

## WORK AND QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE: FOCUSING ON THE DIFFERENCES AMONG OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS\*

JOON-SHIK PARK  
Hallym University

*The quality of working life among Korean people has improved since the year 1986. Despite the continuous improvement, environmental factors such as the economic growth rate and union density have been declining recently. Considering those factors have played a very important role in improving the quality of working life, we can no longer expect such improvements in the near future. Among different occupational groups, the satisfaction level of public sector employees looks very high. Professionals were satisfied with their education and social status. On the other hand, agricultural workers were dissatisfied with their life conditions, with the exception of health and work. Stress levels were highest among manufacturing workers and agricultural workers. Of all occupational groups, manufacturing workers experienced the worst conditions in both objective and subjective quality of life. Despite low productivity and the routine character of their work, public sector employees seem to enjoy stable objective and subjective conditions. Higher satisfaction with life and working conditions do not necessarily guarantee corresponding creativity, autonomy, and productivity. One of the basic contradictions in the quality of Korean working life does not reflect productivity, creativity, and work performance. (The major causes of job characteristics in Korean society may not be inherent in job categories but in the models of industrialization and consequent work organization.)*

### INTRODUCTION

The Korean economy has expanded rapidly since the onset of economic growth. Although shaken by the effects of the unexpected international financial crisis and consequent IMF bailout, Korean economic development has been one of the most successful models of growth in the later part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite its speed, however, the impact of economic development on the subjective and objective quality of working life among Korean people has been almost neglected. Only in recent years, have a handful of policy makers and researchers begun to turn their attention to the quality of working life among Korean people. The neglect of these issues results from a paranoiac adherence to the materialistic growth, while disregarding any concern for the impact of quantitative development on the agents of indus-

\*This study was supported by the Korea Research Foundation.

trialization. Now, as the Korean economy is shaken to its roots, and the illusions of the miracle are revealed, Korean people are forced to reflect on the overall objectives of economic development.

This article is divided into three major parts. First, we will examine changes in the quality of working life among the Korean people. In this section, our main focus will be on the objective side of the quality of working life reflected in a few social indices. Second, we will try to capture a subjective picture of the quality of working life, drawing from 1996 survey data on the quality of life in Korea. In this section our major focus will be on the perceived quality of working life among different occupational groups. In conclusion, we will discuss the major findings of this work, and address a few problems and implications for improving the quality of working life among different occupational groups in Korean society.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL INDICES ON THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE

A generation of rapid economic development has had enormous consequences for the quality of working life among the Korean people. This section is a brief description of changes in objective indicators of working life at the macro level. The quality of working life can be measured through a number of diverse indicators. We have selected the following indices as tentative scales for the changing contours of the quality of working life: 'average weekly working hours of manufacturing workers', 'unemployment rate', 'frequency of industrial accidents', 'economic participation rate of women', 'organizational density of labor unions', and 'satisfaction with working conditions'. Acknowledging their limitations as reliable indicators of the changes in working conditions, a summary of these indices is presented in Table 1.

Note that most of the major indicators related with the objective conditions of Korean employees began to show a rather sharp increase around the year 1986. Among those indicators of improvement, the most impressive is the decrease in average weekly working hours. The average working hours of manufacturing workers began to decline thereafter. This trend continues. Reductions in working hours have contributed to an increase of leisure time.

The economic participation rate of women shows a contrary trend, increasing consistently — since 1986. Such a trend could imply a positive impact on employment quality, as well as the quality of working life. Compared with the advanced countries in the OECD group, however, there

**TABLE 1.** ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHANGES OF THE MAJOR INDICATORS OF THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE IN KOREA: 1975-1995

