

<p>Institution: University of Portsmouth</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 19 Business and Management Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Improving the Wellbeing of Employees by Assessing and Enhancing Quality of Working Life</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL®) scale and its derivatives have been used to assess and enhance the quality of working life in 10% of UK universities, ten NHS Trusts, five Trade Unions, 15 schools, a professional body (the British Psychological Society) and parts of other large national organisations (Police, BBC, RNLI). The research and data provided by the Quality of Working Life (QoWL®) team at the University of Portsmouth also now forms a significant element of the UK Government's definition and approach to tackling organisational stress. The WRQoL® scale is available in 11 languages and 50+ countries, and is directly and indirectly saving organisations thousands of pounds and helping contributing to the improved wellbeing of millions of employees.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The quality of working life (QoWL) of an individual is influenced by their direct experience of work and by the direct and indirect factors that affect this experience. QoWL is important in maintaining an effective workforce and is related to job satisfaction, wellbeing, stress, productivity and engagement of employees (Easton & Van Laar, 2012). <i>Nationally</i> it has been estimated that 200 million working days, at a cost of £13 billion, are lost each year in the UK due to poor health and wellbeing (Bevan, 2010). <i>At the organisational level</i>, reductions in sickness absence due to enhanced wellbeing have been shown to bring large and quantifiable economic benefits to the organisation. <i>At the individual level</i>, improved life quality translates into a longer and happier life. The WRQoL psychometric scale was created and developed by Van Laar and colleagues at Portsmouth as an aid to understand <u>and</u> improve the quality of working life of working people in the UK and across the world.</p> <p>Background</p> <p>Since 1998 Van Laar and colleagues have provided staff surveys to a large number of organisations including NHS trusts, schools and universities. This public engagement, the survey data collected, and ongoing discussions with staff, management and unions in these organisations prompted Van Laar and colleagues to consider 'quality of working life' more generally.</p> <p>Linking real-world survey data to the theoretical literature on the quality of working life led to the development of the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) scale (Van Laar, Edwards & Easton, 2007) using Finance South East Concept (Project 1) and Higher Education Innovation funds (Project 2). The WRQoL scale is the psychometrically strongest measure of QoWL and has a six factor structure: General Well-Being, Home-Work Interface, Job and Career Satisfaction, Control at Work, Working Conditions and Stress at Work. This original validation assessment took place while the UK Government's Health & Safety Executive (HSE) was developing its Management Standards Stress Scale, and this coincidence saw the Portsmouth team invited to work with the HSE to validate the HSE scale and to investigate the links between the quality of working life and stress in the workplace. The findings were reported by Edwards, Webster, Van Laar & Easton (2008) which was the first paper to analyse the full HSE data set and was crucial in the acceptance of this now very widely used scale.</p> <p>A large scale survey with responses from over 2500 staff from four UK Universities enabled the</p>

validity of the WRQoL scale to be further tested, (Edwards, Van Laar, Easton & Kinman, 2009). This research provided new benchmarking data and norms for university employees and confirmed the WRQoL scale as outperforming similar scales. In 2012, the WRQoL user manual was published, providing full validity and reliability information for users of the scale (Easton and Van Laar, 2012).

Research since 2009 has focussed on development of the WRQoL 2 scale which includes a new employee engagement sub-scale and provides norms for new organisational areas such as the Police (Easton, Van Laar & Marlow-Vardy, 2013). The Portsmouth team have also been working with (and advising) researchers from around the world to enable development of culturally valid translations of the WRQoL scale.

Portsmouth staff involved:

Dr Darren Van Laar 2003–13 (Reader in Applied Psychology),

Mr Simon Easton 2003–13 (Chartered Clinical Psychologist),

Dr Julian Edwards 2007–8 (HEIF Research Fellow).

3. References to the research

1. Easton, S., Van Laar, D.L. & Marlow-Vardy, R. (2013). Quality of Working Life and the Police. *Management*. 3(3), 135-141, DOI: [10.5923/j.mm.20130303.01](https://doi.org/10.5923/j.mm.20130303.01)
 2. Easton, S. & Van Laar, D.L. (2012). *User Manual of the WRQoL Scale*. University of Portsmouth: Portsmouth. ISBN: 9781861376398.
 3. Edwards, J., Van Laar, D.L., Easton, S., & Kinman, G. (2009) The Work-Related Quality of Life Scale for Higher Education Employees. *Quality in Higher Education*. 15(3) 207-219, DOI: [10.1080/13538320903343057](https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320903343057). 17 citations since 2009.
 4. Edwards, J.A., Webster, S., Van Laar, D.L., & Easton, S. (2008). Psychometric Analysis of the UK Health & Safety Executive Management Standards Work-Related Stress Indicator Tool. *Work & Stress* 22(2) 96-107, DOI: [10.1080/02678370802166599](https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370802166599). ABS List 2*. 42 citations since 2008.
 5. Van Laar, D.L., Edwards, J., & Easton, S. (2007). The Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) Scale for Healthcare Workers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 60(3) 325-333, DOI: [10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04409.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04409.x). 45 citations since 2007.
1. Project 1: 2006. (£49,250). The Healthy Employee Assessment & Diagnostic Toolkit (The HEAD Toolkit). Finance South East. [Van Laar, D. and Easton, S.]
 2. Project 2: 2005. (£71,011). Assessment, understanding and change of Quality of Working Life. Higher Education Innovation Fund. [Van Laar, D. and Easton, S.]

