

Proposal for measuring the impact of the quality of work life on business competitiveness: expert panel method

Propuesta de medición sobre incidencia de la calidad de vida laboral en la competitividad empresarial: método de panel de expertos

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Abstract

Objective. Validate an instrument for determining the quality of work life factors that affect business competitiveness, taking several companies in the industrial sector as a case study through the Content Expert Panel method.

Methodology. The research approach is quantitative, the aim is to contrast the theory found with the empirical evidence in the field. As the research developed, 3 research techniques were used in order to comply with methodological rigor: 1) Documentary technique. Reference materials: books, database, techniques and studies. 2) Bibliographic technique. Those used as support were: bibliographic and electronic files. 3) Field Technique, structured interviews for the Expert Panel.

Contribution. In the literary review, it was found that there is statistically significant evidence on how improving the quality of life of the members of the organization has a direct impact on its performance, which is why, the better the quality of life, the employees can become more competitive. For future research, other validation techniques of the proposed instrument could be implemented, as well as the analysis of other theories related to quality of life and competitiveness.

Measurement, Quality of life, Competitiveness

Resumen

Objetivos. Validar un instrumento para la determinación de los factores de calidad de vida laboral que inciden en la competitividad empresarial, tomando como caso de estudio empresas del sector industrial a través del método de Panel de Expertos de Contenido.

Metodología. El enfoque de la investigación es cuantitativo, se desea contraponer la teoría encontrada con la evidencia empírica en el campo. Conforme se desarrolló la investigación, se utilizaron 3 técnicas de investigación con el fin de cumplir con rigor metodológico: 1) Técnica documental. Materiales de consulta: libros, base de datos, técnicas y estudios. 2) Técnica bibliográfica. Las utilizadas como apoyo fueron: fichas bibliográficas y electrónicas. 3) Técnica de Campo, entrevistas estructuradas para el Panel de Expertos.

Contribución. En la revisión literaria se encontró que existe evidencia estadísticamente significativa sobre como el mejorar la calidad de vida de los miembros de la organización tiene una incidencia directa sobre los rendimientos de la misma, es por ello que, a mejor calidad de vida, los empleados pueden lograr ser más competitivos. Para futuras investigaciones se pudiera implementar otras técnicas de validación del instrumento propuesto, así como el análisis de otras teorías relacionadas con la calidad de vida y la competitividad.

Medición, Calidad de vida, Competitividad

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Introduction

Background

Work is an important aspect of an individual's life, not only because a large part of the time is devoted to work activities, but also because thanks to it, the person obtains a series of material, economic, psychological and social compensations, and manages to develop his or her own identity and roles in society, contributing to the creation of goods and services (Peiró and Salvador, 1993).

Work activity usually takes place in formal organisations, with a defined structure, which assigns roles to people, distinguishes hierarchical levels, establishes timetables and the activities to be carried out, the conditions in which they are to be carried out, the technologies and resources available for this purpose, in such a way that the objectives pursued are achieved in the most effective and efficient way (García et al., 1993).

Therefore, the reality of work (Peiró and Salvador, 1993) is very diversified and while in some jobs there are opportunities for personal and professional development, in others, the conditions are such that the satisfaction of the needs for self-esteem, security or fulfilment is not assured. This is why it is said that jobs, depending on these circumstances, offer a higher or lower quality of working life and people, depending on their own work experiences, perceive a higher or lower quality of life in their working environment.

The concept of quality of working life, in its broadest meaning, includes all those conditions related to work, such as pay, working hours, career opportunities, working environment, benefits and services, and human relations, which may be relevant to job satisfaction and motivation. It also includes one's own experiences of work in terms of the opportunities it provides (Delamotte and Takezawa, 1986). In short, as some authors (Jenkins, 1983; Larouche and Trude, 1983, cited by Peiró, 1993) point out, it is about reconciling the aspects of work that have to do with human experiences and with organisational objectives.

On the other hand, as a result of globalisation and a whole series of transforming elements such as new technologies, changes in consumption patterns and a greater awareness of the preservation of natural resources, a re-conceptualisation of the term competitiveness emerges, where comparative advantages as pillars of development move towards competitive advantages. These are created through product differentiation and cost reduction, where technology, innovation capacity and specialised factors are vital.

