



School of Management Studies

The experiences of academics working remotely during the Covid-19 Pandemic in South Africa.

Thembakazi Zwelibanzi

ZWLTHE002

Supervisor: Associate Professor Ameeta Jaga

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Faculty of Commerce

University of Cape Town

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION:

I declare that this is my own work. Where I have used the work of others, I have indicated this by the use of quotation marks and have referenced and properly acknowledge other ideas, and contributions of others.

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Abstract

Academics needed to urgently move to remote working from their homes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and develop new ways of teaching and research, to ensure the continuity of the academic project. The purpose of the study was to explore this experience during this uncertain time. Using an interpretive research design, fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with academics at a South African university. Following the COVID-19 rules and regulations, all interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams. Thematic analyses of the data yielded four key themes: (1) Managing work-family boundaries, (2) Exhaustion and institutional support, (3) Remote work as a transition exercise, and (4) The balance between greater flexibility and loss of human interaction. Implications for universities in retaining academics and future research ideas are presented.

Keywords: Boundary theory, academics, work-family balance, work-family conflict, COVID-19, remote working.

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Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) a pandemic in March 2019 (WHO, 2019). The South African government announced on the 15th of March a national lockdown to manage and stop the spread of the virus, introducing a strategy that distinguishes between five different levels of restrictions, from level five being the highest and level one being the lowest (Disaster Management Act, 2020). During the national lockdown alert level 5, all businesses and entities ceased operations unless such businesses or entities were involved in manufacturing or supplying essential goods and services (Government of South Africa, 2020). Most organisations with office workers closed their workspaces and shifted to working remotely (Kumar et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed significant and sudden changes to employees' lives, such as closing workplaces, social distancing regulations, the closing of schools, and universities and academics are not of exceptions (Akyildiz & Durna, 2012). The pandemic gave rise to a major shift to online teaching in higher education and many universities were unprepared for this (Parham & Rauf, 2020) and employees found themselves in a sudden obligatory situation with little preparation and guidance on how to teach and conduct research remotely (Moawad, 2020). As academics need to be able to retain student engagement through creative teaching ways, produce scientific knowledge, and collaborate internationally. Academics are an important cohort to study to understand the real effects of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic (Parham & Rauf, 2020; Walker et al, 2020).

Furthermore, while globally, there has been anecdotal and empirical evidence showing various effects of remote working on employees, as each country has implemented responses to the pandemic relevant to their own context, it is important to gain a local understanding of the experiences of remote workers in South Africa. This research intends to contribute to the emerging knowledge on South African academics' experiences of working remotely during a pandemic.

Pre-pandemic research on remote work has highlighted the blurring of boundaries between work and family domains showing that remote work experiences vary across countries and occupations (Kossek et al., 2014; Clarke & Holdsworth, 2017). Should the COVID-19 pandemic come to an end or in a manageable state, workers may and may not go

back to their 'normal' workspaces owing to the changes produced by the pandemic such as stimulation of flexibility (Parham & Rauf, 2020), reduction in commuting time and travel costs (Dockery & Bawa, 2020). Therefore, this research has the potential to increase the understanding of the changes that have occurred by outlining rich insights from academics' experiences and how they conducted their academic work remotely from their home space. Furthermore, it may contribute to knowledge production by helping human resource professionals better prepare and develop policies to help academics balance their work with family.

Research aims

This research aims to explore the experiences of academics working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. Overall, the findings bring into light lived realities of academics who had to rapidly shift from their university workplace to remote working from their homes. The research question for this study is: What are the experiences of academics working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa?

Literature review

The literature review section is ordered as follows; first, a discussion of boundary theory as a framework for understanding academics' remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic is presented. This is followed by a review of prior literature on remote working and the COVID-19 pandemic and academics working remotely during the pandemic and the consequences of working remotely.

Theoretical Framework

The experiences of academics working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa can be explained using boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) which describes the boundaries individuals create and maintain to order the environment (Ashforth et al., 2000). Remote work during the pandemic has brought particular attention to the boundaries

between employees' work and home boundaries, because of the need to work from home to maintain hygiene standards in preventing the spread of the virus.

Boundary theory

The continuing COVID-19 global crisis has raised the necessity to understand the boundaries that exist between work and family domains (Allen et al., 2020). Boundary theory emphasises the processes in which individuals create, maintain, and change boundaries to effectively navigate the society they live in (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). These boundaries are created in ways that align with their needs and preferences (Allen et al., 2020). Ashforth et al. (2000) viewed the work domain and the family domain as two separate domains that are interdependent. The boundaries can be cognitive, physical, and behavioural (Ashforth et al., 2000).

It has been discussed that keeping work and family as separate domains makes the transition from one role to the other role easier (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000 & Nippert-Eng, 1996). Furthermore, it has conversed that working from home can decrease work-family conflict as the time used to prepare for commuting to work could be saved. However, it is argued to worsen another aspect of work-family conflict (Nippert-Eng, 1996) as individuals could struggle to prioritise which role, between work or family ought to take priority while work is taking place at home (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). As a result, this may lead to spending more work time on family time (Kossek et al., 2014).

Boundary theory focuses on how individuals can easily and frequently transition between roles and proposes two strategies that people can use to manage their work and family, namely integration and segmentation (Ashfort et al., 2000). Both strategies are argued to have the ability to improve the well-being of employees. When people create firm boundaries between work and family then work and family are kept as separate domains to be easily maintained. On the other hand, combining the two roles can make role transitioning less difficult but can also increase role blurring (Ashforth et al., 2000). Role blurring can be described as an individual's inability to distinguish their work from their family's responsibilities in an environment where these are highly integrated. For example, someone who performs paid work at home (Desrochers and Sargent, 2004).

Boundary management theory

Ashforth et al. (2000) proposed that individuals manage the boundaries between work and family through processes of segmentation and/ or integration. Integration can take place through two mechanisms, namely, flexibility and permeability (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Flexibility refers to the capability of a person to expand one role to meet the demands of another role (Ashforth et al., 2000 & Clarke, 2000). For instance, a person who is working from home can perform the responsibility of being a caregiver at any point during working hours.

Permeability entails the degree to which psychological or behavioural traits of one role enter another (Ashforth et al 2000 & Clark, 2000). For example, an impermeable work role boundary is when a person who works at a call centre cannot take personal calls because the job does not permit it (Ashforth et al, 2000 & Clark, 2000). Furthermore, Clarke (2000) argued that when two roles are high in flexibility and one role can easily spill over into another role, they are easily integrated.

Segmentation describes the aspect of one sphere (e.g., work) that is kept distinct from the other sphere (e.g., family) (Kreiner, 2006). Segmentations are characterised by inflexible and impermeable boundaries (Allen et al, 2014), meaning that individuals create firm physical and/or cognitive boundaries between their roles. While it has been argued that segmentation may decrease role blurring, keeping one's roles separate may also make transitions from one role to another more challenging (Ashforth et al., 2000). For instance, individuals who have a preference to keep work and family distinct try to keep work-related activities at work by creating and maintaining work schedules and family schedules separate from one another.

Remote working

Remote work is defined as working in any location that is outside of the central office where there is no physical contact between the person, the employer, and co-workers but where technology enables communication and work (Grant et al., 2013). Furthermore, remote working can be explained by the use of information technology to meet job-related tasks and responsibilities (Morgan, 2004). The commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic has

restored traditional face-to-face work with remote work for workers who can take work home (Adisa et al., 2020) with many organisations having to shift from the 'normal' workspaces to working remotely. Recent literature has reported that 37% of the job in the United State could be carried out remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic such as financial sectors, scientific services etc while jobs such as healthcare, and farming cannot be performed remotely (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Working from home has increasingly been accepted worldwide, particularly during the pandemic. However, academics are presented with advantages and disadvantages of working remotely (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020).

Academia is one of the jobs that were able to move to remote working from home, however, there is limited literature on academic remote work. This review, therefore, draws on literature from other professional employees.

Remote work presents several advantages and disadvantages (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020), for both employers and employees (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). For example, some of the benefits include that greater flexibility and control for employees over their work (Parham & Rauf, 2020), increased job satisfaction, (Bao et al, 2020), avoidance of office politics, and reduced absenteeism and turnover (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Furthermore, Rahman et al. (2020) indicated that working flexible hours has greater benefits for employees' health and increases productivity. Caulfield (2015) in their study which aimed to determine factors that impact employees' decision to work from home found that employees benefit from reduced travel time and safe travelling costs by working remotely. They also found that individuals in more affluent areas were more likely to work from home in comparison to those living in disadvantaged areas (Caulfield, 2015). These findings are attributed to the diversity in access and availability of resources. That is, individuals who have fewer resources to work from home, such as access to technology and a quiet space to work, are forced to travel to work where it may be more conducive to work. In addition, Caulfield (2015) reported that working remotely has an economic benefit. Individuals working from home reported saving half of their salary and therefore could save and spend their money on other needs.

On the one hand, an increase in modern technology has made working from home easier (Richardson & Writer, 2017). Employees can attend web conferences in the comfort of their homes. On the other hand, working remotely has had some negative consequences for employees. For instance, employees reported that working according to their convenience has led to sometimes not submitting work on time (Richardson & Writer, 2017). Additionally,

Allen et al. (2015) found that when employees work from home, it affected team collaboration and creativity. Camacho et al. (2018) reasoned that communication quality is a significant element to consider for remote workers. Poor communication may lead to poor performance and higher levels of work stress. However, when individuals are forced to work remotely, their lack of resources might create significant communication challenges (Camacho et al., 2018). Collins and Moschler (2009) examined the benefits and limitations of remote working using a case study at the Department of Defence with 350 employees in the United State. They found that when working remotely employees felt isolated from the organisation, which was perceived as a possibility for them to miss promotional opportunities within their organisation (Collins & Moschler, 2009). While at the organisational level, it was reported that organisations may lose control over their employees while working remotely (Collins & Moschler, 2009).

Finally, remote working has had several implications for employees managing their work-life interface, especially during COVID-19.

Remote work, boundary management and work-life balance

Remote work has been an important subject in the work-family field even before the COVID-19 pandemic but has since increased in importance. Prior to the pandemic, working remotely was seen as an important aspect of balancing work with family (Grant et al., 2013) as it provides individuals with the flexibility (Parham & Rauf, 2020). Remote work provides employees with flexible hours thus, employees have control over when they work and where they work (Hillbrecht et al., 2013). Darouei and Plutt (2020) conducted a study among professional workers in the Netherlands examining the process by which working from home interfered with family. From daily surveys in the morning, afternoon, and evening for two consecutive workweeks they found that on days when employees were working from home, they reported less work-family conflict because of less time pressure. Specifically, on days when employees were working from home, they did not experience the work-related stress of having to work at a fast pace as there was no physical contact between them and their supervisors. These findings were similar to those of Delanoëie and Verbruggen (2019). In their study, they examined working from home concerning the identified outcome and found that employees experienced higher work engagement on working-from-home days. This was because in those days there was no physical contact between employees and the employer.

Similarly, Smit et al. (2016) found that fewer work disruptions and interruptions enhanced individuals' concentration levels and resulted in greater completion of tasks. Accordingly, employees experienced higher work engagement.

Anderson et al. (2015) conducted a study to examine how remote workers felt on days when working from home versus working in the office. The sample consisted of employees from the US government agency. The study showed that more positive outcomes were reported when employees chose to work from home and these outcomes contributed to better work-life balance. Anderson and Kelliher (2020) maintained that it is important to note that these experiences will differ as some research has been carried out pre-COVID-19 where employees had the freedom to choose where to work (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Subsequently, during the COVID-19 pandemic employees had no choice in choosing where to work as they were forced to work from home during the lockdown due to the social distancing restrictions that were in place (Kumar et al., 2021).

The drawback of working remotely comprises a blurred line between work and family during the COVID-19 pandemic (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). In Hong Kong, even though working remotely had been a preferred work option for many employees due to an increased dual-family workforce. It was reported that the transition to working remotely has been favourable. However, it has posed challenges in achieving work-life balance (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). The research found that employees over the age of 40 were experiencing challenges balancing their work with family while working remotely as they had to juggle between work and family commitments simultaneously (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). Using the boundary theory to understand the experiences of the work-family interface in Vyas and Butakhieo (2021) research, participants have indicated experiencing challenges in keeping family and work separate which led to work-family conflict. Their experiences enacted high integration of work and family (Allen et al., 2014) as proposed by the boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000). As much as the participants experienced greater role blurring, integrating work and family is argued to make the transition between work and family roles easier (Ashforth et al., 2000), thus the context of the COVID-19 pandemic played a role in these negative experiences.

Another possible reason for this finding was that people in the study lived in multi-generational households. This may lead to sharing their space with many people in the house. Subsequently, this creates an overlap between the family and work domains and results in

failure to balance their work with family (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). As suggested by the boundary theory, the boundaries between work and family can also be physical. That is, individuals may suffer when work and family are taking place in one space. For example, Purwanto et al. (2020) in their study found that teachers who are working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic suggested that having a good workstation at home was beneficial in terms of completing their work-related tasks and balancing their work with family. The work setup at home presented a physical boundary between work and family. That is, teachers would attend to work during working hours and leave their workstations to attend to their family responsibilities after the working hours. To get a better understanding of the context of working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have presented evidence on how employees experienced the shift to remote working in a short space.