4. Details of the impact

The **reach** and **significance** of this research can be demonstrated through:

- The incorporation of Portsmouth research and resulting data in the UK government's benchmark definition of stress at work.
- The wide range of UK organisations which have used the QoWL tool to survey and improve conditions for their staff, including 10% of all UK universities (including Cardiff, Essex, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, LSE, QMU, and Sheffield) and some of the largest UK Trade Unions (including the Police Federation, TUC, Unite);
- The many translations and applied use of the scale across the world (including India, Iran, Philippines, Turkey), and the extent of media coverage it has attracted at home and abroad.

This research has not only had a demonstrable **health and welfare impact**, but also a strong **economic, commercial and organisational impact**. In 2008, building on an award of £71,000

from the University's Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF) to commercialise this research, a university spinout company, QoWL Ltd, was formed.

1. *Contributing to the development of UK government stress benchmarks*

At the national level, current Health and Safety Law requires that if work-related stress is suspected in employees then it must be assessed. This led the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to develop a Stress Management Standards questionnaire in 2005. The Portsmouth team played an integral role in helping validate this questionnaire and were actively consulted in the construction of the HSE Management Standards (MS) psychometric scale and stress-intervention procedure that has been in place since 2008 to help employers manage work-related stress. The Manager of the HSE Stress Area confirms that more than ten per cent of the *current* HSE MS benchmark data was contributed by Portsmouth QoWL researchers and that "the benchmark data-set has formed a key element of the UK government's definition and approach to tackling organisational stress" (*Corroborating Person – CP1*). Significantly, since 2008 an estimated "...17,000 organisations, including 80% of Local Government Authorities, and more than 1 million staff have used the management standards scale and the associated benchmarks to assess the factors that affect the health and wellbeing of their staff." (*CP1*). In 2011 Van Laar worked with the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and Robertson Cooper Ltd to link QoWL university employee wellbeing data to NSS organisational scores (p. 28-9), which led to specific **guidelines for HR professionals** on implementing effective wellbeing strategies across the HE sector (*Corroborating Source – CS1*).

2. *Improving workplace wellbeing: the application of the WRQoL scale and QoWL surveys*

At the organisational level, WRQoL based QoWL staff surveys have typically been employed by Human Resource (HR) departments to identify organisational shortcomings so that remedial policies can be introduced in order to improve organisational satisfaction and to enhance the working life of employees. In the majority of cases, organisations have paid for Van Laar and colleagues to set up, analyse and report the WRQoL and wellbeing of their staff, demonstrating the **economic and commercial value** of such surveys. For example, since 2007 the University of Huddersfield, a large UK University employing over 1,600 staff, has conducted a WRQoL based QoWL survey every two years, using the data provided by the surveys to drive change in many ways (*CS2*). In 2009, QoWL survey results "allowed us to focus on sickness absence" (*CP2*), prompting the introduction of a new sickness absence procedure that led to "a 16% reduction in sickness absence with average days lost per employee now at 4.4, significantly below the HE average of 6.2" and "days lost since 2007/8 for stress/mental ill health for academic staff have more than halved from 1453 days to 604 days, a saving estimated to be in the region of £100,000 p.a." (*CP2*).

Leeds College of Music, a specialist UK conservatoire college, have used the WRQoL survey three times across five years (2008-2013) to 'drive change' in the organisation by emphasising the organisation's **social responsibility** and management support for employees. The 2008 survey identified inconsistencies in management training programmes – leading to the introduction of a formal management and leadership induction course for all its (40) managers. Other changes introduced as a direct consequence of survey findings include changing the way requests for flexible working are dealt with and improved staff communications, causing "home-work interface approval rates to rise by 12% and overall [staff] satisfaction levels to rise by 16%" (*CP3*). The Director of Work-Life Solutions, a Business Psychology consultancy which has worked with more than 10 commercial clients using the QoWL survey confirms that the tool has allowed "clients to gain a competitive advantage over similar organisations through allowing them to demonstrate lower costs of absence and staff turnover and to become more attractive to talent through improved reputation." (*CP4*).

3. *The WRQoL scale and QoWL surveys: International and Media Reach.*

The global reach of the WRQoWL scale developed at Portsmouth is evidenced by requests from more than 340 researchers from over 50 countries to use the scale since 2008 (CS3). The WRQoL scale is downloaded on average 100 times a month from the www.qowl.co.uk web-site and the scale has been officially translated by researchers into 11 languages to date, including Chinese, Farsi, Hungarian, Spanish, Thai and Turkish.

The QoWL/Portsmouth research has also been widely cited by journalists, broadcasters and social media. It has formed the basis for the lead article on the BBC Business web-site in 2009, and has helped to shape public debate about the engagement of older employees in work (CS4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Corroborating Source

CS1: Shutler-Jones, K. (2011). *Improving performance through wellbeing & engagement: essential tools for a changing HE landscape*. London: UCEA.

CS2: Wolff, C. (2009). *Measuring wellbeing brings rewards at the University of Huddersfield*. Intelligent Research Solutions Employment Review, No. 916. London: XpertHR.

CS3: **QoWL archive of researchers accessing and downloading the WRQoL tool.**

CS4: **Archive containing copies of all citations relating to QoWL/Portsmouth by journalists, broadcasters or social media** (inc: BBC business website and older employee engagement articles).

Corroborating Person

CP1: Manager of Stress Services, UK Health and Safety Executive. Letter. *REPORTER*.

CP2: Director of Human Resources, University of Huddersfield. Letter. *REPORTER*.

CP3: Director of Human Resources, Leeds College of Music. Letter. *REPORTER*.

CP4: Managing Director, Work-Life Solutions Ltd. Letter. *PARTICIPANT/REPORTER* (in the sense he worked with QoWL to help develop their product and marketing strategy and has implemented the survey in a number of organisations).