Year	GNP Growth Rate	Average Working Hours of Manufacturing Workers	Unemployment Rate	Industrial Accident Rates	Economic Participation Rate of Women	Organizational Density of Unions
1975	6.1	50.5	4.1	16.8	40.4	23.0
1976	11.9	52.5	3.9	16.2	43.2	23.0
1977	10.1	52.9	3.8	16.2	41.7	24.3
1978	9.4	53.0	3.2	16.6	43.3	24.0
1979	6.8	52.0	3.8	13.5	43.3	23.6
1980	-3.9	53.1	5.2	11.1	42.8	20.1
1981	5.5	53.7	4.5	12.4	42.3	19.6
1982	7.5	53.8	4.4	14.5	43.4	19.1
1983	12.2	54.4	4.1	14.0	42.8	18.1
1984	8.5	54.3	3.8	13.1	40.7	16.8
1985	6.6	53.8	4.0	11.6	41.9	15.7
1986	11.9	54.7	3.8	10.9	43.1	15.5
1987	12.3	54.0	3.1	9.8	45.0	17.3
1988	12.0	52.6	2.5	9.3	45.0	22.0
1989	6.9	50.7	2.6	7.5	46.6	23.3
1990	9.5	49.8	2.4	6.7	47.0	21.5
1991	9.1	49.3	2.3	6.4	47.3	19.7
1992	5.1	48.7	2.4	6.0	47.3	18.4
1993	5.8	48.9	2.8	5.2	47.2	17.2
1994	8.6	48.7	2.4	4.7	47.9	16.3
1995	8.9	49.2	2.0	3.9	48.3	15.3
1996	7.1	48.4	2.0	3.5	48.7	14.7

Note: Industrial Accident Rate=(Number of Industrial Accidents/Total Working Hours) × 1,000,000.

Source: National Statistical Office, *Social Indicators*; Ministry of Labor, *Yearbook of Labor Statistics*; Bank of Korea, *National Account*.

is much room for improvement.

At the workplace level, one of the most important indicators of the quality of working life is the frequency of industrial accidents. Workplaces in Korea have been notorious for their high risks for industrial accidents, contributing to unbearable conditions for most workers. The high accident rates have so far represented the hard work, and dangerous situations in the workplaces. Around 1986, however, this trend also began to curve downward. Decreases in the number of working hours and industrial accidents may be among the most significant indicators of positive change in objective working conditions. An encouraging implication is that it appears to be a long-term trend. Despite such positive implications, claims of improvement

in the quality of Korean working life must be understood within the context of some important considerations.

A first reservation calling for more careful interpretation of improving trends is that the starting point was extremely low. We can observe the late-late industrialization effect in the quality of working life (Amsden 1989). Due to its lateness in industrialization, the relative position of the Korean people still remains significantly lower than in other OECD countries. In particular, the average working hours of employees, the frequency of industrial accidents, and the economic participation rate of women are still very low in comparison with other countries of similar income levels (Lee 1987: 293). So, despite rapid improvements in working conditions, the comparative position of the Korean people with regard to the quality of working life remains well below average. In other words, there is still much room for more improvement.

Second, despite continuous improvements in the quality of work, the rate of improvement was slow compared with the fast growth in other sectors. In other words, the quality of working life has been retarded and uneven compared with other indicators of economic development. This is apparent when we compare the indices of work quality with the growth rate of the GNP. Since 1987, the GNP has grown at an average annual rate of 7.9%. However, the improvement of working life could not match that. Improvements in the quality of life lagged far behind the average growth of the economy in general. Such uneven and delayed development may explain the rather low subjective satisfaction with working conditions in general.

Finally, the institutional frameworks of labor relations and work practices at workplaces in Korea are still retarded compared with the international standards among OECD countries. Especially, the organizational density of labor unions has decreased significantly since 1989, resulting in a weakening bargaining position for labor in Korea. Declines in the density of labor union may not be closely related to the quality of life for workers. However, considering the special position of labor unions in Korean society, it may portend potential improvements in workplace quality.

As was well known, labor unions have contributed enormously to changes in working conditions, especially since the late 1980s. The enhanced position and bargaining power of organized labor has been a crucial variable in the consistent improvement of wages and working conditions. The crippled position of labor unions in Korean society may mean a draining of important political and institutional potentials for further improvement of quality of working life.

Quality of working life includes both objective and subjective facets. By

the subjective facet, we mean the ways people themselves subjectively evaluate their own lives or working conditions. Table 2 provides a brief overview of the fluctuations in Korean employees' perceptions of their working conditions. Comparing indices of employee satisfaction with working conditions — such as jobs and wages — Table 2 shows a slight increase since 1991, with the exception of job satisfaction. In fact, we cannot observe any significant change in subjective satisfaction.

Additionally, wide variations in subjective satisfaction with working conditions can be observed among different occupational groups. Satisfaction seems to be higher among employees with more education, professional and administrative employees, and male employees. Workers in production, agriculture, and other occupations with hard working conditions showed relatively low levels of satisfaction, as did female workers (National Statistical Office 1996). These wide variations may reflect differences in labor markets and working conditions.

