Quality Of Life In The High Tech Sector: Excellence In Work And Non-Work

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Nadia **Towaij** and Terry **Orlick**, University of Ottawa

Nadia Towaij and Terry Orlick are with the School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada K1N 6N5 Email: nadiatowaij@sprint.ca

Abstract

The present study explored the relationship between excellence in job performance and excellence in quality of life. Twelve interviews were conducted; seven men and five women participated in the study. Participants represented a wide range of employment levels from high tech employee to members of the executive group (vice-presidents). Inductive analysis of transcripts revealed that all participants used the term "balance" in their definition of quality of life. When asked to define "balance", the following domains were included in the comments of all participants: (1) family; (2) work; (3) physical fitness. Factors contributing to quality of life were listed as (1) family/ relationships; (2) physical activity and leisure; (c) making valuable contributions at work. Prerequisites for achieving quality of life and job performance excellence included: (1) having a commitment to a balanced lifestyle; (2) having supportive relationships; (3) participating in physical activity; (4) being highly effective in work roles. Participants believed that increasing the quality of life of employees would increase long-term productivity and performance levels. Recommendations were made by participants on how to improve the quality of life of employees.

Introduction

The relationship between work and nonwork inspired such early writers as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Max Weber (Keller, 1987). In recent years, the connection between work and nonwork experience has been investigated by numerous researchers. Although much of the research in this field has focused primarily on the impact of work on personal well-being and family dynamics (Burke, Weire, & Duwors, 1979, 1980; Jackson, Zedeck, & Summers, 1985) the effects of nonwork experiences on work role behaviour have also been examined (Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987; Kanter, 1977).

Two theoretical models, the spillover model (Wilensky, 1960) and the compensatory model (Wilensky, 1960), have directed the majority of the studies examining work and nonwork relationships (e.g. Kabanoff, 1980; Keller, 1987; Martin & Schermerhorn, 1983; Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1980; Rousseau, 1978; Staines, 1980). Proponents of the spillover model predicate that positive relationships exist between work and nonwork factors due to the fact that the two domains generalize to one another. For example, an employee who experiences difficulties at home may then experience a decline in job performance due to the fact that the initial family disruption has generalized into the work

domain. The compensatory model, however, argues that a deficiency in one domain will lead the individual to compensate for the shortcoming by engaging in positive activities in another domain. Hence, a negative relationship between work and nonwork factors is posited by the compensatory model. For instance, an individual who is experiencing excessive pressures at work may compensate for this pressure by seeking out positive experiences with family members or through leisure activities.

There is increasing indication that work and non work roles are mutually interdependent (Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987). The majority of research exploring this interdependency indicates that negative experiences within the work environment can impair the quality of life for both the individual and family (Greenhaus et al., 1987). Moreover, researchers examining the relationships between the work and nonwork domains of life have further concluded that non work activities may affect an individual's work life (Champoux, 1981; Near, Rice & Hunt, 1987; Near et al., 1980; Staines, 1980).

Some researchers suggest that rather than focusing research solely on proving which theory best explains the relationship, investigators should examine how the nature of the relationship between job and life satisfaction might differ between individuals (Judge & Watanabe, 1994). Moreover, Judge and Watanabe suggest that it is conceivable that each model is possible for different individuals, and hence individual differences should be explored.

Methods
The purpose of this study was to explore

the relationship between excellence in job performance and excellence in quality of life for a selected group of high performance individuals who were also identified as having a high quality of life outside of work. Part of this exploration included gaining an in-depth understanding of quality of life based on participants' subjective perceptions of this concept and examining how these individuals manage their lives to attain excellence in job performance and excellence in quality living

Participants were chosen from personnel working in a leading high-technology company. There is a lack of empirical data concerning quality of life in this industry (Gamst & Otten, 1992; Nijkamp, Bouman, & Verhoef, 1990). Each of these participants met stringent criteria of excelling in the workplace and excelling in their lives outside of work.

Two grand tour questions guided the interviews conducted in this study. Is there a relationship between excellence in quality of life and excellence in job performance? How do individuals manage their lives such that they attain excellence in job performance and quality of life?

The definition of quality of life used in this study was based on the work by Myers and Diner (1995) which stated that quality of life is a subjective summation of the quality of an individual's life and no one but the individual can evaluate his or her life. In this study both peers and the person him or herself judged their life to be of high quality and balance.

Job performance was measured using the Nortel Networks job evaluation measure

called the MFA (Managing For Achievement). The MFA is the name of the Nortel Networks performance review determined annually. It is based on three possible job performance evaluations: Ex (Exceeds), Ac (Achieves) and NI (Needs Improvement). The Exceeds rating indicates that an employee has exceeded their annual objectives and has performed at a very high level. The Achieves rating indicates that an employee has achieved their annual objectives. Finally, the NI rating indicates that the employee "needs improvement" and has not achieved their annual objectives.

Description of the participants

The sample included employees from the various band levels within the Nortel organization. The band levels at Nortel Networks vary from band level 3 to band level 9, plus the executive group (vice-presidents). The various band levels are typically associated with specific titles, e.g., manager (band level 7). Executives are individuals above band level 9.

The sample varied from individuals who had achieved a minimum of 1 Exceeds rating to 3 Exceeds ratings in the past 3 years. An attempt was made to recruit participants who vary in age, marital status and gender. This variation was desirable in order to interview individuals who may possess different perspectives and points of view. The specific description of the sample follows.

A total of 12 individuals participated in this study - seven men and five women. Seven participants were married; an additional 3 participants were involved in long term committed relationships. The final 2 participants were not involved in relationships at the time of the study.

Four participants were parents at the time of the study, and an additional two were expecting children. Age ranged from mid twenties to late thirties.

