questions contained in the online form and the influence they may have had on the answers. The technique used was the analysis of the content, as proposed by Bardin (1977), trying to identify convergences and divergences in the information collected.



#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To avoid cases of missing answers, the respondents were required not to leave any questions unanswered. As a result, the quantitative sample of the survey consisted of 337 respondents subdivided into permanent and substitute teachers, administrative technicians and outsourced collaborators.

The statistical treatment was initiated with a descriptive analysis of the data and the verification of Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire to be used. The value of 0.91 was obtained, and it was considered a very good result according to Hair et al. (2005). Therefore, the instrument used is reliable to the work of Walton (1973) and to the proposed objective.

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic data of respondents.

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic data of respondents

		TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
GENRE	Female	182	44.8%
	Male	148	55.2%
AGE	Up to 25 years	11	3.3%
	25 to 45 years old	168	50.9%
	45 to 60 years old	127	38.5%
	Over 49 years	24	7.3%
EDUCATION	High school	15	4.5%
	Higher	47	14.2%
	Specialization	29	8.8%
	Master's degree	98	29.7%
	Doctorate degree	99	30.0%
SERVICE TIME AT THE INSTITUTION	Up to 1 year	27	8.2%
	1 to 5 years	94	28.5%
	5 to 10 years	51	15.5%
	10 to 20 years	78	23.6%
	20 to 30 years	52	15.8%
	30+ years	28	8.5%
CAMPUS	ITAPERI	237	71.8%
	FAEC	15	4.5%
	FECLESC	16	4.8%
	CECITEC	9	2.7%
	CH	13	3.9%
	FACEDI	17	5.2%
	FECLI	9	2.7%
	FAFIDAM	13	3.9%
	GUAUIUBA*	1	0.3%

POSITION / FUNCTION	Effective teacher	172	52.1%
	Substitute teacher	69	20.9%
	Administrative technician	33	10.0%
	Outsourced contributor	56	17.0%
INCOME	Up to 5 salaries	89	27.0%
	5 to 10 salaries	97	29.4%
	10 to 15 salaries	79	23.9%
	More than 15 salaries	65	19.7%

\* In the city of Guaiuba, there is only one UECE experimental laboratory, not a campus. Source: Research Data (2016).

Table 1 shows that more than two thirds of respondents are from the Itaperi campus, located in the city of Fortaleza, where most of the institution's employees are concentrated. This reinforces the initial idea that there was a difficulty in accessing the questionnaire by some servers in the various campus and experimental laboratories of UECE and that may explain the low rate of respondents in other campuses.

In the factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (0.830) and Bartlett's Sphericity indices (with zero significance) were verified, indicating the adequacy of this procedure. To match the results with Walton's (1973) work, it was necessary to "subject" the formation of the eight factors to the factor extraction method, principal component analysis and varimax orthogonal rotation, and giving 79% of the explanatory power of these factors, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the factor that has the greatest explanatory power is "Time for work and leisure". This shows that the institution's workers believe that time dedicated to work and time spent on leisure are fundamental to the quality of life. It is observed that the second most important factor for QWL is the salary issue. On this aspect, it is worth highlighting the disparity found among workers, as shown in Table 1.

The factor that has the least value is "Social integration in the organization". This allows us to infer that for survey respondents, socialization among their peers is not as essential for QWL as it is for other factors. This can be justified, among other aspects, by the age, income and positions held by respondents in the institution.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests were also performed, and the significance level reached was Sig. 0.000 for all factors, which indicates that there is no normal distribution (Hair et al., 2005). Thus, it was chosen to perform the analysis of comparison of the



**Table 2.** Total variance and explanatory power of factors

Factors	Sum of square load extraction		Sum of square load rotation	
	% Variance	Accumulated %	% Variance	Accumulated %
Time for work and play	29.549	29.549	12.354	12.354
Fair and adequate compensation	12.321	41.870	11.379	23.733
Working conditions and life effort	9.437	51.307	10.591	34.324
Social relevance of work life	8.169	59.476	10.131	44.454
Capacity utilization and development	6.033	65.509	9.761	54.216
Safety and health at work	5.414	70.923	9.209	63.425
Growth and Security Opportunities	4.458	75.381	8.926	72.351
Social integration in the organization	3.787	79.168	6.818	79.168

Source: Research Data (2016).

**Table 3.** Mann-Whitney test (Sig.) with the factors generated

	Service time	Age	Schooling	Income	Gender	Satisfaction with QWL
Time for work and play	0,823	0,359	0,061	0,005*	0,083	0,007*
Fair and adequate compensation	0,580	0,491	0,000*	0,000*	0,755	0,036*
Working conditions and life effort	0,790	0,663	0,052	0,048*	0,448	0,003*
Social relevance of work life	0,888	0,380	0,683	0,244	0,531	0,000*
Skills utilization and development	0,662	0,348	0,417	0,080	0,498	0,990
Occupational safety and health conditions	0,775	0,538	0,268	0,118	0,284	0,993
Growth and Security Opportunities	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,490	0,015*
Social integration in the organization	0,322	0,074	0,592	0,850	0,596	0,024*

\* Significance level of 0.05 or less. Source: Research Data (2016).

means of the groups with the factors generated through the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test.

Analyses were performed to compare the means obtained in each of the following groups:

- Length of service (less than ten years and more than ten years of service provided at the institution);
- Age (less than 45 years and over 45 years);
- Education (elementary, high school, college, master and doctorate / postdoctoral);
- Income (income below ten minimum wages and above ten minimum wages);
- Gender (female and male);

- Satisfaction with QWL (less than six and more than six, as a result of an online questionnaire question).