Despite continuous improvements in objective indicators of working conditions, the subjective satisfaction of employees has not changed for more than 10 years. Overall satisfaction with working conditions is not high. In particular, working conditions and wage levels were major areas of dissatisfaction. When evaluating the subjective quality of working life, therefore, we may observe that the majority of the people are not satisfied with their working lives, and that the overall level has not improved so far.

The relative weakness of the quality of working life may be due to several factors. Among these important factors is the weak bargaining power of organized labor. Additionally, political factors may help explain this weakness. The state has politically workers' demands in the name of economic development. The state has regarded labor as only a cost factor preventing economic development and tried to repress the rapid improvements in working conditions in order to maintain the international competitiveness of the companies (Park 1996). A final reason may be that the increasing gap between the rising expectations of people and their objective working con-

**TABLE 2.** CHANGES OF SATISFACTION WITH WORKING CONDITIONS SINCE 1985

(Unit: %)

	1985	1988	1991	1995
Wages	19.1	14.6	16.1	17.2
Working Conditions	33.2	20.7	19.4	21.7
Jobs	34.3	28.5	35.3	34.9

Source: National Statistical Office, *Social Indicators*.

ditions. Rapid economic development has pushed people's expectation for living and working conditions very high. However, the improvement of objective situations has not progressed so fast. A significant gap between expectations and reality has persisted, despite improvements in working conditions.

The objective working life of Korean employees showed improvement at least until the later part of 1997. From the beginning of the 1998, however, Koreans began to experience a drastic degradation of working life due to an unprecedented economic shock. The sweeping economic crisis and the consequent IMF bailout has invoked inflation in consumer prices, reduction of effective demand, decrease of real income, depreciation of the assets. Since Korea began to industrialize in the 1960s, the Korean people have had to endure a declining quality of life.

The most serious impact of the economic crisis on employees' lives is reflected in steep rise in the unemployment rate in a very short period of time. In December of 1998, the unemployment rate of Korea was recorded as 7.9% — the highest since industrialization began in the early 1960s. In a society with very weak social safety nets for unemployed workers, and in which most families depend on the income of the employed male, sudden unemployment means a total destruction of household lives. As unemployment rates soar, employment has emerged as the most important social and political concern (Korea Labor Institute 1998). The fear of unemployment has spread toward every corner of Korean society, and the quality of employment is deteriorating rapidly. For the first time since the onset of industrialization, Korean employees are experiencing the degradation of their own working lives.

Considering the present economic situation of Korea, the employees may have to be prepared to accept deterioration in the objective aspects of the quality of their working lives, at least for more than two years and prospects for recovery remain foggy. The aggravation of working life quality brought in uncontrollable social shocks. Much more serious, however, is that such shocks are crushing the lives of the middle class and the lower strata of the Korean society. So far, Korea could maintain social stability and integration

**TABLE 3. CHANGES OF MONTHLY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AFTER IMF BAILOUT IN KOREA**

	97.11	97.12	98.1	98.2	98.3	98.4	98.5	98.9	98.10	98.11	98.12
Unemployment Rate	2.6	3.1	4.5	5.9	6.5	6.7	6.9	7.3	7.1	7.3	7.9

Source: National Statistical Office, *Social Indicators*; Ministry of Labor, *Monthly Labor Statistics*.

due to the rather equal distribution of its economic growth, and the emergence of a thick middle class has been the most important fruits of rapid economic development. However, the sweeping economic crisis is shaking the fundamental basis of the middle strata in the Korean society, thus widening the inequalities among different social groups. Korean society may need drastic innovations in its institutional structures, and people may have to mobilize concerted effort in order to overcome crisis in the quality of life.

## PERCEIVED QUALITY OF LIFE: DIFFERENCES AMONG OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

### *Satisfaction of Life Spheres*

So far, studies on the quality of life among the Korean people have depended heavily on official employment or labor statistics published by the government. Official data, however, cannot contribute much to the understanding of the diverse characteristics of the quality of working life. In order to take a synthetic understanding of the quality of life, we must capture how employees themselves perceive and evaluate their own working conditions or situations. In fact, official indices concentrate so much on the objective side of the quality of life that there is a significant dissociation between objective aspects and the subjective evaluation of the people. In particular, we do not have a basic understanding of how different occupational groups perceive the quality of their working lives.

