

Pogledi/ Views

QUALITY OF LIFE AS A MEDICINE: HOLIS-
TIC CONCEPT OF HEALTH PROMOTION AT
WORK PLACE*

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KVALITET ŽIVOTA KAO LEK: HOLISTIČKI
KONCEPT PROMOCIJE ZDRAVLJA NA
RADNOM MESTU*

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Abstract

As safety and health at work is an essential part of labour relations, it is affected by the same forces of change that prevail in the national and global socioeconomic context. All the trends in a changing world and workforce are expected to continue and be aggravated by the crisis. But the crises present opportunities for a fresh look at national priorities and purpose. Health and safety at work today is a basic human right more than ever. Safety and health at work does not merely mean preventing workers from being exposed to workplace risks and hazards and to protect them against these. It also involves being proactive in promoting healthy literacy and practices. Mental health issues are a growing concern in our communities and at work. Workplaces can play a role in promoting positive mental health. Achieving good mental health workers requires a holistic approach. The author of this paper encompasses the concept and experience of others who applied this approach by institutions such as *Quality of Life Research Center, Research Clinic for Holistic Medicine and Nordic School of Holistic Medicine* in Copenhagen-Denmark as well as *Scandinavian Foundation for Holistic Medicine* in Sandvika-Norway. This concept is a huge challenge for academic public and vocational practitioners in poor countries in transition, such as Serbia, that are already burdened with the current economic and financial crisis. These practitioners, each in their own way, helped by self-education and education, without big material investments, together may take their countries to the road of health, which is still rarely taken, yet more secure.

1. INTRODUCTION

The work environment has witnessed dramatic changes in recent years as a result of globalization, competition, technological advances and economic uncertainty. Working conditions are now characterized by a high work load, an effort-reward imbalance, less job security, and the continual need to update skills. Consequently, there is a growing concern that the workplace has adverse effects on the physical and psychological well-being of workers. Substantial economic losses have been attributed to work-related stress [1,2]. As safety and health at work are an essential part of labour relations, they are affected by the same forces of change that prevail in the national and global socioe-

conomic context. All the trends in a changing world and workforce are expected to continue and to be aggravated by the crisis. The evidences from other crises are showing that a crisis puts working conditions and quality at risk. It causes uncertainty and antagonisms at all levels of the organization and society. It is in such situations of crisis that the voices calling for the right to safe and healthy workplaces should be loud and not muted. Health and safety at work today is a basic human right more than ever. When cutting costs, why does safety and health have to go first? Who will continue any production at all if all the workers are ill, injured or dead? It is time to look beyond tomorrow and after tomorrow, into the future, in which we could find ourselves paying the price for a compromise in the

wrong area. We, everyone, should take matters in our own hands, and not wait for further research around the impact of the crisis on worker's safety and health... or it may just be too late. Beyond the economic issues we have a moral obligation: The human costs are far beyond unacceptable. As public awareness on safety and health at work tends to be low, it does not get the priority it deserves. In the context of the economic crisis, even more efforts should be made to change this tendency. International and national action needs to be stimulated. Awareness-raising of the potential implications of such crises for workplace accidents and diseases can help people and high-level decision makers understand the seriousness of the dilemma. People need to be informed of the existence of effective legal and technical tools, methodologies and measures to prevent occupational accidents and diseases. They should know that the costs of occupational accidents and work related diseases far outweigh the costs of investments in good safety and health measures, that those improvements can often be made at little or no cost, and that productivity is often increased as a result [3].

Safety and health at work does not merely mean preventing workers from being exposed to workplace risks and hazards and to protect them against these. It also involves being proactive in promoting healthy literacy and practices. Using the workplace as a platform to raise awareness of healthy lifestyles can help workers and reach out to their families and the community as a whole. In times of crisis and restructuring, health promotion in the workplace can help workers cope with psychosocial stressors and turn the concept of health literacy into practical action. Any introduction of changes in the workplace requires an assessment of psychosocial factors and needs to be carefully managed to reduce stress.