Remote work and COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a different environment than when the remote working studies were conducted as employees did not have a choice to work from home, but were rather forced to (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Organisations did not properly plan to send their employees to work from home (Baudot & Kelly, 2020; Lades et al., 2020; Purwanto et al., 2020; Yunus et al., 2021). Most employees had to work remotely and had to also manage their families at the same time (Johari et al., 2020). During the pandemic, working remotely exacerbated the blurred lines between work and family, as employees worked in isolation from their colleagues (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021) and almost all family members remained at home because of work and school closures.

In Hong Kong, even though working remotely had been a preferred work option for many employees due to an increased dual-family workforce. It was reported that the transition to working remotely has been favourable. However, it has posed challenges in achieving work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). The research found that employees over the age of 40 were experiencing challenges balancing their work with family while working remotely as they had to juggle between work and family commitments simultaneously.

Moreover, studies have also presented the gender gap, with women bearing the more negative impact of working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to their male

counterparts (Allen et al., 2020). Similarly, Adisa et al. (2020) argued that working women experienced more adversity compared to men in balancing work with family during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason for individuals' difficulties in achieving work-life balance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was suggested to be due to the increased work demands as well as family demands (Caringal-Go et al., 2022). For instance, work increased because employees had to learn new digital skills whilst overseeing children's online schoolwork (Sinclair et al., 2020). The experienced imbalance of work and family amongst female employees was perpetuated by social and cultural obligations. Women were mostly the primary caretakers of children (Adisa et al., 2020). The closing of schools exacerbated the challenges of working and schooling children from home (Vaziri et al., 2020). Oleschuk (2020) supported that women have experienced greater emotional strain compared to men, because of their multiple roles, such as caring responsibilities that affect their ability in achieving work-family balance.

Moreover, recent studies have indicated that parents with young children at home suffered the most concerning to balancing responsibilities (Garbe et al., 2020; Hjalmsdottir & Bjarnadottir, 2020). Garbe et al. (2020) examined parents' experiences during the closure of schools amid COVID-19 pandemic. Using an online survey with an open-ended questionnaire, they collected data from 116 parents. Although parents were satisfied with schooling taking place at home, they were also unprepared for this unexpected transition. As a result, they experienced challenges in attending to their work, and family and teaching their children (Garbe et al., 2020).

Conversely, in a longitudinal study examining the work-life among Canadian workers during COVID-19, Schieman et al. (2020) found that employees had experienced less work-family conflict at the beginning of the pandemic, especially among those with no children at home. During the hard lockdown, employees had limited non-work activities which could interfere with work (Schieman et al., 2020). Further challenges for remote workers in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic included the loss of motivation to work (Purwanto et al., 2020). Among teachers, Purwanto et al. (2020) reported reasons for motivation loss included not having the same atmosphere as working in the office, and there being many distractions at home such as the television and family. Further, the participants experienced higher costs related to electricity and internet usage costs that would usually be covered by their employers (Purwanto et al., 2020). With many challenges experienced by remote workers

during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was imperative to use personal resources to support their adaptability to the COVID-19 pandemic and new ways of working (Ojo et al., 2021).

Resilience has been conceptualised as a personal resource that helps individuals adapt to changing and stressful demands and is crucial for staying in balance (Ojo et al., 2021). In a study on faculty members, Lustig et al. (2020) conducted a study on their organisational resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. They interviewed employees in different occupational positions who had to move to remote work due to the pandemic. The researchers found that participants used different ways to navigate resilience in attempting to survive the new ways produced by the global pandemic. For example, they noted that developing tactics such as flexibility in their schedules eased the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) expressed that resilience can be improved through the support of supervisors. Some academic institutions such as the University of Washington offered communication services to expand human networks within the remote workspace to promote personal well-being. These extended networks included teaching instructions and solutions to issues related to working remotely. Consequently, participants reported a stronger sense of belonging, teamwork, and well-being (Lustig et al., 2020). These resources allowed them to work from home more effectively.

In contrast, Waizenegger et al. (2020) reported that even though the use of technology is very convenient for communicating, employees were no longer engaging in ad-hoc conversations about their tasks as they no longer shared a common workspace. As a result, communication was less frequent, and collaboration was lacking particularly for new employees. New employees found it difficult to ask questions related to their tasks as they did not want to send other employees frequent messages as they could not see if they were busy or not. Thus, their learning, collaboration and coordination were negatively affected (Waizenegger et al 2020).

Academic's remote working during COVID-19

There are a few studies across the globe that have specifically focused on academic samples. Yildirim and Eslen-Ziya (2020) conducted a quantitative survey to examine and understand the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on women and men working in higher education. The sample ($N = 198$) consisted of highly diverse respondents from France,

Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, the UK, and the United States. The findings from the regression analysis suggested a weak gender gap in how the pandemic affected academics. However, the gap becomes disturbing among academics with children at home, particularly for women (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2020). This suggested that as the lockdown required schools and childcare facilities to close, homes with children were left with more childcare responsibilities. In addition, women working in academics were mostly affected compared to men due to the traditional responsibilities' women bear in the house.

Parham and Rauf (2020) conducted an exploratory study on faculty members from different countries to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and obligatory remote working on work-life balance, mental health, and productivity. The findings revealed that faculty members experienced both positive and negative effects of obligatory remote working as flexibility was perceived positively. Flexibility is the second component of micro-transition of the boundary theory, which allows a person to expand the boundaries of one domain to accommodate another domain and move easily from one role to another. Faculty members having flexible work schedules allowed them to attend to different roles in a variety of settings (Allen et al., 2014; Ashforth et al., 2000). For example, an academic may be expected to enact the role of a mother during the working day.

However, academics experienced challenges with managing their work and home time, separating work from personal life, and experiencing continuous interruptions by children and family members while working from home (Parham & Rauf, 2020). These findings are consistent with those of Almaghaslah and Alsayari (2020) as they found that some academics reported distraction as a significant factor, and it negatively affected the ability to focus when compared to working in the office.

More specifically, academics experienced challenges with adapting to the new ways of preparing and arranging customised learning materials (Almaghaslah & Alsayari, 2020). These challenges included a lack of engagement and control of students and were due to a lack of human interaction. This resulted in low levels of productivity and an imbalance of work with family, particularly during the first few weeks of working remotely. Akyldiz and Durna (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study on 290 academics in Turkey. Their findings revealed that academics experienced difficulties in concentrating on their work while working from home. Furthermore, the study revealed that most academics had not conducted academic research for the duration of the pandemic while women academics conducted a lower

proportion of academic research than men. These results emphasised the negative impact of COVID-19 on academic knowledge generation (Akyldiz & Durna, 2021).

Information and communication technologies and remote working during COVID-19

The use of technology for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed many organisations to operate digitally (Almaghaslah & Alsayazi, 2020). Zoom daily users grew by 67% in March 2020 while the number of Microsoft Teams users increased to 44 million and Slack accounted for 7 000 new users (Leonard, 2020). Zhan (2020) suggested that the unplanned and sudden change did not allow time for psychological preparations. Since many faculty academics live with their family members, they were prone to interruptions and difficulty in completing their work-related tasks, while teachers and students were struggling to adapt to new online activities.

Mumtaz et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to examine and highlight the impact and challenges presented by the transition from traditional face-to-face to online academics in Pakistan. The study used search engines and websites including Google Scholar to access literature relevant to the topic. It was found that accessibility in developing countries was one of the core challenges that the pandemic produced in the educational sector (Mumtaz et al. (2021). In developing countries, access to technology is a challenge as students remain deprived of computers and the internet as they cannot afford it. Almaghaslah and Alsayari's (2020) results indicated that most academics found the switch to online learning to be more effective than the traditional face-to-face classes. Academics believed that sufficient training and IT support when it came to scheduling online meetings made the transition to be effective. They reported that the technology was reliable, and communication tools were efficient, hence they did not face any challenges reaching their students (Almaghaslah & Alsayazi, 2020). The study used a cross-sectional, the questionnaire was distributed online and carried out in the College of Pharmacy on 59 academic staff. These results suggested that remote working worked effectively when there was adequate planning, technological support and communication from the university.

Trust and Whalen (2020) conducted quantitative research to learn more about the experiences of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers distributed an online survey to 325 educators via social media channels. The survey included one open-

ended question. The majority of educators in the study reported that they never engaged in online teaching prior to the pandemic, while one-third of the participants indicated that they had some experience with working remotely (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Participants reported many challenges in working remotely. These included being unprepared to use remote strategies and the inability to adapt to the new tools used, unreliable internet access, and unclear educational or governmental directives (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Several participants reported that they would benefit from training in emergency remote teaching. Remote training would allow them to be better equipped in the use of technology in classes to ensure an easy learning experience for themselves and their students. Research has confirmed that lack of preparation, training and support created additional stress and challenges for educators in times of emergency and need (Foulger et al., 2017; Lades et al., 2020; Naidu & Modise, 2021; Wanga et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020 & Trust and Whalen (2020). Saldana et al. (2020) suggested that casual communication is at times the most important and effective communication that can help faculty members gain institutional knowledge during such times.

To investigate the challenges remote work produced in higher education institutions, Guangul et al. (2020) conducted a case study at Middle East College in Muscat. The college has over 4500 undergraduate and postgraduate students in different faculties such as engineering, science, technology, business, and management. For the research, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed through Google Forms to 50 faculty members in different faculties (Guangul et al., 2020). The college offered various online training sessions to the staff after face-to-face classes were suspended by the government. However, even though the College provided various training to the staff on an open-source conferencing system, faculty members experienced connectivity challenges on the second day of the training. To overcome this challenge, the college decided to shift to a new online channel, Microsoft Teams to continue with the training (Guangul et al., 2020).

The extension of the suspension of face-to-face schools in Oman by another month allowed the institution to prepare for the online shift (Guangul et al., 2020). As a result, supportive measures were implemented which drew on the guidelines from the Minister of Education. The “Supportive measure” and assessment approach was designed to ensure the health and well-being of the entire institution, and provide opportunities to ensure that students were progressing, graduating, and considering employment opportunities to name a

few (Guangul et al., 2020). The research suggested that access to the internet and academic dishonesty are the most pressing challenges listed by the respondents. It was challenging to complete tasks that required computer labs and high internet speed. However, the College made a significant effort to provide remote access to the college computers to students and implemented follow up methods to keep track of their staff's online progress (Guangul et al., 2020).

To ensure effective learning and support, educators need to be fluent in the use of technology and be adaptive to the new ways of teaching produced by the COVID-19 pandemic (Trust & Whalen, 2020). FastLane (2020) highlighted that employees were unhappy with the lack of infrastructure such as limited access to resources such as office documents while working remotely. This also suggests poor levels of preparedness. As much as the use of technology produced challenges to remote working, Joshi et al., (2018) argued that the use of technology at distance is an important strategy during times of emergency, such as natural disasters.

Furthermore, Quenza et al. (2020) found that academics reported technological challenges as the pressing issue for remote working. To overcome this challenge in Hong Kong, various government departments provided information technology support to their workforce by installing new computers, mobile devices, and other equipment (Vyas & Butakieo, 2021). The support of technological resources resulted in the enhancement of remote working and effective communication between employees and the organisations (Vyas & Butakieo, 2021).

Similarly, research conducted by Barton (2020) suggested that teachers have shared negative views on remote teaching substitutions. The sample consisted of university teachers from 200 public and private research universities in the United States. The research findings revealed that teachers had to remove some of the course learning outcomes as they were previously taught in field settings (Barton, 2020). In addition, technology was reported as one of the barriers to effective remote teaching and learning to have the ability to record and upload the recorded material (Barton, 2020).

Quezada et al. (2020) presented how a college in California liberal arts College prepared its faculty to transition to working remotely in a response to COVID-19 after the closure of schools. by taking quick action to ensure a smooth transition to remote teaching,

allowing room for development and creative working arrangement opportunities (Quezada et al, 2020). The research used an autoethnography case study and a combination of qualitative research to collect data as means of triangulation. The findings revealed the experiences of faculty members and how the closure of the university affected the educational programme. It further hindered the opportunity for teachers to shift from face-to-face to remote working smoothly. The results yielded five themes: technology-based instructional strategies, technology-based support office, alternative technology-based course assessment, feedback for learning and teaching improvement and social-emotional engagement in courses and support of clinical placements (Quezada et al., 2020).

The technology-based instructional strategy's theme included the use of technological communications such as Zoom for teaching and using breakout rooms for class discussions and group discussions. Teachers used those communication channels as a strategy to facilitate learning. Zoom fatigue was reported as a major concern by teachers (Quenza et al, 2020). One of the important themes that emerged during this research was the faculty feedback that was provided to teachers to create opportunities to improve remote working. Many faculties requested feedback after every class allowing teachers an opportunity to raise their opinions and make adjustments where necessary based on the feedback provided.

The Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUNed) is no exception to other higher education in implementing tactics ensuring that teaching is not impeded by the COVID-19 pandemic (Veasuvalingam et al., 2021). The faculty developed online support for its educators. The university and IT department developed a series of webinar sessions to further support colleagues to work from home. A remote and home working toolkit was provided to students and staff. These provide guidance regarding the use of technology while working from home (Veasuvalingam et al., 2021).

Gabr et al. (2021) conducted quantitative research to study the technostress and challenges of remote work environment among university staff at Menoufia University in Egypt. Since employees were working from home, this blurred the lines between work and home, consequently, what was known as workplace stress had spread to virtual offices and employees experiencing technostress. Technostress is defined as mental pressure due to the use of modern technology, and when people cannot adapt or cope with information technologies in a healthy manner (Choudhury, 2013).

