

Executive Women: Designing Quality of Work Life in the Public Service

By

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

The purpose of this report is to gain a deeper understanding of quality of work life (QWL), particularly for women executives in the public service. The study is exploratory, focused on identifying factors that contribute to a positive QWL and how this population group would improve and design their QWL. A literature review is conducted of relevant literature on QWL, providing a history of the concept and frameworks researchers used, and factors that are considered important to employees and women. An original conceptual framework was developed from the relevant literature that focuses on different areas of QWL and was implemented into the interview guide. Fifteen interviews were conducted with women executives in the public service to gather their experiences and thoughts on QWL. Interview findings were analyzed using thematic analysis and grounded theory to identify key themes. Participants discussed many aspects that were important in their QWL and considerations for improvement. They considered work impact, relationships, autonomy, flexibility, and open work environment to be important. When asked how they would improve their QWL, they suggested improving the sustainability of their work-life balance and better prioritization in their organization. Implications of the research are addressed, and recommendations are provided based on the themes identified in the literature and interview findings.

Key words: quality of work life, work-life balance, public service, executive women, career advancement

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures and Tables.....	vi
<i>Figures</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Tables.....</i>	<i>vi</i>
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
<i>Issue Identification</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Project Objectives and Research Questions</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Structure of the Thesis.....</i>	<i>3</i>
Literature Review	4
<i>Defining Quality of Work Life</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Women’s QWL.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Summary of Literature Review</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Conceptual Framework.....</i>	<i>11</i>
Methodology and Methods.....	14
<i>Researcher Positionality Statement</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Research Design.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Sample.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Design of Instruments</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Method of Analysis</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Limitations and Strengths.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Findings	19
<i>Major Areas of QWL.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Motivation</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Relationships.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Organization Culture.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Summary.....</i>	<i>35</i>
Discussion and Analysis.....	36
<i>Why is This New Framework Relevant?.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Unexpected and Interesting Findings.....</i>	<i>36</i>

How to improve QWL.....	37
Linking to the Literature.....	40
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	43
<i>Recommendations</i>	43
<i>Future Research</i>	44
References	46
Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Email.....	50
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form	51
Appendix C: Interview Guide.....	54
Appendix D: Visual Depiction of Positive Experiences Themes Coded.....	57
Appendix E: Visual Depiction of Challenges Themes Coded	58

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

[Figure 1](#): Visual Depiction of Positive Experiences Themes Coded

[Figure 2](#): Visual Depiction of Challenges Themes Coded

Tables

[Table 1](#): General QWL and Empowerment Themes

[Table 2](#): Motivation Themes

[Table 3](#): Relationships and Support from Colleagues Themes

[Table 4](#): Work Participation and Involvement Themes

[Table 5](#): Leadership and Supervisory Relationships

[Table 6](#): Work Culture Themes

[Table 7](#): Organizational Policies Themes

[Table 8](#): How to Improve QWL Themes

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Dedication

To my parents for giving me the opportunity to pursue higher education and to my aunt, uncle, sister, and friends who kept me going throughout my years in university.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to develop a better understanding of the needs of executive women and what they would define as a positive Quality of Work Life (QWL). This report will first review key elements that define QWL and the methods for gathering the views of executive women in the federal public service. The findings provide a profile of themes related to QWL as well as interview responses on how participants would design and improve their QWL.

The researcher investigates QWL by interviewing women executives at the three federal research granting agencies, also informally known as the Tri-agencies: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). As part of the Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) portfolio, the mandate of the Tri-agencies is to support and promote research, training, and innovation in Canadian postsecondary institutions through the delivery of programs in their respective disciplines (Government of Canada, 2023b). The Tri-agencies have a combined workforce of about 1,380 employees (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2023).

This research involves a review of QWL definitions and frameworks developed by other researchers to identify key elements relevant for developing a new conceptual framework. The researcher uses a new conceptual framework to develop interview questions to capture a broad range of experiences and to understand what QWL looks like for the population and the challenges for achieving it. With this, this paper is intended to contribute to the general knowledge of QWL and QWL for populations such as women and executive employees in the public sector. As the Tri-agencies are not acting as a client, the interviews with employees at the Tri-agencies were conducted on an involuntary basis.

Issue Identification

The issue being addressed in this thesis is conceptual and organizational. QWL has been defined and applied in many ways with some overlapping consensus on key elements. For the purpose of this report, QWL is defined as, “A person’s feelings about every dimension of work including economic rewards and benefits, security, working condition, organizational and interpersonal relations and its intrinsic meaning in person’s life” (Jayakumar & Kalaiselvi, 2012, p. 141). The concept is subjective by nature, and it can be defined in different ways depending on one’s perspective. This can also mean that every person or population can have a distinct QWL, where some consider certain elements more important than others. QWL is subjective and can be difficult to measure. Work-life balance is also mentioned in this thesis. While similar, this thesis refers work-life balance as maintaining an equal relationship between personal life and work life. Thus, this thesis will use a holistic approach to capture a variety of experiences and create a picture on what QWL looks like for executive women in the public service.

Furthermore, there is also a need for understanding women's work-life balance, especially in executive positions. Women have increasingly achieved leadership positions in the workforce over the past decades. However, they have experienced gendered barriers and have different needs pertaining to their QWL compared to men. Executive positions entail a demanding workload that has implications on managing a work-life balance. Women traditionally perform most of the childcare responsibilities, which puts a burden on them when managing both job and children. Studies indicate that women still bear the burden of the childcare in industrialized countries that negatively impacted their careers (Knight & Brinton, 2017, p. 1518; Kleven et al., 2015, p. 18). Moreover, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had increased childcare needs where most of the burden fell on women (Hjálmsdóttir, & Bjarnadóttir, 2021, p. 274-278; Alon et al., 2020, p. 17-18; Carlson et al., 2020, p. 1234-1235). While this research does not investigate women and their household labour, it is important to note that these gender gaps can influence women's QWL and findings in this research.

Also, there is a question of what needs ought to be met and how can organizations design their work environment that is supportive of women executives and their careers. Particularly for governments and public service, they are striving for diversity and gender equity in their organizations and are committed to removing barriers that limit people from advancing in their careers. Research on this topic has looked at various barriers that prevented women from achieving executive positions and best practices that support them. This thesis will take a different approach by focusing on what a good QWL looks like for executive women and how they would design it to meet their needs.

Understanding QWL is important for the public sector that is looking to create an inclusive workplace. Studies have focused on private organizations and models that are skewed to certain groups such as males and employees from the private or corporate sector who have different motivations than women and public servants. This study takes on a public sector approach that provides insight for public organizations to better understand employees' needs and improve their workplace.

Overall, this research investigates elements that impact QWL in the perspective of executive women working in the public service at the Tri-agencies and how to design a work environment that benefits them. This population is important because of their unique standing of being in leadership roles and a public servant. The findings help understand how women executives operate in their work environment and how organizations can design their work environment.

Project Objectives and Research Questions

The main research question of this thesis is: *What does a positive QWL look like for executive women in the public service?*

The purpose of this research is to better understand the needs of executive women and what they would define as a positive QWL. A positive QWL means factors that contribute to one's work-life in a beneficial or meaningful way. This research identifies elements that influence QWL and investigates the experiences of executive women in the public sector. The thesis also includes implications for how executive women would improve their current work-life environment, how would they design their QWL, and what practices are meaningful to them.

Structure of the Thesis

Following this introduction section, the report is structured as follows: the first section introduces the literature review that discusses QWL and its key themes, providing a brief history of QWL and frameworks developed by other researchers. The section also provides literature on researchers applying QWL and work-life balance to working women and presents examples of elements that women considered important to them. Finally, the section introduces the conceptual framework developed for this research.

The methodology chapter introduces the primary methodology of this research, which is qualitative and exploratory in focus. The methods used are semi-structured interviews with executive women at the Tri-agencies and data analysis of interview responses. The chapter also discusses the limitations and strengths of the research.

The findings section of the thesis is organized into subsections based on the structure of the interview guide, consisting of tables that highlight key participant responses.

The discussion and analysis section has three sections: unexpected and interesting findings from the interviews, how to improve QWL based on the responses for the last interview question, findings that link to the literature.

The final section provides concluding thoughts and highlights recommendations for improving QWL for executive women. It also shares lessons learned and considerations for future research.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to summarize the body of knowledge on QWL. It provides an overview on the history of the concept of QWL and its usage in the workplace to improve employee wellbeing. The review aimed to find studies that are most relevant since its conception in the 1960s to recent studies and conceptual frameworks developed. It assesses the discourse on defining the concept and themes involved. Since the term has much definitional ambiguity, multiple definitions and perspectives are provided. The literature review also discusses the QWL of women and the balance between family and work. Other concepts related to QWL are discussed, such as career advancement, motivation, work-life balance, and interpersonal relationships.

Defining Quality of Work Life

QWL and reorganizing the workplace emerged in the postwar era in the 1960s and 1970s to describe efforts to involve employees in improving the design of work and the recognition that work goes beyond the boundary of the organization. Work organization initially took place in Europe, in Sweden, where the government favoured work conditions that focused more on workers' wellbeing (Martel & Dupuis, 2006, p. 335). It was not until Irving Bluestone, while employed at General Motors, used the expression "Quality of Work Life" for the first time in the late 1960s. This concept was first used in the U.S. that allowed workers to play an active role in decisions concerning their work conditions and it aimed to evaluate employee satisfaction to increase productivity (Martel & Dupuis, 2006, p. 335). At an international conference held at Arden House in 1972, the term 'quality of working life' was introduced by Dr. Louis Davis, which set the tone for further developments (Trist, 1981, p. 27).

Davis and Cherns (1975) prepared a volume for the International Conferences on Quality of Working life. The volume contains dozens of case studies written by managers and consultants that are presented in four overlapping categories: changes in participation and relationships; changes in organizational structure: new design; changes in organizational structure: redesign; and changes in design of jobs. The cases reported steps taken to increase teamwork, autonomy, satisfaction, and productivity, hoping to find more rewarding ways of working. The cases demonstrated that successful innovation required the involvement of all parties concerned and the nature of work such as the product, environmental change, organizational structure, interpersonal relationships, compensation, and training.

There was increased public debate in the U.S. regarding how QWL could be improved in the 1970s (Lawler, 1982, p. 486). However, at that time, the debate did not provide any significant governmental action despite the creation of a governmental body, The National Commission on Productivity and the Quality of Work Life, which accomplished little action in the area before it was dissolved. The debate continued but became more concerned with productivity and its relationship with QWL due to concerns of the lack of growth in the U.S. There were attempts in

the early 1970s to clarify the definition of QWL, such as the creation of the International Council for the Quality of Working Life in 1973 to promote research and share information concerning mental health at work, but there was no consensus (Martel & Dupuis, 2006, p. 336). In Canada, there were a number of QWL initiatives. McGill University created the Quality of Working Life Centre, headed by Dr. William Westley, and the Ontario government set up a comprehensive QWL centre with a joint advisory committee of prominent individuals (Cunningham & White, 1984, p. xi; Trist, 1981, p. 58). Dr. Hans van Beinum, formerly of the Tavistock Institute, came from Holland to Canada to direct it. The federal Treasury Board initiated a series of experiments in the public service, and Labour Canada sponsored conferences and workshops to raise awareness and created a QWL unit in the department. These early attempts showed the challenges in defining the concept but also initiatives to better understand it that involved themes of employee satisfaction, work environment, and wellbeing.

Cummings and Molloy (1977) examined the relationship between productivity and QWL. They developed strategies and guidelines for work improvement based on sixty experiments and case studies. Seven approaches to work improvement were created: autonomous work groups, job restructuring, participative management, organization-wide change, behavior modification, flexible working hours, and Scanlon plans. Autonomous work groups are suitable when tasks involve a self-completing whole and group members can develop their collective initiative. Job restructuring is when a new job will be better than the previous one. Participative management is mutual trust relationships. Organization-wide change is the unavoidable transformation of power relationships. Behaviour modification is when the behaviour of people contributes to productivity. Flexible working hours is suitable in some working situations. Lastly, Scanlon plans are the savings in better performance and are suitable when there is a relationship between the contributions of the workers and the cost of output. The researchers conclude that there is not one-best approach to work improvement. They suggest that change programme must be tailored to fit the needs of the organization.