We live in an era of massive passive data, when massive amounts of data are collected passively. There are more mobile phones in the world than toilets or toothbrushes [4]. Mental health or mental fitness and resilience are resources for everyday living and have the added benefit of helping productivity and retention. In today's knowledge economy, our brains are doing the 'heavy lifting' and many people face mental health problems during their working years. Mental health issues are a growing concern in our communities and at work. Workplaces can play a role in promoting positive mental health as well as preventing and managing depression and substance dependence. Too often, mental health problems lead to absent employees or employees who are present, but not fully functioning. Workplaces can help prevent or respond quickly to problems such as anxiety and depression for workers who experience difficulty. Recognizing the signs and helping people get early treatment is critical. To promote mental health in the workplace, businesses need to target both "coping capacity" of employees and the

work environment. Leading workplaces provide employee assistance programs, flexible disability programs, rehabilitation programs and reasonable accommodations for workers with mental health problems. Workplaces need to engage in initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and promoting conversations to reduce the stigma around mental health and mental illness. Achieving good mental health requires a holistic approach. Mental well-being can be affected by relationships with family, friends and coworkers, anger, sleep, financial issues, eating habits and physical activity – and many other factors in our work and other areas of life. Successful action on one requires an understanding of how these factors are inter-connected [2].

2. *WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION*

Workplace Health Promotion includes the combined efforts of employers, employees and the society to improve health and well-being of the people at work (Luxembourg Declaration of 1997). Health (life) promotion in wider context implies the process which enables individuals, groups of people or the whole society to increase health control and improve health in physical, mental, social and spiritual sense. The very process should be supported by creation of environment in natural and social sense, where people could identify their internal and external resources, so that they could exploit them multiply, to make their wishes come true, satisfy their needs, make their lives meaningful and be able to accept or alter their environment for the sake of health promotion [5]. When it comes to workplace health promotion in Serbia, in the previous period, occupational health mostly dealt with health education, where workers and their employers had a very passive role regarding the issue of our interest. Nowadays, health promotion is based on the dialogue and active participation of all subjects and has long ago surpassed the activities such as promotions of healthy life-style. Hence, vocational activities have to be directed to development of workers' health literacy. Better health literacy is the key to the positive outcome of health education [5].

3. *HEALTH LLITERACY*

What is health literacy? There is a lot of literature about the term and the concept of health literacy. In short, health literacy is defined as the capacity to make sound health decisions in the context of everyday life – at home, in the community, in the workplace, in the health-care system, in the market place, and in the political arena. Health literacy focuses on the individual and empowers the individual to acquire greater self-determination. Why should health literacy be of interest to business? Health literacy provides a holistic approach to health in the workplace. It emphasizes the active role of employers and employees in turn to col-

laborate on advancing personal health knowledge and competences as well as healthy work environments. It is context and content specific and approaches will differ depending on needs. Moving towards a healthier society means that citizens in general are becoming more and more active in their own health and health-care. Essentially, health literacy empowers citizens to navigate their health in terms of assessing, understanding, appraising and applying information to make qualified decisions suiting personal situations and opportunities. Businesses play an important role in this development not only as employers, but also as advocates for health in society.

Health literacy is a social determinant that can be linked to human development and quality of life. Recent research has shown that limited health literacy is a wide spread phenomenon in Europe. The notion of health literacy is linked to literacy and involves peoples' knowledge, motivation and competences to access, understand, appraise and apply information to form judgments and take decisions in everyday life, in terms of health, in order to improve quality of life during the life course.

Aristotle made a consistent distinction between 'health' and 'well-being' and understood health as functioning in an instrumental manner, whereas well-being is the ultimate good representing human development in terms of 'flourishing', 'happiness', 'blessedness' and 'prosperity'. Hence, well-being refers to 'realizing one's unique potential through physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development... in relation to self, others and the environment'. As most people spend a considerable amount of their time and energy at work, business can play an essential role in promoting and sustaining employees' quality of life, help them flourish and develop their full potential and live a life with integrity. The aim of advancing health literacy is to strengthen knowledge and competences for critical reflection and qualified decision-making in accordance to health, personal values and one's life situation. Enhancing health literacy is therefore not only of business value, it is also an ethical imperative from a societal point of view. Research has illustrated a strong association between limited health literacy and increased morbidity and mortality; disadvantage in terms of health service provision; fewer opportunities for active participation and self-management as well as the jeopardizing of the basic human right to health. To accomplish the gaps identified in the study and to mainstream health literacy as an outcome of corporate social responsibility business practice, it is essential to consider how a business's focus on health literacy can help meet the demands for a healthy society. The work place constitutes a unique setting for empowerment and growth. It is part of daily life routine and provides opportunities for specific, targeted initiatives which match the needs of the individual employees [6].