In order to gain entry to the organization and to obtain permission to recruit participants, we relied on contacts within the organization who arranged initial meetings to discuss the proposed research which led to a series of steps allowing the research to unfold.

Interviews were arranged and conducted in such a way that afforded a high level of input from the participants. The first step involved allowing the interviewees to select the date, time and setting of the interviews. A second aspect involved demonstrating a high level of respect and understanding for the interviewees as well as a genuine interest in their lives. Furthermore, we familiarized ourselves with some of the particularities of the cultural arena (language use, terms). Participants were also informed that could edit their interview transcript as desired after the interview freeing them to be open and honest during the interview.

Data collection procedures

All participants partook in a semi-structural interview. The interviewer introduced main questions, followed by probe questions, and then proceeded with follow-up questions. The questions were predominantly open-ended in order to enable the participants to express their beliefs and understanding of the area without being constrained. Interview guidelines were developed based on previous extensive interview work by Orlick and Zitzelsberger (1998) as well as through informal discussions with individuals within the high-technology

industry. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in their entirety to ensure that data was maintained in an accurate and retrievable form.

Data analysis procedures

Listening to the interview tapes prior to transcription, the process of transcription and reading the interview transcripts were all viewed as opportunities for data analysis (Maxwell, 1996). Upon completion of each interview, a detailed analysis took place in order to pull out themes, concepts and quotes that should be examined in greater detail.

The main categorizing strategy involved coding or classifying individual responses into categories that brought together similar ideas, concepts, or themes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Coding strategies were developed inductively during the analysis and were grounded in the data being analysed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Participant verification or member checks

Member checking involves requesting feedback about data and conclusions from the participants of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It is the most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the interviewees say (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Participants were involved in all phases of the research including the opportunity to edit their interview transcript, provide feedback on categories and themes as well as provide feedback on the links made between the categories.

Results and discussion

The twelve interviews were analyzed using inductive content analysis. Themes are presented and discussed in conjunc-

tion with direct quotes from the interviews in order to present the participants' perspectives in their own words. The main areas that are discussed include: (a) definition of quality of life; (b) definition of balance; (c) factors contributing to quality of life; (d) factors contributing to job performance excellence; (e) relationship between quality of life and job performance; (f) prerequisites to achieve excellence in job performance and quality of life; (g) relationship of quality of life and job performance during career span; (h) recommendations to employees to increase quality of life and job performance; and (i) recommendations to the organization to increase quality of life for employees.

Definition of quality of life

In the present research, the definition of quality of life was created by each individual participant rather than being imposed by the researcher. This open-ended approach was consistent with the exploratory nature of the research. Participants were asked, "How would you define quality of life?" An interesting theme evolved from their definitions. Nine of twelve of the participants spoke specifically of the role of 'balance' in their definition of quality of life and the remaining three defined the construct as being a holistic concept comprised of different components of their lives.

The following statement is representative of their views, "If I say I have quality of life, a piece of that would be that I have a balanced life." This holistic definition of quality of life with respect to integrating lifestyle balance is consistent with the findings of a recent study with high performance athletes (Amirault & Orlick,1998). The following quotations illustrate how the participants

in the current study view the issue of balance in quality of life.

I think it means a balance between personal and professional, live a personal balance where you have enough time to devote to family, friends, activities that you enjoy, but also balanced against the professional side.

Quality of life to me is that you have to have a balance. You need to work to provide the money but for me it's work and family and entertainment and whatever follows in the evening.

This is the stuff that I'd like to think I live and breathe each day of my life. I don't live to work, I work to live. I've been very blessed to have been brought up with a value system which allows me to keep this balance. Family to me is the most important thing in my life, work is great and I'll always give 110%. I've always done well in my career, but I do it because of the foundation that was built when I was growing up, so I have been thinking about it. I think it's very important and I think people would be more effective in work if they had balance outside of work and I think I'm a living example of that. So that's the perspective that I have, even throughout university, family's always been my priority. That was the values instilled in me as a kid and I've lived with them ever since and I've gone from being a kid in a family to being a husband in a relationship that only strengthens those responsibilities. I continue to make that my first and foremost reason for living.

To me it means there's a level of enjoyment, a level of recharging yourself, balancing things so that the time that you have is of value to you.

This notion of different components of quality of life is consistent with the cognitive view of subjective well-being that has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of several life domains that are common and important to most people (Alfonso et al., 1996). In their seminal study on social indicators of well-being, Andrews and Whithey (1976) tried to identify those domains of life "that are commonly held, that are relatively broad in scope, and that have significant impacts on people's sense of well-being" (p.27). The domains of life that appeared to be important to most people were job, family, outdoor recreation, and global satisfaction.

In his treatise on subjective well-being, Diener (1984) reported that "the domains that are closest and most immediate to people's personal lives are those that most influence subjective well being"(p.345). Included among Diener's important life domains were self, income, job, and relationships.

The following quotations from the participants in our study identify the principal life domains related to their quality of life. They include the domains of job, family, relationships, self, and recreation.

I think quality of life equates to that, there's not one particular area in your life that dominates to such an extent that it either prevents or blocks you from enjoying other components of your life. So the components of that are family life and work and pastimes.

I think it means that I am comfortable with the time that I am spending with things that are important. Quality of life

is not all about your personal side, it's about work at the office as well. It is about making decisions about what really needs to be done. I need to be cognizant of what the down side is in terms of the other aspects of my life. I am then considering my total quality of life and setting boundaries accordingly.

Quality of life to me would be looking at a month of my work, a month of my life and looking at how happy I am getting up in the morning, going to work, or how happy I am on the weekends, spending time with friends, because they are all intertwined, there's no way to remove work away from my life and just look at my home life.

