



School of Management Studies

Experiences of returning to campus in the COVID-19 pandemic among administrative faculty staff: A job demands and resources approach.

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION:

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of return to campus experiences of administrative faculty staff's transition from remote working to in-person working at a South African university. Administrative faculty staff play an important role in service delivery of the university. Their return to campus following COVID-19 comprises psychological and emotional experiences. A phenomenological focus group study with 11 administrative faculty staff was conducted. Thematic analysis of the focus group data revealed key themes: (1) The work-life balance ideal: adjusting after remote work, (2) Remote work and isolation: return to work as socially rewarding, and (3) We do not have much choice or voice: decision-making is one-sided. Management implications and recommendations for future research are presented.

Keywords: Return to campus, COVID-19, administrative faculty staff, Job-Demands Resource theory

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Chapter 1: Scientific Background and Contextualisation of this study

1.1. Introduction

Lockdown restrictions implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa meant that workplaces had to quickly adapt to remote working in several types of organisations and sectors, including higher learning institutions such as universities (Schalkwyk, 2021). In the university context, while the focus of research was mostly on academic staff shifting to remote work especially for teaching, less attention has been given to administrative staff who were more likely to occupy service roles, and may not have been as equipped as their academic counterparts for remote working arrangements (Zhang et al., 2021). Research on remote work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in university settings has shown that administrative staff experienced intense emotions, role overload, and cognitive demands since the university had not been able to provide supportive measures such as training and counselling for adjusting to the new working style (Varol et al., 2022). Additionally, Slaughter et al. (2021) found that administrative staff were prone to work-life conflict from simultaneously taking care of family and utilising new software and applications to adapt to remote work (Musavengane et al., 2021). This means that these experiences negatively affected many administrative staff's mental health (Slaughter et al., 2021).

In 2021, with progress in vaccine uptake and reduction in infection rates in South Africa, government restrictions were being lifted (Krull et al. 2021). By the beginning of 2022, South African universities were requiring the return of staff to campus (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). According to Wang (2021), this pressure to return to in-person mode of work appeared to be skewed toward administrative staff as academics predominantly remained working from home. Additionally, when universities addressed mental health issues in relation to COVID-19 adjustments, the focus was predominantly on students as opposed to staff. There was typically a lack of supportive measures such as counselling at South African universities for administrative staff for their adjustment return to campus (Garcia et al., 2021).

This phenomenon also created a sense of unfairness among administrative staff. Limited research exists to understand the experiences of administrative staff in this uncertain time of their return to campus (Brennan, 2021).

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Musavengane et al. (2021) conducted a study on COVID-19 and employees' livelihoods in the South African workplace and found that administrative staff were concerned about getting infected with COVID-19 at work. Employees were further concerned about transferring the infection to their families at home. Administrative staff have also been experiencing work overload by working from home and in addition, planning their return to work. These stresses have increased the likelihood of administrative staff experiencing depressive symptoms, including emotional exhaustion, affecting their overall wellbeing (Slaughter et al., 2021). Administrative staff's stressors such as time pressures, workload and ambiguity with return to campus and resources such supervisory coaching, performance feedback and availability of psychological services such as counselling inform their levels of well-being. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to understand this phenomenon using the job demands and resource model (henceforth referred to as JD-R) (Schaufeli, 2017).

Findings from this study could assist universities to manage teams dynamics and work environment that will be supportive towards cognitive demands and techno stress which are likely to negatively affect mental health of employees (Luo & Lei, 2021).

1.2 Problem statement and current knowledge on the problem

Ndevu (2023) found that Covid-19 rapid responses amongst university employees was accompanied by anxiety and uncertainty of adjusting with remote working conditions. The return to work after COVID-19 has contributed to various psychological challenges for university staff (Rahman et al., 2024). Rahman et al. (2024) found that remote working caused psychological challenges. This was due to a lack of support and pressure from work demands. As a result of this, most staff preferred to return to campus (Rahman et al., 2024). Most universities had been already equipped themselves with training and funding to make the possibility of remote working (Cornelius-Bell, & Bell, 2021). Similarly, Krull et al. (2021) found that this was also practised within South African context by placing more focusing on academic staff for teaching and learning by providing educational technology, and workshops for readiness of remote working conditions.

Furthermore, Govender and Mpungose (2022) found that COVID-19 negatively impacted university employees during remote working and upon their return to campus. Similarly, Cornelius-Bell and Bell (2021) acknowledged that university employees experienced psychological challenges such as anxiety, fatigue from working online due to their lack of experience with use of technological devices and training. The uncertainty of safety from COVID-19 infection led to mental health challenges among university employees (Rahman et al., 2024). Furthermore, Ndevu (2023) asserted that

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COVID-19 negatively impacted some South African university employees as there was a lack of resources and training for their adjustment with remote working and thus the return to campus was necessary for their performance despite the fear of being infected by the virus. Similarly, Cornelius-Bell and Bell (2021) found that return to work was important for some employees as there have been a lack of support from supervisors from remote working. However, Rahman and colleagues (2024) found that most universities that became aware of remote working conditions planned and prepared for employee readiness particularly academic staff by providing training, through webinars and online meetings for their work engagements and supervision support. In some rural South African universities, they experienced increased pressure and anxiety that resulted from a lack of training as they had not been exposed to the use of technological work such as online meetings, this frustrated and led to increased work demands for these employees (Govender & Mpungose, 2022).

Despite the awareness and recognition from various authors that remote working and return to work contributed to increased psychological challenges, still there has been a lack of evidence that focused on upskilling the administrative faculty staff to deal with and manage anxiety and frustration from technical difficulties that occurred during remote working and uncertainty of their return to campus (Krull et al., 2021). Remote working was more catered for academic staff rather than administrative faculty staff. The lack of access to mental health care services and physical resources for the readiness of work became a challenge for administrative faculty staff since the academic staff were provided with these services for both remote working and their return to campus (Cornelius-Bell, & Bell, 2021). Additionally, Cornelius-Bell and Bell (2021) stated that these indifferences and accommodation for work flexibility were a challenge for the administrative faculty staff, hence a study to explore the interventions that may be used to recognise these staff will serve to benefit the academic community at large. Moreover, some of the researchers found that administrative faculty staff experienced psychological challenges from their remote working and had to adjust and adapt with a new working environment, although there was no training provided (Barello et al., 2021).

This study will add to the body of knowledge on research amongst administrative staff who are often neglected in research domains (Schalkwyk, 2021). Furthermore, it will contribute by assisting universities to adapt office work that consists of supportive practices, innovative methods, and the use of hybrid work for administrative staff (Awadaa et al., 2021).

This study aims to understand administrative staff's experiences in the university from a South African context during Covid-19. Universities can use these findings to organise teams and

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supportive structures for administrative staff which can enhance their performance, motivation, and reduced work-family conflict for the employees (Garcia et al., 2021).

1.3 Research aim

This study aims to explore the return to campus experiences of administrative faculty staff within a South African university, to have deeper insights and uncover knowledge of this unique phenomenon.

The research questions that guided this study are:

- a) What are the experiences of returning to campus in the COVID-19 amongst university administrative staff?
- b) How can we understand these experiences using the job demands and resources approach (JD-R)?

1.4 Research strategy

To develop rich insights into the shared experiences of administrative faculty staff upon their return to campus during COVID-19, an exploratory research design was used. According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) a qualitative exploratory design seeks to understand a phenomenon based on its shared experiences, which leads to quality responses that allow for reduced generalisation. Qualitative exploratory designs allow the researcher to look at certain phenomenon that has been less explored through people's experiences (Khan, 2014).

Furthermore, the qualitative approach, phenomenology, focuses on describing how people can experience a certain phenomenon. The important use of a phenomenological approach in this study was to allow the researcher to be able to hone into participant's experiences of the particular phenomenon of administrative faculty staff returning to on campus work after lockdown and exploring their feelings and perceptions (Ercan & Marsh, 2016).

This approach was appropriate for gathering information on sensitive issues about the lived experiences of participants which allowed for the analysis of data through thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

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1.5 Research methodology

Focus group interviews were used as the data collection method to explore the shared experiences of administrative faculty staff on their return to campus by discussing issues through interactions with certain and specific groups of participants. While the initial plan was to only collect data through face- to face group interviews, the unpredictable dynamics of new waves of COVID-19 and participants' fear of contracting the virus meant that online focus group interviews were also employed (Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

The focus group discussions allowed the extraction of rich data collection when participants shared their views about the topic (Reisner et al., 2018). The use of focus groups further allowed the participants to share their ideas and feelings whilst listening without judgment, and allowing each participant an equal chance to share their experiences.

Focus groups were chosen because they allowed the administrative faculty staff to share their feelings with each other and relate with similar and different experiences. Nyumba et al. (2017) stated that focus groups allowed the researcher to gather complex data from participant's perceptions and personal experiences from their interactions.

Participants could choose based on their preferences for in-person or online group interactions, especially during the period of COVID-19 when participants were required to practice social distancing (Nyumba et al., 2017). The use of a focus group assisted participants to possibly gain closure regarding how they were treated differently from academic staff, as they were able to openly and genuinely share their experiences that had impacted and affected their return to campus (Ercan & Marsh, 2016).