Generally speaking, diverse occupational groups have their own social and psychological work environments, and such job characteristics have significant impacts on their levels of stress, productivity, and health (Karasek, Robert and Toeres Theorell 1990). Extending this assumption, the status and characteristics of the jobs themselves may be constructed within the context of the socioeconomic development of a specific society. Generally speaking, the Korean style of development was initiated by the state. In this process, the public sector and its employees have emerged as privileged social groups. However, state centered development sacrificed the quality of life of the other sectors. In this section, we attempt to look at how different occupational groups perceive the quality of their working lives in diverse spheres, and characteristics of Korean economic development and work organization. In order to do that, we used a survey data on the quality of Korean having a sample size of 1,000. The survey was conducted during the early part of 1996 and employed a stratified random sampling

method.

Table 4 provides a summary of the general conditions of different occupational groups with regard to their objective working conditions. Table 5 summarizes perceived satisfaction scores for the occupational groups in various spheres of life.

According to Table 4, the average duration of occupational engagement is 8.8 years, and the average weekly working hours is 58.5. Despite the shortening work week, the absolute number of hours worked is still high. Occupational engagement was longest in the agricultural sector 22.7 years. No other group matches the score for this group. The group with the second highest years of occupational engagement is the public sector (12.5 years). In contrast, the group with the first and second shortest engagements are sales and service sector employees (7.4 years) and clerical and managerial employees in the private sector (7.6 years). Workers in the manufacturing sector scored 8.5 years.

When we look at the average weekly working hours of the respondents according to the rank order of working hours, it is as follows: sales and service sector employees (64.0 hours) > agricultural workers (62.0) > manufacturing workers (58.0) > professionals (52.8) > clerical and managerial employees (52.0) > public sector employees (51.5).

Regarding the average satisfaction scores for the respective spheres of life, we observe the following order: company (5.4) work and occupation (5.3) health (5.2) education (5.1) housework (5.0) leisure (4.7) cultural life (4.6) saving (4.5) social status (4.4), and income (4.4). While satisfaction with company, work and occupation, health, education and housework rank above 5.0, other fields such as social status, income, saving, leisure and cultural life were below 5.0.

Public sector employees scored highest on satisfaction with the company,

**TABLE 4. AVERAGE YEARS OF OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND WEEKLY WORKING HOURS**

(Unit: Year, Hour)

	Total Average	Professional	Public Sector	Clerical and Managerial	Sales and Service	Manufacturing	Agricultural	F
Duration of Occupational Engagement***	8.8	9.0	12.5	7.6	7.4	8.5	22.7	21.7
Average Weekly Working Hours***	58.5	52.8	51.5	52.0	64.0	58.0	62.0	12.9

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



**TABLE 5.** A COMPARISON OF PEOPLE'S PERCEIVED LIFE SATISFACTION SCORES AMONG DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

(Unit: Score)

	Total Average	Profes- sional	Public Sector	Clerical and Managerial	Sales and Service	Manufac- turing	Agricultural	F
Company***	5.4	5.8	6.6	5.5	5.3	4.7	4.9	4.23
Work/Occupation***	5.3	6.1	6.9	5.6	5.3	4.5	5.3	5.37
Health***	5.2	4.7	5.8	5.6	5.1	5.3	5.8	2.30
Education***	5.1	5.8	5.1	5.3	5.0	4.3	4.9	2.62
Housework***	5.0	4.8	5.8	5.3	4.9	4.7	5.9	2.61
Leisure***	4.7	4.5	5.7	5.2	4.4	3.8	4.8	4.19
Cultural Life***	4.6	4.6	4.9	5.2	4.4	4.5	4.2	2.20
Saving***	4.5	4.0	5.2	4.7	4.5	3.7	4.3	6.07
Income**	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.3	3.6	4.4	4.88
Social Status**	4.4	5.1	4.1	4.9	4.1	3.0	4.4	8.50
Overall Happiness***	5.4	5.8	6.6	5.5	5.3	4.7	4.9	4.23

\*\* p&lt; .01, \*\*\* p&lt; 0.001

Note: The score ranges from the lowest 0 to highest 10. Scores above 5 mean that respondents' attitudes may be regarded as positive on the respective questions.

with a value of 6.6. The remaining scores are high along the order of professionals (5.8) clerical and managerial employees (5.5) sales and service employees (5.3) manufacturing (4.7) agricultural sector (4.9). With the exception of manufacturing and agricultural occupations, other occupations scored above average.