When you say quality of life, I really believe that quality of life, for me it's taking care of some very basic things which are eating properly, exercising and sleeping. These are these natural things that we should all do and yet a lot of people neglect them. I feel that I have proven over the past five years for sure that a good balance of these things makes you a better person, and a healthier person.

Definition of balance
In that balance was a term raised by participants, it was explored in an effort to understand what lifestyle balance meant for each of these individuals. Participants were asked the question "How would you define balance?" The common themes in the definitions of balance included: family, work, physical fitness, and leisure. It should also be noted that all participants included a variety of domains and themes rather than focusing on one.

What I try to aim for in my personal side

is the recharge element, whether it's physical fitness or reading or whatever. It prepares you for the output of energy that typically happens during your workweek.

It's a lifestyle where you're getting enough from a variety of different groups if you looked at it like the food groups to sustain yourself. And over a little period of time, work may be particularly onerous or there may be personal reasons why you're not contributing or doing the things you want from a work perspective but I think balance plays a significant role. I'd say they are very closely related.

In short, I would use the word happiness. If you're happy about going to work and if you're happy about coming home, and doing things outside of work, then you've established a kind of balance. I think that's a good way to summarize it.

Balance for me... I really have a strong sense of when I'm in and out of balance. Balance for me would be getting a daily dose of stimulation from various sources, a bit of technical challenge, a bit of managerial challenge, a bit of quiet time with my (spouse), a bit of quiet time on my own, time for building my (hobby) or reading, I have a (computer program) for my computer, pursuing interests, doing a little bit around the house, doing something outside, maybe chopping wood. It's a hobby of mine.

Factors contributing to excellence in quality of life
Participants were asked the open-ended question, "What contributes to your own quality of life?" Knowing that balance

and quality of life were related for these participants, an effort was made to explore the areas of life that help these individuals achieve a high level of quality of life. The following domains were listed as being contributors to quality of life for all participants: (1) family/ relationships; (2) physical activity and leisure; (3) contributing at work/sense of accomplishment. Another important area identified by most participants was nature/the outdoors.

1. Family/ Relationship
All participants spoke of the importance of family and relationships in the achievement and maintenance of quality of life. Furthermore, family was the first aspect mentioned by all participants except for one unmarried individual, who first mentioned the importance of relationships with friends. The following quotations identify the importance of family as a domain of quality of life.

I really enjoy being at home, I really enjoy being with my family.

I think my (spouse) and I spend time together doing whatever, walks, bike rides, those kinds of social activities. Some hobbies, a little bit of gardening.

There are a number of things that make up the quality of one's life. Certainly there is my family, my (spouse) and my (child), but also my extended family. It's funny because I've thought about this and I've chosen them to be the most important piece of what quality of life is for me. If these relationships begin to erode I feel it effects my quality.

I have two little girls, and as much as it's difficult to have children and a (spouse) who's self employed who works

day and night and me working Y but as much as it's difficult, I'm so glad I have those anchors, having the kids, having the family anchor. It helps me put the rest of it into perspective. If I had to prioritize, that is my ultimate priority. By having the (children) and the family, it helps to put the zannyness of here (work) into perspective.

Time with my children is definitely part of my balanced lifestyle. During the school year we tend to read books a lot more, in the summer, we're a little lazier but I'll get out and play with them, and do sports. I coach my kids (sport) team .. so those are all things I like to do. From my perspective, if I'm going to be there, I want to be involved, partly because I like sports and partly because I want to help my kids. Time with my wife, not intentionally last on the list, but with young children, it's not a lower priority, it's something that you just fit into all the other things, and we make reasonable efforts to fit it in. So I think those are the major components to a balanced life.

2. Physical activity and leisure
Every participant felt that physical activity was a necessary contributing factor to their level of quality of life. The involvement and level of activity varied from high performance athletes who played in competitive adult leagues, to people enrolled in dance classes, to those who thrive on walks and bike rides. Not only were participants physically active but for a number of individuals, physical activity was a part of every aspect of their lives; they worked out at work, participated in organized sports with friends, coached their childrens' team, and spent time with their spouses walking or going on bike rides. The following representative quotes refer to the role of

physical activity in quality of life.

I play hockey, we both golf, so sports play a reasonable role, we're both sports minded.

Physical fitness is something that is important to me…normally it is a day to day thing… downhill skiing, mountain biking, hiking.

In the winter time here at work they built an ice rink and they have flood lights on it at night, so I started doing that last winter and I'd play hockey with some of my colleagues.. I need to stay in shape. So I bought myself a bicycle and now I bicycle to work 3 times a week.. So I figured it's going to take about 1 1/2 hours out of my day, 45 minutes each way but it's important to stay physically in shape, I have a challenging job.
I need my sports. Up until 5 years ago I was playing very competitive (team sport), at the semi pro level. I had some injuries and I'm out of that now, but I do biking, I do running, mostly individual stuff now. It's very medicinal to just go out on the road and ride and your mind is so focused that you don't have time to think about other things. It's amazing how soothing it is when you get back and you're tired. It feels good, so that's part of my balanced lifestyle.

So I've been out with the dogs, with the 'girls', and I've had people over and I've started my dancing lessons, got all my books read for my book club so I do feel that I have a really nice mix right now. It's good.

3. Contributing at work/Sense of accomplishment
All participants discussed the importance of feeling that they make a difference in the workplace, that they contribute something of value. This varied from the accomplishment of a deliverable to the development of another individual. A difference that was identified between managers versus those who held non management positions was that those who were supervising others in a management role spoke more about gaining satisfaction from developing other individuals rather than completing a specific task or deliverable. The following quotes reflect the participants' comments about how their contribution and sense of accomplishment at work plays a role in their quality of life.