1.6 Paradigm perspectives

This research study employed the interpretivism paradigm as the underpinning framework for understanding the meaning behind different human participants and their contributions established from their set of beliefs system (Lincoln, 2005). The interpretivist paradigm was used to give insight into research study from deriving knowledge from ontological, epistemological and axiological perspective. The ontological assumption was used to understand administrative faculty staff opinion, truth towards their experiences upon their return to work. Notwithstanding the importance of recognising and narrating their meanings of various sociological and psychological experiences from return to campus.

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Moreover, this study adopted focus on providing interpretation and narration to human experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

When epistemological assumptions had already been applied to axiological assumptions and was employed to construct personal experiences and views for conducting and contributing to employee well-being in work place in the context of this study. This approach was used to guide how the researcher engaged and interacted with the participants when they share their life problems through focus group discussions which is in an alignment with a qualitative research approach (Ugwu et al., 2021).

1.7 Structure of dissertation

In this study Chapter One began with an introduction and description of the research topic and the context within which the research was located, followed by research rationale, problem statement, research methods and research aims. Chapter Two provides a review of workplace social support literature, including elaboration and application of relevant theories that explain various psychological challenges from their remote working to return to campus. Chapter Three presents information on the research approach, research design, recruitment of participants, the procedure used for gathering secondary data, ethical considerations as well as reflexive insights adding to study rigour. Study findings and discussion of findings are merged in Chapter Four to aid in the explanation of results for each theme and sub-themes. Lastly, study recommendations, and concluding remarks are presented.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter primarily focused on the introduction of this research study by providing a brief overview of how this research. Chapter 2 presents the theory, the job-demands and resources model (JD-R) that was used to guide and provide insights of administrative faculty staff. In this chapter relevant literature is reviewed to show how the JD-R helps explain experiences of return to work during COVID-19. In the absence of literature specifically on administrative staff in university settings, research on this phenomenon with other samples in different settings was also considered. Next, a review of relevant literature is presented on administrative staff in university settings, research on this phenomenon with other samples in different settings was also considered.

2.2 Theoretical framework: Job demands resources model

An understanding of administrative faculty staff experiences on their return to campus is explained using the job demands resources model by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) theory asserts that strain occurs as a response to a lack of balance between the demands and resources that are available to a person in their workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). JD-R has been used to determine how employee's experiences of burnout, job strain, and work pressure, and the impact on their psychological well-being are challenged by these experiences (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The argument posited by the job demands resources model is that employees' negative experiences are related to a lack of resources such as limited or no supervision support, autonomy, or training, which contributes negatively to organisational outcomes such as decreased productivity. The job demands resources model suggests that to understand how an employee gets to be motivated and challenged psychologically depends on to what extent and degree the employee perceives certain experiences from their work are job demands and job resources, and that these can vary across individuals (Buchs, 2014). For example, what one perceives as job demand within their workplace may not be the case for other employees. Some employees may experience work overload as a job demand, while others may experience technostress as job demand (Govender & Mpungose, 2022). Job demand can lead to emotional exhaustion and job strain. In contrast, job resources can lead to motivation and employee engagement. Together these factors can impact both positively and negatively on employee well-being and workplace goals when there are no initiatives considered (Bakker & Demertrouti, 2007).

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Adler and Koch (2017) found that the JD-R provides insights from employees experiences on how work structures and various working conditions contribute to organisational outcomes for employee's motivation and their psychological experiences. Moreover, it has been viewed as the theoretical framework that assists researchers with understanding what constitutes challenges experienced within the workplace. This could be a university setting, or other workplace settings that explain and predict work-related results (Mudrak et al., 2017).

Buchs (2014) further acknowledged that the job demands resources model has been used to understand how a workplace can lead to emotional exhaustion, stress, productivity, job satisfaction, and work engagement through the job demands and job resources that are made available for employees to manage their mental health and well-being.

These may include providing psychological support services through counselling within the workplace. It was found that job resources such as supervisor support that include constant communication through meetings and feedback motivated adjustment of remote working conditions were of great assistance to employees (Dong et al., 2020). Moreover, the job demands resources model has assisted with providing suggestions to workplaces that need to develop and re-evaluate policies that promote mental health as a job resource. This is in opposition to working extended hours and work overload job demands that contribute to stress and the development of role conflicts (Henz & Mills, 2014).

Barello et al.'s (2021) quantitative study about healthcare professionals working during COVID-19 found that the job demands resources model helped to provide explanation of how these workers experienced burnout and job stress because of work pressure sustained from assisting patients with COVID-19. These job demands were created by understaffing or a shortage of healthcare workers to assist with taking care of patients who had contracted COVID-19. For instance, limited healthcare workers and a lack of psychological support from management, contributed to stress and work overload during COVID19 (Barello et al., 2021). Job resources such as counselling amongst healthcare workers enhanced productivity and motivation because it helped in dealing with traumatic situations that were experienced by these employees such as seeing patients losing their lives because of COVID-19 (Giauque et al., 2021). Job resources could provide psychological buffers to help cope with their traumatic experiences. For instance, hiring more healthcare workers for understaffed hospitals assists with managing role overload and burnout during COVID-19.

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2.3 JD-R in the context of administrative staff returning to campus during COVID19:

The job demands resources model helps increase the understanding of administrative faculty staff experiences of their return to campus within university contexts. The review shows challenges that were experienced from lack of job resources such as work resources and mental health services for employee well-being and how job demands lead to negative work experiences. Also, this model provides insight on how, higher education institutions that catered to and created a positive work environment through resources such as supervisor support, job control, and job autonomy enabled employee job satisfaction (Govender & Mpungose, 2022).

A study by Crawford et al. (2020) found that positive experiences arose when university employees experienced co-worker and management support such as performance feedback and online team building sessions from their remote working which contributed to their happiness as this acted as a tool for their mental health and increased their job performance.

In the context of remote working and return to work, the job demands resources model does not just focus on psychological empowerment for adjustment (Cunha et al., 2021). The JD-R model thus assists workplaces to develop interventions and legal regulations that will reduce working extended hours and on weekends to prevent work-family conflict. For example, by promoting remote working or hybrid working for workplace flexibility, which can lead to the promotion of positive psychological well-being (Tsukada, 2021). Literature from a study by Giauque et al. (2021) also shows that job resources provide relief from stressful experiences and contribute to employees well-being as they transition from remote working during lockdown to hybrid and on campus models of work.

2.4. Job demands affecting return to campus:

This section presents literature on job demands that made work and returning to work during COVID-19 more challenging for administrative staff. Job demands such as work role overload, work-life conflict, and technostress for administrative staff led to stress and anxiety which made the return to campus challenging for most in higher education institutions during COVID-19 (Theron, 2022).

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2.4.1 Work role overload:

Tang and Vandenberghe (2021) defines work role overload as psychological challenges experienced as a result of a work environment whereby too many responsibilities in a role contribute to strain, stress and anxiety.

Furthermore, Coverman (1989) stated that work role overload will always be more common as long as workplaces neglect to focus on or address it. Work role overload contributes to poor motivation and psychological demands when employees experience themselves performing multiple roles over and above their work roles, this might cause stress for some employees (Khan-Seedat & Mansingh -Ramnund, 2021).

In a study by Jensen et al. (2013) it was found that work role overload was common when employees experienced role ambiguity and role conflict because different working styles were required to perform their work tasks. This created challenges to cope with and adapt to their work tasks. Role conflict refers to employees being exposed to working a long shift and being expected to fulfil certain roles in a certain period of time that leads to work overload (Wells, 2021) Role ambiguity refers to when employees perform work tasks and roles, in which they do not have much expertise on their work (Wells, 2021).

Their difficulty to adjust to their work is because of limited training that challenges their ability to learn and to perform their work. The employee experience on struggling to be productive at work may contribute to demotivation, and there may be visible workload and extremely long working hours experienced as a result of trying to understand their new work and roles (Luo & Lei, 2021). Wells (2021) found that during COVID-19 role ambiguity among administrative staff led to performing tasks that were not part of their job roles such as being secretaries and receptionists. This created experiences of anxiety and stress as employees were exposed to work roles they did not understand or have experience in.

On the other hand, work role overload has been found to contribute to psychological stress among employees because of work demands that require too much time and energy, while ignoring, and having less time for their family and other life roles (Wang, 2021). Employees working in higher learning institutions, commonly experience work role overload as this type of work can be demanding at times, particularly during exam and mark submission periods, as it requires administrative staff to provide services to both the student and academics (Idris, 2011).

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Gustafsson et al. (2021) found that work role overload surfaced among the administrative staff when service delivery was demanded by students with their academic related needs. Administrators felt pressurised and challenged to meet these demands and accordingly, this experience led to tardiness, withdrawal behaviours, and turnover. According to Davis (2020) exposure to work role overload among administrative faculty staff contributed to job dissatisfaction and lack of affective commitment. This was because of the multiple roles that they had to perform such as reception and administrative work, which contributed to work pressures from remote working (Donald et al., 2021).

The work pressure experienced from remote working made it difficult to manage their work roles and control their job, which reduced their employee well-being as they felt overwhelmed and anxious about their work roles (Obianuju et al., 2022). Furthermore, role overload presented negative experiences among administrative faculty staff because they were exposed to difficult work tasks. For example, the move to remote working required technical skills such as using computer software like Teams or Zoom for online meetings (Zalat et al., 2021). Employees who experienced work pressure from the use of technology from their remote work encountered work role overload which was found to contribute to mental health-related problems. This is because employees felt as if they were less productive, thus anxiety and strain were experienced (Davis, 2020).