Good work is an activity that creates a strong sense of personal meaningfulness because it is directly connected to the project of our personal development, what we want from life. We all want to become complete. To this end, we have to grow and achieve fulfillment. Good work challenges us to go beyond our limits and confront new and exciting aspects of life. Work should be a direct manifestation of life. Life is a simple and clear expression of what you do. Our love of life is revealed in what we do. The fine art of working and the secret of working are to be found in the intimacy of the intersection between our lives and the world around us. The secret of the extraordinary working life is the blossoming of all our human talents. Most interestingly, it seems that we all have great gifts to give to the world, but only after many years of dedicated practice will these gifts reveal themselves fully. When we work with patients, we call this quality of life as medicine, and this improvement of the patient's personal philosophy of life seems to be the essence of holistic medicine, helping the patient to assume responsibility for his or her own life. When we work with leaders and coworkers, the principles are not very different, but the focus is on using all their talents and obtaining joy of work and proficiency, heartfelt relationships at the working place, and the experience of creating real value to the community.

Very few people know what they want from their working lives. Most people focus on the surface and miss the whole point of their working life. It is curious that human beings rarely have the courage to dream life differently from that defined by our materialistic and superficial culture. It is startling how many end up having an awfully meaningless, grey, and boring working life. The questions above link up with the four conditions that are decisive for the quality of our working life: the quality of life, mastery, joint efforts and creating true incremental value [7].

4. QUALITY OF LIFE

Our viability and vigor in general derives from our state of well-being and life as a whole. Some people are harmonious. They thrive and prosper and have the energy to solve all the problems they encounter. These people are ready and willing to communicate and they are alert and attentive to life. They represent resources to be drawn upon. Often they are very valuable to themselves – they love life and they show respect and appreciation. Human beings who communicate great joy in life and a reserve of strength are those who easily rise to the occasion and quickly adapt to getting on with other people. Quality of life is something inside you and it accompanies you wherever you go. Many people think that it is a matter of chance whether there is quality of life and surplus energy. Some people are born under a lucky star, they say, while others had a

bad start. By chance some humans have better genes and by nature they are the chosen few, the beautiful, the talented and the marvelous, while the rest of us must accept the twists of nature and accept being plain, a bit boring not possessed of the most brilliant minds. Human beings are to a much greater extent the masters of their good or bad lives. Quality of life implies that you know and accept yourself. This is not as simple as it may sound. But you can shape the good life yourself. There are a number of reasons why some people have good quality of life while others squander it and we can go a long way in the influence we exert on these causes. You can shape the good life by: respecting life, having good values, knowing what you want, listening to your inner wants and dreams, not wasting your energy, knowing that time is short and go for a life and taking responsibility.

To respect life means to know as a human being that you are, first and foremost, alive and that life has its own deep regularities with which we must identify and to which we must conform. We have to give life space. If we do not, it will be strangled in common sense and formalities, vouchers, bad habits and every day routines. Discover the feeling of being alive. That is the first and crucial condition to be valuable to yourself and others.

Each of us has a set of values that consciously or unconsciously guides our actions and choices. The values are what we like, what we are looking for, what we consider serious, valuable, and attractive. The values are the small number of central concepts that are our guiding principles. In our culture the important values are often extremely material, be it in the public or the political sphere. In short, we go for money, a residence, clothes, food, consumer goods, a 'good' education and security. A minority group adds to this picture some confidence in a long life on earth because of a healthy life style. All values are equal and everyone is free to choose, is our democratic line. Yet we know deep down inside of us that this is not true. Life has its own deep values that provide the key to the good life. We have an obligation to love life and live accordingly. We have an obligation to seek those values that accompany life: friendship, love, togetherness and to shun those values that are detrimental to life, for instance superfluous materialism, vanity, and power without any purpose.

We create our lives by making our dreams come true. Not knowing what we want makes us lose our lives. The problem is not that the world does not offer any possibilities – there are many possibilities. The problem is rather that we do not know what we want. We make no demands. We are content with almost nothing. Right from the beginning, we reject possibilities that seem, at first glance, to be out of our reach. We prefer to live with the smoldering pain of suppressed yearning rather than the clear and obvious pain from

dissatisfaction with the present state of things, which is, in fact, a prerequisite for change. It is not that difficult to find out what to do with your life. What is difficult is to live up to that knowledge because what is ahead of you is the difficulty of cultivating and refining your spirit; the pain of living with a feeling of yearning and loss; the strictness of waiting with patience; the harshness of living strategically, practicing control, and discipline. The knowledge of the meaning of life demands from you that you dust your morale and start fighting yourself for your life – against your apathy, ignorance, laziness, and indolence to re-conquer your life gradually.

How do you find out what you really want? Listen to your longings and dreams. Trust yourself and listen to your heart. We all have frustrated dreams from the beginning of our adult lives. Life is shaped by your self-expression. It is all there inside of us in the form of opportunities and potentials to be realized. When that happens, we see our life blossoming. The potential reaches us in a strange and magic way, like a vision, an unexpected and surprising idea. But, without our true/proper inner spirit being involved, things will not work for us. The right spirit is the ability to sense the deeper meaning of life's way of being with us – to sense life's deepest purpose with us.