COVID-19 highlighted the gap among socioeconomic classes as access to high-speed internet between rural and urban areas remains unequal (Malisch et al., 2020). These socioeconomic differences were evident prior to the pandemic. However, the pandemic exacerbated inequality in learning from home (Garbe et al., 2020).

Increased workload for academics during COVID-19 pandemic

Many institutions and programs had to make significant changes in their 'normal' ways of operating as a result of health and safety concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Washburn et al., 2021). These changes caused faculty members to take on new responsibilities associated with teaching. Washburn et al. (2021) conducted a mixed methods research study to explore the experiences of full-time faculty members. Participants were members of 18 accredited Masters of Social Work programs in Texas. The quantitative responses were exported from Qualtrics into SPSS while inductive content analysis was used to analyse qualitative responses (Washburn et al., 2021). Both quantitative and qualitative results revealed that faculty members have experienced an increase in workload as they began to work remotely because of an intense and sudden increase in the number of responsibilities to teach remotely. Faculty members had the responsibility to put additional effort to create and delivering thoughtful and impactful online learning for their students.

It was suggested that one of the challenges with remote teaching was maintaining student support while switching to remote teaching (Washburn et al., 2020). Students required more engagement than before as they had little to no experience with remote learning. Therefore, faculty members had to always engage with students by answering any questions they might have (Washburn et al., 2020). These results were consistent with those of Barton (2020). Barton (2020) found that faculty members across professions have experienced an increased workload due to the changes produced by the pandemic. In addition, Ascen et al. (2021) also reported similar findings. Their results showed that most academics have experienced more work during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to when they were working in the office. Findings did not suggest any significant difference in workload increase for women or faculty racial groups. These results may be because the sample consisted of largely white females and heterosexuals. It is also possible that the recruited sample did not observe that their workload had increased because of the COVID-19

pandemic simply because they were already engaging in extra unpaid tasks before the pandemic (Washburn et al., 2021).

On the contrary, Malisch et al. (2020) stated that the pandemic had increased faculty members' needs and reduced the time available to complete work. They argued that women in academia were likely to have a greater responsibility for the pandemic, especially women who face intersecting systems of oppression such as ethnicity, race, and economic class (Malisch et al., 2020). Furthermore, it was stated that women in academia experience higher-than-average workloads at work as they are assigned introductory courses with first-year students who need more support (Malisch et al., 2020). In addition, Viglione (2020) argued that female faculty members usually carry more teaching responsibilities than their male colleagues.

Academia is described as a high-stress profession resulting in negative health outcomes (Morrish, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic increased the workload for academics due to the reconstruction of the 'new normal' (Ashencaen et al., 2021). According to Yuceol et al. (2021) academics indicated an overlap between work and family responsibilities due to the increased demands of working remotely. The main objective of the research was to determine the impact of academics working remotely in Turkey. The survey was distributed to 397 academics working in public and private universities and the results were analysed using the SPSS program (Yuceol et al., 2021). Academics were found to spend long hours working and engaging in virtual meetings even after working hours. Thus, experience a disruption in their work-life balance (Yuceol et al., 2021). These findings suggested a lack of boundary management between the family and work domain, according to Allen et al. (2014) this is known as dysfunction permeations as the interruption from one role affects the other role. For example, a national university in South Korea established a supportive community among teachers. Teachers were working together by sharing lecture videos, academics interpreted this notion as exhausting and time demanding.

Academics were put under pressure to transfer their face-to-face content into online material and were often guided by their department and supervisors which put substantial demand upon them (Lee et al., 2022). Consistent with Dinu et al. (2021) academics indicated that redesigning the course material and interacting with students online involved a lot of work compared to pre-pandemic. Despite the increase in workload, academics reported spending more time upskilling themselves on how to use video calls, recording software, and

editing online teaching material (Dinu et al., 2021). Furthermore, online assessments were suggested to be time-consuming as students expected thoroughly feedback which created more work for academics.

Method

This section presents the method used to conduct the study. A research methodology is determined by the nature of the research question and the subject being investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study aimed to explore the experiences of academics working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. A qualitative research approach was chosen because this approach facilitates an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the phenomena of interest (Catalano & Creswell, 2013). This section comprises six parts, namely: research philosophy and design, sampling and participants, research procedure, data analysis, and rigour.

Research philosophy and design

The present study used an interpretive paradigm. According to TerreBlanche and Durrheim (1999), a research paradigm is a process of interrelated practice and thinking that defines the nature of the enquiry. It reflects our beliefs about the world we live in (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The use of an interpretive paradigm in this research was grounded on the notion that knowledge is socially constructed, and that participants become actively involved in the research process (De Vos et al., 2011). The interpretive paradigm allowed the researcher to view the world through the experiences of the participants (Creswell et al., 2007). An exploratory research design was used to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of the subject (Saunders et al., 2007).

Semi-structured interviews were employed for an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the academics. Different perspectives were sought from several participants who interpreted their experiences of working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic. Potter (1996) argued that interviews are valuable tools for collecting data in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews allowed for an open, in-depth discussion of the research topic (Turner, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) claim that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to understand the complexity of the situation without imposing any prior

categorisation. Through choosing interviews as a method of data collection, the researcher aimed to gain a more insightful and deeper understanding of the academic's work-life experiences of shifting from office space to working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sampling and participants

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select participants for this study. Purposeful sampling was deemed effective as it involves identifying and selecting individuals that are of interest, which enabled the researcher to answer the research question (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, purposive sampling focuses on gaining an understanding of a specific community rather than the generalisability of the findings (Patton, 2015). For this study, participants were selected according to a criterion. The study required people who are employed as academics on a full-time basis and who had to start working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic rules and regulations. This technique allowed the researcher to select participants who were able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences and were willing to articulate their experiences.

The sample was then extended using linear snowball sampling (Taherdoost, 2016). Linear snowball sampling is asking the already identified participants to refer other people known to them who might be willing to contribute to the research topic. These potential participants were approached by the researcher and the help of her supervisor. Those that fulfilled the criteria and were willing to participate in the study, were then interviewed. This sampling strategy increased trust and built rapport between the participant and the researcher as referrals were made by the researcher's supervisor or other participants who were known to them (Atkinson & Fint, 2001). The benefits of snowball sampling are considered particularly in the COVID-19 pandemic where it is hard to reach participants. Referrals made it easier and quicker to find participants as they come from reliable sources. Furthermore, the process of snowball sampling was cost-efficient for the researcher.

Data were collected from 15 participants. All were academics from the University of the study. Their ages ranged from 28 to over 60 years, with an average of 39 years. Only two of the participants lived on their own, while the rest lived with a partner or with family. Of the 12, 66% were married, 27% were single and 7% were divorced. Of those who were parents (66%), 20% had one child, and 47% had more than one child. The participants were

from diverse faculties including Commerce, Science, Engineering, Law and CHED. (Refer to *Table 1* for the summary and demographics of the participants in Appendix A).

Demographic Table

Table 1

Participant information

Participant number	Age	Marital status	Number of people in the house	Number of children	Age of children	Gender
1	28	single	1	0	-	Female
2	31	married	2	0	-	Female
3	28	single	5	1	-	Male
4	37	married	3	1	5	Female
5	36	single	4	1	2	Female
6	43	married	4	2	4 & 8	Female
7	37	married	3	0	-	Male
8	40	married	6	4	8, 7, 4 & 2	Male
9	46	Married	4	2	-	Female
10	+60	married	3	2	40's & 30's	Female
11	44	Divorced	2	0	-	Male
12	30	single	1	0	-	Male
13	40	married	4	2	2 & 5	Female
14	52	married	4	4	4 & 6	Male
15	46	married	4	2	8 & 11	Female

Participant information

Notes: ‘-’ indicates participants with no children.

Procedure

Before data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Committee at the University of Cape Town (REC2021/07/014). The researcher adhered to the APA ethical guidelines that stipulate how the research should be conducted when dealing with a human participant. Participants signed a form consenting to take part in the research. Participants were made aware that they can withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reason. The aims of the research were clearly

explained to the participants, and they were made aware that their privacy and confidentiality will be maintained.

The study was part of a larger study on academics' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. To access academic staff as potential participants, the researcher applied to the Human Resource department at the university. Once the application was approved, an email was sent to 10 per cent of all academics in each faculty. The email contained a summary of the research, the aims and the contact details of the supervisor, and asked interested academics to contact the researcher. However, no participants expressed an interest in participating in the research. Thereafter, the researcher adopted the snowball sampling approach to access participants.

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place virtually via the Microsoft Teams platform. An interview was requested with those academics who had consented to participate. Once each participant agreed to participate, the researcher sent the participant a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any point during the research process and consent for the interview to be recorded. The researcher requested an interview time and date that was suitable. Once a date and time were agreed upon, a meeting invite was sent using Microsoft Teams. The interview schedule was tested with one academic (Chenail, 2011) to ensure coverage and relevance of the questions formulated and identify the possible need to reformulate and adjust any questions (Kallio et al., 2016). No questions were changed after the test interview and the test interview formed part of the data collected.

The researcher began the interview by introducing herself and explaining the background of the study to the participant, to build trust between the participant and the researcher (Qu & Danny, 2011). The participants were reminded of their rights to withdraw at any point without any consequences should they wish so. The researcher asked permission from the participants to record the interview. The researcher was transparent with the participants by not adopting an expert position. The participants were treated as an expert during the research process, this allowed them the opportunity to share their experiences freely (Creswell, 2009). The researcher examined her own judgements, practices, and belief system throughout the data collection process through reflexivity.

Data Collection

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences in their transition to working remotely. The questions such as 'Can you tell me what has changed in your academic responsibilities when your university moved to remote working?' 'What challenges did you experience?' were asked the participants. Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews created more flexibility during the interview. Meaning, that when participants shared their experiences of working remotely, the researcher was able to expand on interesting insights that contributed to understanding more of their experiences. For example, asking questions such as 'what did you mean when you said that?'. The researcher used follow-up questions when the responses were ambiguous to obtain in-depth information that provided meaningful details (Turner, 2010). The follow-up questions were spontaneously designed based on the participant's responses to ask for more elaboration (Whiting, 2008; Turner, 2010; & Chenail, 2011). Probing questions were utilised to help explore more of the academic's experiences. This allowed for further insight and clarity. For instance, "How was this experience for you?" was an example of a 'how' question used to illicit more insightful and rich responses (Adams, 2015). All the interviews were recorded using the Microsoft Team recording feature, and then the researcher manually transcribed the recordings.

Data analysis

The study employed the six stages of the thematic analysis technique presented by Braun and Clark (2006). The thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis is argued to be poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged yet it is widely used in qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nonetheless, it is praised for its diversity and complexity and is seen as a foundational method that researchers should learn as it allows the researcher to provide rich and detailed data by exploring various perspectives of the participants in the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analysis of the data involves a process of moving back and forth with the whole data set to make sense of the information gathered. Therefore, the first step that the researcher took in engaging in the analysis was to familiarise herself with the data. The researcher listened to and watched the recorded interviews, transcribing the interviews and reading the transcribed interviews. In step two, the researcher made notes on interesting knowledge and repeated patterns within the data set such as feeling lonely, exhaustion, and support. This allowed the researcher to generate a list of ideas about what the data entails. In step three, the researcher started to organise the data in a meaningful and systematic way by generating initiate codes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) such as a shift in working styles, enforcing boundaries, and blurred lines between work and family. This reduced the data into small meaningful codes. Some initial codes included: a shift in teaching style, enforcing boundaries between work and family, and social support. After the codes have been examined, the researcher organised and fitted the codes into themes. For example, several codes were related to turning a home into an office. In step four, these codes were then arranged into a theme called, 'Enforcing boundaries between work and family'. In step five, the codes were organised into themes that seemed to answer the research question. The researcher reviewed, modified and developed the preliminary themes. Thus, four main themes emerged "Managing work-family boundaries", "Exhaustion and institutional support", "Remote work as a transition exercise", and "The balance between greater flexibility and loss of human interaction". In the last step, the analysis of the themes was produced in the form of a report. The findings sections illustrated the relationship between the themes and provided evidence by extracting examples to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Research rigour

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is considered one of the appropriate criteria for evaluating qualitative studies (Maher et al, 2018). To establish rigour, four criteria were fulfilled, namely, credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Credibility

Credibility ensures that the research is a true reflection of the social reality of the participants (Maher et al., 2018). To address credibility, the researcher used the interviews most rigorously to ensure reliability and trustworthiness (Patton, 2002). The transcription of the interview was exactly the reflection of what the participants have shared. The researcher was confident that the findings reflected what the research set to answer by interpreting the experiences of academics from their original views, rather than reflecting the bias of the researcher by repeating the answers back to the participants to confirm what they mean.

The strategy used by the researcher to ensure credibility was peer consulting (Guba, 1981). In the process of sharing insights about the data with another researcher on the larger project, the researcher discussed the extent to which her interpretations reflected what the participants have shared as captured in the transcripts.

During the research process, the researcher's supervisor discussed the research findings and provided detailed feedback to the researcher. This continuous guidance allowed the researcher to constantly improve the quality of the research findings. Each section of the research was submitted to the supervisor for critical evaluation. Lastly, the researcher presented the research proposal to a panel of academic staff to provide and assess the feasibility of the study.

Transferability

Transferability implies that findings in the present study could be the same as findings in similar contexts (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). Qualitative research is context-specific (Maher et al., 2018). To establish transferability, the researcher ensured to provide a rich description of the context, experiences, and methods used to meet the aim of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). For example, the method section provides a detailed procedure that was followed, which data collection method was used to collect data and a description of the participants. Providing a rich description of the method section will allow other researchers to transfer the research findings into their contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1982).