These experiences reduced organisational outcomes through reduced job performance. For example, in a study by Govender and Mpungose (2022) it was found that lack of technological training on remote working caused resistant and struggle with adjusting to work, some employees underperformed because of the technostress that was present during the time. In addition, Davis (2020) found that an increase in work role overload created a work-life conflict that meant inability to manage various work tasks over the demands of family roles that contributed to work pressure and anxiety.

Garcia et al. (2021) stated that lack of training and support for employees worsened role overload since the beginning of remote working in COVID-19. Some higher education institutions contributed to employee role ambiguity because employees felt they had to meet certain work standards even though they were not provided with work tools such as sufficient internet data to manage their work. With the return to work, administrative faculty staff experiences present that different higher education institutions were able to control their job demands by creating supporting structures on how to work with new remote working

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standards (Garcia et al., 2021). For example, Wang (2021) found that the availability of mental health services for employees attempted to reduce negative experiences such as stress and emotional exhaustion that were a result of increased role conflict and role ambiguity.

The general lack of mental health services at higher education institutions to help deal with role ambiguity and role conflict among administrative staff made adjusting to remote work, and later the return to campus challenging. Challenges with adjustment contributed to fatigue and fear of returning to work. This was exacerbated for those employees who might still believe that they will contract the virus (Bilotta et al., 2021).

Amie-Ogan and Esegboria (2021) found that higher education institutions that provided job resources such as training for remote work enabled for reduced work overload and role ambiguity since there was an understanding of work assigned to them, such allowed for easy adjustment with remote working conditions. In contrast, the lack of training and the absence of appropriate resources for assisting with work roles upon their return to work worsened employee experiences and their work performance which contributed to high employee turnover because of the work pressure. For instance, the mental health of employees was negatively affected and some employees presented greater willingness to return to work for more assistance (Wang, 2021).

2.4.2 Work-life conflict

Work-life conflict refers to a state whereby employees are exposed to challenges with managing and controlling their personal lives and work demands because some demands require more time and attention than others (Henz & Mills, 2014). Work-life conflict was found to contribute negatively to psychological wellbeing when employees were not happy or motivated from their workplace which might result in high turnover.

Tsukada (2021) found that during COVID-19 remote working for administrative faculty staff, work-life conflicts were common because too much time was spent on work rather than on family roles, contributing increased stress and depression. In support, Rosa (2022) found that too much demand and time on work roles than family roles meant that work was more important than family roles. This experience increased demotivation and employee engagement with in-person working conditions (Rosa, 2022). Similarly, Babic et al. (2020) found that remote working increased work-life conflict, especially with employees who were occupied with work tasks difficult to manage by themselves.

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For instance, an employee had to complete team projects independently, because some of their colleagues were not able to work due to contracting COVID-19. This caused an additional workload to be placed on this employee (Govender & Mpungose, 2022). This consumed more time away from their family and result in an increase of overall stress for this employee.

Experiences of work-life conflict became common among some employees at higher learning institutions in regard to their remote work. For instance, work-life conflicts were present from lack of work tools to assist with remote working, this lack of appropriate infrastructure to work without any work disturbance on their remote working meant visible challenges for their work productivity (Parkin et al., 2022). The work-life conflict reduced organisational commitment among university staff from their remote working because they perceived that their workplace did not provide much social support for them to have a work- life balance during COVID-19. Such experience instigated job dissatisfaction and a decline in mental health (Mohamad & Despois, 2021).

For instance, the lack of internet connectivity, work desks, and chairs challenged employee work performance from their remote work, which contributed to anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Brennan, 2021). The psychological experiences that occurred from remote working not only resulted in poorer mental health but also, what appeared as poor performance (Parkin et al., 2022). For example, employees who were accustomed to the traditional manner of working rather than to be technologically dependent from remote working and could not cope with use of technology. This installed lower productivity as they struggled to learn at fast pace (Brennan, 2021).

Additionally, Karatuna and colleagues (2022) found that challenges and experiences of mental health from adjusting to remote working related to stress and turnover, especially among elder administrative staff who have never been exposed to technology from their early careers. In addition, another study found that technostress and work-life conflict that were present from their remote working reduced job satisfaction, as they struggled to have time to learn and adapt to new working styles of remote working which involved technological use such adjustments presented challenge for some employees (Charoensukmongkol & Puyod, 2021).

The challenge to control and manage time on assigned work tasks among administrative employees meant difficulty with productivity, and a challenge to stay motivated since there

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was limited time to focus on their family time as a result emotional exhaustion was present (Wood, 2022). Based on other research findings it can be attested that work-life conflict did not only place work pressure on employees, but it also meant an increase in working long hours with limited time to rest (Nayak et al., 2021). This was because some different universities management focused more on organisational outcomes than work-life balance, such contributed to employees working overtime (Parkin et al., 2022).

Additional findings by Charoensukmongkol and Puyod (2021) found that work-life conflict meant an inability to control their family time because of extreme work pressure from their managers by requiring them to focus on service delivery. Similarly, Mohamad and Despois (2021) found that university employees who experienced work-life conflict did not manage to fulfil their private lives as a result of increased workload from their remote working. Similarly, Obianuju et al. (2022) found that remote working also led to some employees experiencing difficulties with completing their tasks, because of interruptions from their family members making them struggle to concentrate on work.

Employees who had younger children in their households experienced remote working as a challenge since their children demanded time and attention which lead to distraction from fulfilling some work roles (Ghislieri et al., 2021). These challenges resulted in employees preferring a return to work as this allowed them to focus on their work without being disrupted compared to working from their homes (Munnich, 2022).

Employees who did not have adequate infrastructure believed that a return to campus was a better option for being able to have enough time in their office to complete their work tasks with no distractions. Return to work was sought to be a solution, only if the workplace had been able to promote work-life balance and control COVID-19 transmission (Lindgren et al., 2022). For instance, organisations that required employees to be tested for COVID-19 before entering the premises created a relatively safe workspace preventing the contraction of COVID-19 (AlonsoMunoz et al, 2021). Additionally, employees who practiced hybrid working instead of remote working were able to spend time working from both home to the office space, which assisted them with experiencing work-life balance as they were able to have time with their family and work roles (Chafi et al., 2022).

Brulin et al. (2022) found that in the case of forced return to work some employees experienced psychological challenges in their adjustment. The forced return to work made

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employees feel that work was deemed more important than their health, as COVID-19 still existed. Furthermore, their family roles were not considered or valued because return to work would increase productivity and reduce work-life balance (Brulin et al., 2022). Skurak et al., (2021), concluded that work-life conflict was a negative experience when employees were not able to psychologically detach themselves from working long hours, which contributed to stress and anxiety as work was dominating their lives and their social lives were non-existent. For example, such employees struggled to meet their work deadlines because there was a lack of motivation to perform tasks.

Similarly, Nayak et al. (2021) found that sufficient resources for remote working led to an inability to have increased work productivity as the work-life conflict was not present amongst university employees. For some, return to work contributed to negative experiences that include psychological challenges because there were no benefits of work-life balance such as flexibility and autonomy. Thus, adjustment became a challenge for them (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021).

2.4.3. Technostress

Technostress can be defined as a negative psychological state that is surfaced by threat and anxiety to use new technology which often leads to a sense of ineffectiveness, and mental fatigue among employees (Saleem et al., 2021). Brulin et al. (2022) also stated that COVID-19 has made changes in the work context such as the introduction of remote working, which may lead to conflicting demands such as unclear communication and difficulties for some university employees to learn and use technology for their job roles. In support, a study by Gomes and Ferreira (2021) found that failure of training on the use of technology among university employees worsened stress, anxiety, and depression.

Govender and Mpungose (2022) found that technology overload was more common during COVID-19 as work was done through the use of technology software. The technology overload led to confusion and stress as employees were exposed to new system functions/features. For instance, the training workshops conducted online through Microsoft Teams and Zoom contributed to technostress (Govender & Mpungose, 2022). In addition, the lack of appropriate resources and technology provision from higher education institutions, specifically those in less resourced universities in South Africa, experienced technostress and difficulties with adjusting to their remote working during COVID-19 (Iwu et al., 2022).

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For instance, University of KwaZulu-Natal employees encountered challenges with working remotely as they received different instructions from management through emails and zoom meetings. This contributed to their stress and made it difficult to cope with and manage work (Govender & Mpungose, 2022). Similarly, Parkin et al. (2022) found that higher education institutions that were not providing enough support through workshops and other training for the use of technology contributed to administrative faculty staff experiencing high stress and anxiety as they were finding it challenging to meet their deadlines.

Dlouhy and Casper (2021) stated that the lack of provision of technology training contributed to negative experiences since employees were not able to manage their time and deadlines to complete their work tasks. In addition, Gomes and Ferreira (2021) found that learning and adjusting to technology use from remote working during COVID-19 contributed to stress and frustration as employees were struggling to adapt to technology use since it was too technical for many. Lack of internet connectivity and lack of training resulted in poor performance and feeling incompetent for most employees (Sels et al., 2021).

These challenges stemmed from the lack of appropriate training to adapt to the technology used for remote working, whereby employees were experiencing stress and struggling to be competent with new working styles, which lead to technostress (Munoz et al., 2021). Monika et al. (2021) found that the lack of training and technical support for information communication technology created miscommunication and fatigue among some employees as technology and working styles were new for employees.