Table 3 presents the results of this comparison.

According to Table 3, there was no difference in means between men and women for the variables analyzed. Therefore, the perception of QWL is homogeneous between the two groups. For the "service time" and "age" groups, only in the "Growth opportunity and safety" factor was there difference in the means, which implies that the perception of QWL is heterogeneous for both groups. In this case, there are divergent points between the respondents.

Comparison according to income showed divergences between the group averages in four of the eight verified factors, namely: time for work and leisure, fair and adequate compensation, working conditions and life effort.



The “satisfaction with QWL” group did not present difference between the averages in only two factors. For this group, “capacity utilization and development and occupational safety and health conditions” were indifferent. Finally, the results point to the fact that the level of education of the respondents produced a difference in the averages for the factor “fair and adequate compensation”. This allows inferring that there is a divergence among respondents in the salaries paid by the institution, from their schooling level.

It is also worth noting that the “Growth and Security Opportunities” factor is seen by five of the six groups analyzed heterogeneously. Therefore, with the exception of the “gender” group, this factor is understood differently by the respondents.

In an attempt to better understand the results obtained, new analyzes were performed considering only one variable (QWL perception), as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Mann-Whitney test (Sig.) for one variable

	<b>Considering the questions you answered above, point out on the scale below how much you think you have in terms of quality of life at work.</b>
Service time	0,502
Age	0,106
Schooling	0,704
Income	0,551
Gender	0,027*

\* Significance level at 0.05. Source: Research Data (2016).

Table 4 shows that only the “gender” group presented differences in the means. Thus, there was some difficulty on the part of the respondents in understanding the content of the questionnaire, which may have affected the results found from the quantitative analysis, which therefore proved insufficient for the understanding and analysis of the phenomenon studied. Such analysis is possible if the influence of the following request is considered: “Considering the questions you answered above, mark on the following scale how much you consider having in relation to the quality of life at work, 1 being the minimum value and 10 the maximum value”. This request was entered at the end of the questionnaire. It is noticeable that the request had a unique influence on the treatment of the data, modifying greatly the results found so far.

In addition to the limitation of response options, a typical problem with closed questionnaires, the rigid structure of this model directly affects the level of explanation of the

phenomenon. One of the findings of this survey is the understanding that the questionnaire measures only the opinion, which in turn calls into question the use being made of this research instrument for studies related to QWL.

The qualitative phase of the survey obtained results that further reinforce the hypothesis that the QWL questionnaires raised are able to capture only one opinion survey, thus limiting the understanding of the effective perception of the interviewees.

The analysis of the interview transcripts showed that for most of the interviewees, the biggest problem of the UECE today is security, as shown in the excerpt below:

We have no security here ... even during the day it is complicated. The problem is that since the university is government-owned, you can't bar anyone from entering here, even at night. Then you know. All kinds of people enter (...) and they also rob here, because it is a very large area and it is not possible to watch everything. Who feels good this way? [...] (Interviewee No. 28, March 2016)

The security problem was also reinforced by the fourth person interviewed, an administrative technique:

The worst problem we have here is the fear of something happening to us as women, especially when we have to leave later. I wonder what it's like with the night teachers, having to go out with this entire place in the dark. (...) There have been several cases of robbery here, but we only know a few, when a student comments. (Interviewee No. 4, January 2016)

Mention of the security issue is not limited to the reports recorded here; almost all respondents mentioned it. When considering data (quantitative and qualitative) in isolation, no such problem should arise. However, when comparing the results of both phases of the research, a discrepancy was identified about these research instruments.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article aimed to identify how professionals of a public institution perceive QWL and how they are affected within the organizational context, and to verify whether Walton's model (1973) is adequate to evaluate the perception of QWL. To answer them, a research that combined the quantitative approach with the qualitative one was conducted.

The quantitative analysis of the data showed that there was no total understanding of the respondents about the



QWL questions presented in the online questionnaire. It was evident that respondents could not fully understand the meaning of the questions and how they should be answered.

The factor “security” appears aprioristically as an important convergence point between the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research. The results of the quantitative phase presented a heterogeneity that could put in check the results of Table 3.

In the authors’ interpretation, this nonconformity between one research phase and another has a plausible explanation: Walton’s (1973) scale, which is widely used in many QWL studies, measures only opinion, not perception. Indeed, one of the central questions of the seminal study of the area remains: “How can QWL be conceptualized and how can it be measured (Walton, 1973)?”

This study may be of great value to researchers seeking to rethink QWL measurement methods, as well as those who will replicate previous studies and who may have the same limitations. Moreover, the findings of this study may lead to research that seeks to overcome these limitations, seeking to advance the knowledge of the field.

The research limitations lie in the fact that this work did not create an effective instrument to measure workers’ perceptions of QWL, and did not develop procedural research that could eliminate point distortions that affect the answers provided on QWL. Another important point concerns the possibility that some outsourced workers may be afraid to answer more controversial questions, as they may have felt insecure in dealing with some issues without the protection of statutory stability, like other workers.

Moreover, considering the multiple realities possible from the present research, it is suggested that further studies be developed in order to advance the state of the art on QWL. Not limited to this, it is also suggested that programs aimed at improving QWL in companies undergo constant improvements, always considering the most current in the literature on the subject.

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