Dependability

Dependability ensures that the research process is described in great detail to allow another researcher to repeat the work (Maher et al., 2018). To ensure dependability, the

research provided a clear description of the research process and kept an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). The trail included a description of the purpose of the study, and how and why the participants were selected for the study. The researcher has kept all tools such as recordings of the interviews, notes that were taken during the interview, transcribed interviews, and a reflexive journal. The reflexive journal was used for jotting notes about participants' comments and the researcher's thoughts during the interview. The goal of being reflexive was to identify any personal beliefs that may have incidentally affected the research (Willig, 2008).

Confirmability

Confirmability is comparable to objectivity in quantitative studies (Maher et al., 2018). Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the research during the data collection and data analysis. The researcher aimed to minimise researcher bias by acknowledging her predispositions (Maher et al, 2018). The researcher ensured to interpret the findings of the research accurately to reflect the participants' experiences of their lives by keeping an audit trail. The researcher wrote down topics that were unique and interesting during the data collection and wrote a rationale for why certain codes were merged. This is to avoid the researcher influencing the research processes. Confirmability was achieved through reflexivity.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity has been established as one of the ways qualitative researchers can ensure rigour and quality in their work (Teh & Lek, 2018). It allows researchers to focus on self-knowledge and understand their role in the creation of knowledge (Dodgson, 2019). Acknowledging yourself in the research process allows the researcher to monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences (Berger, 2015). To reflect on the researcher's positionality as an insider, I also form part of the university in which the current study was conducted. I shared similarities with the participants' experiences of working remotely. Although I hold a lower position as a student, I could relate to some of their experiences within the university. This shared similarity must have passively assisted my understanding of the experiences of my research participants throughout the research process.

As the insider, I had access to the culture being studied as I was one of them and could ask more insightful questions and follow-up questions due to possession of prior knowledge in some instances. Being an insider consequently created rapport between myself as the researcher and the participants (Holmes, 2020). To avoid being inherently and unknowingly biased, I needed to acknowledge myself and understand their experiences from their own view of the world. Holmes (2020) suggested that acknowledging your positionality does not only shape a researcher's work but their beliefs in truthfulness and validity.

According to Hubbard et al. (2010), the relationship between the researcher and research participants should be strengthened by reaching racial, economic and gender boundaries. This reflection on the status or identities may help in understanding how these may influence the research process. Both the researcher and the participants' identities such as race and gender remained unchangeable during the research process (Mercer, 2007). I am a young black heterosexual female.

During the research process, I was confronted with the responsibility to understand the differences in gender, race, and socio-economic status, and how these identities may influence the research process and findings (Adeagbo, 2021). All my research participants were older than me and mostly white. Knowing my position within the society might have given the participants power, at times I found it difficult to take charge and freely extract information during the interview process. I needed to keep a detailed journal to track my research process. I would reflect after every interview, this helped me to understand my emotions and experience concerning my research focus, which helped me to inform my interpretation. Furthermore, I monitored how my existing knowledge, experience and assumptions about the intersecting political identities may affect the data collection process by acknowledging these assumptions.

Findings

This research aimed to explore the experiences of academics working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. This chapter presents the four main themes identified using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis: a) Managing work-family

boundaries, b) exhaustion and sources of workplace support, c) remote work as a transition exercise and d) The balance between greater flexibility and loss of human interaction.

Managing work-family boundaries

Academics have tried to create meaningful and helpful boundaries to separate work and family roles while working from their homes. Sub-themes such as time boundaries and space boundaries emerged.

Time boundaries

The analysis of the data revealed that academics working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced work and family challenges because remote work predominantly took place at home. It was important for the academics to create time boundaries between the work and family spheres to ensure a clear division between work and family time as these spheres tended to overlap when working from home.

“This year because of my management role, but also because I have a young son, I was very strict that I was going to start at a certain time and going to end at a certain time and for me, that was particularly important given that I'm home and if you know, if I didn't have my son, you would probably find that I'd be working [longer hours]” (participant 5)

The above participant, who holds a management position, shared stories about the importance of building strong time boundaries between home- and work-life, especially in her role as a mother to a two-year-old child and a partner. She described her working routine prior to the pandemic, and importantly, before having her child as one where she often worked after hours. However, the blurred home and work-life boundaries brought on by the new remote-working structure as well as her responsibilities as a mother forced her to redefine her working routine and hours.

Firmly demarcating a start and end time for remote working from home was an important strategy developed by academics in this study. This strategy enabled them to make a conscious decision about avoiding work overlapping into their home life to keep the sanctity of the home environment intact in the context of remote working. However, this was not always possible because when working from home, one experienced personal disruption during the workday, such as home deliveries:

“I’ve had to take on like more personal admin just because I am here, at home. So, if there’s something related to home or some delivery or something then I’m here. So, then I have to deal with it” (participant 4)

Personal admin during working hours was described as a disruption. These disruptions then affected the participant’s family time in the evenings as she was catching up on work.

Although most academics in this study were able to establish a work-life balance during remote work, some participants continued to experience challenges with separating these domains. Another participant suggested that the challenges of working from home were taking on more responsibilities from work and neglecting the family domain.

“Yeah, you're constantly working and, and unconsciously or consciously, right? But you, you take on the responsibility and uhm you know that the line is too difficult to draw where do you end, right? So, you'll find yourself still responding to student emails or other emails about certain aspects of let's say the department's things we have to do like at 7-8 p.m. Whereas previously, yeah, you could leave it until you get into the office at 8 o'clock tomorrow, right" (participant 7)

The above statement suggests that working from home was more challenging than working in the office. The participant who holds a position as an Associate Professor voiced that he would find himself responding to students and staff emails during family time. All the participants resonated with this challenge. Attending to work even after working hours had a strain on the family time.

Space boundaries

Another participant mentioned that, to create boundaries between work and family life, they could transform the family space into a workplace to transition from one domain more easily to the other. For example,

“Okay, I think, I think two things. One is the physical space stuff. So, moving out of where I was sitting and then, uhm, we've got a spare room with, uhm, the spare slash junk room, you know? So, I redid it completely, it's also actually the cat’s room, so the cat appreciated my presence here, and it's totally revamped now, it has a kind of, almost like an ‘office feel’. Well, with cat litter in it, still [laughs]” (participant 2)

The participant above expressed that physical space was important in separating work from family while working at home. She used a spare room that was previously a cat's room and turned it into an office. The physical space served as a boundary to transition between the work and family domains for this participant and others in the study, making it easy for participants to know when they are attending work and when they are leaving the 'office'.

The participant, who described herself as middle-class and who is in a management position, speaks about the privileges of being able to clearly demarcate her office space in a separate room in her home:

"That is you know, space was a thing. So, I feel like, and it's quite a big room, uhm and its uhm, I don't feel a sense of a kind of not having my own space, I do very much feel I have my own space and it's private. I close the door, so that's that, I'm lucky in my little middle-class life to have that occur, okay but it took me a while, months and months" (participant 10)

While most participants had a separate, private room where they could create an office space, one participant realised that without such, it would not be possible to work from home and hence searched for a new home with a private and conducive home working space:

"The space was not conducive, it meant that we literally we were in lockdown maybe for few months and we just searched for a house and right there moved last year in December which was the best thing we could do because we each have a study, or each has a room that we can be in without disturbance" (participant 2).

The participant who began working at the start of the lockdown expressed that working at home with no dedicated physical space was not conducive. She and her husband had to search for a new house with extra rooms that they could both use as a study or office space. The dedicated working space at home allowed them to focus on work during working hours and made the transition to the family domain seamlessly.

The findings suggest that for many academics in this study, making remote work a success involved demarcating physical boundaries between their work and family lives. The participants argued that this simple strategy offered major psychological and emotional resources to ensure productivity but also, a peaceful family life. Importantly, additional

physical space was acknowledged by some academics as a privileged position that they were nonetheless grateful for.

For some academics, despite having a private space, spatial interruptions persisted

This experience was particularly challenging for academics with young children at home.

“Yeah, so I think, so in terms of space, kids will [laughs] ok I've locked the door now because I don't want them to come into the room. Uhm, it is school holidays, but luckily the two older ones are out, and both the two younger ones are [laughs] already home and so from a space perspective uhm they will be knocking on the door and coming in, and especially last year during lockdown” (participant 8)

Academics with young children, particularly children younger than 10 years at home experienced difficulties effectively working when their children were around. Most participants expressed that demarcating work and family was not very effective for them as children would often come knocking in their ‘office space’. The difficulty and frustration of unsuccessfully establishing a private, quiet office space was described by some as adding more ‘stress’ as noted by the participants below.

“But then I'm also needed because my child is, you know, something has gone wrong and blah blah blah and he is crying and shouting for mummy. I can't just focus on work because I've got that in the background that I can hear, and it adds a layer of stress. So, what I realised is, it's actually luxury to be able to go to work and just focus on work” (participant 4)

"Uhm and because I'm here and they know where I am, as much as I can be in the granny flat and away from the house, and our nanny can be attending to them. If they want to come to visit, they will come and visit, come hell or high water. Uhm, so, yeah, and it's difficult to say, no, no, no all the time when you're in their presence" (participant 14)

The above example suggested that the separation of physical space does not always guarantee work productivity or privacy. One of the participants with a young child described returning to work and having an office space as a ‘luxury’ countering the ways in which remote working has traditionally been constructed as convenient.

Theme 2: Exhaustion and sources of workplace support

Academics indicated that they experienced an extensive state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion whilst working remotely due to the sudden transition to remote working without any preparation. The transition to remote working resulted in academics working long hours as they carried more work and family responsibilities while working at home, such as responding to students' emails late at night and converting material to suit the online space and recording. This theme speaks to the experiences of academics' exhaustion and the support they received, or support they believe is needed to buffer the consequences of exhaustion while they continued to work from home:

Most participants expressed that because the lockdown restricted their movements, most of their time was spent on work activities.

“I didn't do any social things, I didn't see anyone, I didn't get in the car and drive anywhere, I just worked. And when I say work, I'm talking about every single day including weekends”. (Participant 10)

For the participant, more time was spent on working because the transition to remote teaching required new tasks from academics such as converting their teaching material into online appropriate material including the recording of lecture videos and identifying creative ways to keep students motivated and engaged in the remote learning environment. This transition was time and energy-intensive for academics.

“So, I've been also speaking to some staff members, and I sort of reflect on those as well, and I share the same concern is, is burnouts, like we tend to be a lot of burnouts among staff. A lot of this has to do with, in a way, it kind of feels like our days don't end" (Participant 7)

Similar to participant 7's description of his work as ongoing, other academics shared this sentiment and particularly spoke to their new work schedules as resulting in exhaustion and burnout. The above participant expressed that working remotely is the main cause of burnout as this was not experienced when they were working in the office. Being online allowed them to constantly work even after the workday had ended. He expressed that his workday no longer ends at a reasonable time because he is always available to do work due to no physical boundaries between work and home.

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“I spend more time working, uhm, say I said it’s very difficult to switch off working because the environment is the same when you wake up, you just prepared to work and you never switch off, even during the weekend. You’re kind of, 'maybe there's something that I need to do for my work uhm, yeah, you just do work all the time" (participant 1)

In the above extract from the participant, she expressed that her exhaustion is mostly affected by the environment she is working in. The inability to physically transition between her workplace and her some space from work to home exacerbated her psychological preoccupation with work saying that she could not ‘switch off’ from working mode. This led her to work on weekends, with the feeling that there is something to be done or to catch up. In addition, not being able to switch off is largely driven by the remote working method of being online and connected, and therefore always being available. This was particularly challenging for academics who were new.

"With being new, already I need to learn the content that I need to teach, right? Now I also need to learn how to teach, how to do the content and how to put it online. How to make it most engaging, how to oh gosh I spent hours and hours and hours on end working. I worked weekends still. It meant that some days, there was, there was a month where I worked 7 days a week straight, and it led to me having an anxiety attack I didn't know" (Participant 3)

The participant who is young and new in academia expressed feelings of exhaustion, stress, and uncertainty. She had to put extra effort into learning the material as she had never taught it before. In addition, she had to learn how to teach online. Teaching online meant more hours of work for her. While all academics reiterated this experience, being young and new and facing all these additional work demands of remote work, affected her wellbeing.

The findings revealed that academics experiencing exhaustion, relied on social support as a coping strategy. Most academics received relied on informal support from colleagues and friends:

“Uhm, even though there is no like, that level of interaction between me and my colleagues but I think having a chat with one or two of my colleagues during the day. Even if it’s not about work and we just unwind and try to debrief. I think that is one of the things that is keeping me going, to be honest" (Participant 1)

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“Uhm, I was occasionally having a call with people that I might normally see in the building, so we’d set up, you know, just a chat or coffee chat. We had a couple of group chats, just social, social chats early on, and that helped a lot” (participant 6)

Academics valued having informal conversations with their colleagues and used these as a form of support. Additionally, another participant shared that they used their WhatsApp group chat as an online platform to encourage each other and shared valuable strategies on how to manage remote working. For example, one of the academics shared:

"I think there were a couple of sessions where folks who had been teaching in the first semester when everything kicked off, shared what they have learned and what they had done to help those of us who were going into second-semester teaching".
(Participant 6)

“Do you need me to lecture that session? Do you need me to write uhm, they understand that I can be overwhelmed and they always, they willing to give a helping hand, yah” (Participant 12)

The sharing of experiences informally, amongst colleagues was perceived as support as it helped them to prepare for their teaching in the best possible way. One participant expressed that those who taught in the first semester when the shift to remote teaching started, shared what they had learnt. This sharing of experiences helped those who were teaching in the second semester to best prepare for online teaching hence it was perceived as valuable support.