Happiness at work would be a solid sense of achievement. I'm very much goal oriented so I set myself a goal and try to go towards it as effectively as possible and when I achieve it, I get a great sense of satisfaction.

At the office, it's (feeling good) about being on top of the projects and it's having projects that are making a contribution. It's about having an impact on this organization that results in us being a little better as a corporation.

It's been really great because it's been work that I know is really valuable to our organization and really valuable to our employees at large and received well. We've tried using the WEB, we've had great response back and I've been learning it every day. I know I did good work today, like I just know I've done it, and yet I've been managing my time well.

The sense of accomplishment, the sense of doing things right, the sense of as a manager, specifically developing other people plays a significant role in quality

of work life.

4. Nature/Being Outdoors

Nine participants mentioned the importance of being outdoors, or being in nature as being an important contributor to their quality of life. Some spoke of simple acts or pursuits like gardening, running or going for a bike ride; many others referred to activities like camping or spending time at the cottage. Participants spoke of the importance of activities in the outdoors both in terms of solo activities and those that were geared for family.

Quality of life is also about nature. It's funny, I was walking to the cafeteria across the street and I had this real sense of being outside. The sun was beautiful and I was thinking how much I was looking forward to going to camp for 5 days next week. There's joy in simple things. There are many joyful moments that I have with my (spouse) and my (child) on the boat. There's nothing like coming home with the sunset at your back.

I've always been someone who loves being outdoors, being part of nature, getting outside. I'm from(city), but my parents were fortunate enough to have a cottage, so every weekend literally we went there and all summer long. I'd spend my summers outside and so it was always something I wanted to do that way.

We have a cottage and that's a wonderful place, no TV, no phone, there's nothing. Not that it needs to be, but it forces us to behave more like a family, rather than a bunch of individuals doing a bunch of activities, going in different directions. So we go up there between

June and September 80% of the weekends and we spend at least 3 weeks holidays up there. So that has turned out to be a wonderful investment from a quality of life perspective.

5. The role of pets

Four participants mentioned the importance of the role of their pets in their overall quality of life. Interestingly, none had children at the time of the interviews. Each spoke of the level of joy they receive from the bond they share with their pet.

I try to get home by a reasonable hour - by 6 in the evening. My (spouse) and I always have dinner together, I play with the (pets) and brush their teeth. It's a challenge. They're really dear to us because they've been kind of like our kids. We take them outside and supervise; we each watch one.

I feel like I'm their mother in lots of ways and that's the way I think of it, they're my babies. My mother has three grand(pets). What do I do, I mother them. I'm always touching them and petting them, they're house (pets) but I take them outside and make sure they have that freedom to be natural.

6. Time for self

Three participants spoke of the importance of having time for self. All of these individuals were in committed relationships but did not have children. One participant spoke specifically of the need for time for self for himself and his spouse.

There has to be some solitude, some time for myself. I'm not someone who likes well structured off time, or well structured personal time. I need to plan but

there's some things that I need to do on my own.

I do need self time to go off and do my own thing. It's a me time, and a me thing, and he (spouse) gets his time when I'm not around, he gets to wake up and do his thing which he likes and needs. We purposefully set that up, I do believe that that's important. I think I bring things back to the relationship when I do things on my own. I think we both understand the (need for) individual time.

7. Role of faith/religion

Three participants spoke about the importance of their religion as a contributor to their quality of life. There was a great variation between the value placed on religion by the twelve participants. It should be noted that six participants felt that religion had no importance in their overall quality of life. The following quotations represent the views of participants who are committed to the value of religion as a positive contributor to their quality of life:

There's a whole bunch of other things that come into the value system like faith, religion, all that stuff. (Religious faith) is very, very important to me. That has to take a lot of the credit in striking a balance between life and work. My faith and my family are really important.

We go to Church, not every Sunday but pretty regularly. We think that's a balance for ourselves and our children. A lot of people are surprised to find that I attend church regularly and it's not more of a figurehead thing, it's a way of life. The specific aspects of religion are important, but more, it's a time once a week when I get to reflect on myself, things that I did well, things that I wouldn't have wanted to do but I did,

things that I did do that I'm appreciative of. It's a form of meditation and at the same time our children get used to the value set and that's important to me.

Prerequisites to Achieve Excellence in Job Performance

The participants were asked to give their own perceptions on how they have achieved excellence in their job performance. The question was very open-ended yet four prerequisites or contributing factors were identified by all participants. They must: (a) be highly organized; (b) have strong interpersonal skills and communication abilities; (c) seek additional responsibilities in their role; (d) have balance in their lives.

1. Being organized

All participants identified the need to be organized as a factor in their success. This was viewed as an essential skill across all occupation levels. Organization was described as including planning a days work the night before and delegating tasks. Two participants described their need to be organized in the following terms:

Organization is a big one and trying to keep managers organized, making sure they know what they're doing because a lot of times they're so busy that if you don't leave everything laid out for them, they'll forget (something).

Everyday I never leave stuff. Every day I go through what I need to go through, so I always try to keep current of what's going on. I'll either throw it out, send it off or delegate it.

2. Interpersonal skills - communication with others

Succeeding at a high job performance

level required strong interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate well with others. This belief is reflected in the following,

"*I don't think of myself as any star around here. There's some really bright people around here, I'm not one of them. I'm an average Joe who has pretty good communication skills which helps. I think I have a real strength with people interaction and I think that's a real important quality*".

For some participants, this was viewed as the single most important skill in the workplace. Three main trends were identified throughout the responses.

(a) Managing people. The individuals who were very senior within the organization listed the 'ability to manage people' as a main contributing factor to their success. This was also evident in individuals who held positions not specifically identified as 'managerial' yet involved managing groups of people. The following quotes reflect the participants' comments about the role of managing people.