Similarly, Hackman and Suttle (1977) brought together figures in the field of organizational behaviour to discuss about organizational behaviour as an important aid to improving work life. More focused on the individual than the organization, QWL is determined by factors that influence the importance of a need for the individual and factors that satisfy or frustrate that need. The benefits of improving QWL include healthier, more satisfied, and more productive employees and more efficient, adaptive, and profitable organizations. The authors in the book share the assumption that the goals of QWL and organization efficiency are seen as compatible. Furthermore, the responsibility for improvement must be shared by all workers, management, unions, governments, and behavioural scientists. Suttle noted QWL has diverse meaning and implications, where some termed it as analogous to industrial democratization or implies changes in productivity via improvements for the individual workers. Van Maanan and Schein provided a model of career development that incorporated the life cycle of individuals, the needs of the organization, and the norms in society. Hackman emphasized the conceptualization of issues in

job redesign. It included a consideration of individual differences that moderate the efficacy of redesign. Lawler showed how rewards can influence employees' attitudes and behaviours. Alderfer discussed group dynamics and the issues that arise. Beer and Driscoll focused on strategies to bring about change. They suggested three strategies for approaching QWL changes: internal organizational strategies, such as organizational development and a variety of efforts made by management and the union; strategies originating with political and special interest groups, such as community action programs; and societal-level strategies, such as legislation.

Researchers discussed the sociotechnical element underlying QWL, the relationship between workers and organizations. Cunningham and White (1984, p. 14) described sociotechnical system analysis as "organizations are open systems relying on inputs from their specific external environment, and that these undergo transformations resulting in the finished product or service." Every organization is composed of two systems: the technical and the social. The technical subsystem is the procedures and tools in the transformations and the social subsystem is the roles and relationships of the people in the organization. The sociotechnical perspective the needs of both subsystems and attempts to encourage work designs where both can operate in harmony. Change in the organization must respond to both social and technical requirements (Cunningham & White, 1984, p. x).

The sociotechnical concept came from the Tavistock Institute in the British coal mining industry in 1949 during the postwar reconstruction (Trist, 1981, p. 7). The Institute had two projects: one was concerned about group relations in depth in an organization and the other focused on the diffusion of innovative practices and organizational arrangement. The former project was the first comprehensive application of social ideas concerning groups at the Institute, approaching the organization as a social system. From the Tavistock program, there was a search for criteria to obtain the best match between techno and social component. Trist (1981, p. 11) came up with three broad levels for sociotechnical studies, each of which are interrelated: primary work systems, whole organization systems, and macrosocial systems. Primary work systems are the systems which carry out the activities involved in a subsystem, such as a department or unit. Whole organization systems are self-standing workplaces, or entire corporations or public agencies. Macrosocial systems are the systems in communities, sectors, and institutions operating at the societal level. During the last years of the postwar period in the early fifties, society changed from collaboration to competition that discouraged management-labour relations, the social element, and focused almost exclusively on the technical element. It wasn't until 1973, in the U.S, that the notion of work alienation was popularized by the media and the wider public and associated with declining productivity (Trist, 1981, p. 27). With the international conference held at the Arden House in 1972, QWL in the workplace became seen as a critical part of overall quality as the societal climate in the eighties was positive towards sociotechnical innovation.

Early attempts to define QWL and its concepts arose to understand social, or worker's needs in the organization. Mirvis and Lawler (1983, p. 199-200) defined QWL with two sets of criteria: work characteristics and the work environment that influence employees' work lives, and employee welfare and wellbeing, expanded to include satisfaction. They viewed QWL as an economic, social, and psychological relationship between an organization and its employees. Seashore (1974, p. 139-141) said that job satisfaction is a cause of QWL rather than a consequence. He defined QWL based on a concept of the effectiveness in work roles, which are three aspects of the working world: those related to the employer, the employee, and the community. From the employer's perspective, terms used for QWL are productivity and performance while for the employee, areas such as income, safety, and satisfaction are important. For the community, it is the compatibility between the employee and the workplace and the net gains or loss for society. For example, a sick worker has an additional cost for the employer and a burden on society's social or healthcare system. For Walton (1973, p. 12-16), he suggested that QWL has eight conceptual categories: adequate and fair compensation; safe and healthy working conditions; immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities; opportunity for continued growth and security; social integration in the work organization; constitutionalism in the work organization; work and total life space and social relevance of work life. These categories emphasized human needs and aspirations and provided a framework for analyzing different features of QWL. These early studies investigated the relationship between the roles of the employer and the employee and important values pertaining to QWL.

Most studies mainly used job satisfaction to assess QWL. However, there was still ambiguity on defining QWL as Sashkin and Burke (1987, p. 398) mentioned, after a brief literature review, QWL can mean different things to different people based on roles, abilities, and aptitudes. By the 1980s, definitions of QWL slowly trended towards subjectivity and reflective of one's desires and meanings in the organization. Carlson (1983, p. 27) defined QWL as an organizational goal while Kiernan and Knutson (1990, p. 39) defined QWL as an individual's interpretation of their role in the workplace and interacting in that role with the expectations of others. Thus, highlighting that QWL is different for each individual depending on the individual's age, career stage, and position.

Indeed, different researchers had different perspectives as to what workplace aspects influence QWL. Hackman and Oldham (1974, p. 5) observed needs associated with psychological growth as a determinant of QWL. These include skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Taylor (1979, p. 80) explained QWL as a multi-faceted construct, with basic extrinsic job factors (wages, hours, and working conditions) and intrinsic job factors (notions of the nature of the work itself). Other important elements were included such as authority or power exercised by employees, employee involvement, fairness and equity, social support, utilizing one's skills, self-development, and relevance of the work. Other suggested determinants of QWL found by Baba and Jamal (1991, p. 382) include job satisfaction, job involvement, work role ambiguity, work role conflict, work role overload, job stress, organizational commitment, and

turn-over intentions when measuring the routinization of work on QWL. In Saraji and Dargahi (2006, p. 9) study, they considered fourteen factors to measure employee's attitudes on their QWL. These factors were: fair and reasonable pay compared to others doing similar work; concern over losing one's job in the next months and years; sexual harassment or discrimination at the workplace; interesting and satisfying work; trust in senior management; people at the workplace wish to get on together; recognition of efforts by intermediate manager/supervisor; career prospects; amount of control over the way in which work is done; health and safety standards at work; balance between the time spent at work and the time spent with family and friends; intermediate manager/supervisor's treatment of staff; amount of work to be done; and level of stress experienced at work. These perspectives considered a wide range of workplace elements that affect QWL.

QWL does not only consider work-based factors like pay satisfaction and relationship with colleagues but also factors that predict life satisfaction and general feelings of wellbeing as suggested by Danna and Griffin (1999, p. 359). Researchers observed that work-related stress and balancing both work and non-work domains impact QWL significantly and should be considered a determinant (Loscoco & Roschelle, 1991, p. 200). They highlighted that there are three common indicators of QWL: life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and emotional wellbeing. Aspects beyond work are important to consider in QWL as well. Levine et al. (1984, p. 101) found that more than half of the significant predictors of QWL extend beyond job content and included other aspects such as promotion, supervisory respect and confidence, effect of outside life on working life, and contributing to society. The fulfilment of social interactions, self-esteem and aesthetic needs of an employee may also be considered important to contributing to QWL as well (although aesthetic was found to be unimportant) (Sirgy et al. 2001, p. 276-277). Sheel et al. (2012, p. 293) considered QWL as a multi-dimension construct that involves a variety of interrelated factors such as job satisfaction, job involvement, motivation, productivity, health, wellbeing, work-life balance, and more. It could be said that QWL should be looked at holistically and elements that impact work and individual wellbeing and the extend of employee satisfaction should be considered. These studies highlight a turning point in defining QWL that includes the interplay between elements in the psychosocial environment that extended beyond the individual's job or work they do.

In the last decade, literature reviews were conducted to investigate the definition of QWL and its components. Bagtasos (2011, p. 6) reviewed the literature to determine QWL and the extent of QWL in an organization. Their literature review showed that QWL is multi-dimensional and always involve the interplay between the work, job content, and job context. They concluded that employees' perceptions on their work and environment greatly influence their QWL, highlighting personal characteristics of worker's attitude and behaviour. Furthermore, measuring QWL should be conducted through the level of satisfaction employees experience and using variables that are appropriate and useful in the situation. Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2013, p. 435-436) considered nine important components of QWL after analyzing the literature

findings: work environment, organization culture and climate, relation and co-operation, training and development, compensation and rewards, facilities, job satisfaction and job security, autonomy of work, and adequacy of resources. They mentioned these components must be considered to satisfy employees needs during the job design process. According to Sinha (2012, p. 36-37), while investigating the literature on what employees perceive as a high-quality working-life, they came up with twelve factors of QWL that were important for organizations when developing employees to gain a competitive advantage in the market. These factors were communication, career development and growth, organizational commitment, emotional supervisory support, flexible work arrangements, family response culture, employee motivation, organizational climate, organizational support, job satisfaction, rewards and benefits and compensation. Out of these twelve measures, job satisfaction, family-responsive culture, employee motivation, organizational support, and compensation were the most important amongst survey respondents. Vasumathi (2018, p. 123-126), while investigating work-life balance, they considered motivation, organizational culture, efficacy of the superior, flexibility, and social support as important facilitators. These studies highlight QWL is a multi-dimensional concept that considers many different elements and involves the employee's work and their environment.

Women's QWL

During the past couple of decades, women have increasingly joined the labour market to embark on their careers. The culture change from traditional gender roles to developing careers has created a diverse workforce and provided economic empowerment for women. These changes are not without challenges; the struggle to balance work and children. Women struggle to balance more complicated work and family issues than men (Favero and Heath, 2012, p. 349-351, Balaji, 2014, p. 2-3, Lakshmi & Prasanth, 2018, p. 87). Women typically take on most of the childcare responsibilities, looking after their children and dependents, that can lead to stress with balancing responsibilities of both work and family.

As working women get married and become mothers, they have additional responsibilities in the household and pressure to maintain their careers. Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2009, p. 8) studied how married women in leadership maintain work-life balance. They noted that success in leadership for women required having a belief that women have a right to enjoy both family and career. Furthermore, participants reported that they were reliant on complex support systems, such as the support from peers and mentorships. It concluded that women's success was attributed to establishing a network of support. Lakshmi and Prasanth (2018, p. 87) also explored challenges faced by women in sustaining a balance between their personal and professional life. They surveyed married working women working in different sectors and found that IT sector working women had difficulties in balancing work and family, followed by academic sector and health sector working women. Married working women in all these sectors predominantly reported finding it difficult to have time for their own hobbies or leisure activities and maintain

friendships or extended relationships. Baker and Casey (2011, p. 240-242) found women reported partners, parents and having a family helped them balance work and life, seeing these factors as an essential part of their lives. Family shaped confidence because of the support they had and the impact of children contributing to their success as leaders as they reported being more aware of people's lives outside of work. Mentoring, role models, and networking were also important for develop and career progression. Regarding mentorship, women reported its importance to their career progress and stated that women need to be both encouraged and encouraging to other women. For networking, it was valuable by sharing knowledge and establishing connections that help build mentoring relationships.

Other studies looked at the conflict between work and family. Sundareasan (2014, p. 96-97) studied factors affecting work-life balance among working Indian women and consequences of a poor work-life balance. Results showed that working women are having trouble with balancing work and family due to excessive work pressure, too little time for themselves and the need to fulfill others' expectations of them. A majority experienced work interfering with family life due to long hours and a majority agreed that they had no time for themselves. Due to having poor work-life balance, a majority felt high levels of stress and anxiety, disharmony at home, burnout, and inability to realize full potential. Brue (2018, p. 232-233) investigated role integration, social support sources, and work-family conflict to determine their influence on women leaders. From surveying 45 women leaders, respondents reported the two primary sources of social support were from external sources, including their partners and mentors outside the organization. Female supervisors and female co-workers were the most recognized internal sources of support. Supportive sources were important in the leadership development of women, particularly for receiving safe advice and sharing experiences. Regarding role integration and the boundary between work and home, 40% indicated strongly or somewhat agreed that they had clear boundaries and 49% indicated they strongly or somewhat disagreed. Regarding work-family conflict, personal life interfering with work responsibilities was more apparent than feeling fatigued at work due to stress at home or personal demands. Furthermore, the perception that work interfering with family was perceived more than family interfering with work. For respondents who primarily used external sources of support, they tended to integrate their work and nonwork roles more. Overall, results showed that women who integrate their roles perceived more work obstacles interfering with family responsibilities.

There are some studies that investigated work-related variables that influence women's QWL. In a study done by Stone (2007, p. 59, 121, 217, 237), women opted out of successful careers due to lack of choice and accommodation for mothers, citing workplaces offered little or no accommodation for flexibility in work hours and structure, extreme work hours, lack of policies on leave and flexibility, absence of female role models, insufficiently sophisticated telecommuting technologies, and high demand for travel. She concluded that women are being pushed out of the workplace. According to Aarde and Mostert (2008, p. 8), from surveying 500 South African working women, their study indicated that pressure, overload, time demands,

autonomy, and supervisory support are the most important predictors for positive or negative work-home interactions. Job resources, such as autonomy and social support, predicted positive work-home interference while negative home-work interference was best predicted by pressure and lack of autonomy at home. Kotze and Whitehead (2003, p. 80) looked at personal and family related variables and concluded that personality and personal resources have a positive relationship with work-life balance. They also concluded that external variables such as societal views and attitudes, support structures (i.e., housekeepers, friends, family, after-care centres), and organizational values and support were key supporting factors for professional women.