Additionally, Ghislieri et al., (2021) found that learning about using technology features became a challenge for old employees who started their career with working manually and found it difficult to adapt to the use of technology features. Brennan (2021) found that remote work contributed to anxiety and stress among university employees. This is because these employees were fixated on their computers through constant online meetings for prolonged hours (Govender & Mpungose, 2022). Furthermore, employees experienced challenges with having limited time to take lunch breaks because of increased work intensity which contributed to job demands (Wood, 2022). Phungsoonthorn and Charoensukmongkol (2022) therefore stated that returning to work among some higher education institutions were found to be a solution to have access to internet connectivity and other work-related resources. Similarly, some employees perceived return to work as a positive experience since it offered

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them time to seek assistance from their technical support team at their higher education institution (Guidetti et al., 2022).

2.4.4 Time pressure and overtime

Adler and Koch (2017) stated that personal growth at work meant the ability and potential to develop employee skills that allowed for their problem-solving and creative skills to develop. This growth is influenced negatively if there is a lack of experience with online work and time pressure. However, emotional exhaustion can be related to time pressure when employees are exposed to completing many tasks that are not easy to manage. This can lead to role conflict and work overload (Watermeyer et al., 2021).

Emotional exhaustion can be defined as the state of employees feeling frustrated and fatigued from their work, from a lack of emotional resources for their work roles (Puyod & Charoensukmongkol, 2021). Brulin et al. (2022) argued that the neoliberal focus on remote working productivity and service delivery by higher education institutions during COVID-19 contributed to emotional exhaustion among employees. This was accompanied by a lack of support and guidance to assist with reducing work overload.

Similarly, Phungsoonthorn and Charoensukmongkol (2022) found that emotional exhaustion was common at higher education institutions that were not able to, or had a lack of providing tools to help employees manage their work tasks from remote working, which contributed to stress and depression. In relation to these findings, Dong et al. (2020) called the lack of psychosocial support for administrative faculty at the staff university a psychological challenge that instigated anxiety and stress because of high-intensity work.

In regard to emotional exhaustion during COVID-19, Wood (2022) found that university employees experienced emotional exhaustion from their remote working because of the workload and a lack of understanding of performing certain work tasks. Workplaces that did not consider providing psychological support such as counselling for employees who experienced working extended hours and working on weekends, contributed to employee strain as a result of their work pressure (Barello et al., 2021).

Communication and text messages from management resulted in employees feeling obliged to reply quickly, which increased anxiety and stress for employees with internet challenges (Parkin et al., 2022). The differences in technology availability and accessibility resulted in psychological challenges such as emotional exhaustion and reduced performance because

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employees did not receive enough job resources to support them in adapting to their remote working during COVID-19 (Singh et al., 2020).

In support of the above findings, Ipsen et al. (2021) stated that even though remote working has benefitted most university employees as they experienced some flexibility and saving money for transportation, they still experienced work pressure and working longer hours. In addition, poor physical working conditions for employees who lived with their families in a single room, did not contribute to positive well-being and positive organisational outcomes such as employee engagement (Hadi & Hausser, 2021).

The negative experiences of time pressure and work overtime from remote working contributed to cognitive and motivation challenges such as fear and uncertainty of COVID19. Moreover, the fear and uncertainty of in-person working conditions contributed to employees being hesitant and less willing to return to in-person working environments (Brennan, 2021). Munoz et al. (2021) found that fear and uncertainty to return to campus contributed to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety since reattachment and adapting to another working style took a long time to connect with other employees.

The above job demands, work role overload, and work-life conflict, technostress, and time pressure and overtime, are evident that administrative faculty staff had various experiences during remote work which informed their perceptions about their return to work. Some showed willingness to return to campus, whereas some were not willing to return to campus. Furthermore, Shaw et al. (2020) suggested that universities needed to create a healthy work environment that promotes workplace flexibility and modifications to allow easy adjustment for administrative faculty staff upon employees' return to work following the COVID-19 lockdowns.

2.5 Job Resources: affecting return to campus.

This section explores some different experiences of administrative faculty staff from their remote working and return to campus. Literature presents that some employees were happy with their remote working, whilst some preferred return to campus. Such experiences were depending on the job resources that were made available by the university. The resources that had an influence on remote working and return to campus included supervisor support, work-life enrichment, emotional support, and feedback and autonomy.

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2.5.1 Supervisor support

Sommovigo et al. (2021) defined supervisor support as a workplace process that occurs when management can control, and support employees work tasks through the provision of adequate work tools and psychological support. For example, university employees who were provided with adequate work tools including the provision of laptops, and internet devices to assist with remote working were more likely to be engaged and motivated (Govender & Mpungose, 2022). Supervisor support that promoted psychological support such as counselling at the workplace improved employee's mental health from remote working conditions such as work pressure (Dong et al., 2020).

This was noted as a need because COVID-19 brought changes to university working arrangements that included different remote working. This transition required employees to mentally to adjust to these changes, hence supervisor support was required. Some employees seemed to be happy with the supervisor support they received whilst working remotely. Munnich (2022) witnessed that the provision of technological support and enough tools from supervisors, enabled employees to work and cope well as these resources helped to overcome barriers for them to complete their work tasks from their homes.

Additionally, the provision of training with new technology features allowed for control and management of work for administrative faculty staff at their universities (Vyas, 2022).

Talukder and Galang (2021) found that employees were able to control their work because of the guidance and support they received from their supervisors which improved productivity, as they perceived this supervision support as a resource to motivate them.

In contrast, Wood (2022) found that supervisor support was important for reducing burnout and stress, because of assistance provided for difficult work tasks, which acted as a buffer for role conflict and role ambiguity experienced during remote working. Additionally, Zhang and Parker (2018) found that a reduction of role conflict and role ambiguity in workplaces was possible with supervisor support.

Svicher and Fabio (2021) found that during COVID-19 some workplaces that promoted supervisor support through regular check-ups and better ways of communication increased motivation among employees. This is because their work was created to allow for time-spatial fit this refers to when employees reflect on certain work tasks and their personal demands by selecting workplace, working hours and work locations where will adopt and balance their personal demands and work tasks (Svicher & Fabio, 2021).

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The assistance from management providing and assisting their employees to be able to work remotely, especially via the availability of technical support, allowed employee autonomy and work-life balance. This in turn enabled employees more control of their work role and family roles, reducing work overload and promoting a healthy workplace (Parkin et al., 2022).

Importantly, Guidetti et al. (2022) stated that supervisor support that recognized the importance of effective communication and scheduling of constant team building sessions reduced self-isolation among university employees. Additionally, to reduce mental health related challenges for administrative faculty staff, supervisor support was shown through facilitating online counselling (Munoz et al., 2021).

According to Vyas (2022) the presence of psychological support from supervisors minimized emotional exhaustion. During remote working, employees were able to share their work-related challenges with their supervisors and other online counselling servers, contributing to a healthy workplace. Cunha et al. (2021) found that supervisor support contributed positively to employee mental health since employees felt that their well-being was of concern to their supervisors. This promoted positive organisational outcomes such as improved work performance. The provision of technical support such as information communication technology assistance for university employees during their remote working allowed for positive output, as they were able to make use of technology software such as Ms Teams that was introduced during the period of COVID-19 (Parkin et al., 2022). Higher education institutions provided diverse forms of supervisor support during COVID-19 for the adaptation of remote working. Sapta (2021) stated that organisational culture refers to a cognitive state that is aligned with symbols, and values that make a person feel a sense of belonging in the workplace. The new organisational culture of remote working prepared administrative faculty staff to adapt and be fit for the new work style (Cunha et al., 2021).

Supervisor support that aimed at uplifting employees skills from their adjustment to remote working helped employees to overcome role conflict and emotional exhaustion from their job demands which also increased employee motivation (Luo & Lei, 2021). A supportive supervisor helps create a strong relationship between management and employees when there is constant communication, which allowed for achieving organisational goals and objectives. Supervisor support was found to contribute to positive experiences upon return to work, as helped with employees feeling they had job control which led to employee engagement and flexibility (Gomes & Ferreira, 2021).

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Some administrative faculty staff experienced easy readjusting upon their return to work since there has been the provision of work resources such as access to technical support for work and office spaces, without work disturbance, as compared from remote working to enhance work productivity (Theron, 2022). Karatuna et al. (2022) asserted that the reduction of COVID-19 cases allowed workplaces like universities and colleges to introduce hybrid working.

The willingness to adjust to hybrid working were influenced by supportive work environments that came from co-workers and supervisors which enabled employees to feel accommodated from finding assistance for difficult work tasks and projects (Giauque et al, 2021). Moreover, supervisor support, which included constant checking in on its employees, allowed employees to have control and manage their work tasks without work pressure, which allowed for flexibility with family and work roles. In contrast, some employees felt a return to campus was a barrier to their work and family flexibility since returning to campus required most of their time spent at work and having less time with family, which meant that some employees were less willing to return to campus (Parkin et al., 2022).

The information communication and technology technical support structure upon return to campus enabled the possibility of hybrid working since it provided a strong team to provide access to working from home without any technological challenges, such as internet connectivity (Guidetti et al., 2022). However, Munnich (2022) stated that in order for employees to perform well with hybrid working it would be important for the supervisors to trust their employees with their preferred way to work.