If you know how to manage people, you write your own ticket because there aren't a lot of raw term managers in any industry that I've seen, and it's a tough skill to teach because there isn't a lot of formal training on how to manage so I think I'm one of the lucky ones to have a natural knack for doing that. It's part of what makes me successful, it's that relationship I have with the workers that work in my group, so you need raw skills, you need discipline, you have to be extremely organized, but the bottom line is, in my opinion, to excel in this type of environment, is to know how to manage people.

This last year's Exceed (rating) was all around grouping people, people who had never worked together before, it was people management to potentially deliver a program and I aced it. I had a plan, I got these people and I knew how I was going to address it, one on one so they trusted me and then I was going to bring them to a group. Then I said now we're going to work as a team, I used certain words like the team, I made promises and I delivered on them and so everybody's happy, where in the past, they'd never been happy.

(b) Communication with managers. A second theme that evolved was the role of communication with managers. Participants spoke of the manner in which they communicate with their managers and bosses to teach them about what kinds of feedback and rewards bring out the best in the participant.

At work, it's recognition, it's reward, it can be even a simple pat on the back, I work to that and in fact I tell most of my managers when they try to understand who I am, I say you reward me and you'll get more out of me, and I think that's for everybody but in particular it works for me.

I've actually learned to manage upwards a lot better over time. If you don't get the expectations and communications right, usually upwards, you can get caught. I think I've always been good at managing my bosses in such a way that I can be managed the way I want to be managed during the time that I am there.

(c) Creating a network of knowledgeable people. The final aspect of the

importance of interpersonal skills was to create a network of knowledgeable people who could be of assistance. By developing strong work relationships with specific individuals, they are able to solve problems and get answers in a very timely manner.

I understand technical things and people respect that and I can get to the bottom of technical things. I guess it's part of the network, it's part of knowing who the people are that you can rely on. If there's some things I need to know, I go to certain people and they go find out, and I have a good interaction with them such that I can get information I want to know reasonably quickly, partly because they think like I do, partly because of our relationship, professional, work relationship and I think that's important.

3. Seeks challenge and responsibility
The need to be challenged and the desire to be given responsibility were identified by all 12 participants as important for achieving excellence. Participants spoke of their initiative in finding more tasks or being given more duties.

I'm a pretty ambitious person, I'm not shy to speak up. If I'm getting really bored with my job I'll say what else can I do?

One of the big things was that I asked to be challenged, I knew that I could do a job that I wasn't necessarily banded at, so I went out and asked for it. I said I could do this, I've been a major contributor of a team that's delivered this before. So I think that taking on initiative, and then delivering, I was able to do it. And the next couple of years it was because I kept on growing kept on delivering, I kept on taking on something

else, a bigger thing and expanding my horizon and always being able to deliver.

Participants also spoke of their desire for independence and ownership of tasks. This perception of trust and belief from the employer was viewed as extremely important by the participants. For some it was deemed as "empowering", for others is was the challenge of being responsible from the beginning to the end of a specific task or deliverable. These views are echoed in the following quotes:

I like to be empowered, I like it when people trust that I'm going to do a good job and off you go. I check in, and not that I go off on a tangent and nobody knows what's going on, I do all of the right bureaucratic things keeping everyone in the loop but I do like to know that I don't have to report in on every little bit. So that's important.

When given a task, I like to take ownership of the entire task, and to do the best I can with it, and try to envision what the goal is and then go beyond that. It helps in achieving the goals in a timely manner.

4. Living a balanced lifestyle
Every participant spoke of the value of balance as being a contributing factor to their sustained high level job performance. For some participants balance was viewed in terms of getting a bit of time for themselves and for physical activity, whereas for others it was respecting various areas in your life, which leads to high performance in the work place. The following consist of illustrations of these views:

If you have a balanced life, spend your time in many different areas then that's a good pace for doing well in your job. Intuitively, it makes sense that if you're going to run a big company, you need to be able to manage your time. If you can't decide on how you're going to use your time in your personal life, how are you going to be able to decide on how to use your time in your professional life? Over the long term, you have to argue that, especially today, if you can't manage your time in life and work, then you won't last very long. If I look at people who work for me, I have a high amount of respect for people who try to do a lot of things and come to me and say they're going to take off on Friday afternoon to take their kid to a hockey camp or whatever, and I see a fair amount of people who work for me who do better because they do more.

I think the fact that I get to have some time for myself, get home and relax and I don't mean on a couch, because a lot of times I think about work things at home too. I think the fact that I have another life, I get to bring new things to work. I think that some of the things I do outside do effect my work life. I think the biggest thing is that I'm a happy person so because I have my own me time, I can come into work and enjoy it and do a good job.

5. Being viewed as being different
The importance of being viewed as different or unique was mentioned by three participants. It was stated by participants that they felt that the belief that others felt their skills or behaviours were different from other employees had a definite effect on job performance evaluations. This view is represented in the subsequent quotation:

I've always been seen as doing well, as being a capable communicator, but always being a bit different than other people in terms of my approach. I've always been seen as being good at work, different than others, maybe more capable than others, but also broadly capable. I do think that my broad capabilities and my broad interests indirectly has affected how people see me as being different and being set apart from others.

6. The role of commitment
The role of commitment was identified by six participants. The definition of commitment varied between individuals. For some, it was based on working hard and being disciplined, and for others it was defined as following through and making deadlines. It was described as "doing what you say you're going to do". An example of each perspective is illustrated below:

I think the commitment is that you just have to do the best that you can do. The ability to come up to speed and be a quick study, having a technical background in school allows me to understand things that you need to understand in order to excel in this kind of environment. So as long as that drive to succeed is there and you are equipped with some of those raw skills, then I think all you really need is the ability to be very organized and the ability to be very disciplined.