Bejarano (1998) also argues that competitive advantages are unique and are difficult for competitors in other regions to replicate or gain access to, as they are not only driven by the unique needs of a particular industry, but also require considerable and continuous investment to preserve and renew them. The analysis of the quality of working life is a basic and differentiating element that can be leveraged as a very valuable competitive advantage.

Purely economic concepts begin to be mixed with other social concepts, such as: quality of human resources, culture, quality of the product or service, bargaining power, politics, conservation of natural resources and characteristics of the spatial location. In this way, these factors add to the determination of competitiveness and tend to associate the concept with issues such as social efficiency, economic performance and environmental sustainability.

The Royal Spanish Academy (2001) defines competitiveness as "ability to compete" and also as "rivalry for the achievement of an end". Solleiro and Castañón (2005) state that it is the ability of an organisation to maintain its market share based on new business strategies, sustained productivity growth and the ability to engage in negotiations with different institutions.

The resources and capabilities theory argues that a firm's profitability is closely linked to the type, quantity and nature of its resources and capabilities. Amit and Schoemaker (1993) refer to these components as strategic assets, which must be protected and developed to achieve competitive advantage.

In this idea, Prahalad and Hamel (1990) state that it is a fundamental requirement for top executives to possess the ability to identify, cultivate and exploit the firm's resources and capabilities that represent profitability and growth.

The competitive development that takes place in institutions and organisations favours individuals in the creative field by making their way of relating dynamic (Strand, 2011). This phenomenon generates appropriate working environments that influence the economic, commercial, academic and professional competitiveness of employees and workers. That is why the organisation needs to foster an entrepreneurial spirit among its members as a means of personal competitive development that will ultimately also influence organisational competitiveness (Mahdavi et al., 2013).

In studies conducted by Charles and Ochieng (2023) found that there is a relationship between strategic outsourcing and organisational performance. In the study they posed a model where it was found that the variables affecting firm performance are: customer satisfaction, employee productivity, efficiency, profitability and comparative advantage, the last variable being the subject of study of the present research.

Problem statement

The first problem that arises when attempting to evaluate quality of life is the precise and operational definition of what is to be evaluated. Terms such as happiness, state of health, satisfaction and well-being, which are well defined, have become interchangeable in the process of evaluating quality of life. Most work on quality of life assessment uses instruments that attempt to measure one or more of these variables interchangeably, and most existing instruments specifically measure quality of life in relation to health (Sison, 1994). Similarly, in publications by Germán et al. (2018), they mention that employees who have a better quality of life in their work environments can also achieve differentiators in terms of the competitiveness of the organisation, thereby promoting comparative advantages.

Quality of life is a subjective concept, which is related to the perception that people have of their life, in the sense of whether they feel fulfilled with their own expectations and projects. As well as being related to individual perception, it tends to change depending on whether the conceptualisation is economic, philosophical, political or health-related (Espinosa and Morris, 2002).

The confusion between quality of life and state of health has given rise to ethical, technical and conceptual dilemmas; in fact, some critics of the concept have considered that the concept cannot in any way be independent of cultural norms, behaviour patterns and expectations of each individual; it is clear that it is an eminently human notion, which relates to the degree of satisfaction that the person has with their physical situation, their emotional state, their family, love and social life, as well as the meaning they attribute to their life, among other things (Schwartzmann, 2003).

With a philosophical stance, Nussbaum examines the quality of life by presenting it in terms of a list of basic human needs, based on the Aristotelian approach. The list coincides with the proposals of Sen, Erickson and Allardt, despite the fact that they come from different intellectual traditions (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993).

Another problem is the nature of the measures used; social indicators that are based on data or facts linked to what is objectively supposed to cause well-being in the population and that do not necessarily reflect the degree of satisfaction, subjective well-being and happiness that this population can enjoy. They are necessary, but not sufficient, to assess the quality of life of peoples, social groups and individuals. This sociological meaning makes it possible to identify a certain relationship with work, and although quality of life is not defined in terms of quality of working life, the significance of employment is recognised (Sison, 1994).

Iñaki de Miguel mentions that we should not forget the wider sociological significance of employment, which is the key to the organisation of the household, since most of the income is derived from labour income.