There is a gap in the literature for identifying what themes or concepts women consider valuable to them when thinking about QWL. The literature had identified women value social support systems, family, and support for their professional careers. There is also a gap in research on executive women or women in leadership positions and how they manage a QWL. These gaps are explored in this study by looking at perspectives of executive women and their QWL.

Summary of Literature Review

QWL is a multi-dimensional concept that involves interaction between the worker or the individual, what the worker does, and the job environment. Researchers used a variety of subjective concepts to define QWL and the interaction of elements that affect an individual's satisfaction and wellbeing in the workplace. The literature cited some consensus on factors that improve QWL such as motivation, satisfaction, work conditions, relationships, and job role. Some used only work-based factors while others included aspects that extend beyond one's job and the influence of perception. Thus, this study uses concepts from the literature to develop an original conceptual framework that considers both work-based and non-work-based factors to create six elements.

Conceptual Framework

This study uses a new framework largely based on the findings in the literature review. To the researcher, areas such as motivation, relationships, and the work environment are important for QWL. To start, researchers in the literature talked about different types of motivations (i.e., external and internal rewards), job satisfaction, and the subjectivity of QWL (Seashore, 1974; Sashkin & Burke, 1987, Taylor, 1979; Sirgy et al., 2001). Motivation and satisfaction were shown to be important for QWL and for productivity. For this study, motivation is what inspires or incentivizes employees in their work-life. Individuals each have their own motivators and to this end, motivation is included in the conceptual framework to understand what personally drives or inspires executive women.

Researchers emphasized the importance of social relationships for women and employees in general. Work relationships contribute to wellbeing and satisfaction when interactions with colleagues (i.e., teams, collaboration, and supervisor) who provide support in the form of

emotional or job support, which contributes to QWL (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2009; Lakshmi and Prasanth, 2018; Baker and Casey, 2011). Social support systems, in the form of mentoring and networking were important. Three components in this area were developed for the framework to consider different types of relationships: relationships and support from colleagues, work participation and involvement, and leadership and supervisory relationships.

The area of relationships and support from colleagues means the connections made with others and the support these connections provide. Support can be in the form of a social network, helping with various tasks, or offering assistance. It is the friendships employees developed in their organization. This area will help understand what kind of support and relationships executive women appreciate.

Work participation and involvement means the coordination of work between colleagues that involve collaboration, communication, and teamwork. Rather than friendships, it focuses on professional relationships and completing tasks. This area helps understand how executive women interact with colleagues and the type of professional relationship they prefer.

The area of leadership and supervisory relationships is the leadership style they practice and the role they play for their teams. This includes providing guidance and coaching employees. Being in a leadership position, executive women are mentors and roles models for their teams. This will help understand what areas they consider significant for being a leader.

Other researchers showed that the work environment and policies are important for employees, and for women, highlighting the relationship between the employee and employer (Mirvis & Lawler, 1983; Bagtasos, 2011; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2013; Stone, 2007). These includes working conditions, accommodations, human development and growth, workload, and culture. Two components in this area were developed for the framework: work culture and organizational policies.

Work culture is the workplace practices and values within the organization. It is the collection of attitudes and beliefs held within the organization: is the work environment friendly, hierarchical, competitive, or innovative? This helps understand what kind of work environment executive women enjoy within the agencies.

The area of organizational policies is the procedures and guidelines within the organization. It involves working conditions, accommodations, telework agreements, human resources, and etc. This helps to identify what policies executive women consider important for their career growth and QWL.

Hence, six components were developed for the framework using concepts identified as important for investigating QWL that uses a multi-dimensional approach: Motivation, Relationships and support from colleagues, Work participation and involvement, Leadership and supervisory

relationships, Work culture, and Organizational policies. These components take on a holistic approach to capture a variety of experiences and create a picture on what QWL looks like for executive women in the public service. Furthermore, it uses the sociotechnical perspective of designing work that seeks to understand the social system and respond to the needs of the workers, which the organization can use to balance social and technical requirements.

Methodology and Methods

The aim of this study is to identify aspects that are important to improving the QWL of executive women in the public sector. This section outlines the methodology and methods used for conducting this research and consideration of the researcher's biases that influence the research undertaken, and the limitations and strengths of the research. The research process was approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (Protocol Number 22-0261).

Researcher Positionality Statement

This positionality statement reflects on how the researcher biases and beliefs can influence research design and outcomes. I, as the researcher, identify as a white, middle-class, female who grew up and lives in the Greater Toronto Area. While I grew up in a multicultural area and went to schools where I met people of different identifies, the predominate group was white. I am also able bodied and not financially disadvantaged. I recognize that I have lived an advantageous life and fortunate to experience opportunities due to my social position.

These personal characteristics puts me in a position of privilege and part of a majority group in a system of white privilege that oppresses marginalized groups. From this, I self-reflect how life experiences can create biases and affect my research. As a student in the Master of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and someone who has worked in the public sector, I have been exposed to various perspectives and experiences that have made me open-minded and sensitive to biases. However, I am aware that hidden biases can affect my research and interpretation and I lack understanding of how participants experience their life differently. There may be hidden biases in my interpretations of interview statements, the analysis of statements, and how I created and defined themes for coding.

My existing views and life experiences need to be acknowledged so I can understand how my positionality can influence collection and interpretation of the data. Moreover, I have continuously challenged my beliefs and reflected on my biases throughout the research process and the completion of my thesis by being open-minded to suggestions on changes and continuously thinking of ways to make my interpretation and wording neutral. Making known of my positionality is important in being aware and self-reflective of biases and acts as a reminder for neutrality.

Research Design

This study is qualitative and exploratory. Interviews were conducted to understand experiences of women in executive roles and were analyzed qualitatively. The research is exploratory as it investigates QWL and seeks themes related to it that have been studied before but with an emphasis on women executives in the public service.

The primary method used to collect data for this research is semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview approach was chosen because it uses a flexible structure that starts with a defined questioning plan but can shift to follow the flow of the conversation (O’Leary, 2017, p. 240). When conducting research about QWL and identifying aspects that influence it, an empowering and person-centred approach is the best choice and was used to capture people’s life’s experiences and their thoughts.

The study interviewed multiple women executives in the public sector for the purpose of understanding their experiences and the factors that contribute to their QWL. The interviews were conducted with one participant answering open-ended questions that allowed them to tell stories and share relevant experiences. The components of the conceptual framework, identified from the literature review, were implemented into the interview guide to capture the different areas of participants’ QWL. Participants described their experiences related to each component.

The interviewees were selected by the researcher using an internal executive organizational chart, accessible for the researcher being employed at SSHRC, and the Government Electronic Directory Services (GEDS), which is publicly accessible. Once participants were identified, invitations were sent out by the researcher that asked individuals to voluntarily contribute to the study and arrange a time and place to meet if they were interested. A consent form was sent to the participant to be signed. In the form, participants were given an overview of the study and the scope of the questions they will be answering. An interview time was established once they signed and sent the consent form. A meeting link and time was allotted in the participant’s calendar to meet for one hour. At the beginning of the interview, participants were reminded about the terms of confidentiality and anonymity, and they were told that the session will be recorded using a voice recording device. Using a recording device helped with focusing on the conversation instead of notetaking during the interview process and missing important cues. Then the interview commenced. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, and all interviews were conducted one-on-one through Microsoft Teams.

Once interviews were completed, the data was analyzed to understand the needs of executive women and themes that improve their QWL. Further analysis was conducted to compare the literature review and interview findings and find similarities and differences. This analysis was used to inform broad recommendations.

Sample

A sampling strategy of snowball-chain sampling was applied with the help of an executive organizational chart. To employ snowball sampling, the researcher sent participants recruitment emails (Appendix A) and consent forms (Appendix B) to known contacts who work for the Tri-agencies; SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR. This information was accessible using GEDS and the internal executive organization chart, which was used to help identify and cross-reference

participants. After the interview, participants were asked if they had contacts who meet the criteria and may be willing to participate.

Study participants were required to meet the following criteria: must identify as female; active employment in the public service (SSHRC, NSERC, or CIHR); and must be in a leadership or executive position for a period of at least six months before the time of the interview. This is defined as someone who has senior responsibilities in an organization who oversees teams and/or projects. Participants described working in office jobs, mostly remotely.

In 2022, there were 53.2% women executives in the public service (Government of Canada, 2023a). Representation level was 6.5% for persons with disabilities, 4.9% for Indigenous people, and 14% for members of visible minorities. The proportion of public services executives between 40 to 49 years of age and between 50 to 54 years of age were the largest, at 26% and 25.9% respectively. Participants were not asked about their ethnicity and so it would be presumptuous to infer the sample's demographics.

A total of fifteen participants were interviewed; six participants were employed at SSHRC, seven at NSERC, and two at CIHR. A sample of fifteen was chosen for saturation of responses to occur, where additional interviews no longer provided new perspectives. According to Guest et al. (2006, p. 78), saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews while Hagaman and Wutich (2017, p. 35) found it occurred at sixteen interviews or fewer. Saturation did occur in this study, where major themes appeared, which provided an overview of this group's perspective.

Design of Instruments

Implementing the conceptual framework, the interview focused on affirmative questions, where participants were asked a series of questions on multiple topics related to QWL. For example, participants were asked to describe an experience where support from colleagues was positive or meaningful. In addition, participants were also asked to describe challenging or not so positive experiences. Overall, questions encouraged interviewees to provide examples or experiences which they have viewed as being positive in contributing to their QWL or viewed as challenging or not so positive, hindering their QWL.

Interview questions (Appendix C) were divided into the following sections: introduction, QWL and empowerment, motivation, relationships and support from colleagues, work participation and involvement, leadership and supervisory relationships, work culture, organizational policies, and how to improve QWL.

Most sections of the interview followed a similar series of questions: what are some examples or experiences in this area that have been positive or supportive? and, what are some examples or experiences in this area that have not been positive or challenging? The logic for this is to

identify areas that contribute to a positive QWL and areas that hinder it. Responses to these questions provided perspectives on experiences and examples rather than opinions.

The interview consisted of approximately 15 questions and lasted between 20 to 35 minutes, with a few lasting either shorter or longer. A few interviewees strayed away from the prescribed questions but were deeper explanations of what the question asked of them. Interviews were conducted between September 2022 to April 2023.

Method of Analysis

To analyze interview findings, thematic analysis based on the conceptual framework was used to conceptualize participants' experiences. Thematic analysis is an approach involving searching through data to find interconnection and analyze patterns and themes (O'leary, 2017, p. 377). Thematic analysis helps to capture themes in the data that may be relevant to the research question. Interview transcripts were coded to find themes in areas related to the framework. Grounded theory approach was also used to conduct open coding to find similarities and differences in the experiences described by participants unrelated to existing literature. The grounded theory approach for analyzing qualitative data generates theory directly from data and uses inductive reasoning (O'leary, 2017, p. 365). Further analysis was conducted by comparing the literature review with interview findings, to find similarities and differences. The analysis was used to inform recommendations on designing a positive QWL that is meaningful for women executives in the public service.

Microsoft Teams was used to conduct interviews. The application's transcription software was used to create written transcripts of the audio. Notes were taken during the interviews to supplement the transcripts. By reviewing the transcripts and notes, the researcher was able to understand the data and correct transcription errors. The transcripts were then reviewed and organized into the pre-determined elements identified in the framework using NVivo, which is a computer software for qualitative data analysis that helps organize and analysis research findings. The researcher identified statements and themes within each element.

After the initial open coding and several rounds of intermediate coding were complete, themes were identified within each category (parent theme) of the framework. Each category had themes coded and identified for the positives experiences and challenges participants talked about (see Appendix D and Appendix E for more details). This helped find common statements, what themes participants referenced the most, and differences between each theme and category. Themes were created based on what was referenced explicitly and often. Smaller themes (with one or two responses coded) were created where statements did not fit into any identified themes or statements had a specified aspect that warranted its own category.