Public sector employees also scored highest in the spheres of work and occupation. The satisfaction score of this group is 6.9 point — significantly higher than the average point 5.3. Next to the public sector, professionals ranked second, with a score of 6.1. Clerical and managerial employees and agricultural workers recorded the third position, scoring 5.6 points, which is slightly above average. Manufacturing workers ranked the lowest 4.5 points.

Satisfaction with health was highest among public sector employees and agricultural workers (5.8). Clerical and managerial employees scored 5.6, and manufacturing workers scored 5.3. In the health sphere, professionals ranked lowest at 4.7.

The average satisfaction with education level was 5.1, and the most satisfied occupational group was professionals, scoring 5.8. The remaining occupational groups were arranged as the order of clerical and managerial employees (5.3) public sector employees (5.1) sales and service workers (5.0)

agricultural workers (4.9) manufacturing workers (4.3).

Respondents' satisfaction with housework averaged 5.0. Among occupational groups, agricultural workers scored highest at 5.9 points. Public sector employees followed at 5.8, and clerical and managerial employees scored 5.3. The lowest point was found among manufacturing workers at 4.7. Professionals also occupied a lower position with 4.8.

Satisfaction with leisure was 4.7 in average. Satisfaction in this sphere was low in comparison with other spheres. The highest point was among the public sector employees, at 5.7, and the lowest point was among the manufacturing workers at 3.8. This means, that, despite the shortening trends of work time, most of the Korean people are constantly plagued by long working hours.

Clerical and managerial employees were most satisfied with their cultural lives (5.2). The satisfaction scores were rank ordered as clerical and managerial workers (5.2) public sector employees (4.9) professionals (4.6) manufacturing workers (4.5) sales and service workers (4.4) > agricultural workers (4.2). As with leisure, satisfaction with culture was lower than other life spheres. This means the respondents are very thirsty for leisure and cultural consumption, and that the Korean people are very exhausted with their working lives.

When we look at the satisfaction scores of respondents' saving life, it was 4.5 in average. The highest scores among occupational groups were in the public sector (5.2). The lowest was among manufacturing workers (3.7). Professionals and agricultural workers were among the most dissatisfied group (4.0).

The average satisfaction with income was 4.4, and was among the spheres of life with the lowest scores, along with social status. Clerical and managerial employees scored highest at 4.8. Public sector employees and professionals were 4.7 and 4.6 respectively. The income satisfaction of manufacturing workers' was lowest at 3.6.

When we compare scores of satisfaction with social status across occupational groups, the rank order is as follows: professionals (5.1) clerical and managerial employees (4.9) agricultural workers (4.4) public sector employees, sales and service workers (4.1) manufacturing workers (3.0). The average score for satisfaction with social status was 4.4, among the lowest among different life spheres. The dissatisfaction of manufacturing workers with their social status was especially low.

Different occupational groups expressed different levels of satisfaction for different life spheres. In other words, different occupational groups have different life experiences and work environments, and life satisfaction

scores may be rooted more or less in these different situations. Combing an scores into an aggregate measure of satisfaction with the quality of life, we can observe some differences among occupational groups. The last item in Table 5 summarizes respondents' perceptions of overall satisfaction with their present lives. All in all, the highest general life satisfaction was found among public sector employees (6.6). Second was among professionals (5.8), and third was among clerical and managerial employees (5.5). The lowest point was found among manufacturing workers (4.7). Sales and service workers (5.3) and agricultural workers (4.9) were also among the lower group in satisfaction with life situations in general. As with the individual spheres of life, respondents' general evaluation of quality of working life varied consistently among different occupational groups.

Comparing the satisfaction scores of the various life spheres, public sector employees were most satisfied of all occupational groups with their life situations. They scored highest in their evaluations of health conditions, work and occupations, companies, leisure, and saving. They were distinguished with other social groups except satisfaction with social status. Professionals, were satisfied with their education and social status, but were lower than the public employees in most of the life spheres. On the other hand, manufacturing workers were the most dissatisfied group. They scored lowest in most of the spheres except health situations. Their relative deprivation is highest at least in subjective evaluations. Agricultural workers were also reported much dissatisfaction with life situations, except for health and work.