Furthermore, another participant stated that his colleagues were willing to help out when he was feeling overwhelmed. Their support would be through reducing the workload for him, such as lecturing on his behalf.

“So, that really helps [to relax] –the spending time with friends on the weekend.”
(Participant 3)

The above participant shared that time spent with friends meant more relaxation, taking time away from work and recuperation to start the week in a good state of mind.

“Uhm, I was occasionally having a call with people that I might normally see in the building, so we’d set up, you know, just a chat or coffee chat, or actually there were”
(Participant 6)

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The above extract indicated that because she had already established a relationship with her colleagues as she would see them in the building before the pandemic, it was easy for her to reach out to them occasionally. They created what was called a 'coffee chat' which was virtual where they would sit and talk about anything. These coffee chats were an important strategy that was developed so that they don't feel isolated from one another.

“Uhm, the new lecturers we are kind of like a little team, the three of us, one starting in 2019, me in 2020 and the other one 2021 so kind of have our little WhatsApp group” (Participant 2)

The academic who was new in the department expressed that her source of support included the team of other new lecturers in the section. They formed a chat group themselves. The group chat provided them with the opportunity to discuss things they were not familiar with amongst each other before they could ask for help from the older staff or their supervisors. This allowed them to provide feedback and support each other.

Academics likewise expressed that support was also received from the institutions in the form of formal resources:

“So, I suppose the other support, which is like a general support in like an academic setting, is the fact that we could have used our research funds to buy office-based equipment” (Participant 5)

“There's a time when we're given data allowance. So, which you upload obviously work because some people didn't have the internet at home" (participant 3)

The participants reported that the university allowed them to use their research funds to buy office equipment that they could use at home to create a home office, such as an office desk. This experience was compared to pre-Covid, here the participant stated she was not allowed to use her research funds on equipment prior to the pandemic. Data allowances were also given to academic staff to support their remote working. As they were working from home, they depended on the internet and the data allowance was one of the supporting resources that were valued by the academics.

Although participants spoke to the value of having institutional support during the COVID-19 pandemic, not all the academics in this study believed the university to

successfully have offered this support. Staff wellness was felt not to be a priority to the university, and this had implications on their well-being.

“I feel like there’s more to be done, especially in terms of work uhm of stuff uhm and trying to be considerate in terms of the context that we are living in uhm and trying to think about uhm our health as academic” (participant 1)

"I think there need to be more check-ins. I mean checking with each employee. How are you doing? Leading in a time like this is less about deliverables, but more about man management...I'll give you an example, Ramaphosa. That family meeting is a check-in. This is where we are at. This is what is happening, please take care of yourselves" (Participant 3)

The participant quoted above stated that the resources provided by the university were valued. However, more check-ins were required. These check-ins would enable them to express how they are feeling and if they are coping with working remotely so that their emotional and psychological needs were considered for improving their wellbeing and health. Participant 3 made use of the president’s speech where the president would address the nation. According to this academic, this was equivalent to what the university should do with their staff by providing more check-ins.

Several academics perceived that the university prioritised students over their staff’s health and that support was limited for academic staff.

“It’s about the student and literally nothing about the lecturer, the lecturer is not seen in this equation of this relationship at the university setting” (participant 2)

“Yeah, I feel like the university hasn’t exactly practised what they’ve preached in their communications around wellness. I think more like counselling and like psychological [supports are needed]” (participant 5)

Participants indicated that during the shift to remote working and dealing with the pandemic, the university could have prioritised staff wellness in the same sense as they prioritised student wellness. It is suggested that during this period, academics learnt how to be kind to students, supporting students in the best ways with the understanding that they are faced with confusion, anxiety, and personal crises due to the pandemic. However, this understanding was not extended to the staff by the university. For instance, it was felt that the

academic calendar catered for students more than for staff. For example, the teaching calendar was adjusted, and students were alerted before the academics were aware of how their adjusted calendar would look like. Another participant suggested counselling and psychological resources need to be offered to staff to buffer the stress from working in this demanding and uncertain environment.

Theme 3: Remote work as a transition exercise

The transition to remote working has been the most challenging event experienced by academics. The transition was rapid and required them to make adjustments to accommodate the pandemic. This was challenging as they were trying to manage the pandemic and adjust to the COVID-19 protocols. This theme speaks about the transition to online academic work and the processes participants followed in re-creating their teaching, for example, to work more effectively for remote and physically distant audiences.

"The biggest change was of course the online right. My teaching responsibilities have remained the same" (participant 7)

Most participants expressed that their teaching and supervisory responsibilities remained the same. The only change experienced was the shift of everything taking place online.

"I mean, so you know before when you prepared for lectures, you just prepared for the lecture, and you went to the venue, and you delivered the lecture. But now you prepare for the lecture, then you record the lecture, then you try to make the site, or the lessons type as interactive as possible" (participant 3)

The above extract from the participant indicates ways in which the role of teaching has changed to require several additional requirements for teaching including the need to record the lecture videos and create a course site in ways that would encourage students to engage with the material and activities.

"And change your course, uhm, face to face to online without any sort of training or anything like that, so that was a lot of work, and I was trying to come up with how you will, you know switch the course from face-to-face to online" (Participant 12)

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This transition required investment of time from academics to attend online courses to learn these skills to deliver high-quality lessons. They had to learn how to modify learning material to suit the online teaching space. This translated into several more hours to prepare a lecture.

“A combination of what I normally would say in class and then a combination of the textbook. Then, coupled with that, we also have to ensure that the tutorials that students were given were adequately explained” (Participant 8)

The additional hours required from teaching was necessary to ensure that students received as much information and resources as possible to reduce their uncertainty and maximise learning as recorded lectures restricted students’ opportunity to ask questions. The lecturer needed to be explicit as students had no access to in-depth tutorials where they could ask questions and frequently consult with their lecturers.

Academics also shared that they experienced many interruptions at home when trying to record lectures resulting in having to do the recordings over and over:

“While you’re recording there’s someone in the background talking about something, it goes into your recording (laughs) and you have to start fresh” (Participant 3)

Another concern expressed by the participants was the change in the nature and mode of assessment which created further stress for the academics because of the uncertainty of how to adapt assessments suitable for the online environment to maintain the integrity of the assessment and ensure that students are assessed fairly given that the students have different access to resources.

“How would assessments work? how would the criteria change? how do we make sure that uhm, students are not dishonest when it comes to assessing, to online assessments” (Participant 4)

“So, so there was that frustration and then trying to get all of the, everything into notes, uhm, I found, I found [it] very very difficult because a lot of students learn in different ways and if you only have the notes, that’s only speaking to one way of learning” (Participant 8)

The two participants above expressed that the assessment of students had to change. This resulted in more work for them as they had to recreate the course outline to meet the

online teaching. In addition, the academics stated that they were not happy with offering one mode of learning to students which was through online as this limited their learning abilities. Academics were cognisant that not all students had the resources to study online which affected both the students and the lecturers. This made them feel like they are failing the students who do not have the resources to meet the demands of the online environment.

Furthermore, some participants stated that it was a challenge to teach remotely during the pandemic owing to a lack of resources, incurring extra costs of having to purchase equipment to make it easier to record. In some departments, academics felt that they were not provided with the necessary resources to fulfil online teaching, while other participants spoke to the challenges they experienced with unpredictable and unreliable internet connectivity— an issue many South Africans are frequently trying to navigate due to unpredictable load shedding schedules.

“So, you know if you don’t have a camera, you’ve got to buy your own camera. If you don’t have a microphone, you’ve got to buy your own microphone” (Participant 15)

“For example, the uhm, uh internet suddenly dropping uhm talking to students, or whether you’re talking to staff, that for me, has been quite a bad experience”
(Participant 7)

Unstable internet connectivity and load-shedding were frustrating for academics as they would miss out on important information. Another participant mentioned that their internet would be out for three days at their home, and he would have to find a convenient place to work from.

Academics stated that the administration of the courses took most of their time. When there is an assignment coming or going out, they are heavily involved in the marking and sending feedback to students. With unstable internet connectivity, it delays the response rate to students and creates a backlog of emails.

Email volumes have increased significantly for academics during remote work as it has become the primary way to communicate with other staff and students. Academics were presented with a lot of inquiries about the structure and the assessment of the courses as courses were moved online. It appears that students were confused and anxious about the changes implemented by the university which resulted in them asking questions through

emailing their lecturers. Replying to students' emails timeously reassured them and provided clarity on their academics but added to the working hours and workload of academics.

"You know, when you're convening a first-year course there's a lot of emails. Students are anxious you know, they scared, they want you to reassure them, so I would say there are lots of emails you know" (Participant 12)

"Uhm because you know, as students have problems that they've never had before because they're also having a difficult time. So, then you know, whereas before we had, like say I'm just going to give up a mythical number like say twenty students' queries came to you in a week. Now there's like 40 or 50" (Participant 4)

"So, I think the administrative support systems that have worked really well previously, have basically become non-existent" (Participant 13)

The extract above suggests that academics experienced limited administrative assistance to help them fulfil their responsibilities and liaise between them and the students. As a result, more work was generated. The existing support was not catered to accommodate the online learning mode hence they describe it as non-existent. A participant shared that when they were working in the office, it was easy to walk into the administrator's office and discuss what they might need. However, during the online working, they were unable to see the person and could only access them virtually. This resulted in many academics taking on administrative tasks themselves which added extra work.

Theme 4: The balance between greater flexibility and loss of human interaction

Academics have shared that the transition to remote working resulted in some benefits such as flexibility. Remote working allowed them to work according to their own time and space. Some academics also stated that they experienced fewer interruptions from their colleagues and students as they were isolated from them. Nonetheless, they have missed the human interaction with colleagues and students.

Academics shared their experiences of appreciating not being forced to be at work at a certain time, so they would maximise the time not spent travelling to work. One participant shared that they would record all lectures for the week in one day. This enabled them to focus on other personal responsibilities.

“The other nice thing that I really liked about it; I could give lectures for a week in a day” (Participant 12)

“I love it this way because then it allows me the flexibility of say, for example, I work 13:50 today and I say, you know that I need to do something else to re-energize myself. Maybe I go to the beach and then come back and work” (Participant 3)

The above extracts suggest that academics valued having autonomy. As a result, it allowed them to work ahead and have agency over their time. From the flexibility perspective, academics revealed that working remotely saved them time and money. The time saved on commuting was then spent with family. For example, one participant revealed that working remotely allowed them to spend time with their children, take them to school every day and not get someone else to do this on their behalf. One of the strategies they employed to ensure flexibility was to prepare the lectures at night.

Another participant explained remote work as a shift from ‘do I see you every day’ to ‘are you getting your work done’. This suggests that seeing a colleague at work might not mean that they are working and being productive, but that remote work revealed that academics take full responsibility for their work without being supervised closely if they are working or not.

It was interesting to note that women valued flexibility differently compared to men. Women expressed that it allowed them to make dinner for their families. The time that would be spent in a face-to-face meeting would be spent on cooking.

“And if I have those kinds of meetings where I have to be present, but I don’t have to have my video on and I don’t have to have my mic on and its solely kind of lie listening to discussions, I normally use that time to cook” (Participant 5)

“If I fetch them or if my husband fetches them then they come only sort of past four, five and then supper is ready and just that, that one thing [laughs] not having to walk in the door at 5 and rushed to get supper ready by like half-past five it's a huge shift” (Participant 6)

Remote work was associated with fewer interruptions as the result of being isolated from colleagues and students. Participants expressed that they were able to focus on their work without students interrupting them.

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“I think it also allows you to be a bit more focussed so if I’m in the office, there are often, I would have my door open, and students would be walking past and coming to ask questions or I’ve been chatting to colleagues” (Participant 8)

As suggested by the example provided above, participants revealed that working remotely allowed them to focus on their work more compared to when they were working in the office because they no longer had colleagues and students walking into their offices. One participant described this as “networking” In addition, the student would come and consult with the lecturers during the day. Sometimes these consultations were not planned as they would just knock on the door. This sometimes meant that academics would not finish their tasks on time.

Academics who are in management positions also expressed that working remotely saved them from staff interruptions. Their offices would normally be busy as colleagues would come in and address any queries they might have. Working remotely meant that they were able to manage how they spend their time and when they are attending to staff queries. One participant who holds a management position expressed that she thinks that because it takes time and effort to send an email and wait for a response, colleagues have taken a step to solve their problems or make decisions for themselves. Due to the office disruptions, they would prefer to have some days working from home to avoid interruptions.

"So, you know I've always said that I wished that I could work at, from home sometimes, just because my office was a very busy office, people used to come in all the time" (Participant 13)

“Everybody would run into my office to ask me something and it’s like I would constantly be disrupted” (Participant 5)

Work interactions have changed as academics moved to remote working. Most participants have expressed that they have a very close working relationship with their colleagues which has resulted in a more personal relationship. However, during remote working, that human interaction has been lost. Technology has been used to keep workers in touch. However, participants have reported that their virtual meetings lack human connection as they would switch their camera’s off during a meeting to stabilise connectivity issues.