The researcher manually coded interview responses using NVivo. Each interview transcript was reviewed, and statements were organized into codes. Some interview responses were double-coded. Here is an example of a statement:

It's the people that motivate me. I have a really fantastic group of individuals that I work with and four and so. You know the mandate of [agency] is pretty fantastic. You know, managing the health of Canadians so that it motivates me to do well for, you know, the general public, if you will. I love. I love the work that we do, you know, through COVID, for instance, you know, one of my big motivators at CIHR is really being tapped into the ground-breaking research that kind of takes place. And so, you know, that's a strong motivator to show up every day and be informed and to learn.

This statement would be doubled-coded to 'impact' and 'team collaboration'.

Limitations and Strengths

Limitation. This study has limitations. The generalizability of this study is limited due to the size of the sample and the sample strategy. The study involved a small group of selected people, with no random assignment and therefore may not be generalizable. Given that all participants were employed by the federal Tri-agencies, the study may not be generalizable to employees of other federal employees. In addition, studying employees in executive positions may not be generalizable to employees in other positions. Validity is limited as well. Given the complexity and subjectivity of QWL, it is difficult to assess whether the concepts and questions used in the study accurately measures QWL. Time and capacity constraints limited the resources available to study the topic such as number of participants and data that can be analyzed. Personal biases can also affect the data analysis of the research.

Strengths. This study provides unique preliminary research on the QWL for executive women in the public service. Using a semi-structured interview approach empowers the respondent to gather rich data set of experiences and behaviours. Collecting detailed information helps understand the needs of the population group that can provide insight for organizations and employers looking to create best practices based on the responses. Despite generalizability being limited, some findings from the interviews can be applicable to women who face similar experiences in their careers and QWL. Public organizations can build on top of this preliminary research by conducting robust research to gather detailed information about the needs of their employees.

Findings

Major Areas of QWL

The interviews were structured around the major categories identified in the framework and interview guide. These categories were further organized into three major areas and are discussed in this section: motivation, relationships, and organization culture. Each of these areas includes subsections of positive experiences and challenges. An overview of themes coded and identified can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E.

Motivation

QWL and Empowerment. Participants were provided a brief description of QWL and were asked to describe what kind of job environment empowers them. Participants mentioned many different themes that empowered them. The theme that was talked about the most often was autonomy (7), and smaller themes were coded such as supportive relationships (6), team collaboration (5), impact (4), and recognition (3). Table 1 provides key comments regarding the themes.

Autonomy was important to most participants where they described having the discretion to make decisions on their work environment and work-related tasks. A participant described it as, “being able to work from home or if needed to come in and really having it be a choice based on personal circumstances balanced with what's most effective for, for the work as well.” Participants felt empowered to have control over how they organize their work.

Participants commented on supportive relationships, with a participant describing it as, “The work environment is one of competency and of support. Those who aren't in a crunch moment are able to support those who are et cetera, et cetera.” These participants valued the support they have gotten from their relationships with colleagues.

Participants mentioned team collaboration, with descriptions about working with team members. One described it as, “The fact that we are working as a team is something that I found really empowering that there's like impact of my work and my decision on like the organization.” These participants enjoyed the team aspect of their work.

Some participants talked about their work having an impact. One participant commented, “Having opportunities to communicate, interact directly with clients and stakeholders, get their feedback and help sort of come up with solutions that meet their needs.” Participants described the fulfillment they got from seeing their work making a difference for their clientele and within the organization.

Recognition had participants describing feeling appreciated that their work and expertise were recognized by others. They felt empowered when their input was taken into consideration.

Table 1

General QWL and Empowerment Themes

Autonomy (7 out of 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Having a fair amount of autonomy to control the day-to-day function. So you know, having the authorities to approve things and plan things and implement things. With support from the team, obviously, but being able to chart a course for what we do and then implement it and make the day-to-day decisions that come with making sure things happen properly.</i>• <i>I think in part because of the level of the role that I play, I have a lot of autonomy and control over the pace of work that we do so there's a lot. There's a lot, you know, I'm not being driven by somebody all the time. I understand the context of what I have to deliver, but I'm given full autonomy in terms of how, how and when within the context of what is being asked. So that creates, obviously. The ability for me to have more control on how I work.</i>
Supportive relationships (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Support, I guess from colleagues. Support from my supervisors from like senior management and my organization. That's certainly very empowering. You know, at work environment that has a lot of flexibility. Where sort of judgment is appreciated. The safe environment, I guess in terms of like, being open to ideas and things.</i>• <i>I have a really strong relationship with my own boss, who is a woman, really values work life balance and understands, you know, I have a family, I have two children. She has children of her own. Her values are very much tied to work, life balance and understanding that when you have kids, you might need time off to take them to appointments or they may get sick or various things. So she's very, very supportive of that. She's very supportive of taking time off for mental health. She's very supportive of making sure that people are taking vacation, you know, because that's important to take time away from work to recharge.</i>
Team collaboration (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>I enjoy my team. So we tend myself and my 2 managers. We work hard when we hire to sort of make sure that we're hiring people who are highly motivated, who want to work, who have strong interpersonal skills. We work hard on keeping the environment and the team positive and equitable.</i>• <i>...having a good team around me. People I can rely on. You know below me in the structure I suppose and knowing that that they have the right expertise for the job and that I can value and respect their knowledge.</i>
Impact (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>I'll be honest, just seeing things getting done like deadlines being met and moving forward and things going, you know, going as planned and delivering on the results that we've committed to.</i>• <i>Empowering that there's like impact of my work and my decision on like the organization. So they're feeling of having a bit of a of a say I guess into the into the decisions being able to set the direction. So yeah, make a difference...So there is a direct impact from the work that I do on a day-to-day basis onto the like the researcher community essentially.</i>
Recognition (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Having my knowledge and expertise recognized by others, I would say is one thing. So feeling that when you provide advice or input that that it that at least you know that those are being considered in higher up decisions.</i>

- *I do feel really good about very positive recognition that I've received from my boss as well as from the senior management team overall, so I do feel that the work I put in personally and the team is recognized and appreciated.*

Challenges. Participants were asked what de-empowers them. Workload was referenced the most (8), and smaller themes of lack of recognition (5), lack of support from colleagues (4), lack of alignment (3), administrative burdens (2), and lack of flexibility (1) were identified.

The theme of workload had participants talk about issues with the volume of work and priorities that impacted balancing their work. A participant described it as, “Unexpected increase in responsibilities and workload. And because the work has to get done, so I find that takes away the choice to manage work life balance.” These comments were expressed with feelings of stress when their workload increased unexpectedly. Two specially mentioned being a female in an executive role; one participant talked about finding it hard to balance both work life and the caregiver role at home while the other participant mentioned being in a female dominated position where they felt disheartened when others put extra expectations and responsibilities onto them due to being a female.

Lack of recognition had participants commenting on instances where they felt frustrated that their expertise or input were not acknowledged. One participant described it as, “Knowing that I have knowledge and expertise on a particular subject or on a particular file, and for decisions on that to be made without my input, I find really discouraging.” Participants described it as demoralizing when others ignored or did not respect their input when they had knowledge on the subject.

Lack of support from colleagues had comments about the times when others do not effectively communicate or connect with them and feeling isolated. Lack of alignment had participants mentioned feeling dissatisfied when the personal principles they hold not aligning with others or the work they were doing. Administrative burdens had two participants feeling frustrated when government processes slow down their work. Lack of flexibility had a participant disliking heavy top-down management.

Motivation. Participants were asked what motivates them. Themes that were referenced the most often are seeing the impact of their work (10) and teams and relationships (9), and smaller themes of recognition (3), autonomy (2), and family (2) were identified. Table 2 provides key comments regarding the sub-themes.

Participants talked about seeing the impact or results of their work the most, describing it as rewarding for them. Participants found it rewarding when they saw the connection between their work and tangible results. They often referenced to improving the lives of Canadians through developing programs and directly speaking with their clients. One participant’s comment that the motivation of “mak[ing] life better for people in the long run because we’re funding amazing

research” shows the value of one’s work influencing lives outside of their organization. Another comment, “The mandate is really motivating itself and able to see how what we're doing actually makes a difference in practices,” speaks to feelings of satisfaction when work is meaningful.

The next theme that participants mentioned the most was teams and relationships. Participants referenced being a part of a team and building positive relationships with other colleagues as motivating. A participant mentioned, “I find it motivating when the team, well, we have meetings every two weeks and frequently I hear really good positive remarks about how good our team is” shows the team aspect of their work inspires them. Another commented, “You get to meet some really interesting people, you know, the researchers that I've met through my career have been great, and I've become friends with some of them. And you develop personal relationships over a long period of time” exhibits the value of building connections with others. Participants felt moved by their peers and appreciative that they have colleagues they could rely on.

Other smaller themes were referenced. Recognition was motivating when participants felt happy that they were commended for the work they delivered. Autonomy was motivating for participants who enjoyed the freedom to organize their work. Lastly, participants mentioned family was motivating, expressing their family inspires them to improve their work-life balance.

Table 2

Motivation Themes

Impact (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I think there's a great deal of satisfaction and like, you know, knowing that we've made change so that so, so that's very motivating when you can make that connection between what you're doing and the impact that you're having through your work.</i> <i>I would say seeing the positive effects of my work on the public, on Canadians. So when we develop new programs, seeing those in practice. Things like, you know, various COVID measures that we put in place, hearing about how those have made a positive difference for students, for researchers. Speaking to clients directly and seeing the impacts of my work, I would say.</i>
Teams and relationships (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The building of relationships to see that by the work you're doing, you're having a positive impact on others. That you're creating a workplace that aligns with your values, I think is extremely motivating.</i> <i>So like, I feel like I've brought a lot to the team that that the team recognizes, so it's motivating for me to see, to hear words of appreciation from the team, both about my leadership but about the health and positive feelings about the team itself as a whole. So that's motivating.</i>
Recognition (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I like to be recognized as a leader who does excellent work, which I think largely I am. So part of what motivates me, I guess, is the approval of. My boss and colleagues in terms of being recognized as doing great work.</i>

Autonomy (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Yeah, certainly recognition both through financial remuneration and through just you know specific examples of appreciation for the work delivered.</i> • <i>And that's why I got into this work in the 1st place and the higher up as you become an executive. You get more ability to just make decisions that hopefully make that easier or facilitate it, or you know, you get to choose some of the things that happen.</i> • <i>Motivation can be, certainly comes with the sort of aspect of challenge, of the of the job, of the responsibilities. A lot about the autonomy to be able to run with it to large degree.</i>
Family (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So one thing that is important to me is spending time with my family and throughout my life I've always put the requirements for my children and my family first. So if my child needs support in doing something no matter what I'm doing at work, that is secondary to my family and that will always take the priority and I've always done that. And encourage my team to do that.</i> • <i>I'm not sure if it's like motivation for thing, but I think the thing that I wish number one reason why I wish I had better work life balance was because I'm a mum. I have [children] and they are still like fairly young, so I know they're at an age where, you know, they still actually want to engage and play and things like that and... I wish I could better disconnect. So it's a motivation for me to do better...It's just the element of being present with them and same for my husband.</i>

Challenges. Participants were asked what de-motivates them. The theme that was referenced the most often is bureaucracy (7), and smaller themes of unclear impact (6), not feeling valued (6), overworked (3), problematic people (2), and contrary values of the public service (1) were identified.

Participants were frustrated about the bureaucracy of government in some way. Participant referred to operational issues, the reporting process, and the change in priorities. One mentioned, “The endless nature of the bureaucracy and how you can work away at something and then the priority changes in the work you've done.” Another mentioned, “It's like a really, really, heavy process for doing some things like, you know, you wanna get to point A and takes like months and months to get there.” These comments expressed discontent with the government processes that were time consuming and hindered work.

The next theme participants talk about the most is unclear impact, which is the negative or opposite of the positive theme of ‘seeing the impact’ mentioned above. A participant mentioned, “Meetings that don't add value that have too many individuals going to it. So when you go to a meeting and they're not perhaps clear on the outcome of the meeting on the goal of the meeting.” Another mentioned, “Sometimes I get a bit frustrated because I feel like I'm part of the executive and I should be able to, like if anyone should be able to change things right, like I should be able to and I feel like I'm still feeling a bit trapped.” These comments also displayed feelings of frustration when the outcomes of one’s work are vague.

The next theme had participants expressing not feeling valued (the opposite of recognition) as de-motivating, describing it as when “senior management...not listen[ing] to my concerns” and “my work is not valued or feeling like I'm being micromanaged.” Participants felt excluded when their voice was not heard and when their expertise was not recognised. These participants were discouraged when their input was ignored. Two participants expressed discontent for not being valued, making a reference to being a female executive. One expressed it was challenging engaging in tables dominated by males and another voiced their concerns about women who are parents not being valued due to the perception that they are not dedicated to the organization.