2.5. 2 Work-life enrichment

Taludker and Galang (2021) defined work-life enrichment as a positive experience among employees that occurs when workplaces provide flexibility with work and family roles, which contributes to improved employee performance. Not only does work-life enrichment promote work-life balance in the workplace, but it also reduces job strain when there is management and control of work tasks and family time (Sommovigo et al., 2021).

Monika et al. (2022) found that during COVID-19, remote working was regarded as the best option for administrative faculty staff, as it allowed for more flexibility as opposed to before the pandemic. Employees who were able to manage their work role and family roles contributed to job control and improved productivity (Monika et al., 2022).

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Vyas and Butakhieo (2020) stated that university employees felt that remote working was a useful initiative since it allowed for work-life balance and autonomy. Employees who experienced work-life enrichment were able to manage their work without experiencing stress from work overload, which fostered a sense of meaning in regard to work (Qamari & Tjahjono, 2021). Therefore, flexibility at work was found to be key for improving mental health among employees during COVID-19 (Usmani & Das, 2022).

Work-life enrichment can enhance the mental health of employees when psychological support has been provided for the adjustment of their return to work (Brulin et al., 2021). Findings from administrative faculty staff indicated that remote working contributed positively to work-life balance as it allowed university employees to spend more time with their families (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). This resulted in some employees preferring hybrid working as opposed to a full-time return on campus. Since hybrid working would enable them to be productive based on the availability of work resources, while at the same time will get to spend their time with their families which can improve their well-being (Leineweber et al., 2022). In contrast, Sommovigo and colleagues (2021) found that return to work was a negative experience, since the workplace did not allow enough time for balancing both work and family roles during COVID-19. Instead, there was more work pressure experienced. Therefore, fostering work-life enrichment was encouraged by allowing the opportunity to work in hybrid formats (Monika, 2021).

2.5.3 Emotional support

Li and Liu (2021) refer to emotional support as positive guidance that is aimed at reducing work pressure by increasing psychological well-being, so that a person can adapt to a new work style. Yuan et al. (2020) stated that emotional support enabled employees to adjust to new working styles from their remote working, contributing to positive adjustment and job reattachment. Furthermore, Guidetti et al. (2022) argued that the provision of emotional support provided through check-ins with supervisors encouraged a return to work.

Supervisors would check if employees were coping with work-related challenges, such as difficulty with having access to digitalisation tools for their remote work.

Phungsoonthorn and Charoensukmongkol (2022) asserted that emotional support has been important for the adjustment of employees from their return to work. This occurred when psychological counselling was provided, which assisted with managing and coping in within their work environments. Psychological counselling assisted with job reattachment among its

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employees as it created positive mental health in workplaces by providing mental health campaigns, which empowered and encouraged a return to campus (Cunha et al., 2021). The provision of counselling for job reattachment upon return to work increased job satisfaction and productivity, which contributed to mental readiness for hybrid working.

Furthermore, Dlouhy and Casper (2021) stated that emotional support enabled employee engagement amongst employees by enabling self-efficacy and a sense of belonging to work, especially for self-isolated employees. Emotional support contributed to teamwork through socialisation upon employees return to work, for employees that experienced self-isolation (Lindgren et al., 2022).

Crawford et al. (2020) found that employees who experienced self-isolation were able to get emotional support from their workplace which enhanced their psychological well-being during COVID-19. This is because emotional support as a job resource promoted positive mental health through counselling that contributed to productivity for university employees (Akerstrom et al., 2021). Higher education institutions that offered emotional support such as counselling upon return to work promoted socialisation through working in teams, which reduced self-isolation (Bilotta et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Lindgren et al., (2022) found that psychosocial support meant constant engagement with work tasks and guidance on task performance which contributed to university employees being able to understand their work tasks better without stress. Some employees felt a return to campus would assist in seeking help from their colleagues when they were struggling with some of their work roles. This enhanced relationships with coworkers which served to improve work performance and result in reduced work stress (Lindgren et al., 2022). This was found to allow for easy adjustments for workplace flexibility and a positive attitude for employees who experienced mental health problems in their return to work (Akerstrom et al., 2021).

Theron (2022) stated that higher education institutions that had invested in providing psychological counselling during COVID-19 through telephone calls and online videos that contributed to mental readiness to return to work. Return to campus for some employees were motivated with career development through learning and guidance from their supervisor so that they can be able to promote service delivery in their workplace. Some wanted to spend some days at office space and some working at their houses through hybrid working, but that was not possible for some employees (Theron, 2022).

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The failure to this balance contributed to work-family conflict, since there was exposure of increased working hours and increased workloads that interfered with their family roles (Wood, 2022).

Importantly, emotional support would be an important tool to minimize emotional demands by providing support and work tools that would encourage a return to work, and encourage employees to express their emotions when work is challenging (Yang et al., 2021). The adoption of hybrid working with emotional support job resources has been found to minimize work-life conflict and technostress (Munoz et al., 2021).

2.5.4 Feedback and autonomy

Bilotta et al. (2021) defined feedback and autonomy as a process whereby employees have control of their work, whilst also being able to receive guidance on their progress from their work through appreciation and innovativeness. To further expand these constructs Zhang and colleagues (2021) viewed feedback and job autonomy as a job resource within the JD-R model that benefits employees from working independently at convenient places and during convenient times whilst receiving support to complete their work.

During the period of COVID-19 remote working, it was found that administrative faculty staff who had experienced feedback and autonomy were able to have improved work performance compared to when working in their office space (Thielsch et al., 2020).

However, Watermeyer et al. (2021) found that university employees that were monitored felt their organisation did not have trust in them. This made employees feel like monitoring made them work long hours with limited breaks (Garcia et al., 2021). The provision of feedback and autonomy for some workplaces enabled motivation and employee engagement as employees had a clear working schedule and assistance with their work tasks (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021).

Sommovigo et al. (2021) found that feedback and autonomy contributed to job control when employees were able to manage their work times and other family-related roles, which was important for reducing the strain of investing too much time in work roles compared to family roles. Stress was reduced since management was not overly monitoring employees which allowed for them to work independently (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Furthermore, Sommovigo et al. (2021) found that higher education institutions that provided autonomy and feedback to

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university employees enabled adaptive behaviour and employees were able to understand their performance and what was needed when they returned to campus.

The support from work tasks that were provided, allowed for their preparedness and adjustment since they experienced employee engagement as a result of in-person working conditions (Tan et al., 2020).

2.6 Linking job demands and job resources to well-being:

Watermeyer et al. (2021) stated that the intense emotions experienced among employees during COVID-19 contributed to mental health problems such as depression and feeling helpless when organisations did not provide support such as counselling for job control and reduction of extensive workloads. Preston (2021) supported this view that during COVID-19 intense emotion contributed to anxiety and depression among administrative staff since their workplaces were not catering to their mental health needs through counselling, and they were prone to experiencing extensive workload from various role demands. Slaughter et al. (2021) asserted that workplaces that did not cater to psychological counselling among employees enabled exposure to work-related challenges such as psychological distress, which led to mental health illnesses such as depression, stress, and feeling lonely.

These challenges contributed to burnout and reduced job performance in the workplace. Universities that failed to provide support for the return of work, because of a lack of knowledge in implementing safety measures, contributed to the above psychological challenges (Asaba et al., 2022). These challenges contributed to employees being unable to cope with their workload, which increased their stress (Garcia et al., 2021). For many of these employees, they were encouraged to return to work since working from home increased their emotional exhaustion (Varol et al., 2022). Returning to work for these employees was considered a solution to manage their work-related challenges as a result of remote working.

However, some employees experienced returning to work as a challenge rather than a solution, since they experience a lack of work-life balance. For these employees, remote working facilitated work-life balance, and there was provision of support and work tools to stay productive (Dong et al., 2020). In contrast, employees who required office space due to their home space not being conducive, were more willing to return to in-person working conditions (Mojtahedzadeh et al., 2021).

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Some employees with health-related problems such as chronic illnesses were not happy with returning to work as they believed that they were at risk of easily contracting COVID-19.

A study by Lindgren et al. (2022) indicated that employees with health problems returned to work because they feared losing their jobs even though they were not psychologically fit and happy to do so.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter shows that the JD-R model has been important for understanding administrative employees' adjustment upon their return to campus during COVID-19. The chapter concludes by highlighting administrative faculty staff shared experiences from their job demands that lead to various experiences such as work overload, work-life conflict, role ambiguity, and emotional exhaustion which contributed to negative experiences upon their return to work. Further, it reviewed the various job resources such as supervisor support, autonomy and feedback, and emotional support and how they can reduce the above-mentioned job demands during return to campus among administrative staff. Importantly it should be noted that support from supervisors can allow for motivation, employee engagement, and flexibility when universities can provide necessary support and job resources for employees. To overcome negative experiences for administrative staff, there can be the development of flexibility policies that promote work-life balance. These findings show that administrative faculty staff had various experiences regarding their willingness to return to campus during COVID-19. This was dependent on the job demands and job resources that the university provided for them.

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Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

The primary objective of this study was to explore the shared experiences of return to campus of administrative faculty staff during COVID-19 using the job demands resources model. The exploration of this study was achieved using a phenomenological approach employing qualitative methods. Chapter Three outlines the research design and approach, research paradigm and data collection method, sampling and participants, research procedure, and ethical considerations. This chapter concludes by detailing the thematic analysis technique to analyse the data and steps taken to ensure research rigour and reflexivity.