Employment is the most common means of personal fulfilment, of integration into the group of friends and, paradoxically, work facilitates the form of leisure management (De Miguel and De Miguel, 2002).

The analysis of the quality of working life is of growing importance given the new forms of business and work organisation that generate high levels of pressure and work stress in individuals, which impacts on performance and consequently on productive results. Based on these considerations, it is thought that the analysis of the quality of working life constitutes a basic and differentiating element that can be promoted as a very valuable competitive advantage.

A number of studies have shown that quality of work life influences organisational performance. Lau and May (1998); Harter, et al., (2002), establish that the quality of work life offered by an organisation and perceived as satisfactory by employees, has a positive impact on the physical, psychological and emotional health of the worker, having a favourable impact on organisational performance and results.

Competitiveness is related to the capacity to increase the standard of living of the inhabitants, to generate sustained increases in productivity, to successfully enter international markets, among others (Padilla, 2006). The meaningful study of personal and/or professional competitiveness is developed in the application of the dimensions of being competent in three different spheres: 1) desired situation, 2) development process, 3) training context, which are supported by competitive development (Climént, 2012). These dimensions drive the individual to make use of his or her abilities and skills, such as adapting and modelling for the resolution of conflicts to which he or she is exposed. It is appropriate to consider that competitiveness is an innate part of individuals and the idea is to develop this capacity by interacting with each other, individually and in groups, and at all times considering the environment in which they operate. This holistic view increases the necessary stimulus to consider appropriate skills, knowledge and aptitudes in different social contexts (Climént, 2014).

An increase in the perception of competence occurs mainly in people and in their relationships, as it is in them that they develop to fulfil some vision or goal, sharing experiences that favour individual performance and opening the way for the efficiency of group processes (Mantilla and García, 2010).

Likewise, Amini and Rahmani (2023) found statistically significant evidence on how adaptation to dynamic changes in the environment (also understood as strategic agility) have an impact on the competitiveness of private companies, highlighting the vision of managers. Therefore, the competitiveness variable should be analysed from different contexts, to have a more concrete approach of how it affects the performance of organisations.

The competitive field where companies are able to create win-win situations; show social astuteness, understanding social situations; socialise; develop, maintain and use effective networks to interpret situations through active listening in all contexts in which they are involved in achieving their goals and objectives (Chatenier et al., 2010), give a progressive result in all areas of work, stimulating an appropriate culture for the members of the organisation to develop their capabilities and skills allowing them to achieve both personal and work objectives for mutual benefit.

In publications by Aydin et al., (2023), they found evidence on how meeting customer demands, considering different aspects such as social and economic aspects, favours organisations in their performance, since managers with sufficient knowledge about customer requirements will have a greater impact on the competitiveness of the company, regardless of the sector where it is carried out.

Given the above, the following research question is established: What are the factors of quality of working life that affect business competitiveness?

Objective

To validate the instrument that serves to determine the factors of quality of working life that have an impact on industrial business competitiveness, through the Content Expert Panel method.

Justification

In this sense, the most important contribution (intellectual merit) is obtained by fulfilling the objective of the research, with the intention of improving the quality of life of workers, it is possible to narrow the gap and thus guarantee the productivity of companies, given that an increasing number of companies opt for structures and forms of management based on the dehumanisation of labour relations in search of higher levels of competitiveness, productivity and market positioning. In addition to promoting education and dissemination, through the generation and application of knowledge along the lines of quality of life and business competitiveness, as a new learning strategy for students and teachers involved in the project, generating high-level publications with the use of statistical methods.

Limitations and limitations of the study

It is necessary to indicate that, in the search for information for the approach of this project, few studies were found that relate the variable quality of working life with the variable business competitiveness from the approach of the theory of resources and capabilities, this would generate an important contribution to the incipient literature of the same.

Methodology to be developed

The approach of this research is quantitative, divided into two stages; the first, whose results are reported in this paper, is the design of the instrument, which requires contrasting the theory found with the empirical evidence in the field. The process for the state of the art of the research starts from an idea that is gradually narrowed down and, once delimited, research objectives and questions are derived, the literature is reviewed and a framework or theoretical perspective is constructed. The instrument is developed and the assessment methodology is used through expert judgement (Dalkey and Helmer, 1963, cited by Rodríguez-Prieto (2017) based on obtaining and efficiently processing the knowledge and information that experts possess on specific topics, and from there, achieving a useful group result to be used as input in decision-making.