“I don’t know if I would describe it as a challenge but the main thing that I missed was just that kind of informal social contact, social and professional contact with colleagues” (Participant 6)

One participant reported that he missed interacting with humans, and as a result, he was looking forward to picking up kids at schools as this allowed him to chat with other parents as this was lost by working remotely.

Human interaction was also critical for academics as teaching online became challenging. Remote teaching lacked student engagement. All the participants shared the students did not engage with the content online and it was difficult to grasp if they were understanding the content or not. Normally, during face-to-face classes, lecturers would read students facial expressions to know if they understood the content they were teaching. However, in an online learning mode, learning was either asynchronous or students’ cameras were switched off. Furthermore, students did not ask questions during the online lectures compared to face-to-face classes. This was also experienced in online supervision meetings.

"That, that kind of human interaction face-to-face interaction is critical. Now we've been robbed of that. So, I go on and I'll lecture. I lecture live. I do not know whether the students are understanding what I'm saying or not" (participant 7)

“I want to sit with you, and I want to draw on the paper and I want to write on the paper and make sure that you understand and so students will sit there, and they’ll nod and they’re like ‘ok’, I get it, but they don’t actually get it” (Participant 5)

The theme suggested that academics enjoyed the flexibility of working remotely. It awarded the academics control over when and where they work. On the other hand, academics missed and longed for human interaction with their colleagues and students.

Discussion

The purpose of the research was to gain in-depth insight into the lived experiences of academics working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. The findings suggested that academics experienced unique challenges of balancing their work with family while working remotely, particularly related to teaching and especially for those with young

children at home. The findings revealed that some academics created boundaries to keep work and family separate by creating boundaries between these domains while working from home. Boundaries were created by mimicking an office space at home to avoid the family domain overlapping with the work domain. Furthermore, the findings revealed that academics experienced exhaustion and feelings of isolation during the pandemic. Personal and institutional support was used to buffer the negative effects of isolation and exhaustion. Some academics enjoyed the freedom and flexibility of working from home while others described returning to work as a 'luxury' because attempts to create a productive, healthy home office environment were unsuccessful, especially during the hard lockdown when work and family overlapped constantly. This study's implications offer recommendations for how human resource professionals and universities can better manage their employee's work-family balance during times of crisis.

The discussion chapter begins with presenting descriptions of the findings of the research and comparing the findings with prior literature to make sense of the results of the research. These descriptions will be presented in four sections, creating boundaries between work and family during the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work is socially distant yet flexible, crisis management and reaction in Higher education, and communication and the use of technology. This is followed by the contribution of the study to the field, implications for practice, and the limitations and recommendations for future research.

Creating boundaries between work and family during the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic has devastated many aspects of daily life (Dwivedi et al., 2020), and as a result, the government implemented measures such as lockdown restrictions to reduce in-person contact to contain the spread of the virus. Rapid changes occurred in the way universities operated because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fetherston et al., 2021) and this change impacted academic interactions with colleagues and families and how they perform their work. Consequently, academics experienced blurred lines between work and family during working remotely. Boundary theory helps to explain their experiences because it captures how individuals construct psychological and behavioural boundaries around work and family to assist in them attending to work and family responsibilities (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). The research findings suggested that academics constructed cognitive boundaries and physical boundaries in an attempt to avoid a role spilling over to the other

role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) describe spill-over as transpiring when working remotely results in attention, time and physical presence being demanded by the other domain. Ultimately, causes work-family conflict. The creation of office space at home was an important boundary that helped academics to physically separate work from family and subsequently prevent conflict, particularly for those living with others at home. This strategy is in support of Nippert-Eng's (1996) segmentation preference. Academics preferred to keep their work and family separate while work was taking place at home, with the premise that segmenting their roles would reduce work and family conflict.

The shift to remote working required academics to adjust their home environment (Dwivedi et al., 2020) to fit the online teaching environment. Another strategy employed was the demarcation of a start and end time to their workday. Due to the increased use of technology to deliver education during the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and academic work environment (Retherston et al., 2021), having a start and end time allowed academics to mimic the office working hours and enabled them to attend to their family responsibilities during known 'family' time. Wang and colleagues (2020) explained this strategy as an attribute that helps remote workers mitigate the destructive effects of interruptions as self-discipline.

In the context of COVID-19 where academics were forced to work remotely, according to Wang et al. (2020) self-discipline became an important aspect of working remotely. However, not everyone was able to create temporal psychological boundaries as they did not always feel like they had this choice. Work-family integration happened almost automatically, as also reported by (Naidu & Modise, 2021), hence it was difficult for some to demarcate spaces and times for work and home activities. Furthermore, creating an office space at home can be costly and accordingly it was challenging to demarcate spaces, especially for those who lived with family members creating work-family conflict. These research findings are consistent with those of Naidu and Modise (2021) who also conducted their study in the South African COVID-19 context.

A further challenge experienced by academics was not being able to differentiate between working days and weekends. Academics were occupied by work even during the weekends. Spending more time working even after working hours meant that less time was spent on family responsibilities. The research findings are supported by Naidu and Modise (2021) that technology facilitates blurred boundaries between work and family. Academics,

therefore, found that it was challenging to detach from work (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017) as technology creates the ability to be available anytime and anywhere. For instance, academics received emails at all times during the day and on weekends, and they would attend to those emails at anytime and anywhere from their laptops and mobile phones, contributing to feelings of exhaustion. This also made family boundaries more permeable so that work often interfered with family time (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017).

The study findings imply that remote work produced work-family conflict for many academics especially those with children at home because of the dual pressures that made work and family roles feel incompatible. These findings are consistent with those of Schieman et al. (2021), Qian and Fuller (2020) and Usher et al. (2020). One key takeaway from this research was that the age of children at home was an important factor. Academics with children younger than 10 years reported more blurred boundaries between work and family. This can be explained by the fact that young children have unique demands such as daily care, supervision, and home-schooling where they are not yet independent to do their work on their own (Qian & Fuller, 2020). Thus, demanding higher levels of time and attention from their parents. Accordingly, many academics' well-being was physically and psychologically affected. For example, increased levels of stress and anxiety due to time management were prominent in those with young children at home. In this regard, the role of industrial psychology practitioners becomes vital in addressing psychological challenges experienced by employees during the pandemic. One way in which this can be done is through fostering supervisor support (e.g., family supportive supervisor behaviours) (Hammer et al., 2014) and family-friendly organisational support for employees managing work and family roles.

Academics with young children also suffered due to the restricted social interactions as there were no childcare facilities to provide childcare support during the lockdown. Squazzoni et al. (2020) reasoned that this lack of support can be detrimental to parents' mental health, which ultimately affects parents' ability to manage work and parenting roles (Usher et al., 2020). Thus, a new role burden was created with no alternatives as they tried to minimise social interactions. Parents felt conflicted in choosing work activities over children—a finding that was similarly noted in the current study. The COVID-19 restrictions also meant that academics no longer had opportunities to meet with friends and families which they usually assist with childcare responsibilities. Similarly, contributed to their work-family

conflict (Wang et al., 2020) because they were following the regulations of social distancing and staying at home.

This study elucidated the pressure women have faced because of their increased domestic workload from being at home all the time. Women have engaged in more domestic duties than men during the lockdown (Ferguson et al., 2020). These duties included taking the role of assisting with home-schooling because schools and daycare were closed. It seems to be those gender role expectations associated with being a mother and a wife (Adisa et al., 2020) meant that mothers were mostly responsible for childcare and housework despite having a full-time work role that had to take place during the same hours in the day creating dual demands that furthered their work-family conflict. It is, therefore, the responsibility of industrial psychology practitioners to apply their skills and identify interventions to ensure those female employees are accommodated to increase their wellbeing (Moralo & Graupner, 2022).

Despite both males and females being involved in multiple roles such as familial duties which left their time and energy depleted resulting in role conflict (Adisa et al., 2020), some researchers (Squazzoni et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2020) have supported gender differences in work-family balance issues during COVID-19. Squazzoni et al. (2020) attributed these differences to employers' expectations of male versus female employees. Men tend to use flexible working to improve their work performance while women are expected to increase their family responsibilities when working remotely, which potentially increases their work-family conflict (Chung & Van de Lippe, 2018). In this research, women have shared a higher level of stress that resulted from work and family conflict while men shared children as being a disturbance to their working days. While women academics indicated that their children's responsibilities were shared with their spouses, they felt that most of the responsibilities fall on them as mothers. Responsibilities falling into the mothers can be explained by the social role theory. Eagly et al. (2000) proposed that gender divides labour between two sexes, that is, men are expected to engage in paid labour while women are involved in domestic responsibilities. As a result of the division of labour, the inequalities between men and women have deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chung et al., 2020) and resulted in implications for their work-life balance. Thus, supervisor support or counselling may be beneficial in alleviating work-family conflict experienced by female academics in the workplace.

Remote work is socially distant yet flexible.

Loneliness and loss of human interaction

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, all the participants in this study used to work in the office and were forced to work remotely due to social distancing protocols imposed by the government. Workers no longer met in person anymore to engage in ad-hoc conversations as they did not share a common physical working space (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Thus, feelings of loneliness were identified as one of the pressing challenges among academics working remotely during the pandemic. These findings are consistent with recent research (Wang et al., 2021) that reported loneliness as a challenge while flexibility was reported as an advantage for working remotely (Parham & Rauf, 2020). Therefore, this study supports that academics' experienced both positive and negative effects of remote working as proposed by Parham and Rauf (2020).

Owing to the lack of social contact that employees usually experience in the workplace, academics were overwhelmed with feelings of loneliness and lack of interaction. According to Smith et al. (2020), higher levels of social isolation were reported to relate to negative mental health outcomes which decreased performance, work engagement, and increased job-related stress (Galanti et al., 2021). Academics lost human interaction not only with their colleagues but also with their students (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Working remotely meant that this bond was no longer experienced between co-workers. Consequently, remote work was characterised by emotional effects of isolation (Al-Taweel et al., 2020) such as low motivation and engagement (Kulikowski et al., 2021). These experiences reported vividly demonstrate the value of support at the organisational level. Career counselors are then urged to integrate career and mental health counselling interventions as working in isolation can impact employees' mental health (Autin et al., 2020). For example, an intervention that focuses on helping academics identify methods outside of work to fulfill social connections may be beneficial in lessening the effects of social isolation caused by remote work.

Consistent with the findings of Sretenovic et al., (2021), this current research has indicated that academics were faced with the challenge of not finding an optimal way of connecting with co-workers and students as the relationship with co-workers was substituted

with family members living in their home during the lockdown. This suggested that students required extra support from their lecturers because they could not get detailed feedback or explanation due to the loss of connection. In addition, academics in this current research suggested that it became harder to get verbal cues of whether the students were grasping their learning content. According to Shetty et al. (2020), face-to-face interactions motivate students to learn, help them interact with one another, and share opinions concurrently. These opportunities were lost during remote teaching among academics in this study. Furthermore, remote teaching affected academics' self-efficacy (Beatson et al., 2020) due to not having prior experience with online delivery. This study's findings also indicated that academics did not trust themselves to deliver effective online teaching as they were used to teaching students face-to-face.

This can be explained using self-efficacy theory, self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence about their ability to succeed in performing a task (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is built on previous experience, verbal persuasion, vicarious learning and physiological state. Prior research has shown that mastery experience has a powerful impact on an individual's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Beatson et al., 2020; Yeh et al., 2019). The current findings indicated that most academics had no experience working remotely before the pandemic. Verbal persuasion was also affected, academics did not have ad-hoc conversations with their colleagues and did not see their colleagues work to get motivated or to build each other's self-efficacy. Beatson et al. (2020) argued that when people are faced with uncertainty, it is important for communities to support one another and build each other's self-efficacy. However, this opportunity was lost due to isolation.

Furthermore, for new academics, it became difficult to establish relationships with co-workers whilst relying on online tools. Chiles and Zorn (1995) support this notion and state that self-efficacy can be influenced through verbal persuasion in existing relationships. Meaning, that new colleagues will experience challenges in forming relationships with existing staff during the pandemic. Feelings of isolation have been established in earlier studies to have negative results on an individual's health (Soysa & Wilcomb, 2015; Galanti et al., 2021). Remote working is perceived as weakening the sense of community (McGaughey et al., 2021) that was established by academics within their department. Nonetheless, academics attempted to fill this gap with the support that they received from their colleagues and managers through online opportunities.

The effects of isolation did not only affect academic well-being. The academics in this study expressed the ways in which confidence in their teaching was negatively affected as it was challenging to remain motivated when students' cameras were off. This hindered building rapport between the lecturer and the students and observing their reactions and understanding of the content. Beatson et al. (2020) argued that such problems could be overcome by training academic techniques to engage better with students in an online environment. However, it must be noted that the academics demonstrated resilience in the context of the pandemic, in how they faced major challenges and obstacles.

Flexible working arrangements

The sudden shift to remote work affected academics in different ways (Beatson et al., 2020). However, academics experienced flexibility as one of the positive characteristics of working remotely during the pandemic. Working remotely enabled academics, some for the first time, to have autonomy over their work. Flexibility has been established in the literature as one of the positive attributes of working remotely (Bao et al., 2020; Parham & Rauf, 2020; Soni et al., 2020; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020 & Rahman et al., 2020). Flexibility enables employees to choose when and where they want to work. Thus, it gives individuals time and location flexibility (Soni et al., 2021). Findings suggested that academics appreciated not being forced to work at a certain time, these enabled them to cut costs of travelling to work and time spent on preparing for work (McGaughey et al., 2021). Consequently, comfortability was found in working without dressing formally for work, such as working in pyjamas.