3.1 Research design and approach

To develop rich insights into the shared experiences of administrative faculty staff upon their return to campus during COVID-19, an exploratory design was used. According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) a qualitative exploratory design seeks to understand a phenomenon based on its shared experiences, which leads to quality responses that allow for reduced generalisation. Qualitative exploratory designs allow the researcher to look at certain phenomenon that has been less explored through people's experiences (Khan, 2014).

Furthermore, the qualitative approach, phenomenology, focuses on describing how people can experience the certain phenomenon. The important use of a phenomenological approach in this study was to allow the researcher to be able to tap into participant's experiences of the particular phenomenon of administrative faculty staff returning to on campus work after lockdown, and exploring their feelings and perceptions (Ercan & Marsh, 2016). Sundler et al. (2018) stated that the phenomenology allows the researcher to explore and understand the meaning of lived experiences of people's opinions, and views.

This approach was appropriate for gathering information on sensitive issues about the lived experiences of participants which allowed for the analysis of data through thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.2 Research paradigm and data collection method

In this study, phenomenology is used as an approach in the interpretivism paradigm. Goldkuhl (2012) stated that the interpretivism paradigm is important for qualitative research as it allows for understanding the meaning behind different human participants. The interpretivism paradigm was used to understand and advocate different psychological and

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emotional experiences and meanings of returning to campus among the administrative faculty staff (Ugwu et al., 2021). The interpretivism paradigm also guided how the researcher should engage and interact with the participants when they share their experiences through focus group discussion (Bryman, 2008).

Focus group interviews were used as the data collection method to explore the shared experiences of administrative faculty staff on their return to campus by discussing issues through interaction with specific groups of participants. While the initial plan was to collect data through face-to-face group interviews, the unpredictable dynamics of new waves of COVID-19 and participants' fear of contracting the virus meant that online focus group interviews were also used (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). This research study employed both face-to-face group and online focus groups interviews, as this allowed for participants to choose their preference.

The focus group interviews allowed the extraction of rich data collection when participants shared their different and similar views about the topic (Reisner et al., 2018). The use of focus groups further allowed the participants to share their ideas and feelings without showing sympathy; this included listening without judgment and giving everyone an equal chance to share their experiences. These participants experienced a sense of belonging through the focus groups interviews since trust and transparency was made available (Rabiee, 2004). The equal chance was given to each person by politely and constantly asking participants that dominated the focus group interviews, to please give other people a chance to share their experiences.

Focus groups were chosen over semi-structured interviews because they allowed the administrative faculty staff to share their feelings with each other and relate with similar and different experiences. Nyumba et al. (2017) stated that focus groups allowed the researcher to gather complex data from participant's perceptions and personal experiences from their interaction.

Participants could choose their preferences for in-person and online group interaction especially during the period of COVID-19 when participants may not have been comfortable with being in the same room with other people, as they fear contracting the virus (Santhosh, 2021). The use of a focus group assisted participants to have closure of how they were treated different from academic staff, as they were able to openly and genuinely share their experiences that had impacted and affected their return to campus (Ercan & Marsh, 2016).

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To better understand more interesting points from participants during the focus groups, probing was used to extract much data (Nyumba et al., 2017). Probes were used to encourage participants to explain why and elaborate more. However, in situations where some participants were dominant in the conversation, the researcher probed to give an opportunity to hear from other participant about their experiences (Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

3. 3 Sampling and participants

Bhardwaj (2022) noted that sampling refers to a subset of a population that allows for the generalisation of a group or transferability from one group to another similar group. In this phenomenological study the researcher was not seeking generalisability. Non-probability sampling was employed which allowed the study to target and approach only administrative faculty staff that were available in this university (Berndt, 2020). Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. Purposive sampling was the most appropriate strategy for use because it allowed the study to deliberately select and match the target population, in this context were full-time employed administrative faculty staff (Bhardwaj, 2022). This sampling method was used to allow the researcher to make assumptions about the desired number of participants that fulfilled the research aims and objectives (Staller, 2021).

Moreover, purposive sampling allows for determining other sample methods to use when more participants are needed through the experience and knowledge of the researcher (Campbell et al., 2020). Johnson (2020) stated that purposive sampling refers to a research study's intentional selection of desired participants that meet and answer the research question of an explored study. Also, the inclusion criteria were met by including only permanently employed administrative faculty staff at the university, since they had experienced the transition from remote working to returning to campus during COVID-19. The participants were all based at the university where the data collection took place.

Snowball sampling was used to expand the sample size by reaching other participants through a referral from those who already opted into the study (Staller, 2021). Snowball sampling assisted in accessing desired participants who were not easy to find, through referral by one participant to another (Berndt, 2020). Parker et al. (2019) stated that snowball sampling helps us to build meaning and recognise participant's beliefs and opinions since they were able to relate to other participants' experiences on their return to campus. This was done by the researcher informing participants that are in a safe space and their shared information is

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confidential which made participants feel that their rights and confidentiality would not be violated, helping to develop the level of trust (Parker et al., 2019). In addition, Atkinson and Flint (2001) stated that the snowball sampling allowed for the increased building of rapport and trust since referrals were direct from their colleagues which allowed for more chances of building trust and rapport.

Data saturation and adequacy occur when the researcher receives the same information repeatedly when there is the repetition of information without any new insights into the study being generated (Staller, 2021). In the current study, data saturation was achieved after three focus groups. Three focus groups were held, the first and third had four participants each and the second had three participants. Overall, participants consisted of 11 women. While the sample is small, Shaheen et al. (2021) confirmed that the sample size cannot be regarded as a barrier just as long as the data collected meets the research objectives, especially in a study that has a unique phenomenon. The ages of the participants ranged from 38 to 57 years. However, some participants did not agree to share their ages. All participants that were involved in this study were permanent administrative faculty staff at the university.

Most women were single parents and most of them had children to take care of who were under the age of 18 years. The participants' race identities were diverse including three Black, five Coloured, and three Indians. Further, details for participants are summarised within the participants' demographic information in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Table illustrating demographics of focus group participants

Participant Information

Participant's number	Gender	Race	Job level	Highest Education level	People in Household	Marital status
1	Female	Black		Postgraduate		
2	Female	Coloured	10	Postgraduate	2	Married
3	Female	Coloured		Matric	4	Married
4	Female	Indian	09	Postgraduate		Single
5	Female	Coloured				

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6	Female	Coloured				
7	Female	Indian	09		0	Single
8	Female	Coloured				
9	Female	Black	07	Diploma	3	Single
10	Female	Indian			0	Single
11	Female	Black	08	Diploma	3	Single

Only female participants agreed to participate in the focus groups. This might be because the administrative faculty work roles/jobs are more dominated by females, which made it a challenge to access men. Accessing participants was a challenge because the data were collected during a time when the participants had been busy with their academic administrative work in preparation for exams. With rampant load shedding, some participants were no longer able to join online focus groups.

With the uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic brought, some participants still had a fear of being involved and being in physical contact with their co-workers as they had fear that would contract the virus. As a result, some participants preferred telephone interviews as opposed to online focus groups. However, use of this option would allow for the study to gather less information since there would be no ability to observe their behaviour and would not have been suitable for focus groups.

3.4 Procedure

The researcher is a student at the University of Cape Town and made use of the Human resources database for faculty and administrative staff, which the researcher used to email those in the list. When insufficient participants indicated interest and availability through this process, the student utilised their supervisor's network to access additional administrative faculty staff. With the ease of COVID-19 restrictions and regulations, face-to-face and online data collection were employed. Online data collection included the electronic platform Ms. Teams (Olugbade & Olurinola, 2021). Before the data collection took place it was ensured that the participants were provided with details and an explanation of what the study entails. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Committee at the University of Cape Town with the reference number: REC 2022/08/007. In addition,

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the focus group questions were guided by the APA ethics research guidelines to ensure that the study does not harm human participants.

This study dealt with ethical issues since the study was dealing with sensitive information that involved lived and shared human experiences. All efforts were taken to protect the participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality, through physical and online consent forms that outlined the purpose of the study. Obtaining informed consent also required the participants to share their demographics and permission for the study to be recorded online through the use of MS Teams and in person using the audio recorder (Khan, 2014). The informed consent outlined that participants had a right to withdraw at any time (Archibald, et al., 2019).

The researcher organised and arranged suitable a time, date, and venues for the in-person focus group interview. During the focus group interview process, the researcher made sure to introduce himself to build rapport and trust (Nyumba et al., 2017). To promote anonymity in this study the researcher introduced the study, welcomed the participants, and reminded the participants that their identity would not be disclosed, and instead pseudonyms would be used when transcribing the focus groups. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher ensured to asked for the participants' permission to audio record prior to conducting the focus group. The focus groups interviews were conducted in a quiet and comfortable space for all the participants. Furthermore, the researcher informed the participants about their rights to withdraw from participating in this study. The researcher also informed the participants that the research data would be secured and kept safe and were only to be used only for academic research purposes. The study participants who were interested in the findings and conclusion of the study received information by their work emails. Moreover, the participants were informed that there were no benefits for participants such as money and gifts.