Life is shorter than we expect. Accepting responsibility means that you see to it that things become the way you want them to be, no less. We have far more freedom to shape our lives than is generally believed. When we start the fight for change the very first time, we often realize that the obstacles are not in the world out there but have their roots within us.

Sense of coherence and health seems to be dependent on contributing and creating value in life. This could be the most relevant scientific argument for a strong relation between working life quality and health. But sense of coherence is dependent on the person developing his purpose of life and character. Many kinds of work are severely limiting the individual's possibility to stem into character and using him- or herself. Much too often a job is about collecting money, not about thriving and personal development. It is a major challenge for every organization of our time to organize work in a way that it offers room for personal development and self-exploration that in the end leads to optimal job satisfaction and lasting health [8].

5. MASTERY IN PROCESS OF WORK

Mastery in the process of work is one of the four dimensions developing the quality of work life. Mastery is about developing our potential, and our potential is all we might be and do in life. Mastery consists of all potentially achievable skills, including personal qualities. To master something means doing it brilliantly and to be among the best in what you do.

But a master is not preoccupied with comparing himself with others. A master prefers comparisons with his/her personal visions and life dreams about the best way of improving. People who seek mastery live with a dream of ultimate professionalism and then go for it. Slowly and systematically it is done. They will gradually master a profession to perfection. A master loves his/her work intensely. He/she finds the greatest challenges at work and confronts them. The master develops professionally and mentally at the same time. In mastery, life is unfolded more freely, more perfectly. Every human being can develop toward mastery. It is true that most people are prepared to make an effort in their working life. This is not just about the salary but also about providing the world with a valuable and personal contribution that gives a strong sense of personal meaningfulness. Developing mastery is one of the four conditions besides quality of life, joint efforts, and creating true incremental value that are decisive for the quality of our working life. Today almost all human beings have both the potential and the opportunities to develop their mastery [9].

6. COOPERATION WITH COLLEAGUES AND MANAGEMENT

The job has become the modern man's bridge to the world. It is, first and foremost, our joining an organization (company) that provides man with actions that confront us with the outer world. There is enormous potential in the development of the joint energy of an organization and of groups. The groups that manage to handle all conflicts and conflicting interests turn into regular small combat units that perform miracles none would ever think of. Fellowship is something in life that contains immense potential, and fellowship is the third aspect of working life quality besides quality of life, mastery and creating real value. If you open up and let things happen, a group may turn into an incredibly intense and creative unit. Cooperation and management gradually disappear in favor of group members' increasing ability to act intuitively and directly. Much time is wasted and valuable energy lost in internal disputes. Instead of fighting our personal limitations and ourselves, many of us fight others. A section of a company may end up being unproductive and without profit if the classical pattern of complaints, envy, cliques, and arguments prevails.

A company is in many ways like a living organism, where every employee and leader corresponds to a living cell. Only when all the cells are happy, healthy, oriented and fully informed about what is going on everywhere in the organization can do an optimal job. Only when everybody is connected to the world and giving their gift to the world through the work, can we have an optimal performance in an optimal organization. The key to all this is fellowship, for only through fellow-

ship can man be nourished and supported enough to grow and heal existentially. The team must support personal and professional growth. Only in the soil fertilized with human respect and unconditional love can geniuses and masters grow [10].

Good relationships are the heart of effective visionary leaders. They embody a deeply caring approach to people, seeing them as their greatest asset. They know how to listen and learn from other points of view and have fine tuned their communications skills. They exhibit a greater respect for others and carefully develop team spirit and team learning. The most effective visionary leaders are responsive to the real needs of people and they develop participative strategies to include people in designing their own futures.