The theme of overworked had participants feeling overwhelmed when their work unexpectedly increased, citing “you have to do more” and taking on extra priorities. The theme of problematic people had participants describing unpleasant interactions with individuals who were difficult or uncooperative. The last theme of contrary values of the public service had a participant expressing discontent when aspects that oppose the values of the public service, such as injustice and inequities, occur in their work environment.

Relationships

Supportive Relationships. Participants were asked about their relationships and support from colleagues. The theme that was referenced the most often was safe space (9), and smaller themes of collaboration (5) and flexibility for urgent tasks (4) were identified. Table 3 provides key comments regarding the themes.

Having a safe space to share information was referenced by more than half of participants. Participants cited appreciating the relationships they built with their colleagues where they could share their thoughts and reach out for guidance. One participant commented, “I would say I have many people that I feel comfortable reaching out to either for, you know, for guidance, for help with the request for input and I feel comfortable like providing input in a way that I know it's being, it'll be received.” Another commented, “Having someone more senior in a role who sort of offering advice and tips and guidance and having sort of a space safe space to ask colleagues questions in a very candid way.” Participants liked the welcoming environment that made them feel comfortable to ask questions.

The theme of collaboration had participants referencing the collaborative relationships they have with other colleagues. One commented, “I think it's important again to like take the time to get to know those individuals as people. And have conversations that are not work related to sort of get a sense of like who they are, what their lives are like, what their challenges are outside of work. And then that tends to help with the collaboration, workwise.” Participants enjoyed building relationships with others that were constructive for delivering programs.

The last theme had participants referencing flexibility for urgent tasks where they had the ability to set away from work. A participant commented, “There's only been, you know, a few

exceptions in the last four years that were urgent, things that had to happen on the weekend, and those were extremely rare and very justified. So I think just respecting our and I don't send emails on the weekend. So I think just respecting prospecting hours of work and stuff like that is important.” Another commented, “There was an event in my life and there was good support from the organization to take time. I needed to not only take care of [my child] but take care of myself as well.” These participants appreciated the options to take time off for unexpected events in their lives and the understanding from colleagues.

Table 3

Supportive Relationships Themes

Safe space (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I have a couple of colleagues here who are incredibly supportive and have been there either when I've had questions and was new to the role when something was different or challenging and they were there to help me talk it through. And have, you know, have provided either support in a meeting or support in terms of suggestions on how to deal with the difficult situation, either personally or professionally, and I find that that makes a big difference in the work role.</i> <i>So my direct colleagues, it's a support circle because we really get to share experiences tips, or sometimes just talking through something when things are really, really tough. And then the relationships that you have with your staff, like with your direct reports. My role is to coach them and support them, but that gets flipped back to me sometimes too, right?</i>
Collaboration (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The idea that [colleagues] support you and also challenge you so I also expect my colleagues to. Not agree with everything I say, but part of the pleasure of working with other people at my level is that they will bring different ideas. And maybe change the way I think about things. So it's a, but I like those interactions to be constructive and respectful and I feel I have that right now with my current group of colleagues</i> <i>We're all here to kind of deliver program funding. We do it in slightly different ways. And I find that built a lot of collegiality because people have a sense of we're in this together and a bit of a team spirit in terms of figuring out solutions to things and working together.</i>
Flexibility for urgent tasks (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>But you know whether [my kids] have appointments or whether there's a crisis going now, they're older. So the different types of crisis the phone call comes in or whatever. There's flexibility and understanding from colleagues that that we may have to step away from our work for a period of time and either come back later in the day or catch up the next day. So I think from that perspective, there're very supportive.</i> <i>My VP is definitely very supportive of my work life balance. You know, supporting me to take the time off that I need. My direct reports are also supportive of me taking time off, you know, covering for each other. I think I covered for them. They cover for me and I think it's that idea that it's not about individual goals. It's about our team goals.</i>

Challenges. Participants were asked about challenges or negative experiences regarding relationships and support from colleagues. The theme that was referenced the most often was negative behaviours (6), and smaller themes of different priorities (5), lack of recognition (3), lack of flexibility (3), and limited resources (1) were identified.

The theme of negative behaviours had participants experiencing microaggressions. One participant explained it as, “situations where people act in a way that they trying to bully people into decisions or try and take away their authority.” Participants described feelings of shock and discomfort when employees displayed ‘toxic’ behaviours towards them and others. Being a female, one participant mentioned feeling hurt when they encountered people bullying others into making decisions.

A participant described different priorities as, “when you're working with people at your own level, who they themselves have a team they're leading and they have their own priorities, and your team has its own priorities and you're trying to collaborate and sometimes you don't necessarily have the same viewpoints or the same objectives or you know your pressures are different.” Participants felt dissatisfied when they experienced issues or disagreements when collaborating with colleagues.

Lack of recognition had participants cited being frustrated when others did not trust or valued their expertise and their work. For lack of flexibility, participants described feeling restricted in their careers, where two participants mentioned being unable to support their family and advance their career simultaneously and another said they experienced resistance to change. Limited resources had a participant wanting more formal resources for virtual onboarding and mentorships programs to provide advice and support.

Work Participation and Involvement. Participants were asked about work participation and involvement. The theme that was referenced the most often was collegiality (9), and smaller themes of information sharing (5) and diversity of perspectives (5) were identified. Table 4 provides key comments regarding the themes.

Collegiality was reported the most. Participants liked the shared responsibility employees have in the organization to collaborate on projects and mutually support each other. One participant commented, “Someone on my team would work on another team to help them deliver their program and also vice versa. And that is a collaborative approach that makes dealing with the unexpected so much easier.” Participants valued the collaboration and shared priorities where everyone is working towards a common goal.

Information sharing had participants appreciating the opportunities to share ideas or information, such as in meetings and gatherings. A participant commented, “There are times when we get to work with different colleagues on a special initiative so that again increases the sort of knowledge of the organization knowledge of colleagues that you don't necessarily get to work

with and an appreciation for just learning a little bit of what they did typically do on a day-to-day basis, Etcetera.” Participants favoured socializing with their colleagues and learning more about their expertise.

The theme of diversity had participants referencing the diverse perspectives they engage with. One participant mentioned, “I think knowing that with the team, it's not usually an individual leading something, it's a team having a discussion. So you're benefiting from differing experiences, differing perspectives and bringing work to the table.” These participants valued the different experiences involved in team collaboration.

Table 4

Work Participation and Involvement Themes

Collegiality (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>You know, I've had the opportunity to lead a working group... And I mean just generally I find there's a pretty collaborative approach people want to be engaged and do things.</i> • <i>Because we all had this very focused and goal inside that we had to get this funding out as soon as possible. Everyone just got on board and we just made it happen and that was a very, very rewarding experience and everyone was kind of mutually supportive and we all recognize the urgency of it.</i>
Sharing information (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I value all types of get-togethers to provide information like information sharing and yeah, meetings or types of gatherings, providing heads up on what's coming and hearing from my colleagues also what's coming so that no one is caught by surprise.</i> • <i>We were introducing kind of fun things like every couple of weeks somebody present their, something that they know to share their knowledge that was interesting for others to learn about or even now with summer vacation. We've invited people to show their slide show of pictures and talked to us about their trip. So like that really fosters good morale and also collaboration. People nominating groups for Bravo Awards. That's another form of recognition. So people appreciate that.</i>
Diversity of perspectives (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think a positive thing that I've experienced over the last few years evolve in terms of my being involved in different collaborative projects and activities is recognition of how diversity is beneficial to those groups. I think that's been a positive evolution of these type of collaborations that I've seen over the recent years.</i> • <i>I mean, there's lots of ways. In team collaborations, you really have a chance to draw on diversity of experiences, of perspectives, of expertise. And I've had some really positive, really positive experiences where my own work was enhanced and where I learned a lot from the experience.</i>

Challenges. Participants were asked about challenges or negative experiences regarding work participation and involvement. The theme that was referenced the most often was different priorities (9), and smaller themes of personalities (4), limited capacity (3), unclear roles (2), and lack of diverse views (1) were identified.

Participants described challenges with certain individual personalities. One participant described as, “Some personalities are really loners right they just do their thing and then suddenly. You learn about it and it's not what you were expecting or so it's more difficult.” Participants disliked when individuals worked alone or put their individual priorities above the team that made collaboration difficult.

Different priorities had participants commenting on the variety of views or expectations other teams had. One participant described it as, “Not all collaboration is good collaboration, right. Like they're always a little bit of a hierarchy of ideas and structure that you have to put or like parameters that you have to put for that collaboration to work effectively.” Some referenced challenges of aligning the three agencies, as one explains it, “Anytime you need to get the three agencies to agree on something and be harmonized, it's a, it can be an enormously time intensive, very challenging, very frustrating process. And I think that's because each of the three agencies have their own cultures. They have their own priorities.” These participants were frustrated when priorities are not shared that made collaboration time intensive.

Limited capacity had participants describing difficulties with contributing enough time or resources into the multiple projects they engage in, citing wanting to be engaged in activities but lacking the capacity to do so. Unclear roles had comments where collaboration was frustrating when there were unclear expectations or misunderstandings. Lastly, the theme of lack of diverse views had a participant express discontent about the lack of new perspectives, cited working in a small organization.

Leadership and Supervisory Relationships. Participants were asked about their leadership and their role as a supervisory. The theme that was referenced the most often was mentorship (11), and smaller themes of communication (3) and team recognition (2) were identified. Table 5 provides key comments regarding the themes.

Mentorship was valued by a majority of participants. Participants talked about their role as a leader through supporting employees and their team in their career goals. One participant commented, “I really like the performance management exercises set like discussing the employees and setting the goals and feeling that all the goals taken together will advance you know the divisions direction for instance.” This speaks participants valuing career goals and seeing their employees achieve them. Another said, “Yeah, I think as a leader, your job is to create other leaders right as to and when that when you see that happening and there's no better reward.” Participants here found it rewarding when they supported their employees' career and acted as a role model for them.

The theme of team recognition had comments about feeling fulfilled when their team gets recognize for the work they have done. Participants described it as rewarding when the team's efforts received acknowledgment from other colleagues. The theme of communication had

participants liking the open communication style they had with their employees and managers, emphasizing the importance of listening and providing advice.

Table 5

Leadership and Supervisory Relationships Themes

Mentorship (11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sometimes one of the things that I like to do when I'm with my staff is I do like to talk about what their career interests are and where they like to see them go. And I always like to think of helping them develop for the next job, what they need to do. And so seeing those staff be promoted and go into other positions is very rewarding as their leader and supervisor.</i> • <i>I find leadership development to be very fulfilling. I enjoy looking for ways to become a better leader. I really thrive on that. So finding ways to support and empower my staff and sort of seeing their positive results and seeing them be successful is a real kind of measure of success for me. I get a lot of fulfillment out of seeing out of being able to support my staff and achieving their own goals in seeing them get promotions or take on projects and have really great result.</i>
Team recognition (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Certainly you know record when you have recognition for a project that you led...being recognized seeing your work finally going on the NSERC website and receiving recognition for a job well done from the organization is really rewarding.</i> • <i>One of the most successful files we've worked on recently was this, it was a revision of one of our policies. And because I have a great team, I was able to kind of delegate a lot of that work to the team and just kind of kept an eye on it. And it was really rewarding for me to see that team take on the responsibility. And, you know, I kept a watching brief and I kind of made sure everything was happening, but it was great to see them deliver it and then also be able to recognize them for that effort. And the best part was just handing out the recognition at the end of it and seeing how what a great job they've done.</i>
Communication (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I have three managers who work under me and generally I feel quite well supported by them. So I think setting a structure so that we need every week and we talk about our files that relate to each other. So it's been positive to have that tight group of communication managers that we work tightly together.</i> • <i>The communication style we have is very open and I take what my manager team and well, what the team reports me directly. I take their advice and I listen to them seriously and I think that shows them that I respect their perspectives and their opinions and I think having respect going both ways is incredibly important for a positive work environment.</i>

Challenges. Participants were asked about challenges or negative experiences regarding leadership. The theme that as referenced the most often was managing employees (8), and smaller themes of adapting to their role (5), improve themselves (2), and lack of connection with supervisory (1) were identified.

For managing employees, participants difficulties with employee competency and coaching. One participant commented, “There's always going to be either people who aren't a good fit within a team or people who aren't necessarily aligned. So I guess depending on the individuals and the individual kind of interactions between a leader and there could be negatives experiences that way.” Participants expressed disappointment when interactions with employees hindered the team or their work. Other participants commented on staffing positions and developing staff, where one said, “Bringing in new people isn't without its effort, and a lot of time also is going on training and orientation and developing new people so that they can take on increasingly challenging files.” While important, participants found developing staff time intensive.