Working according to their own time enabled them to attend to family responsibilities and personal responsibilities. Using the boundary theory to understand these experiences, academics having the ability to expand the work domain to meet family and personal needs has presented them with less work-to-family conflict as suggested by Allen et al. (2014). It is interesting to note that, concerning flexibility, women reported using the time on cooking dinner and bathing children whilst men reported using the time to see friends and attend 'happy hour' once the lockdown restrictions were eased. These findings are consistent with McGaughey et al. (2021), who found that men in their research described their free time as focusing on individual actions while women were found to experience increased domestic duties. These findings suggest a response to remote working was gendered.

Remote work has provided academics with new ways of working. It must be noted that the transition to remote work was sudden, and some employees have no experience of working remotely. For such, new forms of working were established such as getting work done irrespective of being supervised. In the literature, employees were reported to take full responsibility for their work (Gelles et al., 2021). These experiences have the potential to inform practitioners on new ways of flexible working arrangements and how to improve work conditions that support flexible working. These can inform new policies and regulations that support academics in working more flexibly as it is a win-win situation for the organisation and the employee. The flexibility aspect of remote working was extended to students, where academics became flexible in assisting, marking students' assessments and being accessible to students. Academics were flexible with submission deadlines whereby students were granted an extension with less paperwork compared to face-to-face learning. Gelles et al. (2021) expressed that academic flexibility helped students adapt to the new context of online learning.

Crisis management and reaction in Higher education

The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to higher education (Gelles et al., 2020). It is not the first time a crisis has caused a shift to remote learning and working. Academic disruptions have occurred because of natural disasters such as earthquakes and student protests (Gelles et al., 2020; Gomes, 2011; Mackey et al., 2012; Czerniewicz et al., 2019). Universities played a huge role in helping academics adapt to the changing working environment (Guangul et al., 2020). There is a variety of strategies people used to cope with stressful events (Vaziri et al., 2020). As such, academics created tactics that worked best for them such as calendar invites, time management, and setting boundaries. All these tactics were rooted in the strategy of being self-disciplined. Academics reported experiencing excessive increased workload due to the rapid transition to remote working coupled with an uncondusive working environment. These findings are not surprising, as universities had a short time to completely change their teaching style and the way they teach. Gelles et al. (2020) expressed that remote learning is effective if it is adequately planned and both the students' and lecturers' expectations are well defined. However, in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities reacted to the best of their abilities and the available resources (Gelles et al., 2020). The participants in this research shared how challenging it was

to navigate unplanned remote working at home. Academics had to go through the gesture of making extra effort to work long hours and extend their empathy for students' plight.

The research suggested that academics learned empathy and humaneness during the transition to remote working. The university encouraged academics to be more understanding of the students' difficulties as some had no access to online resources to meet the demands of the online learning environment. To support these findings, Gulles et al. (2020) expressed that during a pandemic, extra attention such as empathy is crucial. Showing empathy in an online world however can be challenging. This was mitigated through frequently responding to students, granting an extension of assessments, and making course material more assessable (Gulles et al., 2020). Students have been reported to appreciate and thrive when shown compassion and flexibility (Gulles et al., 2020). Unfortunately, this increased workload for academics as they took more responsibility upon themselves to answer students' questions. The findings in this research may guide practitioners into developing person-centered frameworks to help organisations better understand the changes produced by the pandemic (Byrd, 2022). A person-centered framework will help to support specific needs of remote workers whilst instilling new norms. Ultimately contributing to a healthy remote working culture.

Perceived support during the pandemic

To manage the COVID-19 crisis, working in isolation and working remotely, social, and institutional support was perceived as being extremely valuable during the pandemic (Watermeyer et al., 2021). The study findings alluded to emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion experienced by academics due to the rapid shift to remote working. Receiving a sense of support was reported to lessen the impact of exhaustion when working remotely. Academics have indicated to provide support to one another during the time of the pandemic. The support provided assisted in managing work stresses which improved well-being outcomes (Daniels & Harris, 2005).

The principle underlying the mediating role of support is based on the notion that employees may perceive jobs that cause stress as harmful (Van Zoonen et al., 2021). Social support theory further strengthens these arguments that supportive actions of others enhance coping strategies during difficult times (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). The research has suggested that remote work during the pandemic has exacerbated work-family conflict (Van

Zoonen et al., 2020) and the uncertainty of the nature of the pandemic has yielded negative results for employees such as stress and reduced productivity and job insecurity (Van Zoonen et al., 2020). Participants in this current research have suggested that co-worker support was an important factor in their lives. Individuals with supportive co-workers lost out on the positive impact of those co-workers in both work and nonwork aspects of their lives as work moved to the home (George et al., 2021). Academics offered emotional, psychological, and behavioural support to one another, for instance, they shared tactics on how they can make the abrupt transition to remote working easier and manageable.

Institutional support was also perceived as a great strategy to deal with the transition to remote working. Individuals reported the appreciation of resources offered by the institution as they shifted to working remotely without any preparations, therefore, lacked resources. The literature has established that internet access and availability of resources were significant challenges for students and academics (Gorbe et al., 2020; Quenza et al., 2020). Hence, supporting them with resources such as research funds, data allowance, and office equipment was valued and improved their remote working experience. Richardson et al. (2008) expressed that organisational support mediates the relationship between stressors and psychological strain hence individuals value the support.

Nonetheless, academics have indicated that emotional support was lacking during the pandemic, emotional support from the institution was among the most desired support by the academics in the study. Meaning, that tangible support in the means of technology and equipment, as well as co-worker support, was helpful but insufficient to buffer the negative effects of the pandemic (Dawson et al., 2016) to enable academics to cope with workplace stressors. These findings can be explained using the Job-Demand-Resource Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006), the Job-Demand-Resource Model encourages the functioning of employees' wellbeing.

The model suggests that stress arises from the imbalance between the demands of the job and the resources available to meet those demands and social support can be used to buffer the negative outcomes of the imbalance between job demands and the resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006). The literature indicates that social support plays a crucial role in buffering the negative outcomes of the imbalance of work with family (Sarwar et al., 2021). Merging theory with practice, these findings reinforce the argument that employer providing support is always important.

Academics in this study indicated that the university prioritised students' health over theirs. Academics had to extend compassion to the students but felt that there were inadequate measures taken for supporting the staff's wellbeing. More frequent check-ins with employees were needed. Practitioners are then presented with the challenge to counsel and foster communication between colleagues and supervisors. For example, more frequent check-ins, introducing tools that have calendar management, and news feeds of the company to keep employees engaged.

Furthermore, practitioners are urged to work hand-in hand with other disciplines such as clinical, social psychologist to study the emotional and psychological effects of remote work as suggested by Bryd (2022). These check-ins could have provided the university a platform to be aware of any challenges that the staff might be facing, what were their needs in the context of the pandemic and working remotely as Van Zoonen et al. (2021) expressed that low level of adjusting to remote working led to strain and higher levels of conflict. This could have meant that the university is considerate of the context of the pandemic as people are losing their loved ones due to the virus.

Although it was mentioned that virtual meetings were frequent, these were more about the deliverables and less about the well-being of the academics. Van Zonnen et al., (2021) argued that a lack of emotional support to staff is problematic as support helps employees to reduce psychological strain. These findings may mean that working remotely during the pandemic could be viewed as a critical incident evoking high emotions that may exceed employees' abilities in coping with the demands of the pandemic and work. Consistent with organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1984) this research suggests that the degree to which social support intercedes the relationship between job stressors and strain depends on the extent to which employees perceive the organisation as not doing enough to help them cope with the emerging work demands during the pandemic.

Communication and the use of technology

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all spheres of education (Chatterjee & Chaakraborty, 2021), particularly with social distancing protocols in place (Dhawan, 2020). Social distancing protocols that have been put in place required limited in-person gathering.

This has led to the cancellation of in-person teachings and universities being forced to use a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) tools to ensure the continuity of education amidst the pandemic (Chatterjee & Chaakraborty, 2021). The research has revealed that academic responsibilities remained the same irrespective of the transition to remote teaching. However, the shift required critical changes to teaching styles (Alammary et al., 2021). Technological platforms played a significant role in boosting remote learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Alammary et al., 2021).

The transition to online teaching was reported as the most challenging and time-consuming change, particularly for those who had to use pre-recorded lectures to maintain low use of data for students. Chatterjee and Chaakraborty (2021) substantiated that pre-recorded teaching requires substantial time and effort. The effort is to ensure that students receive all the necessary information simply. This is particularly a disadvantage for academics as they have indicated that recording lectures at home were challenging as a result of noise interruptions that get into the recording and force them to record over again to ensure noiseless recording. However, an advantage of recorded lectures for students is that they receive in-depth learning. On the other hand, pre-recorded lectures prohibited students from asking a question and getting an immediate response. The time-delayed in responses may make students lose their train of thought when compared with face-to-face learning. Thus, misunderstanding may occur (McDougall, 2013). Nevertheless, remote learning proved to be adequate in times of social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and these findings are supported by Ali (2020).

Due to the sudden shift to working remotely, academics were faced with various challenges such as a lack of remote teaching practices appropriate preparation, or technical support (Alimmary et al., 2021; Davies, 2021; Mumtuza et al., 2021), and an internet connection. These challenges restricted communication and lowered the quality of communication as they relied heavily on ICTs to communicate and cooperate with colleagues, students, and managers (Wang et al., 2020). Trust and Whalen (2020) suggested that the unpreparedness for remote work created a gap in the teaching effectiveness and the use of technology to deliver education as technology-supported remote work (Davies, 2021).

Mumtaz et al. (2021) reported remote work as widening the inequity gap which is particularly applicable to the South African context. These findings are mostly based on students' experiences of learning remotely. For this research, while no significant gap in

accessing technology was evident among the academic participants perhaps because the university offered data allowances, they all had their own computers and were most likely all middle class. However, it is still important to be mindful of social factors given South Africa's persisting inequalities across race and class identities. Moreover, it can be argued that academics had the privilege to upgrade their ICT equipment compared to other workers who might earn lower salaries.

Research has shown that students in rural areas in South Africa experienced technological barriers to remote learning and teaching (Barton, 2020) due to not having access to high-speed internet and technological resources. It is important to note that, even though academics indicated unstable connection as the most pressing challenge, the online platforms allowed them to manage their issues. For instance, turning their cameras off during a meeting with colleagues or a discussion with students helped stabilise the connection. Even so, turning one's camera off was suggested to hinder communication. Communication is a key element in building trust and maintaining relationships (Roberts, 2020).

However, working remotely presented a dilemma of not knowing whether students understood content adequately or whether colleagues needed support. This is because academics were unable to see verbal cues as the camera was off. According to Heller (2020), face-to-face communication facilitates the transfer of knowledge as people can draw visual cues and gain quick feedback or make the necessary adjustment. Furthermore, these visual cues build trust within these interactions (Storper & Venables, 2004). Conversely, the research showed that academics rapidly acquired digital skills during the pandemic and remote working was reported to strengthen humanity when face-to-face interactions were not possible. Academics shared empathy and adopted a more human-centred approach to teaching. For instance, academics were understanding of challenges such as unstable internet connection or unforeseen disruptions.

The rapid shift to remote working did not allow the university to invest in digital technological equipment. Trust and Whalen (2020) argued that academics need to be fluent in the use of technology to adapt efficiently to remote teaching. Thus, universities need to train their staff on how to use technology to teach online. Furthermore, the research has highlighted the lack of technological resources to meet the demands of online teaching space and these findings are similar to recent studies (Guangul et al., 2020; Fastlane, 2020; Gorbe et al., 2020). Both the lack of resources and lack of digital skills are a result of limited

opportunity for preparedness for remote working as suggested by Fastlane (2020). Prior literature (Vyas & Butakieo, 2021; Grant et al., 2019) and this study indicated that universities and government departments provided information technology support to their employees. Academics have further indicated that funds to buy office equipment, computers and data allowance have enhanced remote working and effective communication between colleagues and the organisation (Vyas & Butakieo, 2021). The support provided by universities has played a role in smoothing the transition to remote working.

Concerning the lack of digital skills needed to teach remotely, academics have taken it upon themselves to learn new technical skills to improve their remote teaching as the university offered several voluntary courses to assist in this regard. Academics in this research have shared that they have learnt new skills during the COVID-19 pandemic and further utilised those skills to deliver suitable teaching to students. Alimmary et al. (2021) explain these findings as a positive attitude towards remote working. Their findings have shown how attitudes towards remote working play an important role in the successful adjustment of academics during the pandemic (Alimmary et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with recent studies (Alyoussef, 2021; Jere, 2020) that also indicated that academic technology acceptance during the pandemic has played an important role in adjusting to and implementing remote working. Nonetheless, practitioners are expected to implement training programs such as e-learning, and computer-based training, to meet the demands of technology and working remotely. It would be further beneficial to evaluate the effectiveness of these training programs to identify its suitability to academics.

Contribution to knowledge

This study makes an empirical contribution to the emerging understanding of remote working among academics in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research can help university heads of departments and human resources with constructive insights to help them assess opportunities and developments in an environment of threat and uncertainty. With the continuation of adjustment of policies and practices in the context of COVID-19, it will be vital to understand how such outbreaks affect academics' well-being and them balance their work with family (Chen, 2021). For instance, to understand what training approaches can be adopted using the work-family framework and boundary theory where work skills are

different from the traditional office requirements of the past, development of a work-family balance plan considering the negative impact of the work-family conflict.

