QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

ABSTRACT. The main purpose of this study is to examine distinctive aspects of the quality of life (QOL) of Korean government employees utilizing in large part many features of the 1999 QOL survey of Korean government and private sector employees. To this end, responses of government and private sector employees regarding various dimensions of QOL are compared. This study finds that the QOL of government employees is significantly lower than that of private sector employees. The result of regression analysis of QOL dimensions shows that the level of satisfaction with one’s work environment is the most influential determinant of the overall QOL of Korean government employees. Based on this finding, this study recommends that the government agencies consider improving their employees’ work-related environment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The roles of Korean government employees are very much in transition. Their behavior had always been in conformity with the demands of policymakers and politicians. Recently, they became more assertive, however, about their own views and opinions in designing various economic and political initiatives. It is becoming clear, furthermore, that many of the past human-resource management policies and programs in the public sector are inadequate for any future work environment. Considerable attention is being paid, in particular, to the needs and expectations of government employees regarding their attempts to balance their work and private lives (Kim and Cho, 2000). Some observers and managers have found that current government employees behave in their own interests in the workplace, and perceive their job as not a mere part of public affairs, but as a place to enhance their individuality and personal development (Cho, 1997; Lim, 1995).

The importance of QOL in Korean government agencies is accentuated, more than ever before, in the current era of globalization. If the government fails to respond to the demand for
QOL enhancement of public employees, it will eventually be placed at a competitive disadvantage compared to private counterparts. As Cho (1997) pointed out, government managers typically regard themselves as captives of a series of cumbersome internal management “systems” over which they have no control, and they believe that they are suffering from a lack of discretion, freedom, and individuality, some evidence suggest that the resulting erosion of the morale and confidence among government employees may cause disruption of public responsibilities and self-trust (Cho and Kim, 2000; Park and Won, 2000). Many studies warn, moreover, that the current system of government workers is losing high-quality employees due to its declining pay levels as well as the declining prestige of their occupation (Cho, 1997; Kim, 1994). For these reasons, Korean public administration today faces a number of overriding issues; increasing one’s sense of personal commitment to their respective agencies.

The challenge of the Korean government is to respond to social changes that places emphasis on non-material benefits, especially social relationships. QOL within many agencies today is much more than a composite of material incentives for their employees; it is increasing perceived as a pivotal element in fulfilling employees’ need for self-actualization in an organization. Keeping this social context in mind, the Civil Service Commission of Korea (hereinafter the CSC of Korea), the government’s primary personnel management agency, conducted a nationwide survey in 1999 to assess the level of QOL of government employees, and the results were made public (Kim and Cho, 2000). With limited funding arranged by the National Assembly, the CSC of Korea provides government-wide human resource management policies, guidance, and oversight for some one-half million central government employees.

This paper attempts to delineate the major dimensions of QOL from a subjective perspective, and thereby evaluate the quality of life experienced by government employees. What constitutes the QOL people themselves experience on a daily basis? How do government employees compare with private sector employees in the experience of it? Do government employees really experience a lesser QOL than private sector employees? If so, in what domains of QOL do the two groups show a significant difference, and to what extent?