Some participants mentioned challenges with adapting to their role, with comments referring to the evolving workforce and their role as a leader. A participant mentioned, “Recognizing a mental health issue that I was a bit slow to recognize and that, you know, if I look back, that would be something that I wish I had at that time, been more knowledgeable.” Another participant mentioned the need to adapt to new technology, referencing COVID-19, and to the new generation with regards to mental health and diversity. These two participants cited the role of a supervisory has changed overtime and become more comprehensive. Another participant mentioned adapting to their role as a leader, saying, “If you just keep having the same person in the position, it doesn't evolve. So I think having people realize that just because I do things differently than the person who did it before doesn't mean I'm not going to achieve the outcome that I want to achieve.” Others spoke about adapting to changes in the organization hierarchy where they were frustrated about a ‘gray area’ when understanding their authority on decisions and responsibilities.

Improve themselves had participants comment on experiences they wished they had acted differently and wanting to improve their shortcomings. The last theme had a participant mentioned not having the opportunity to connect with their supervisor as often as they would like due to busy schedules.

Organization Culture

Work Culture. Participants were asked about the workplace culture. The theme that was referenced the most often was personal connections (9), and smaller themes of shared vision (4), respect for work-life balance (4), innovative (2), career development opportunities (1) were identified. Table 6 provides key comments regarding the themes.

Participants enjoyed the personal connections they have created within their organization. One participant commented, “I've developed some really some relationships with people that are really important to me that are sort of important to me beyond work that go, that move into my personal life and some people that that I've met who become really true friends and valuable parts of my life.” Others described liking the openness of the work environment and the value of building good relationships.

The theme of shared vision had participants talking about the shared responsibility between employees in the organizations to deliver the mandate. A participant described it as, “A general sense that it's an environment that is positive and there's a share. There's a shared kind of sense of vision and commitment to like the goal.” Participants liked the shared sense of collegiality where everyone worked towards a common goal.

Respect for work-life balance had participants mentioning the encouraging for maintaining a health work-life balance. A participant described it as, “I think lately there's been more respect for people having taking time for mental health and taking time for work life balance than there was in the past.” Participants appreciated the flexible work arrangements and having options on the type of work employees can take (i.e., working from home on certain days). They also appreciated the respect for mental health when managing their work-life balance.

Innovation had participants liking the initiatives that aim to improve the workplace and the organization being opened-minded about improvement. The last theme of career development opportunities had a participant appreciate the organization having a lot of options for career growth.

Table 6

Work Culture Themes

Personal connections (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There's been those occasions just socialize perhaps more so in the earliest days of the pandemic when there was a sense that people were all very isolated. I think most of the staff. Welcome took part in when we said oh let's just get together as staff and socialize, not work. The staff was responding to that. They wanted to spend time with colleagues in a informal way so. Again, I think the that that sense of camaraderie people that get along well.</i> • <i>The fact that we have, like so we're small organization, so you know a lot of the people. So that's to me the positive because you build relationships really quickly and there you have a network in an organization that you don't have perhaps elsewhere. You also have access to senior management... I think there's that familiarity a little bit more with the upper management.</i>
Shared vision (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We're all driven by this motivation to support the research community, and we care about that and we care about our colleagues and supporting each other whenever we need to continue to support the greater good.</i> • <i>It's nice to work with colleagues that care and are really trying their best and like, I feel like you just get that sense from the agency that people are committed, right and they're trying to really do the best that they can possibly do.</i>
Respect for work-life balance (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I mean the workplace, I really great thing when we have kind of options and a lot of I mean flexibility in terms of work life balance, flexibility in terms of what types of work to take on. I've had roles where I've had a lot of freedom in terms of where I think my efforts are gonna be most impactful.</i>

- *Sure, my supervisor is an excellent manager. There's a lot of trust. There's a lot of open communication. Like I said before, those are very important things for me. He models solid work life balance for the most part. He slips. We all slip, but he is very encouraging in me to manage my own work life balance and make sure I have. I have time to have my home life and personal life as well as getting all my work done.*

Innovative
(2)

- *I think that openness to trying different ways and being open to ideas from, from staff across the agency of things that we could do... t's not stagnant so that the culture is to always and be exploring ways for improvement.*
- *I think that genuinely like effort is being placed in important areas like equity, diversity and inclusion and recruitment from underrepresented groups. And accessibility and wanting to genuinely make things more accessible for people. So there's a genuine desire to be a good employer and to do everything.*

Career
development
opportunities
(1)

- *There's a lot of career growth opportunities at CIHR. You know you can come in, say, through the contact center, learn some of the core business across the organization and then there's lots of opportunities and it's such we do such diverse things, you could change careers, you know, six times within the organization and do something completely different.*

Challenges. Participants were asked about challenges in the work culture. Many themes were referenced; incongruity was mentioned the most (6), and smaller themes of workload (4), consultation issues (3), competition (3), government dynamics (3), lack of clarity (2), lack of diversity (1), and lack of work-life balance strategy (1) were identified.

The theme of incongruity had participants frustrated about some contradictions between the organization's messaging and what is in practice. One participant commented, "I would say it's that incongruity between we care about you and not getting burnt out and take care of your mental health and if things get too much to talk to your manager but then putting just as much pressure and workload as ever." Another commented, "There's commitments to trying to be a more inclusive organization, but when it comes down to some of the harder work to go into really looking at ourselves and doing that assessment...I think that there's, that we're quite steeped in terms of the status quo." Five participants in this theme referenced EDI, mental health, and/or work-life balance when they talked about incongruent messaging.

Workload had participants comment about the culture of doing more, where work tasks and priorities accumulate. One participant described it as, "There is sort of that culture of let's just do more, let's do more and kind of keep on trying to raise the bar which is great for trying to move things forward but from a balanced perspective that's definitely something that has major implications." Participants mentioned the stress when the number of priorities get out of control and emphasized the need for prioritizing better.

Consultation issues had participants frustrated about some instances of collaboration being time-consuming. Competition had comments about disliking a competitive environment, where people

worked in their self-interest. Government dynamics had participants frustrated when central government processes and the bureaucracy affecting the work of the agencies. Lack of clarity had a participant expressed difficulties when work and priorities were unclear. Lack of diversity had participants talk about wanting the organization to do better on its EDI pieces internally. The last theme of lack of work-life balance strategy had a participant wanting their organization to improve on its work-life balance strategy and messaging, citing mental wellness and family.

Organizational Policies. Participants were asked about policies in their organization. The theme that was referenced the most often was flexible work schedule (9), and smaller themes of access to help and resources (7) and commitment to EDI and mental health (6) were identified. Table 7 provides key comments regarding the themes.

Flexible work schedule was mentioned the most with participants referencing available sick and vacation days and being able to adjust telework agreements that fit their needs. As one participant mentioned, “One that I think had a big impact more recently, it's just been the changes related to telework like working, working hybrid and environments and telework agreements for staff that are outside the National Capital Region.” Another commented, “So I have I think four or five weeks vacation a year and that vacation is very necessary. Um to recharge and reboot and just take time outside of the everyday slog...So then you come back to work and you feel refreshed and recharged.” These participants appreciated being able to adjust their schedule however they like and take time off for urgent matters or for mental health.

Having access to help and resources was important for participants. One participant described it as, “Information sharing at all levels...what helped me to grow in my career is to have access to information corporate information even though I was not involved in doing it, updating it, but knowing about an organizations corporate vision I think is very important.” Three participants appreciated the creation of the Ombuds office that assists with anonymous employee issues. One participant referred to the Employee Assistance Program, which is a call service if any employee needs to talk through situations.

The theme of commitment to EDI and mental health had participants liking attempts to improve these areas. As one participant mentioned, “[There’s] more practices in relation to committees and attempts with to improve the organization, some of them are our staff led and others are led by HR but have a lot of staff participation, so committees related to mental health where we have champion related to EDI where we're trying to welcome more input from staff and ideas of how we can do better.” A participant mentioned the Executive Committee on EDI and two mentioned the Employee Assistance Program, citing them as great resources.

Table 7

Organizational Policies Themes

Flexible work schedule (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'd say we have a lot of really flexible organizational policies over the years I've had the flexibility to do things like compressed work to take various kinds of leaves, leaves without pay. We've had really great support for working remotely, our policies during the pandemic have been flexible and really meet the needs of lots of different staff and myself too.</i> • <i>Yeah, I think I think things have been flexibility at work has definitely improved so just having, you know, telework arrangements. And this is before the pandemic even just knowing that you could if you needed to focus on a file or do something. Important you could kind of take a day at home and work from home. I think that was a very important step. Especially for people who need to kind of commute up a long distances and things like that.</i>
Access to help and resources (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I mean just the that we have these programs in place like the Ombuds office, the Labor Relations, like lots of resources that we have access to help us manage difficult situations that are our staff may be going through.</i> • <i>We have the...employee assistance program, so I know that that's a great resource that's available for all staff and that's certainly something that's I think really great to have that an on call service if anybody needs to talk through situations. And I've seen examples where our HR also leverage that service to organize sessions for the whole of agency when something's happened... which has been I think really important for supporting the well-being of staff.</i>
Commitment to EDI and mental health (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The you know, launching this committee, this Executive Committee on EDI...So the fact that they didn't have to do that, but we decided to bring together a committee of executives to talk about how do we truly implement the Tri Agency EDI policy. So that's a good initiative.</i> • <i>Things around just the mental health. I think these recently have been positive in terms of making it more acceptable, I guess not to be able to, to be like a go, go, go all the time. You know that, you need some breaks and you need to be able to do things properly without necessarily burning yourself or burning everybody around you.</i>

Challenges. Participants were asked about gaps in policies. The theme that was referenced the most often was internal communication (4), and smaller themes of systemic barriers (3) work leaves (3), managing resources (3), professional development (2), and health (1) were identified. There was one participant who didn't comment on this topic.

Internal communications had participants frustrated about information on policies not being well communicated. One referenced the pandemic saying, "In the past was accessible through informal channels and now it's not obvious to maintain those informal channels or networks and therefore the information we get is mostly the official information." This participant and two others mentioned the pandemic, citing the need for better communication.

Systemic barriers had participants discontent with the lack of EDI and accessibility elements. One participant commented, "I think there's a penalty for women on performance pay when they take leaves, so that's a financial thing that's been very difficult to have discussions about and

some women in those positions have been quite demoralized because they feel that their work isn't being recognized and they feel that they're paying a penalty for taking time off work to have children.” Other participants mentioned the organization could do better at addressing systemic barriers.

Work leaves had comments about challenges with taking leaves or sick days, with participants mentioning that the policies on leaves could be expanded and minimize unintended consequences. One participant mentioned gaps in short-term disability, and another mentioned incorporating gender-based analysis (GBA+). Managing resources had participants expressing discontent with the limited number of resources and employees assigned to projects or programs. Comments about professional development had participants wanting robust ways of career planning and how to be a better leader. Health had a participant wanting policies encouraging physical health.

Summary

Participants discussed positive experiences that influence their QWL and challenges that hindered their QWL. Overall, participants had a variety of responses. Regarding the positive experiences, empowerment, and the last question about improving one's QWL had the most variety of themes. Supportive relationships, work participation and involvement, and leadership and supervisory relationships had the least variety, with three themes each. Regarding challenges, work culture and organizational policies had the most variety of themes.

Discussion and Analysis

This section discusses and analyses the key findings found in the interviews. The main themes from the findings with regards to the framework are highlighted and are discussed in relevance to QWL. This section also discusses connections to the literature and how to improve QWL based on responses from the interviews. These collectively help answer the main research question: *What does a positive QWL look like for executive women in the public service?*

Why is This New Framework Relevant?

This study was designed to consider what women executives consider important to their QWL. The study used elements known to contribute to QWL, based on the literature and findings of other researchers. Interview data was analyzed using themes identified from participants' responses where they described experiences or examples that contribute to or hinder their QWL. The following sections discuss unexpected and interesting findings, how to improve QWL, and linking findings to the literature. These sections illustrate what QWL factors are important to executive women.

Unexpected and Interesting Findings

There were some findings in the interviews that stood out to the researcher. Workload was mentioned a lot in the interviews and appeared in different topics when discussing challenges, such as empowerment, motivation, work culture, and improving QWL. Considering an executive's workload, participants found it difficult to organize their work when unexpected priorities arise, which can lead to struggles with maintaining a good QWL. As participants mentioned, it can lead to burnout. Similarly, in organizational policies, participants appreciated the flexible work schedule. With the workload of executives, organizing one's own schedule helps them decide what times work best for them based on the work given to them. Furthermore, having flexible days is important for when one needs to step away from work for unexpected tasks or events, whether for mental health, illness, or spending time with family or friends.