3.5 Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step process for thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This process allowed the researcher to identify and determine relevant themes, patterns, and codes from the data that were in relation to the research question in a qualitative study (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2021) stated that reflexive thematic analysis can be used to provide meaningful knowledge by using coding practices and developing themes in a study. In the first phase of thematic analysis, both the audio and online recordings were transcribed. The researcher familiarized himself with the data by completing the

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transcription for a better understanding of the data. The re-reading of the transcripts ensured that it was simpler for the researcher to understand the data that might be fit for the themes through the development of a coding scheme. MS Excel was used to organise data to determine codes that responded to the research question. Then the researcher ensured that the codes were sorted and arranged using excel spreadsheet codes, in the process each transcript was analysed through coding scheme, with consistency this allowed for ability to interpret those that were related to one another. The ones that seemed to be related were refined and used to form themes. Furthermore, the researcher made use of the semantic approach to determine and identify themes that allowed to combine codes with similarities so to develop a theme that provided meaning to the research questions and aims.

The researcher reviewed and discarded any themes that were not relevant revealing three themes: (1) The work-life balance ideal: adjusting after remote work (2) Remote work and isolation: return-to-work as social rewarding (3) “We don’t have much choice or voice”: decision-making as one-sided; The analysis of the themes was reported and written in a manner that reflected administrative faculty staff experiences of their return to campus.

3.6 Establishing Rigor:

In this study, rigor was established through considering issues that relate to trustworthiness (Johnson et al., 2020). Trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Daniel, 2019).

3.6.1 Credibility

The research study has to show how the researcher engaged with participants to achieve the research objectives of the study, especially through data analysis (Daniel, 2019).

The researcher obtained this criteria by asking questions that related to psychological experiences of returning to campus for administrative faculty staff, as such themes around the research question were developed for data analysis. Furthermore, the credibility was met when the researcher presented equal opportunity for the participants to share their own experiences (Baxter & Eyles, 1996). Also, in the research process, the researcher maintained credibility through receiving supervision support and guidance on draft chapter submissions and as well presenting the research proposal to a panel of academic staff who provided feedback and suggestions and commented on the viability of the study.

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3.6.2 Transferability

Baxter and Eyles (1996) refer to transferability as how the study can relate from one population to another based on the findings. The transferability criterion was met by the researcher by gathering observations and asking open ended questions to gather more information from participants to establish the most reliable findings for the study (Daniel, 2019). Importantly, the researcher met this criterion by informing the participants that their information was confidential, and the data collection process only included administrative faculty staff (Campbell et al., 2020). Additionally, the provision of a detailed methods section provide context on how some researchers can use the current study findings.

3.6.3 Dependability

This criterion was achieved by explaining to the participants that their experiences are all important and that there were no right or wrong answers which allowed everyone to talk freely without having to worry about their responses (Baxter & Eyles, 1996). Importantly this criteria was achieved through explaining that the transcripts and audio records were kept safe, and information will only be used for academic purposes (Campbell et al., 2020).

3.6.4 Conformability

This refers to the researcher's interests and motivation how they can influence interpretations of the findings of the study (Baxter & Eyles, 1996). In this study, confirmability criteria were achieved by avoiding shifting participants views and perceptions from their reflections, and rather remained flexible with their shared responses (Daniel, 2019).

3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's active role in knowledge production through data collection and data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexivity includes researchers influencing researcher's assumptions, subjectiveness, values, and beliefs in the research such as challenges of bias to the findings. Reflexivity in thematic analysis needs researchers to be involved, be able to think, and conduct analysis and interpretations which will allow for themes to make meaning. This is because the codes and themes that are developed from emerging data are not just available or waiting to be interpreted - a researcher should strategically interpret them to make meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The researcher is a Black South African who grew up in the Eastern Cape. At the beginning of the research process, the researcher had expressed interest in wanting to conduct a study

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that would aim to show administrative staff experiences from the universities upon their return to campus during COVID-19. The researcher wanted to conduct this study, so that government, and organisations understand how women experience psychological and emotional challenges from both work and home roles. Even though these are visible still organisations do not take into account of bringing solutions to these problems. I believe the shared experiences would be a call that workplace need to take into account of work and family demands, that women experience by promoting measures such as work-life balance and support to promote their well-being and work productivity. Also, with study I wanted organisation to understand that remote working can still enhance productivity and work-life balance as long there are supportive measures such as access to data. Moreover, employees need to be given an opportunity to choose their working preferences as long work productivity is present.

Before having to conduct the research, the researcher discovered studies that had focused on the academic experiences of employees return to work it was evident that there was a lack of focus on the administrative staff experiences. The Aunt of the researcher is an administrative employee at the university of Eastern Cape motivated and this motivated me to explore their experiences further. This study has shaped the thinking of the researcher on how hierarchal power and top down approach in employment areas still impact some employees emotionally and psychologically since they do not have a voice in decision-making. It provided the researcher with an insight that universities still need to revisit their policies and regulations with regard to employee fairness and equity among all employees, since in the context of this study administrative faculty staff felt had limited voice in decision-making compared to academic staff.

Being a young male researcher has open insight on how one should conduct themselves during the focus group interviews. This is because the researcher worked with older women, in South Africa respect is important when talking to elders amongst all tribes. To maintain respect and rapport, the researcher listened and spoke in a respectful manner when participants were done with their answers. The researcher also shared with them about how and why he had an interest in this study, by relating to his other family members who shared some experiences from their return to campus. The manner in which the researcher spoke and shared this idea allowed the establishment of trust and willingness to share their experiences.

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For the researcher, this study is important for inclusion and voice in the decision making of support staff employees in the university as they play a crucial role in service delivery. Also, this study is a way of providing context in the university on how women are influenced by work and life roles, it calls for ways in which universities can embark on strategic and innovative ways to maintain their work-life balance (Crawford et al., 2020). In the process of focus groups, I wanted to indicate the participants departments, but for confidentiality, as stipulated by the Ethics research committee participants and the university name need to be protected. Also, if their department were revealed it would breach ethics confidentiality, since findings shared various experiences on it treated return to campus on employees from one department to another.

I recommend that some researchers explore the significance of identity in exploring research who might need or not need their identity during the focus group interviews.

3.8 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study adopted a qualitative exploratory design. In this study, phenomenology was employed as an approach in the interpretivism paradigm. The researcher recruited the administrative faculty staff by using both purposive and snowball sampling and generated data through the use of focus group interviews. Thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse the data. This findings and discussion of this study are reported in the chapter to follow. The requisite ethical considerations were adhered to and issues relevant to trustworthiness were maintained at all times.

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Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction:

The purpose of this study was to explore administrative faculty staff's experiences about their return to campus at the university during COVID-19. In this chapter, three themes were identified using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis: 1) The work-life balance ideal: adjusting after remote work, 2) Remote work and isolation: return to work as social rewarding, and 3) "We don't have much choice or voice": decision-making as one-sided. The identified themes addressed the study's research question: What are the experiences of administrative faculty staff returning to in person working conditions during COVID-19 pandemic? The job demands resources model framed the analyses of themes. In summary, the findings reported positive and negative experiences that were present from the transition of remote working to in-person working conditions.

The findings of these participants with the use of the JD-R model provided insight into the negative experiences that these employees encountered as a result of work overload and anxiety contributing to challenges for their readiness for returning to campus. However, some report experiencing work-life balance, saving money for travel, focusing on their studies, and being family oriented with remote working, hence were reluctant with in person working conditions. This model was important to understand various strategies/interventions employed to reduce work overload, and anxiety, and provide support measures by the university. In the context of this study supervisor support and provision of work resources were reviewed as some job resources that were feasible to the administrative faculty staff experiences. Importantly, the findings are discussed relative to similar studies in the field and more specifically to the JD-R model, and the meaning this model might have for South African scholarship on the study's topic.

4.2.1 Theme one: The work-life balance ideal: adjusting after remote work

All the participants offered context into how remote work – either through its value or challenges – shaped their experiences of returning to work. Some spoke about an improved work-life balance made possible through remote work thereby making the transition to in person working more challenging. Others spoke about the boundaries of work and family life becoming ever-blurred during remote work and therefore welcomed a return to campus, even during a time where health risks were high. This theme captures these different experiences

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showing how returning to work was shaped not only by perceptions of COVID-19 but also by the way remote work impacted the participants' lives.

Returning to campus was a big transition for everybody since we got used to remote working. (Interviewee 4).

The above excerpt from Interviewee 4 highlights the key issues explored in this theme. For most participants, adjustment to on-campus work meant losing the healthy psychological and emotional harmony achieved in their family and work lives during the remote work period. For example, one participant spoke about the transition to in-person working conditions as a struggle, especially as her experience of remote working was positive:

It was a struggle that we struggled because we had gotten accustomed to working from home, having control of our time work and also our department has given us enough work resources to work at home. It was good, working at home and now I have to be back it is not easy for me (Interviewee 1).

This administrative faculty staff member working in the university department experienced difficulty when transitioning from remote to in-person working, as she claimed to be used to remote working, contributing to some challenges with psychological adjustment with in-person working. This participant employs language such as “good” and “having control” to describe the positive experience offered through working from home, while also referring to having the necessary work resources to work productively from home; a sentiment shared by other participants.

In contrast, she described her return to work as “a struggle” and “not easy”. Aligned with her experience, other participants spoke about experiencing a better quality of life during the remote work period because they were able to achieve balance between work while simultaneously performing household tasks. In addition, the value of saving time and foregrounding productivity was front and centre for some, whereas another participant noted the benefits of remote work on reduced travel:

I was happy that COVID-19 came in and I was not ashamed of that. Firstly, traveling to work for me takes 2 hours. Then traveling back home it's again another two hours. So that's four hours away from my day, which I could have been extremely productive, and coming from home late traveling because of the traffic becomes a

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challenge as well. It depletes your energy and depletes your petrol. It's just like a lot goes just to travel to work (Interviewee 4).