### *Satisfaction with the Quality of Life Among Occupational Groups*

So far, we have examined perceived satisfaction with spheres of life across different occupational groups. In this section, we address different evaluations of the quality of working life along six different indices. These measures are constructed in five point scales and represent different aspects of the quality of working life. Table 6 presents a summary of evaluation scores by occupational groups. The score ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 10. Scores above 5 indicate positive responses.

Comparing the average scores of the 6 indices, participation in decision making received the highest score (6.3), and the autonomy of work was also relatively high (6.0). Autonomy dimensions were perceived to be higher than the other dimensions of the quality of work. Demand for learning in respondents' work scored 5.6. In contrast, the lowest scores were for both demand for creativity in work (5.5) and work stress (5.5). Respondents per-

**TABLE 6.** A COMPARISON OF PEOPLE'S PERCEIVED QUALITE OF WORKING LIFE SCORES AMONG DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

Indices	Total Average	Profes- sional	Public Sector	Clerical and Managerial	Sales and Service	Manufac- turing	Agricultural	F
Stress of Work*	5.5	5.3	4.1	5.3	5.7	5.6	6.8	3.39
Repetitiveness of Work*	6.0	5.2	5.4	5.3	6.6	6.6	5.6	5.54
Demand for Creativity*	5.5	6.8	4.7	5.5	5.2	4.8	5.7	4.53
Demand for Learning*	5.6	7.0	4.9	5.8	5.3	5.1	5.5	4.54
Autonomy of Work*	6.0	6.7	4.9	5.5	6.4	4.5	6.9	5.99
Participation of Decision Making*	6.3	6.8	5.0	5.7	6.7	5.2	6.6	4.97

\*  $p < 0.01$

Note: The score ranges from the lowest 0 to highest 10. Scores above 5 mean that respondents' attitudes may be regarded as positive on the respective questions.

ceived their work to be highly repetitive. These average scores vary widely among different occupational groups, indicating a need to examine the different evaluations of different occupational groups.

First, we will consider the work-related stress scores among the occupational groups. In order to measure the stress of work we examined responses to the statement "I'm always stressed by work". 30.9% of respondents said 'more or less agree', and 10.8% responded 'strongly agree'. 41.7% of respondents therefore, felt more or less stressed by work. On the other hand, the combined percentage of respondents who 'disagree' (22.6%) or 'strongly disagree' (4.9%) is only 27.5%, meaning that the majority of Koreans perceive their working environments as stressful, for various reasons. Respondents' average score for this item was 5.5. Among the occupational groups, agricultural workers (6.8), sales and service workers (5.7), and manufacturing workers (5.6) scored above average. Agricultural workers were most prone to work related stresses, while the least stressed were public sector employees, scoring 4.1. Professionals (5.3), clerical and managerial workers (5.3) were also below average in stress.

In order to evaluate the repetitiveness of work, we asked respondents to evaluate the following statement, "my work is simple and repetitive". 35.3% of people 'agreed' and 16.1% 'more or less agreed'. Thus 51.4% of the respondents regarded their work as simple and repetitive. On the other hand the 22.5% of reaspondents disagreed, combining the 'disagree' and

'more or less disagree' (18.7%). The average score was 6.0, meaning that the majority of people feel that their work is simple and repetitive, with very routine working conditions. Sales and service workers (6.6), and manufacturing workers (6.6) perceived their work to be most repetitive and routinized. Professionals felt least routinization (5.2). Clerical and managerial workers (5.3), and public sector employee (5.4) were below average.

Concerning the demand for creativity, 30.3% of respondents 'more or less agreed' and 14.3% of people 'agreed' to the following statement, "my work demands creativity in order to accomplish it". Thus 44.6% of people evaluated their work as demanding creativity. On the other hand, 7.8% 'disagreed', and 24.1% 'more or less disagreed' with the statement. The average evaluation was 5.5. Perception of creativity was highest among professionals, surpassing other groups, with a score of 6.8. Public sector employees (4.7) and manufacturing workers (4.8) were below average. Public sector workers were found to be working in environments that were less stressful, more routinized, and demanded less creativity.