Commitment is really, important to me personally, but I've seen it from organization's perspective, like actually saying you're going to get things done, getting them done, getting them done on time, getting them done in quality, and that's just something I've always done. I think

people remember that, so having things done when they're supposed to, so you don't screw up other people.

Relationship between Quality of Life and Job Performance

All participants felt that there was a relationship between their level of quality of life and their job performance, that their balance has contributed to their job performance. Some spoke of the effect of excessive work for a continuous period of time as having a negative effect on their overall quality of life. Participants' views regarding a relationship between their quality of life and their job performance are illustrated below:

If things are out of kilter for me, then something suffers. So to be able to sustain a 70 hour work week for a month, or 2 months, well then stuff suffers, and you know that.

Of course, absolutely, absolutely (they are related). I think depending on what's going on in your personal life, we don't have kids but I can imagine if we had children, for the first little while it would take quite a bit of getting used to and adjustments to the lifestyle and work style and that would probably impact work performance.

It's interesting because the first Exceed rating came the first year that we had our son. I focused on less travel but I think what happened there was that I became very passionate about the work that I was doing and secondly, I had a manager who really understood what my strengths were and what I could bring to the table. This is interesting because I think if anything in those two years, I was more focused on balance and you learn to be more effective in the time that

you have. I don't see that my personal life has been negatively effected over the past 2 years and in fact I think I made my family life more of a priority and it had a positive impact on my job performance.

I know I'm more happier now and I know I'm performing better now than I was back in the 80s. I think now that I've become more happy in my life, and more enthusiastic about the future, and positive and looking forward to being a dad, I see all the linkages in my work life, all falling into place. I'm happier at work, I'm more successful at work and I'm happier in my personal life, they're all kind of working together.

I've always done well in my career, but I do it because of the foundation that was built when I was growing up, so I have been thinking about it and I think it's very important and I think people would be much more effective in work if they had balance outside of work and I think I'm a living example of that.

Since participants spoke of balance and quality of life as contributing factors in good performance, they were asked if they felt they could achieve high job performance without being "balanced". Three participants responded that they did not think they could.

The other nine participants talked about the ability to perform at a very high level while being completely unbalanced as long as it was for a short period of time. This concept is very similar to that of "seasonal unbalance" described in the study by Amirault & Orlick, (1998).

I think you need to look at it over a long enough time span to see the balance. In any given time there may be reasons why

you spend more time in your professional life or in your personal life but overall I think the balance part of it is key in terms of making sure that in a reasonable interval 6 months, a year, two years, that you're satisfied. For me it's absolutely important that work play a significant role in that balance, in that equation.

As long as I know it's short term (you can have high job performance without being balanced). So if I do feel out of balance, and I do right now, at least I'm enthusiastic about what I am doing.

My own view is that they all come together, and they're not (segregated). You have to be sure to look at time frames. You can be maxed out, focused on one part for a short period of time, and usually that's work, but if you're looking at sustained performance over the longer term, months, years, it's all got to come together. It doesn't mean that you can't go for weeks without balance, but I think that if you go for months, you won't get good performance.

Prerequisites to achieve excellence in job performance and in quality of life
The participants were asked if there were any prerequisites that they required in order to achieve both excellence in job performance and excellence in quality of life. All 12 participants identified the following four main prerequisites to achieve their 'balanced excellence'. The participants must: (1) make and maintain a commitment to a balanced lifestyle; (2) have supportive relationships at work and at home; (3) participate in physical activity and/or leisure activities; and (4) be highly organized and efficient.

1. Commitment to balance
All participants spoke of their commitment to balance as a goal in their lives. This was discussed in a variety of ways but a consistent statement was that it was necessary to ensure that decisions are made as life decisions rather than just work decisions: "So you've always got a sense of what's important." Participants further explained that it was important to determine and fully understand the potential effects on all aspects of your life when decisions are made in the work place. These views are expressed in the following quotations:

I think it's all about priority, if you have balance as a priority and you're conscious of it, then you think of ways to maintain it. It is just another hurdle in what you're trying to achieve. We try to schedule our travel for team meetings in order that we don't have to travel on Sunday. You would never arrange things like that if you weren't conscious about putting a value on family and balance.

I have to keep things in perspective, to see things as what is really important. Making sure that you're making the best decisions for you even though they may not be the best decisions for work. Occasionally I lose perspective but I have a lot of people at home who help put things into perspective so that if you lose it, someone's there to bring something to light. Also, it's important to listen to your own intuition and listen to that flag.

I know where the next level is and I know I have the capability to achieve it and the next level beyond that. The question is the time frame and the cost associated with that. It's a question of trying to balance the cost and the value of what you try to do. At the end of the

day you sort of weigh it off and say is this an investment I'm ready to take now, versus no, I think I'm willing to forgo this excellent career opportunity because we're going to have a baby and the next couple of years is going to be very important. I don't want to be in a situation where my work life is hairy because I'll be in a situation where my personal life will be hairy. I'm not naïve enough to think that I'll be able to be in control of all the knobs all the time. Right now I feel comfortable that I, we jointly, my wife and I are reasonably in control of things. That's enabled us to have the success that I've had and to have the success she's had.

2. Supportive relationships

All of the participants discussed the importance of having understanding supportive relationships with family and friends as being a major contributor to both their job performance and their quality of life. The subsequent quotes reflect the value that individuals place of the importance of their families.

If I took a look at it, it's (balance) a whole bunch of factors. It's my personal situation- my wife who I think has a good understanding of me, sometimes I think better than I do, and she helps to provide some grounding.