This research offers insights into academic work-family balance experiences in the South African context. This is significant for research conducted within the South African context, this research further addresses an area of work that is still in its infancy and provides critical insights into the psychological and emotional wellness of employees working from home, especially during unpredictable, stressful times. Furthermore, the findings contribute to a greater understanding of the diverse context in South Africa, in response to work-family interface and remote working during crisis management. As universities move toward a hybrid return to work options, these findings help expand the literature on some of the causes of work-family conflict and stress among academics.

Implications for practice

This research provides opportune insights into the experiences of academics working remotely and the interplay between the work and family domains during the prolonged period of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, those involved in developing university policies, and human resource practitioners should pay close attention to the levels of support that are needed by working parents during the pandemic. In fact, in this study, we found that working parents most needed support from their employers to balance their work with family roles. The literature indicated a significant diminishing work-life balance among working parents (Adisa et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2020; Usher et al., 2020). Since working parents have been unable to leave their homes due to childcare responsibilities, measures of parenting counselling and parenting interventions can help reduce stress and work-life conflict experienced by working parents. Furthermore, once work returns to face-to-face and hybrid models, some of the benefits of remote work such as increased flexibility should be taken into consideration when developing policies and practices for returning to work to retain academics, especially for women. Thus, the support provided to employees should be tailored according to their different needs.

Policy developers and industrial organisational practitioners should also pay attention to challenges in remote working. Remote working has been documented as an attractive option in the current digital phase, because of the flexible working arrangement opportunity

to work globally with other academics (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020) and spend less time and money on commuting and more time at home with children. However, several social, behavioural, and economic factors should be taken into consideration. Less disciplined, less-resourced individuals and those who are parents experience more challenges while working remotely. Given these challenges, their well-being and performance are more likely to be affected (Wang et al., 2021). Thus, industrial and organisational psychology practitioners need to deliberate the fit between remote work and the person (Perry et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020), and develop policies that accommodate a diverse group of employees such as funding home-office set ups as part of working remotely, and clear guidelines on how employees will be held accountable for their performance in a virtual setting. These guidelines can assist those with less self-disciplined to be more goal-focused and promote productivity.

Having studied the experiences of academics working remotely during the time of the pandemic, universities should consider the implementation of psychological assistance (Ghali-Zinoubi et al., 2021) and health programmes (Du Plessis, 2019). This will be an active strategy for improving their well-being and giving priority to the work-family interface.

Furthermore, human resource practitioners need to consider the emerging culture as corporate culture has significantly weakened by the loss of physical distance contact (Wang et al., 2009). Universities need to adapt some strategies to meet the demands and skills necessary to carry educational responsibilities remotely and create and maintain a culture that fits the online space. This culture should emphasize the importance of empathy, encouraging the separation of work and family by providing advice and training on how academics can create and maintain those boundaries and active strategies that enable academics to be able to switch off from work as the findings of this research suggested 'inability to switch off as a challenge.

The university policy developers should clearly communicate and actively manage expectations related to the workload of academics during the pandemic and as academics return to face-to-face teaching. The university needs to adequately empower and support academics to manage their workloads by making resources available for effective online or hybrid education delivery.

Limitations and Future recommendations

This research has presented significant findings that are of benefit to academics, industrial organisational practitioners, university policymakers and management, to understand academics' experiences of working remotely during the pandemic in South Africa. However, this research inevitably has limitations. A limitation of this research is that it only interviewed participants at one point in time during the pandemic and academic experiences may have changed over the duration of and the different levels of the lockdown. It might be fruitful to perform a longitudinal (Bliese et al., 2017) qualitative study to show these variances in experiences especially as academics begin to return to work in person as required by several universities in South Africa.

Another limitation produced by this research was conducting the interviews virtually. Online interviews lacked the richness and social presence associated with face-to-face interviews with the ability to monitor nonverbal cues (Andres, 2002) that could be valuable to the analysis of the data (O'Connor et al., 2017). Moreover, face-to-face interviews create a better rapport between the researcher and the participant (Creswell & Clerk, 2011). To overcome these limitations, firstly, the camera was on during the interview and only switched off when there were connectivity challenges that could not be controlled in the research process. Secondly, the researcher clearly explained the aim of the research study and the expected outcomes. Participants were informed that there are no foreseen risks associated with participating in the study, which promoted transparency (Moravcsik, 2014).

Thus, this research stresses the importance of universities in implementing and establishing an innovative approach to creating and maintaining worker's bonds during the pandemic. Furthermore, these findings suggest that universities should consider and observe the positive outcomes expected from remote working (Galanti et al., 2021) and increase the opportunities to communicate with colleagues as effective and frequent communication can decrease social isolation perception (Galanti et al., 2021). In the same breath, universities should also reflect on the frequency, timing and structure of such communication, these observations will help to avoid the risks of excessive interruptions of employees.

This suggests that universities need to invest in ways that enable remote workers to retain frequent contact with co-workers as the research has demonstrated that individuals used the existing methods of communication as support platforms during the pandemic such as WhatsApp group chats, and coffee chats. However, a more sustained method is needed.

Future research is recommended to focus more specifically on the work-life conflict among academics who are mothers as this demographic seemed to experience the most stress from managing work and family. As South African universities aim to address gender equality in universities, particularly among senior-level academics, research needs to identify ways to retain women in academia. Detailed knowledge about working mothers would help universities attend to the specific needs of mothers and enhance their wellbeing. However, as the findings showed that parents of young children in general also experienced particular stressors in the context of remote working, future research on academic fathers with young children would be valuable to expand our understanding in this area. This is especially needed in patriarchal societies such as South Africa where women still do the majority of caregiving, but where some fathers are wanting to be more involved in parenting while continue wanting to succeed in their careers.

While this study showed the work-family conflict of academics, which speaks to the negative aspects of combining work and family roles, future research could focus especially on the work-family enrichment among academics as they experienced remote working (Carlson et al., 2006). Findings focusing on the positive side of the work-family interface could surface additional important strategies for informing remote working and hybrid work policies for universities.

Conclusion

Although the temporal and spatial divide between work and home is not new, this study revealed how COVID-19 accelerated the blurring of these roles and its impact on family time, work demands, relationships, and the general well-being of academics. Besides the challenges, academics demonstrated resilience through negotiating work-home spaces and made the necessary adjustment to the new normal. Boundary theory assisted in understanding how academics experienced the blurring of boundaries between work and home and the resulting work-family conflict. However, some positive experiences such as greater autonomy and flexibility also surface and should be further explored.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Summary review of remote workers, work-family interface.

Authors	Country	Year	Sample	N	Method	Conceptual framework
Schieman, et al.	Canada	2021	Canadian workers	2524	Quantitative	Restricted life Spheres
Vaziri, et al.	United State	2020	Remote employees	379	Quantitative	Theory of Work-Family enrichment
Rahman & Arif	Bangladesh	2020	Professionals working remotely	100	Exploratory research design	Boundary theory
Wang et al.	China	2021	Chinese remote employees	522	Mixed research method	Work-design perspective
Baudot and Kelly	United State	2020	Amazon MTurk respondents	592	Quantitative	
Bao et al	China	2020	Faculty members	139	Quantitative	
Trust & Whalen	United State	2020	educators	325	Quantitative	
Guangul et al	Muscut	2020	Faculty members	50	Case study	Three major components in an online education environment diagram
Quezada et al	United State	2020	University teachers		Autoethnography case study	The blending with

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						pedagogical purpose model framework
Gelles et al	United State	2020	Engineering students	11	Qualitative	Self-determination theory
Gabr et al	Egypt	2021	Egyptian Academic stuff	142	Cross sectional	
Vyas and Butakhieo	Hong Kong	2021	Employees working from home		Exploratory	Exploratory framework and SWOT analysis
Caulfied	Ireland	2015	Dublin remote workers	21120	Quantitative research	
Purwanto et al	Indonesia, Tangerang	2020	Elementary school teachers	15	Explorative case study	
Washburn et al	Texas	2021	Faculty members	256	Mixed research	
Barton	United State	2020	University teachers	1000	Quantitative	
Staniscuaski et al	Brazil	2021	academics	2245		
Devi	Chennai city, India	2021	Higher education members	452	Quantitative	

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Beland, Brodeur and Wright	United states	2020	Workers in the CPS		Quantitative research	
Galloway et al	Toronto, Canada	2020				
Grant et al.	UK	2013	Remote workers	11	Qualitative research	
Lonska et al.	Latvia	2021	Latvian employees	1006	Quantitative research	
Kumar et al	Delhi, India	2021	Teachers and private occupations	433	Quantitative	Conservation of Resource
Akyildiz & Durna	Turkey	2021	Academics	290	Cross-sectional study	
Parham & Rauf	Multi-country	2020	Faculty members	122	Exploratory, qualitative-structured survey	Boundary theory
Kossek et al	United State	2014	IT Division	694	Field experiment	STAR intervention
Eddleston & Mulki	United State	2015	Remote workers	299	Multi-method	Boundary theory
Adisa et al	United Kingdom	2021	women working remotely	26	Qualitative	Role theory
Darouei & Pluut	Netherlands	2021	Professional workers	34	Quantitative	Work-family spill-over theory
Delanoewij & Verbruggen	Belgium	2019	Staff members at	381	Quantitative	Work-family conflict

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			the University			
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Appendix B

Interview Guide

- 1. How long have you been working at your current University (UCT) and what role?**
- 2. Can you tell me what has changed in your academic responsibilities when your university moved to remote working?**
 - How was this experience to remote working?
 - Where did you work from?
 - What challenges did you experience? (Probe- space, time, does family interfere with work or work demands interfere with family, how long do you work?)
- 3. Which aspect of remote work, work well for you (Probe time, space and managing multiple roles).**
 - Are there any ways in which your family made remote work easier for you?
 - In a day, which activities do you spend most time on?
- 4. What is helping you manage all your responsibilities working remotely? (Probe-work-family).**
- 5. Reflecting on how your leader(s) has behaved during the Covid-19 pandemic and the transition to remote work, what have you found most valuable?**
 - Can you describe any behaviours/actions by your line manager that you particularly appreciate?
 - What have you appreciated less?
 - What do you think your leader could have done differently?
 - To what extent has the behaviour of your leader(s) impacted your performance?
- 6. How satisfied have you been with the quality and frequency of meetings with your line manager and your co-workers?**
 - Is there anything that you could have been done differently?
- 7. How are you experiencing the use of online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Whatsapp calls thus far?**
- 8. What are some of the major changes to your personal life that have resulted due to the Covid-19 pandemic and working remotely?**

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9. Demographics- for demographic purposes, I would like to ask you for few questions.

Answers to these questions can help me account for any differences between people who took part in this study.

- Age
- Marital status
- Number of people in your household
- Do you have kids, if yes, how old are they?
- Faculty

Is there anything you would like to add to help us better understand the benefits and challenges of working remotely during this time?

Thank you so much for taking your time and agreeing to participate in this study, do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C

Consent form

Greetings

I am a master's student in Organisational Psychology, at the University of Cape Town. As part of my master's degree, I am required to conduct research. I am inviting you to be part of my research on the experiences of academics working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research project has been approved by the UCT Commerce ethics committee.

To participate, I would like to ask you questions about your experiences. As Covid-19 rules and regulations of social distancing, I would like to request that we conduct the interview using MS. If you agree, I will require your email address. Your email address will be used strictly for the purpose of this interview, and I guarantee that your details will not be shared.

Please note that your participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time. Identifiable information such as your name will not be published or included in the research project unless consent is given ensuring the anonymity of your responses. All responses provided will be kept in confidence and will only be used for the purpose of this study only.

Should you have any concerns or questions about participating in this study please contact the researcher, Thembe Zwelibanzi at zwlthe002@myuct.ac.za or the research supervisor Associate Professor Ameeta Jaga, Ameeta.jaga@uct.ac.za

Do you agree to have the interview recorded?

Yes

No

The recording will only be used for the purposes of research only and your identity will be kept anonymous.

Participant Signature _____

Appendix D

Ethical Clearance



Faculty of Commerce

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701

2.26 Leslie Commerce Building, Upper Campus



@Commerce UCT



UCT Commerce Faculty

14 07 2021

Thembe Zwelibanzi

School of Management Studies University of Cape Town

REF: REC 2021/07/014

What are the experiences of South African academics working remotely during Covid-19?

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 31-Dec-2022.

Your clearance may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

2021.07.14

17:05:09 +02'00'

Jacques Rousseau

Commerce Research
Ethics Chair University of
Cape Town Commerce
Faculty Office
Room 2.26 | Leslie Commerce Building

Office Telephone: +27 (0)21 650 2695 / 4375

Office Fax: +27 (0)21 650 4369

E-mail: jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za

Website: <http://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/com/Ethics-in-Research>

—“Our Mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society.”

Appendix E

Reflexive journal

13/09/2021

The interview started so well. The participant looked happy to be participating in my research and it kind of feel at ease. After I asked for consent to record the interview, I could find the 'record' on my screen, and I have conducted interviews before suing Microsoft Team without any struggles. I started panicking and I told her I can't find the record option on my screen. She suggested to record the interview on her side and send it to me once we are done. This experience made me anxious, and I wondered if she saw me as an incompetent researcher?

She didn't seem to have any problem with recording, and she answered all the questions in a friendly and relaxed manner. I also started relaxing and probing more questions to get more insightful experiences. After the interview I said to myself 'oh God, peaks of online interviews, I almost lost a participant.

I confirm that the uploaded document is the dissertation to be examined.