In the second stage, from the variables already determined and validated in the instrument, a plan is drawn up to test them; the variables are measured in a given context; the measurements obtained are analysed using statistical methods, and a series of conclusions are drawn regarding the hypothesis or hypotheses.

The research design is explanatory, since explanatory or analytical studies answer why or the cause of the presentation of a certain phenomenon or behaviour, and in turn, try to explain relationships between independent and dependent variables.

Research is based on observational studies where no independent variable is altered, it is based on the use of techniques that allow the researcher to acquire information through direct observation and the recording of phenomena, but without any intervention (leaving the observed free). It is based on categories, concepts, variables, events, communities or contexts that have already occurred or occurred without the direct intervention of the researcher. This is why it is also known as ex post fact research (events and variables that have already occurred), as it observes variables and relationships between them in context.

As the research was developed, 3 research techniques were used in order to comply with the methodological rigour required in scientific documents: 1.- Documentary technique. Through different graphic documents published by various authors. Consultation materials: books, databases, techniques and studies. Bibliographic technique. Exploration of the source of description of the scientific community on a given problem or event. Those used as support were: bibliographic and electronic files. 3.- Field Technique, carried out through or directly in the environment in which a study phenomenon is presented. The support tools used for this research were: opinion interviews.

The instrument used for data collection was elaborated on the basis of the literature reviewed on the variables that influence the phenomenon, in function of which the dimensions of the study were structured, resulting in five sections:

1). Objective by way of introduction to the interviewee; 2). General data on the person; 3). The measurement scale that is requested to be followed for the contribution of their answers; 4). Questions related to each variable, with a definition of each variable at the beginning. In its content, rating scale questions were included, where the respondent selects a single rating for the question in an equally spaced continuum of possible options. In addition, the opinion of three researchers regarding the design of the instrument was used.

Results

In order to check the content validity of the measurement instrument, in its initial phase, the template containing the instrument and the indications for its evaluation were sent by e-mail to five experts. The response of the five experts was awaited for a certain period of time; however, only three responded, two of them belonging to the Technological Institute of Sonora and one more from the business sector.

The first version of the questionnaire, applied for content validation by the experts, consisted of a total of 82 items corresponding to 2 variables, each variable was made up of various constructs.

Steps followed for the evaluation of the instrument:

(a) preparation and elaboration of the instructions and forms, (b) selection of the 5 experts, (c) explanation of the context, (d) the instrument was sent via email with all the relevant indications for its evaluation, (e) finally, doubts were answered on questions that some experts found repeated or poorly worded.

Based on the responses obtained, Table 1 was drawn up, which shows the modifications suggested by the content experts.

Expert 1:	Expert 2:	Expert 3:
"Question 4 needs improvement in the way it is worded, as it could lead to confusion. "Question 11 I recommend that the wording be improved, as I find the way the question is phrased inadequate. "Questions 38, 39 and 40 need more context". "Question number 65 could be duplicated with question number 61".	"You could ask more than about the product, about customer complaints and the level of response/coordination of the organisation, because it is up to them to receive all that". "About the image of the company (79), you could ask if the image that customers have of the company matches the vision of the company (aligned and coherent)". "On publicity (59), the result is "how well known the company is in its sector and beyond" - that generates pride of ownership and raises the rate of talent attraction and retention." "In business competitiveness "Resources". One issue that could be interesting is, how much impact the research and development efforts have generated in the organisation, if it has really impacted on customer complaints (or indicators that measure them) (employee perception, because sometimes it is perceived as more workload)".	"Questions 1 and 2 are duplicated". "It needs to be explained to whom the instrument is addressed. "Question 20 is worded very similarly to question 18. "The variable entitled integration into the work environment could be very similar to the variable personal development of the worker". "Questions 33 and 34 are very similar and could cause confusion. "Questions 39 and 40 are duplicated". "I consider that question 41 lacks correlation with the instrument". "Improve the wording of question 48, I find the way it is worded inadequate". "Question 69 lacks relevance to the instrument". "The capabilities variable in terms of business competitiveness needs to be reworded".