To evaluate respondents' perception of the demand for learning at work, we presented the following statement: "in order to accomplish my work, I have to learn new things constantly". To this, 30.7% of respondents 'more or less agreed', and 14.9% 'agreed', thus 45.6% of people perceived a the constant demand for learning. On the other hand, 6.8% 'more or less disagreed' and 22.4% 'disagreed' on that. About half of the respondents perceived their work to demand learning in various kinds of ways. The degree of demand, however, differs significantly across occupational groups. Professionals perceived the highest demand for learning, far exceeding other groups with a score of 7.0. Public sector employees scored below average with 4.9. Manufacturing workers (5.1), sales and service workers (5.3) were also below average (5.5). Public sector employees were working in situations demanding less creativity and learning. Routinized and uniform supervisory work were typical job environments for these workers.

Autonomy of work is an important dimension of the quality of working life. In order to measure the respondents' perception of autonomy in their work, we asked respondents to evaluate the statement "I have enough freedom for conception and execution of my work". To this sentence, 32.3% responded 'more or less agree', and 19.8% 'agreed'. More than half of the respondents (52.1%) regarded their work as allowing autonomy. On the other hand, 6.9% 'disagreed' and 16.4% 'more or less disagreed', comprising at total of 23.3%. The average score for this question was 6.0.

We can identify clear distinctions among occupational categories in the autonomy of work. Agricultural workers scored highest (6.9), and profes-

sionals followed closely at 6.7. Sales and service workers were also included in the autonomous group, with a score of 6.4. On the other hand, manufacturing workers scored lowest (4.5), and public sector employees were just above this group (4.9). Clerical and managerial workers were also below average (5.5). Interestingly, agricultural workers scored highest in both autonomy and work stress. Public sector workers contrasted most sharply with agricultural workers, scoring lowest on work stress and autonomy.

To examine respondents' participation in decision making processes at work, we asked for evaluations of the statement "I can participate in the decision making processes in the work". Together 54.7% of respondents responded 'more or less agree' (32.0%), and 'agree' (22.7%). On the other hand 6.3% 'disagreed' and 13.2% 'more or less disagreed'. Average scores for participation in decision making was 6.6. While professionals (6.8), sales and service workers (6.7), and agricultural workers perceived higher levels of participation, public sector employees (5.0), and manufacturing workers (5.2) scored below average.

So far, we have compared perceptions of different dimensions of the quality of working life. In this comparison, we identified several important differences among different occupational groups. First, professionals were very high in their evaluations of the demand for creativity and learning. While relatively high in autonomy of work and participation in decision making, their stress levels and the repetitiveness of their work were below average point. This suggests that, professionals were high in creativity and autonomy and reported below average in stress levels. The relative evaluations of their work was more positive other occupational groups. Creativity, demand for learning, and autonomy of work were the three most important characteristics of the professional job.

The situation of public sector employees differs greatly from that of professionals. Their perceptions of the creativity, autonomy, and participation in their work were below average. They were also very low in their reported levels of work stress. Public sector employees usually work in a very routine and repetitive environment, with low levels of work intensity and work related stress. Thus they are located in a job environment with low equilibrium of working life dimensions. Despite low creativity and high repetitiveness, public sector employees are highly satisfied with their life conditions.

Clerical and managerial workers were located at the middle in most of the evaluation scores. They were lower than professionals in creativity and autonomy of work, and higher than manufacturing workers and public sector employees.

Sales and service related jobs, scored lower on most dimensions, with the

exception of work autonomy and participation in decision making processes. This group reported very high levels of stress. High autonomy and high stress characterize their working conditions, but, they differ from professionals due to lower demands for creativity and learning.

Manufacturing work was very high in stress and repetitiveness. Demand for creativity and learning for these jobs was much lower than average, as was autonomy of work. Thus they show the worst situation among occupational groups. Simple and repetitive work processes, high work related stress and low autonomy indicated seriously adverse environment. Such problems in the quality of working lives may be closely related to the structural conditions of the work environment and industrial situation in Korea. In order to recover a healthy working environment for them, alternative strategies for industrial development or measures for improvement of work life may be needed.