7. CREATING REAL VALUE FOR CUSTOMERS AND ENVIRONMENT

The organization is our chance to become valuable to a much wider circle than the one closest to us. By being part of a valuable organization, we create genuine value, not just market value. In order to create real value, it is necessary to adhere to good and viable values that allow us to create clear preconditions for quality of life instead of wasting these preconditions. The transition towards creating proper values requires a profound re-thinking of our attitudes. To this end, customer satisfaction will be subordinate to a more global perspective on production. It may well be better to remain in your job and change a bad company than fleeing to another job. This must be considered an emergency solution. The world needs competent people exactly where change is needed. We can all grow and develop, thus becoming more valuable. Every one of us can be useful by contributing our individual skills to the environment. Consider this a personal obligation. Put in another way, if we do not put our uniqueness and best talents to proper use, we betray ourselves as well as others. Real value might be more strongly connected to our common survival on the planet than most people realize. We are in the middle of a technical revolution and explosive population growth; we are completely transforming the surface of the planet. We suggest that real value very soon will be about contributing to the global eco-system, more than anything. This demands a highly developed consciousness and maybe the development of human consciousness itself is the next area we need to focus on for man to create value and the human race to survive. Most interestingly, the development of consciousness and self-insight is closely connected to development of sexual ability and the ability to love others and function socially. Medicine might very well be about developing the human consciousness as well, as health and happiness is highly dependent on this. Our central conviction with regard to humanity is that you can make the dif-

ference, if you want to. You can contribute to a shift in attitudes and practice. In this way you will make a significant change not only for yourself, but also for your place of work and your environment. People who fight for their personal values to be implemented in the company contribute to making a difference. It is people like this who make the world a better place.

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 [11-14].

Visionary leaders anticipate change and are proactive, rather than reactive to events. Their focus is on opportunities, not on problems. They emphasize win/win– rather than adversarial win/lose– approaches. Each of us can access our inner resources to become a more effective leader in our own field. First we must be willing to take initiative and stand for something we believe in passionately. We must be ready to take the heat. Many of us avoid the responsibility of leadership primarily because we are too sensitive to criticism. But when we know who we truly are and we live from an inner core of values, criticism can be filtered to take in only what is true and helpful to our growth. Today, as we enter the Third Millennium, thousands of new visionary leaders are emerging in all fields of human endeavor around the world, leading a quiet revolution energized by power of the soul. By appreciating and supporting those who lead from their core spiritual values, we strengthen those leadership qualities in ourselves.

In order to create the right conditions that invoke more leaders of this quality and truly transform politics, there is work we each need to do now. We can adopt a leader who has high potential, and support him or her inwardly by sending our positive energy so s/he might align with his/her highest self. When there is a clear purpose and mission in an organization, there is tremendous coherence and energy – things seem to happen almost effortlessly and magically. In fact, focusing on mission and vision is one of the latest hot trends in management. Clear purpose and unified commitment produce the most productive, creative and high energy organizations. And having a clear mission personally, in alignment with our soul's purpose, makes us more effective and productive in our own life.

8. CONCLUSION

Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come? Victor Hugo wrote centuries ago. Ideas have changed the world – great ideas such as ?love your neighbor as yourself? or ?all men are created equal?. Why are ideas so powerful? Because consciousness is primal, not physical form. Consciousness is the causal factor. How would our politics be different if citizens personally understand that consciousness is primal and thoughts are the cause of everything that manifests in our lives and in the physical world? If we would know consciousness is primary, we would recognize that separateness is an illusion and that everyone and everything is interconnected. And most importantly, we can each realize the power of our own consciousness on others, and so take more responsibility for refining and transforming it. Only thus can we collectively create a better world that works for all and be truly happy and secure.

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Apstrakt.

Bezbednost i zdravlje na radu kao ključna karika u svetu rada trpi uticaj intenzivnih promena koje nameće savremeno doba. Aktuelna ekonomska kriza na globalnom i nacionalnom nivou umnogome doprinosi negativnim trendovima zdravstvenog stanja radnika širom sveta. To međutim može da bude i prilika za nove izbore i stavove u zaštiti zdravlja ugrožene populacije radnika. Čini se da zdravlje i bezbednost na radu danas postaje osnovno ljudsko pravo više nego ikada. Bezbednost i zdravlje na radu ne sme da podrazumeva isključivo zaštitu od povreda na radu, izloženosti profesionalnim štetnostima i promociju zdravih stilova života. Neophodan je proaktivan stav u promovisanju zdravstvene pismenosti radnika u praksi. Kako je mentalno zdravlje radnika posebno ugroženo, osmišljena akcija u tom pravcu može da ima presudnu ulogu. Promocija mentalnog zdravlja zahteva holistički pristup. Autor ovog rada prezentuje koncept i iskustva drugih (Danska, Norveška) na takvom putu sa, već odavno, ostvarenim i institucijama za takvu praksu. Ovaj koncept je veliki izazov za akademsku javnost i stručne praksu u siromašnim zemljama poput Srbije. Oni, svako na svoj način, zajedno uz pomoć samo-obrazovanja i obrazovanja, bez velikih materijalnih ulaganja, mogu da povedu zemlju na put zdravlja, kvalitetnijeg života i humanijeg društva.

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