Table 1 Opinion of panel of content experts
Source: Own elaboration, 2023.

With the results obtained through the panel of content experts, the instrument was modified as follows: duplicate questions were eliminated, the wording of the questions was improved, more context was given to the questions that could generate confusion, questions that lacked relevance for the instrument were eliminated, the variable of integration into the work environment was eliminated and only the variable of personal development of the worker was left, and the questions indicated by expert number 2 that could make the instrument more effective were also added.

Conclusions

Benavente (2016) says that nowadays, to have a competitive company and not worry about the people who work in it, or because the environment in which it operates has a better quality of life, is to condemn it to failure. In fact, when the quality of life in society is better, consumption is higher and, therefore, companies will have better results. In order for employees to be involved, and for companies to differentiate themselves from others and, therefore, be more competitive, it is vital to focus on this quality of life.

Argüelles et al., (2017) have found evidence on how improving the quality of life of the members of the organisation has a direct impact on the performance of the same, which is why, the better the quality of life, the more competitive employees can become and increase differentiating measures for the organisation.

The very concept of firm success is polysemic and difficult to measure, so that some researchers have associated this concept with the achievement of extraordinary profits (Rumelt, 1991; Fong, 2003) and tend to express firm efficiency in terms of profit maximisation associated with the provision of competitive advantage.

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing trend in the use of the resources and capabilities theory, since it has been empirically proven in the international literature that internal firm factors explain business performance to a greater extent.

In this context, the aforementioned theory bases its explanation of the firm's success on the characteristics of the resources and capabilities that the firm controls, and on its capacity to generate rents; and it emphasises how an efficient combination of its resources and capabilities allows it to obtain and maintain its competitive advantage (Teece, 1997).

On the other hand, one of the most common difficulties in instrument design is the validity and reliability of traditional assessment methods, often scales and questionnaires. Validity also depends on the operational definition of variables. Many researchers report difficulties in establishing criterion validation items or construct validations, the development of new instruments to measure quality of life has become more complex and only satisfactory for the clinical goals of indicating what clinicians and patients perceive as such (Badia and Tudela, 2003).

The concept of quality of working life proposed in this study for the development of the instrument is based on Neopositivism (González, 2007) because it chooses as its logic that of categories, and includes as objects of study all those that can be described in their structure by means of their parts. This theory also emphasises the validity criteria, pointing out objectivity and relevance as criteria, and seeks objectivity from the moment in which the conceptual construction of each of the variables and their indicators is made, in order to try to demonstrate that these parameters are really the ones that will reflect the quality of working life.

In order to carry out this research, the steps of the scientific method have been respected, such as the development of certain stages to be followed for the ordering of ideas. Performing this type of action is important because, as Ventura-León et al. (2017) cite, the application of the scientific method allows users of the information to be able to replicate the methodologies employed, thereby being able to develop patterns of behaviour consistent with the theory analysed.

In consideration of the above, it is established that the objective of the research was met by validating the instrument that will serve to determine the factors of the quality of working life that affect industrial business competitiveness, through the content expert panel method.

Having constructed a valid instrument to measure quality of work life in a local context will decrease the variability inherent in the measurement method. To ensure the strength of the instrument, feasibility and validity are determined; feasibility is ensured through the use of a questionnaire where care is taken in the simplicity and amenity of the format, the interest, brevity and clarity of the questions, as well as the correctness, interpretation and presentation of the results. Validity refers to the degree to which a measurement or study reaches a correct conclusion, because in reality, all diagnostic tests and/or measurement instruments can be fallible. The situation is not so simple when dealing with variables with a high subjective content (Hernández et al., 2014).

One of the most important advantages is that by obtaining a versatile instrument, valid for any worker in the industrial sector and, possibly, of general application in the local workplace, it will be of great scientific use due to its simplicity and easy administration.

For future research, other validation techniques of the proposed instrument could be implemented, as well as the analysis of other theories related to quality of life that could have an impact on the work competence variable. For example, according to studies Nguyen et al. (2023) mention that one way in which foreign direct investment in a region could be improved could be through replicating success stories from other regions, for example, by implementing transparent public policies and practical solutions. Applying this to the present research, it could be a variable that could be analysed in future research to measure its impact on competitiveness.

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