For supportive relationships, it is interesting to note the participants who reported flexibility for urgent tasks. Executives can have a stressful workload, as captured throughout the interviews, that can lead to burnout or feeling overworked. It is necessary to have flexibility when unexpected events come up. It is no surprise that participants appreciate the support when they need to take a step back from work and colleagues covering for them when they are away.

For leadership, while mentorship was referenced the most as a positive theme, managing employees was referenced the most in challenges. Mentorship is pivotal for executives when they have a team or staff they supervise. Mentoring, or training employees, is rewarding when executives see positive outcomes such as employees succeeding in their careers and becoming their own leaders. However, a lot of effort goes into mentoring staff where it can be time consuming and competency issues can arise. Mentorship has both positives and challenges.

There were additional findings that are worth mentioning:

- It was interesting to find empowerment and motivation have overlapping themes. Four themes overlapped: autonomy, impact, recognition, and team/relationships. These themes also had a lot of participants mentioning them which can provide insight on what concepts should be included when measuring QWL.
- Impact appeared in both empowerment and motivation. This theme may be unique to public organizations where employees strive towards improving the lives of citizens and deliver public programs. It may not appear for employees in private organizations who may have different needs, but some may consider impact as a big contributor to staying motivated at work.
- Work participation and involvement had a positive theme of diversity and a challenging theme of different priorities. The Tri-agencies, while separate organizations, must collaborate with each other on programs which brings together diverse people and teams to work with each other. While the agencies have a collaborative environment, some participants mentioned the differences in priorities that can bring up issues when working together. Harmonizing is important but can also be difficult and time intensive to achieve.
- Another interesting finding in leadership is that some participants referenced adapting to their roles as challenging. As leaders, these participants must adapt to the workforce, which can lead to changes to how they perform their role. Leaders may struggle to adapt when changes arise, as one participant mentioned about mental health being more openly talked about and the expectation that they should be knowledgeable about the topic. As society and organizations change, leaders are expected to adapt.
- Note the incongruity theme reported in work culture. Participants talked about the differences in the messaging communicated to staff and what is done in practice. Most of these participants referenced EDI, mental health, and/or work-life balance when talking about inconsistent messaging, implying they want to see more of these aspects when the agencies cultivate its culture and messaging.
- There were some mentions of governmental burdens, which are unique to public organizations. Being agencies, the Tri-agencies are outside of the core federal departments, but they still experience the pressures of government processes, such as the bureaucracy and reporting deliverables in a timely manner.
- While the researcher did not ask participants if they were a mother, some mentioned having children and families and discussed how it affected their work. These participants appreciated the support from colleagues and having flexibility in their work to take care of their family responsibilities.

How to improve QWL

After going through all the interview questions, the last question asked participants about what aspects would help improve their QWL overall. As expected, many different themes appeared in

the responses, with themes of prioritization and sustainable work-life balance being cited the most. There was one participant who did not comment on this topic. Table 8 provides key comments regarding this question.

Table 8
How to Improve QWL Themes

Sustainable work-life balance (8 out of 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I guess that's the time management. It's really hard to carve out the time to be thinking ahead proactively and not sort of just dealing with the day-to-day. So it's, I would say the most challenging thing is how you manage time and how you manage time so it doesn't eat into so much of your personal life.</i> <i>It's a really tricky balance to want that hard working, dedicated person that has the right value system and also someone that's willing to say I'm sorry my family comes first, you know, like to really create a culture that respects that person... you would want that culture where you know, both sides of that coin matter equally.</i>
Prioritization (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I feel sometimes we're set up for failure in a sense that we have a lot of topics we don't like a lot of files to manage but I don't think we're setting ourselves up for success all the time because we are chasing whole bunch of priorities at the same time and not necessarily focusing on one or two things.</i> <i>Trying to be really mindful of workload for executives is important because our workload can kind of get out of control and I regularly work that technically on paper, you're even an executive. It's 37.5 hours, and I'd calculate I probably work at least 45 to 55 hours a week...So like being mindful of workload even for executives and truly trying to modulate the volume of work for oneself and one's team is important for quality of life.</i>
Relationships (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>So something I would like to see is a bit more, one-on-one time... I did want more interaction with my director, colleagues, and I set that up. I now have regular meetings with them.</i> <i>I think one thing that would help me is having like a group of other women who are similar to me, to sort of share ideas and share thoughts...almost having that support group like a women's leadership network kind of group might help. And having ideas, thoughts and people who are going through similar things that I am.</i>
Role clarity (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Transitioning from a manager to execute this like executive in the public service. That's something also that maybe people don't talk that much, but I found that step is pretty significant and it's the idea of the expectation are not necessarily all clear... sometimes I talk with other colleagues in terms of what your role is in the responsibilities you have, so there's variation, you know, in budget responsibility and HR responsibility. Some executives have you know 150 people under them and I've seen executives at my level that have like themselves.</i>
Personal health (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I'm talking more about physical health, that they don't do in the public service...[go] see a doctor and nutritionist...do a physical test...every year.</i>

Career planning (1)	• <i>I still think it's difficult for people to talk about ambitions and to be supported in their career ambitions. So coming back to this sort of career planning or professional development</i>
Autonomy (1)	• <i>I think that going into remote work, if genuinely senior management will provide the latitude to executives to truly make the decisions that are best for their teams in the way that they think works. Then that will be a positive way to work</i>
Gender-Based Analysis (GBA+) (1)	• <i>Before we launch a program, [GBA+ is done] when looking at the results of the program to make sure that the results kind of align and were fair. But there isn't the same approach internally...see that disconnect and less emphasis on GBA plus.</i>
Diversity (1)	• <i>People stay long at the agencies and so, by doing so, you work with the same people for the long time... everybody knows everybody and it gets a bit, the pool of people that you get your advice or your information from is starting to be limited.</i>

The theme of sustainable work-life balance had participants explaining the struggle they had with managing their work and work encroaching on their personal lives. This is due to the unexpected increase in priorities that inadvertently increases workload. This theme is interconnected with prioritization, which contributes to the challenge of maintaining a sustainable work-life balance. Executive positions strive to achieve the priorities set out by the organization which entails leading employees and making autonomous decisions. This can take a toll on balancing work-life balance when priorities spiral out of control. Furthermore, some responses mentioned their role and other colleague's role as a mother and having a family that adds to the stress due to balancing both work and household labour. There was also a comment about the post-pandemic world where the separation of work life and personal life has become blurry due to working from home. All these factors contribute to the stress of trying to create a sustainable work-life balance, with references to experiencing burnout or considering finding a junior positions as the executive position can mean never finding that balance.

Prioritization is the next theme that respondents talked about. Respondents mentioned the hectic number of priorities or expectations that can be put upon them. The pressure of getting things done can be stressful when chasing a bunch of priorities and the list of priorities continuously growing. They make references to their organization needing to prioritize better and be more strategic. The theme of workload ties into this, where working on multiple priorities will lead to a workload that can get out of control. Participants mentioned the increased volume of work, with some references to the pandemic, on a day-to-day basis and spending long periods of time in meetings. As one participant mentioned, it is a challenge trying to manage time and be proactive instead of being reactive. Unable to think ahead and plan can also lead to burnout and an unsustainable work-life balance. Both the lack of sustainable work-life balance and poor prioritization are intertwined and can hinder the QWL for executive women. This can be mitigated with a tightly focussed strategic direction from the organizations.

Relationships is the next theme participants referenced. These participants would have liked more interactions with their colleagues, whether to have a safe space or have conversations. Indeed, the literature and the interviews showcase that social support is important for QWL. Having a support system is important for overall mental health, reducing stress and anxiety. Particularly, colleagues can provide practical and emotional which are important for working in an organization while managing one's work-balance.

Other smaller themes appeared in the interview, such as role clarity, personal health, career planning, autonomy, GBA+, and diversity. Each of these had one participant mentioning them but they are still important to consider when discussing QWL. Role clarity is important to understand one's job description and the amount of autonomy or discretion they can exercise. Career planning, in tandem with development, is important to progress in one's career and for better one's skills. Autonomy is important, as displayed in empowerment and motivation, as executives enjoy having control over their work environment and tasks. Diversity is important when being in a collaborative environment such as the Tri-agencies.

GBA+ is an interesting theme that was brought up once. It is a gender- and diversity-sensitive approach and a form of analysis that assesses systemic inequalities (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2022). GBA+ considers identity factors and how these factors influence the way someone experiences policies and initiatives. This approach is important because it can improve organization policies and initiatives by considering the experiences of women executives. The approach can improve the situations of this group, which would improve their QWL as well as find barriers to achieving a positive QWL. Using a GBA+ approach when developing policies and initiatives should be encouraged to ensure all populations' experiences are considered.

Linking to the Literature

Firstly, Jayakumar and Kalaiselvi's (2012, p. 141) definition was used to describe QWL. After the collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher would continue to use their description to define QWL but would describe it differently. The researcher would describe QWL as the interplay between one's work and personal life, how work and life influence the individual and how they balance these two aspects. As shown in the findings, participants provided their own perspectives and examples on different areas. Their perspectives are influenced by their how work influences their personal life and how their life influences their work. Participants liked building personal connections, having a safe space to talk about personal matters, and flexibility for when life interrupts their work.

This study contributes to the sociotechnical perspective in the literature (Cunningham & White, 1984; Trist, 1981). The study focused on the social system of the organization, with understanding the QWL of executive women. Findings suggest the group has certain social needs and have concerns about workload, prioritization, and work-life balance. Their responds to

improving their QWL can help to search for the ‘best fit’ for balancing their needs and the needs of the organization and improve management-labour relations and productivity.

Regarding interview themes, many responses were consistent with themes discussed in the literature review. Walton’s (1973) conceptual categories, particularly adequate and fair compensation, opportunity to use and develop human capacities, social relevance of work life and social integration, appeared in a variety of ways in the interviews. The category of adequate and fair compensation was in themes such as flexibility for urgent tasks and flexible work schedule, highlighting that some participants consider this concept important. While the category of opportunity to use and develop human capacities was cited a few times (in work culture, organizational policies, and how to improve QWL), personal development is still important to consider in QWL. Social relevance was referenced a lot in different framework categories such as empowerment, motivation, support from colleagues in different instances, and work culture. Social integration was also relevant throughout the interviews (i.e., safe space, collaboration, collegially, personal connections) which reinforces that relationships are a major component in QWL and for the mental well-being of employees.

Elements discussed by Taylor (1979), such as authority exercised by employees, social support, self-growth, and relevance of the work, were cited in the interviews. Authority exercised by employees would be considered as autonomy, which was important for participants who discussed it in empowerment and motivation, citing having control over their work and decisions. As mentioned above, social support via relationships was important to many participants throughout the interviews. While self-growth (similar to the themes of career planning and development) was mentioned sparingly (in work culture, organizational policies, and how to improve QWL), it has some importance for QWL. Like mentorship, it was mentioned the most in leadership and supervisory relationships, which can mean that participants put emphasis on growth even if it is not pertaining to their own advancement. The element of relevance of the work can be referred to the impact participants mentioned in empowerment and motivation. Impact is a motivator for employees to feel their work is contributing to society and beyond their organization, which is highlighted in the mandates of the Tri-agencies and public organizations. As Levine et al. (1984) mentioned, elements outside of work content are important to consider.

This study’s framework categories take on a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to QWL, linking with Sheel et al.’s (2012) and Bagtasos’s (2011) who defined QWL as such. Other researchers discussed QWL as having many factors involving the interplay between work and the employee’s environment (Sinha, 2012; Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy, 2013; Vasumathi, 2018). Furthermore, QWL can mean different things to different people based on their experiences, which was evident in the variety of response in empowerment, motivation, and how to improve QWL (Sashin and Burke, 1987). Taking a multi-dimensional approach helps capture the varied experiences participant have.

Regarding women's QWL, there were some linkages from interview comments to the literature. The literature had studies where women relied on complex support systems and success being attributed to a network of support (Ezzedeen and Ritchey's, 2009; Baker and Casey, 2011). Indeed, participants in this study appreciated the support they had from colleagues through themes of having a safe space and building connections found in multiple framework categories. Stone's (2007) study found that women opted out of careers due to lack of accommodation and flexibility. As highlighted in the interview themes, participants appreciated the flexibility they had at work with some mentions of wanting to see improvements to accommodating diverse circumstances. Aarde and Mostert (2008) found important predictors for positive or negative work home interactions, such as pressure, overload, time demands, autonomy, and supervisory support. Pressure, overload, and time demands can be attributed to the theme of workload, which (as mentioned above) was cited multiple times by participants, indicating issues with balancing work and pressure to do more.

While this research did not look into families or married women like other studies (Sundareasan, 2014; Lakshmi and Prasanth 2018; Brue, 2018), a few participants mentioned their positives and challenges with balancing their work and home responsibilities.