I feel like I've had support all my life, maybe because of who I am and my positive outlook and that I'm a happy camper, that people have naturally supported me. I feel that the organization's always supported me and maybe it's my managers, who they are but I've always felt that the organization was there for me and it's never scrutinized. I get up and 4 o'clock and I leave and this place is still buzzing. Nobody turns around

and says why are you leaving at 4 o'clock. From home, I've always had positives - you're doing well - and I have a healthy relationship from my husband, we have a happy home. I think a lot of that has to do with just being able to go outside and enjoy the garden, that you literally can enjoy the garden because you don't have any other worries behind you.

3. Physical activity and leisure

The importance of being physically active was identified by all participants. The involvement in sport, recreation and leisure were believed to be major contributors to the ability to achieve both excellence in job performance and excellence in quality of life. The following quotations echo these views:

I've always been involved with sports, with competitive sports all my life so, volleyball and soccer and touch football, and hockey, baseball, and softball, and then I got married I had to cut down on those sports because there were other things, I go 3 or 4 times a week to workout and I still play competitive volleyball and that's really important, if you like that competition at that level, that brings something to your life, that other things don't necessarily bring to your life, like being on the court with a bunch of guys all striving for the same goal and playing at a pretty high level is something that turns me on and I really enjoy that. That adds to quality of life for sure. But it's less important to experience that than to experience the bonds I have with family, so if that stuff ever interfered with my family life, and playing on 5 sport teams rather than 1 did, so I cut 4 of them out.

At one point a couple of years ago I went

back to aerobics but that's gone again. I go biking with my oldest, and I tend to do exercise at home very regularly for muscle building. I'm not a big athlete or a big sports person but I really need that sense of movement, so my trade off to my crafts and painting has been a half hour of exercise at home at 10 oclock at night.

4. Effectiveness in the workplace

All participants spoke of the importance of being highly effective in their jobs. They felt that this ability to be organized and efficient contributed to their job performance and their quality of life by effectively using their time at work. Intuitively, this would then allow the employees to leave the work place at a more reasonable hour, thus leaving more time to enjoy the people and things that are of value to them. These views were communicated in the subsequent quotes:

I used to think it had to do with brain power, it has something to do with brain power but more to do with effectiveness. I think I have a very common sense approach to how I look at life and that helps a lot.

I think I'm more effective if I know that I'm going to leave the office at 5 o'clock, so I work more efficiently if I know I have a deadline to get out of my office.

If you're expecting that you have to put in 80 hours a week to be successful, I can't answer that. I think a 40 or 50 hour a week of mine is probably as productive if not more productive than a lot of 80, 90, 100 hour a week of some of my peers.

Other themes that were identified by certain participants included: being in the moment, knowing yourself, religion or faith, and interpersonal skills. "I think it's a question of trying to maintain a sense of who you are and what you are all about. So trying to maintain a balance in your head in terms of what's important."

Recommendations to new hires

One of the main goals of this research was to develop a better understanding of how people can achieve excellence in terms of quality of life and job performance. The findings may be of value to newly recruited employees who may be seeking advice and recommendations to achieve excellence in life and work. Participants were asked if they had any recommendations or advice to offer to other employees to help them reach a high level job performance while still maintaining a high quality of life. One of the main themes that was reiterated by all the participants is represented by the following statement: "The most important thing is to be aware of what you want to achieve at work and what you want to achieve for your self, your quality of life." The following reflects some of the advice offered by participants.

Make your own decisions, manage your time and what is important, and work hard, and you know you're going to have to spend a lot time so manage your time as being the most important thing that you have.

Be choosy about what it is that you want. Recognize that minutes are finite, so work carefully, scope out where it is you want to go, be clear about the types of responsibilities you take on as to where you want to go. Set goals, set reasonable goals. I think taking care of yourself, so invest in yourself as well as in your ca-

reer and recognize that yes, there's trade-offs. So be open, listen to your body.

You need to find out what you want to do with your life. So I think making sure that they are aware and able to make decisions and move in a particular direction. I think I would tell them to spend a lot of time figuring out what's important to them from a life perspective, from a whole life perspective, and know that there's steps they need to take. What you want to be, what do you want to do, what's important to you, figure those things out and those will help because I think a lot of people struggle with those very fundamental things, who don't have a good sense of what it is they want, not necessarily just from a work perspective but from a life perspective.

I would say to really have a clear mind to what your priorities are. I find a lot of people who are starting here are either right out of university and don't have a house or a spouse or children, so they're very easygoing and fit in and do what they have to do, even if it requires working 14 hours a day, because they have no responsibilities to go home to. I see a lot of frustrated people and a lot of unhappy people but it's almost just about setting your priorities. For me, work isn't everything, you need to have a balance.

I would tell them to be conscious of their values. They become more and more important as we move on in our career and they can easily be compromised. Balance is just one of them and it is more important to some of us than others. At Nortel the structures are all in place to make balance happen and it's all up to the individual. So for these new grads, it's all about standing up for what you

believe in if you truly value it.

I tell them that they've got to understand what their priorities are, I tell these guys, that for me, family is always the number one priority, you can never compromise what is happening in your family and in your personal life because of work, so don't make those kinds of sacrifices because you'll always regret them. When you're at work, give 110%, be the absolute best you can be, don't necessarily wait for the rewards or the pat on the back. If that's something that you want and you need, then you can make it easier for your boss to give you those pats. But if you don't want it and you don't need it then don't look for it and just really do the best that you can because at the end of the day, justice always prevails. Sometimes it takes a little bit longer in certain circumstances than in others, but if its taking longer, it's probably taking longer for a reason and it's probably because we have to learn some stuff as well. If you assume that justice is going to occur, and you just keep doing the right thing, then that's the mode I think you need to be in. When you're here do the best you can do and when you're here, be the best that you can be, don't let work interfere with your family life. If family's really important to you then keep it at the top of your priority list and don't compromise that for anything.