Finally, the situation of agricultural workers is unique compared with other occupational categories. Their work is high in autonomy and participation in decision making processes. They are also very high, however, in the level of work-related stress. The situation differs from that of professionals due to extremely high levels of work stress, meaning that most of the agricultural workers in Korea are self-employed in small size farms. Due to the high age and low productivity, they feel very stressed despite high levels of autonomy.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have discussed both objective and subjective aspects of the quality of working life, in Korea. The objective side of the quality of working life has been improving since the late 1980s, with the year 1986 as a decisive turning point. Despite continuous improvements, however, environmental factors such as economic growth rate and union density have declined recently. Considering these factors, we can expect less rapid improvement in the objective quality of working life in the future. In fact, the recent economic crisis have an extremely adverse effect on the objective quality of life. Considering the scale and scope of the economic difficulties sweeping across the country, the Korean people may face hard times for years to come.

In subjective satisfaction with the various spheres of life, we can discern significant differences among social categories. Dissatisfaction with life conditions is especially deep among manufacturing workers and agricultural occupations. In contrast, the satisfaction of public sector employees is rela-

tively high. They scored highest in their perceptions of health conditions, work and occupations, company life, leisure, and saving. Except for satisfaction with social status, they were satisfied with their general living situations. Professionals were satisfied with their education and social status, but scored lower than public sector employees in the other life spheres. On the other hand, manufacturing workers were dissatisfied with their life conditions except for their health. Agricultural workers were also dissatisfied except for health and work.

Respondents' perceptions of their quality of life differ across occupational groups. Stress levels, were the highest for manufacturing and agricultural workers compared with other social categories. While agricultural workers experience high autonomy in their work, manufacturing workers feel are very low. Manufacturing workers evaluate both the demands for creativity, autonomy low. From this survey, they appear to have the worst conditions in both objective and subjective quality of life measures.

The high turnover rate of manufacturing workers, their discontent, and the farmers' continuous escape from their villages can be understood in the context of their low quality of life. Those situations apply for sales and service workers as well. Public sector employees' evaluations of autonomy and participation appear low, but they have very low level of stress. One of the problems for them is that their working environments do not demand creativity and learning, meaning that they enjoy a privileged situation, despite low productivity and the routine character of their work. Clerical and managerial employees were located around the average in their autonomy of work and level of stress.

Looking at satisfaction levels with the quality of life, only public sector employees appear to enjoy stable objective and subjective conditions. However, their actual performance and productivity can not allow such privileges considering their routine work environments. They work in a very low stress situations and enjoy high job security. They scored highest in scores of subjective satisfaction scores. Higher satisfaction with life and working conditions, however, do not guarantee corresponding creativity, autonomy, and productivity. In fact, their satisfaction is mainly due to their protected position in the labor market and social environment. One of the basic contradictions in the quality of working life in Korea is that it does not reflect the productivity, creativity, and performance of work.

In contrast to the public sector workers, professionals work in environments demanding more creativity, diversity, and autonomy. Stress levels for them are above average. Appropriate level of stress with high demands for creativity and learning, combined with autonomy and participation seem



characterize professionals' working environment.

Characteristics of work among different occupational groups seem to reflect specific socioeconomic construction processes in a given society. In order to change the negative conditions of the working lives of manufacturing workers, a major reconstruction is urgent. Extraordinarily high esteem and satisfaction despite low productivity and discretion among public sector employees may appear strange. More than a generation of the state-led industrialization and a privileged position in Korean society have led to this situation. The major causes of job characteristics in Korean society may not be inherent in any job categories but in models of industrialization and consequent work organization.

## REFERENCES

- Amsden, Alice. 1989. *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*. N. Y.: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Korea Labor Institute. 1998. *Unemployment and Policy Options for the Unemployed*. Seoul: KLI Press.
- Karasek, Robert and Toeres Theorell. 1990. *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lee, Hyun-Song. 1997. "Objective Aspects of Quality of Life in Korea." *Journal of Korean Sociology* 31 (Summer): 269-301.
- Park, Joon-Shik. 1996. *Politics of Production and Workplace Democracy*. Seoul: Hanul. (in Korean)

**JOON-SHIK PARK** is an associate professor at the Hallym University, teaching industrial sociology, information sociology. He received his Ph. D. degree in sociology from the Yonsei University. His research interests include labor problems and information society. His E-mail Address is [jsp@sun.hallym.ac.kr](mailto:jsp@sun.hallym.ac.kr).