Researchers discussed in the literature review emphasized autonomy, social support or relationships, and development as significant for QWL. In this research, social support was found to be the most significant, having appeared in multiple instances and themes while conducting interviews. Development did not appear to be significant while reviewing interview findings. This may be attributed to the senior level of an executive position, where employees have already developed qualities for their positions. Despite this, participants placed importance on mentoring when discussing leadership, indicating development is significant for employees.

Interviews findings showed that autonomy, personal connections, collaboration, and flexibility were important in the QWL of executive women. Executive women liked the autonomy they had over their work. They also prefer an organization that is collaborative, striving towards a common goal, and one built around making connections with colleagues, whether through mentoring, having a safe space, or collaborating with others. This group also favoured the flexibility in their work, citing being able to organize their work schedule and step away to handle urgent tasks or unexpected events.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This thesis aimed to explore the QWL of executive women in the public service using a pre-conceptualized framework. It seeks to answer the main research question: *What does a positive QWL look like for executive women in the public service?*

The need for this research was to gather insight into QWL and areas that are important. QWL is subjective and encompasses a range of concepts and needs. Insight into the specific needs and supports for population groups is important to improve individual and collective QWL in the workplace. The thesis intended to contribute to the literature on QWL and how they are applied to population groups, in this case, women and public sector employees.

The research comprised of a literature review, a conceptualized framework, interviews, and a review of interview findings. The literature review defined and discussed key themes on QWL such as elements that influence it and the importance of it in one's career and in an organization. It provided old and recent literatures that discussed the challenges of applying QWL and how it has evolved overtime. The interviews with the Tri-agency staff discussed positive aspects of their work and challenges in their QWL, providing insight on how to support their QWL. The literature review and the interviews highlighted themes that are significant to the concept.

One of the implications of the research is how executive women in the public service would design their QWL. Findings have shown that this group liked the impact of their work, wanting their work have purpose, and having autonomy over their work environment and tasks. They also appreciated the relationships they have, particularly having a safe space and being in a collaborative environment. This group also finds mentorship important, citing mentoring was fulfilling and wanting to support their staff. Similarly, they want a culture that facilitates personal connections where they can build relationships and network in the organization. Lastly, they favoured the flexibility in their work schedule.

Another implication from this study is how this group would improve their QWL. They would like to improve their work-life balance to make it sustainable and improve their organization's priorities. These are closely connected as unexpected priorities can affect work-life balance. This suggests that the organizations could improve how they prioritize objectives and provide strategies on how to successfully sustain a work-life balance that benefits both workers and the organization itself.

Recommendations

The main recommendations from the research findings to support a QWL that executive women consider important are the following:

1. Participants indicated that when the list of priorities grows and there is a lack of prioritization, their workload and work-life balance become unsustainable and difficult to

manage. Developing and maintaining a strategic set of targeted priorities would improve unexpected workloads; discussions with employees would be beneficial to gain insight on achieving priorities.

2. Participants appreciated the flexible schedule and autonomy they had in their work because they got to control their workspace and decisions and they were able to manage the times when they needed to step away for urgent tasks or mental health. Providing flexibility is important for work-life balance where employees can manage unexpected workloads or tasks and tailor their schedule to fit their personal circumstances. Employers should discuss telework agreements (i.e., days in office, remote work) and entitlements to different types of leaves (i.e., illness, caregiver, family responsibility) to meet employees needs. This can help mitigate employee burnout that would hinder organizational goals.
3. The literature indicated that success in leadership for women was attributed to the belief that women have the right to enjoy both career and family and have a network of support from peers. Furthermore, participants also indicated that they appreciated the open work culture and the connections they made with their colleagues. Developing a work culture that supports building personal relationships and encourages employees to enjoy both career and family is important for the continued success of women executives.
4. A participant indicated using a GBA+ approach internally was important for improving QWL. Furthermore, implications from the literature review and interviews emphasized the importance of recognizing different personal circumstances, citing flexibility and the subjectivity of QWL. Ensure policies and initiatives have a GBA+ approach to consider the varied experiences of women executives and all populations.

Future Research

It is not possible to confirm validity or generalizability of the QWL framework that was developed given the limitations of sample and sample variability. The framework would need to be tested on different population groups and with larger sample sizes to see if it can be applied more broadly and discuss adjustments in the framework based on participant responses. Subsequent research could investigate comparing male and female responses and identify similarities and differences in their responses. Furthermore, future research can investigate working mothers or women with family responsibilities and how their household responsibilities influence their QWL. Investigating broader population groups would gather rich responses to better understand QWL.

A range of contributors to QWL have been mentioned by participants and confirms that people have highly varied needs and experiences when it comes to QWL. More research in some of these areas is needed. QWL is a highly individual experience that can be influenced by intersecting identify factors. Employers may consider looking at intersectional research to better understand the needs of their employees and look at barriers to address challenges and better

support them. Employers would need to collaborate with employees to enhance understanding and co-develop recommendations and supports for QWL.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Email

Dear _____,

I am conducting interviews as part of my research study for my Master's in Public Administration to understand the quality of working life of executive women in the public service. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Barton Cunningham, who is a professor in the department of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. I am contacting as you are in an ideal position to provide valuable information.

The interview will take no more than one hour and is very informal. I will be capturing your thoughts and perspectives on being an executive woman in the public service and your responses will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be valuable to my research and findings could lead to a better understanding of executive women and the people in the field.

Participation is voluntary and relationships will not be impacted whether or not you choose to participate. If you are willing to participate, the consent form is attached for you to learn more about the study. Please let me know if you prefer using Teams or Zoom and suggest dates and times that suit you once you provide your informed consent and signature. I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you.

Sara Confreda

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form

Executive Women: Designing Quality of Working Life in the Public Service

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Executive Women: Designing Quality of Working Life in the Public Service that is being conducted by Sara Confreda and Dr. Barton Cunningham.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Public Administration. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Barton Cunningham. Dr. Barton Cunningham is a professor in the department of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact him at if you have any further questions.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to improve understanding of the work-life needs of executive women in the public service and what they consider a positive quality of working life (QWL). The objective is to develop a quality of working life framework that improves the work-life of the group who is studied.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it may help public organizations and employers with creating best practices in this research area. Further study can create new knowledge on designing the workplace to better support diverse employees.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as an executive woman in the public service who might be interesting in participating in this research.

What is Involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include responding to a series of questions about your experience as an executive woman and perspectives on quality of working life. Participants will be asked to recall both positive and negative experiences. Interview questions about motivation, relationships, work

culture, leadership, and organizational policies will be asked. This will take place during an interview, and it will focus on aspects of work-life balance. Participation in this research asks for a short time commitment, using a semi-structured interview method.

Audio-tapes, written notes, and observations will be taken. A transcription will be made.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including fatigue during the interview process and lost time that you incur from participating in this study.

Risks

There may be risks to you by participating in this research. You will be asked about positive and negative experiences involved in work and your well-being. These questions are sensitive in nature and can give risks of emotional or psychological discomfort. If you experience discomfort, you are allowed to skip and question or withdraw all or part of your responses in the study.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an opportunity to share your experiences and contribute to understanding and improving the quality of working life for executive women in the public service that may inform policies in this area.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be used in the analysis and will be erased.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will remove your responses anytime that you decide to withdraw from the study. The interviewer will ask you if you would like to proceed before the interview starts and at the halfway point of the process.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, your name will be removed from any interview material and anonymous in the analysis and results. Your identity will not be disclosed or published and your responses are confidential.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. Your identity will not be included in the final results and the notes and recordings will be stored securely using encrypted and password protected files. There is a possibility of participants being

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Introduction

This research project focuses on quality of work life of executive women in the public service and what it could look like. The purpose is to develop a better understanding of the type and design of work-life which might be considered a positive QWL.

The interview questions will ask for examples or experiences in work-life that executive women in the government find helpful and empowering in their work lives. Your experiences might relate to ways you organize tasks, provide feedback, give support, and etc. The goal is to have you identify and define a positive work-life.

I will ask for examples which you have experiences or viewed as positive and those not so positive, and any comments or ideas for designing a positive work environment.

Questions

Neutral questions were asked first to make the participant comfortable and facilitate conversation. These questions include:

- What is your position/title and department?
- What kind of work do you on a daily basis?

Afterwards, questions on quality of life will be asked.

QWL and empowerment

1. Overall ideas about Quality of Working Life: Quality of working is a concept which talks about the overall focus on employee as a person rather than just the work done by them. It asks about what empowers you and the favourableness or unfavourableness of a job environment for the people working in an organization.
 - a. Thinking about Quality of Work Life generally and a job environment which you feel would be most empowering, what are examples of things that have really empowered you that you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples
 - b. Thinking back about work generally and a job environment which would discourage you or disempower you (when you might have been really discouraged and felt like quitting), what are examples of things that you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples

Now, I will be asking for examples of experiences in various areas.

1. Motivation

- a. Overall motivations. Thinking back about work generally and what has motivated you and empowered you (very positive emotive feelings), what are examples of things that have really empowered you that you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples
- b. Thinking back about work generally and what has discouraged you or not motivated you and empowered you (when you might have been really discouraged and felt like quitting), what are examples of things that have really disempowered you that you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples

2. Relationships and support from colleagues

- a. What are examples of ways that relationships and support from colleagues have been supportive of work-life for yourself as for women executives?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples
- b. What are examples of ways that relationships and support from colleagues which you have experienced or observed which have not been positive?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples

3. Work Participation and Involvement

- a. What are examples of ways that team collaboration has been positive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples
- b. What are examples of ways that team collaboration has not been positive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples

4. Leadership and Supervisory Relationships: experience as a leader

- a. What are examples of ways your role as a leader or supervisory has been positive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this executives
 - ii. Other examples
- b. What are examples of ways that your role as a leader or supervisory has not been positive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this

ii. Other examples

5. Work culture

- a. What are examples of ways that the workplace has been positive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples
- b. What are examples of ways that the workplace has not been positive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples

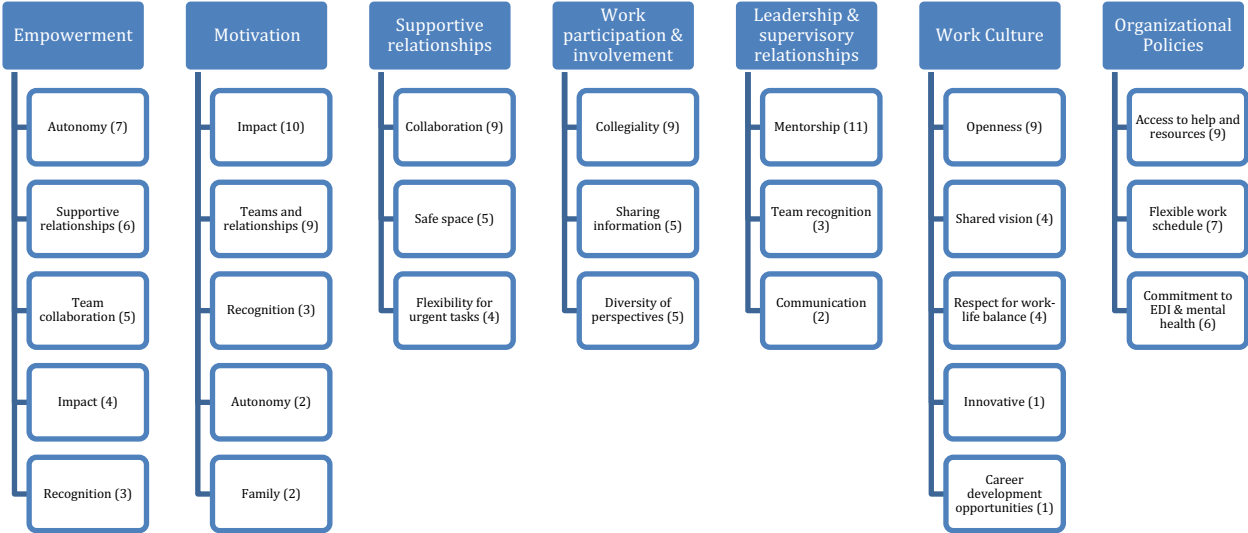
6. Organizational Policies: polices impacting culture

- a. What are examples of ways that organizational policies have been supportive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples
- b. What are examples of ways that organizational policies have not been supportive which you have experienced or observed?
 - i. Probes: Are there examples of experiences you describe to illustrate this
 - ii. Other examples

7. Open-ended: Thinking about all the areas you have talked about regarding your QWL, what are some ideas or ways that would improve your QWL overall?

Appendix D: Visual Depiction of Positive Experiences Themes Coded

Figure 1



Appendix E: Visual Depiction of Challenges Themes Coded

Figure 2