Take time to find some channel, to find out what is important to you, to discover and be thinking about what's important to you because it's an evolving process. Make your decisions in perspective of that whole, not just the work part of your life. I actually gave that advice to a friend not too long ago. He was deciding about different jobs and he said it's only 70% of what I want and then this other

opportunity was a bit different. I remember typing back to him, saying okay, step outside the job for your whole life, what you want for your whole life, is it 70% or is it 50% or does that change for the jobs, so broaden your perspective and how does that change your decision?

All of the participants felt that in order to reach and maintain their level of job performance without compromising their level of quality of life, there were a number of key factors that needed to be taken into consideration. These included (a) determining priorities; (b) making your own decisions at work; (c) understanding your values; (d) ensuring that decisions are made from a life perspective rather than just from a job perspective; and (g) setting work goals and determining what specific job path they want to follow.

Recommendations to the organization

In terms of recommendations to the organization, participants were asked, "Could the organization do anything to assist in this goal"? All participants responded that the organization could make changes to increase the level of quality of life for their employees. Ten out of twelve of the participants specifically make reference to the importance of change at the managerial level. Change was recommended in the selection, development, training and monitoring of managers. The following quotations outline some of the ways in which the organization could improve or contribute to the quality of life of their employees.

I think it very much starts with the managers and the senior managers, they really have to set an example and en-

courage that kind of wise view, so I would call it counseling at this point because you would have an MFA (spell out) at that point. MFA's right now is completely goal oriented for your work objectives, but could be a good plan to make you aware of what else you can do for your quality of life *as well.*

Be smarter in the selection and development of managers. Developing managers is as much art as it is science, perhaps a little bit more art, and we don't know how to develop it. We need strong managers and we need to make sure that we're developing the right managers, stop putting excellent technical people into managers' jobs, we try to do it so often.

Managers learn from their managers and they learn from their managers. This is part of the problem. Most executives in this company don't have balance. Unfortunately you learn from how you're being managed. High tech is a high work environment. We have a reputation of 'take them in and burn them out'.

I think it's something that's got to be driven by management. People need to really look at the resources, people, and look at the core values. So you're almost talking about a cultural paradigm and they set the bar pretty high to begin with so I have no simple words on how to change it except for management to do what they say they're going to do.

I know some managers who are very much work oriented, try to get every minute of work out of a person as possible, and I'm very much against that. If that's what a person wants to do for a very short period of time and its urgent for their personal development, then

otherwise, obviously it's not going to promote any loyalty from the employee to that manager or to that company, so I think a level of care would help a lot.

The organization can make that a fundamental management principle, make it a behaviour that they try to breed into the management structure. Some do that anyway, the one's who have family as the priority. I think corporately we should be making sure that people don't feel that making family their priority is going to jeopardize their standing in the corporation. People want to take vacation and I tell them always not to cancel their vacation, vacation is family stuff so take your vacation. There's a lot of executives that react (negatively) to people that say that I want to take 3 weeks or 4 weeks in the summer because I want to go to Europe with my family. If I was running the company, I'd fire the manager or the executive that told their employee that this is what you should be doing because we can only afford for you to be away one week at a time. There's stuff in our literature that says we're people oriented and that people are our best resource, but we don't live it, and we don't reward people based on living those things. It starts at management. Managers have to behave we want them to behave, the only way we're going to get them to behave that way in my opinion is to reward them for those types of behaviours.

The participants also felt that the managers do not necessarily value an employee who chooses to develop their "soft skills" or who chooses to go and play beach volleyball during the day outside of the work building. It was stated by 4 participants that a change should be made to understand that productivity may in fact increase for employees in terms of their commitment, motivation, energy, and satisfaction with the organization by supporting such ventures as the use of flex time, vacation, courses and physical activity.

We are in business to make a profit and there's a fine line always between what we have to deliver and how productive our people are in delivering it. A manager needs to have the attitude that understands that this will contribute to individual productivity.

Everything now has to be linked to keep our costs low, be very efficient. If it's not linked to putting the business forward, then there's no reason for us to be doing it. We want a balanced life, why, so that we can advertise that, so that we can get people and retain them, that's the goal. It would be that piece of it, of recognizing that some of that is just an investment you have to do, to believe it's the right thing to do.

Final reflections

Perhaps the most encouraging finding in this study is that this group of people was able to excel in their performance domain (at work) and to also excel in living their lives outside of work. All of their lives respected numerous domains that brought joy and balance. All spoke of the importance of family, the relationship with their partners and the devotion to their children, or their love of nature and physical activity. Participants gained by having multiple areas in their lives that contributed to their sense of meaning and quality. No single aspect of their lives was viewed as being "too much to handle". Factors that contributed to their quality of life were viewed as opportunities to experience with a level of quality.

Rather than having the attitude that "there is simply not enough time" to exercise or to go on a bike ride with their wife or coach their child's soccer team, these individuals understood and lived the principle of quality of time rather than quantity of time. They understood that time was finite and that set priorities to experience what was of value to them. They understood what was of value to them, and acted on it. They don't merely "talk the talk", they "walk the walk", that is, the walk to quality of life.

Gaining an understanding of what leads to a high level of job performance and high level of quality of life can result in benefits for both employees and employers. The understanding of how employees achieve excellence in both of these areas may lead to meaningful recommendations to organizations in terms of the promotion of quality of life of their employees. An investment in employee quality of life may result in an increase in overall work satisfaction and an increase in long-term performance excellence.

It is hoped that as a result of this preliminary step in exploring the value and means of achieving both quality of life and high level job performance, future investigations will further explore these themes. On a more personal note, we hope that you will apply some of the findings in this study to your own life - towards a higher quality of life and sustained high quality job performance.

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