In the above extract, the participant spoke about how work-life balance shaped difficulty with their adjustment to in-person work as she struggled to cope with new working conditions. The adjustment on campus was a challenge for most of these participants since they experienced positive outcomes of work-life balance from this working style. In addition, the participant notes the importance of productivity and explains how in-person working conditions were a drain on her time, finances, and productivity due to her lengthy daily travel and fatigue that followed this, as she says, “it depletes your energy and depletes your petrol”.

International studies on adjustment to in-person working following the pandemic resonate strongly with the findings from the current study (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021; Ipsen et al., 2021; Munoz et al., 2021; Theron, 2022). A qualitative study by Theron (2022) conducted in Canada found that some administrative faculty staff at the local university experienced difficulty with adjusting to in-person work following a period of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Theron found that staff largely experienced remote work positively due to open access to work resources, internet connectivity, and a home infrastructure that facilitated a comfortable work environment. Theron (2022) concluded that remote work might have been a positive experience, especially for participants who formed part of the middle-to-high income earning brackets, such as those who have homes with private office space, and who were able to financially access work resources and familial support with ease.

These findings have meaning for the current study where the participants who expressed favour for remote working styles were largely those who were able to draw on familial or extra support when it came to child care and were additionally able to use financial resources to ensure work-from-home comforts. For example, Interviewees 2 and 7 spoke about the benefits of simultaneously taking care of work, family, and household responsibilities that could only be achieved when working from home:

I could juggle my plans well, get through my degree, and finish my studies. I enjoyed doing my work from home because I was able to work without pressure and able to take care of my family roles much better when I worked at home (Interviewee 2).

I feel like the work-life balance has now shifted with my return to campus. Whereas, with remote working, I was able to easily put up a pot of rice whilst

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working on the other side. In my faculty, the managers were very helpful, and very supportive and they also understood it was a big change and a big transition for everybody. However, working from home was a bit peaceful and less stressful since there was no disturbance (Interviewee 7).

Interviewee 7 speaks about the disruption of her work-life balance achieved during the remote work period, when she says, “I feel like the work-life balance is now shifted with return to campus”. Although Interviewee 7 highlights the support offered by her faculty managers with the transition back to working on campus, she additionally speaks to the loss of key aspects of work productivity, such as “peacefulness” and a “disturbance”-free environment, that helped her to thrive while working from home – a similar sentiment shared by Interviewee 2. Earlier in their interviews, both participants 2 and 7 additionally spoke about the deep family connections developed while working from home and the benefit of being able to spend time with her family and shared that upon returning to campus she struggled to adjust, emotionally and psychologically.

Dlouhy and Casper’s (2021) study conducted in the UK with a sample of corporate administrative staff shows how the return to work contributed to experiences of stress and frustration with adjusting since employees felt that it did not promote work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy. Dlouhy and Casper’s (2021) findings resonate with the current study’s interviewees – particularly Interviewee 1 – who highlighted the lack of “control” and agency as significantly shaping their experience of the return to in-person working conditions. In many ways, this study’s findings echo international studies on the topic and indicate how the experiences of working from home played an important role in shaping the return to work.

While the majority of participants found that the healthy work-life balance achieved during remote work shaped their hesitation to return to campus work, other participants yearned for social engagement and a sense of community that could only be experienced through in-person working conditions, which will be explored further in the next theme.

4.2.2 Theme two: Remote work and isolation: return to work as socially rewarding

Most of the interviewee’s stories revealed how remote working had its negative experiences such as long working hours, work pressure, and isolation before the in-person work was introduced. Some participants expressed to happy, with in-person working conditions. In this

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theme Interviewee 11 indicated to have experienced work pressure from their remote working.

These work pressures were exacerbated by disturbances from their children. Not only did family distractions contribute to increased working hours, also the university's pressure contributed to work pressure. The amount of work that this interviewee experienced from work overload contributed to overtime, which was a negative experience:

I felt relieved from returning to campus because working from home was a bit stressful and overwhelming for me and there was pressure because I ended up working overtime. Since I lived with my kids at home, I could not concentrate on working from 8:00 to 4:30. Sometimes I had to do something for them then I had to cover the minutes that I used for my work. So, coming back to the campus was perfect and good for me because I work better without any disturbance (Interviewee 11).

In the extract from above Interviewee 11 expressed how remote working contributed to working overtime because of work-life conflict that existed in these working conditions. Moreover, this interviewee made use of language such as “stressful” and “overwhelming” which describes how draining it was as she was unable to focus and concentrate on her work. She expressed happiness with her return to in person work as she worked without any work disturbance and working overtime. Another participant spoke about experiencing increased working hours since her work and the hours spent at work were monitored. With this pressure she would work overtime. For example, Interviewee 5 report feeling unhappy with not having privacy as she would receive communication by email even after working hours:

I could do the bulk of work which was more than my working hours. There was also a lot of work pressure of having to respond to emails after hours. Even on weekends, we were working, and we did not have time for our families (Interviewee 5).

This interviewee narrates how unhappy she was getting from the work pressure of receiving phone calls and emails, after hours which instigated stress. She employs words such as “frustrating” and “pressure” to narrate how stressful was remote working was because of the managers that placed them under work pressure and prolonged working hours:

I did not understand these people. They could call and email at any time, even on weekends this was so frustrating for me. If we are working on campus, we do not get

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such calls and pressure hence returning to campus was a better option for me (Interviewee 3).

Telephone calls and emails outside normal working hours and during weekends were received from managers, reducing the participants' time in the evenings and on weekends to spend with their family, their social life, and to rest. The administrative faculty staff participants expressed being emotionally exhausted from work, because of increased working hours which were a psychological challenge. In contrast, to negative experiences the return to work, for some participants, was a welcomed transition.

Some administrative staff reflected on the psychological and social benefits of once again being part of a community of workers after the isolating effects of remote work. For example, Interviewee 8 spoke about the benefits of social engagement on her mental health in the work space:

So being back at work I had a really positive effect on my mental health and on my work life. So, I really quite enjoyed coming back to work, we had like meetings now and then just so everybody could meet up and still have that social interaction to feel ready and happy in their work. So, I am happy with the way it's working now (Interviewee 8).

In the above extract, Interviewee 8 speaks about feeling "ready and happy" to adjust to in-person working conditions. She uses optimistic language when describing her experience from talking about "enjoyment" to mentioning the word "happy" twice in the above extract alone, which highlights the social benefits of engaging closely with her team on her psychological and emotional well-being.

In relation to the above participant experiences, her experience from the data extract uses words such as "happy" and "meet up" that describe the positive experience she encountered from being able to be back from work and socialise with people other than being isolated. For example, Interviewee 8 and 4 note the positive experience of in-person work including receiving work support from their colleagues, as their motivation for their readiness.

Also, Interviewee 4 expressed motivation and engagement from being able to work from home and office on their working days, such experience promoted a level of autonomy and flexibility.

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For example, this participant used words such as “enjoy work now” which may describe how happy and productive she is now within person-working other than from remote working conditions:

We also have a good support structure in the office, which is great. So, it motivates people to look forward to the whole return, to work from campus. I am only coming Monday to Friday, so there is a lot of flexibility attitude. I really enjoy work now (Interviewee 4).

Similarly, Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 10 reported how return to in-person work was a positive experience, despite COVID-19 related challenges to remote working, their university channelled ways to prevent self-isolation and promote a sense of meaning at work. For example, Interviewee 6 spoke about the role of regular support and addressing issues with in-person working conditions through meetings. These interviewees reported that addressed issues meant their voices were heard and they experienced a sense of meaning, a sense of belonging, and work engagement with co-workers from in-person working conditions:

Often, I brought up my concerns with my colleagues. It was addressed and like they are moving forward differently. So, I feel like they were very supportive, and I am really experiencing a better version and adjusting to the work environment (Interviewee 6).

Similarly, Interviewee 10 expressed that:

I remember our faculty checked up on use for morning meetings frequently, you know, just to make sure everyone was clear with the objectives for the day and that sort of everything (Interviewee 10).

The data extract from Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 10 noted how consistent support by management through checking on them from time to time had contributed to their happiness. Most of the interviewees indicated being happy with being able to receive a sense of safety and belonging from their manager support, contributing to a positive work environment.

In their language words such as “checked up” and “adjusting” were used to symbolise how these participants accepted adjustments of in-person working conditions, which contributed positively to their sense of well-being and their preparedness.

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Data from Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 6 indicated positive experiences from remote working since these working conditions enabled them to maintain and control work and their academics without work pressure.

Interviewee 2 reported being able to take care of family responsibilities and work roles without having one role dominating another which contributed to psychological attachment:

I could juggle my plans well, get through my degree, and finish my studies. I enjoyed doing my work from home because I was able to work without pressure and able to take care of my family roles much better when I worked at home (Interviewee 2).

Her ability to multitask work and family roles from remote working indicated that her work productivity was maintained without any work disturbance. Interviewee 2 expressed being unhappy with in-person work since limited her from being able to take care of some family needs and studying. Consistent with above, Interviewee 6 shared that remote working allowed her to take care of other family responsibilities such as taking care of her parent's health. For example, she claimed to be able to take and rush her parent to hospital who was ill during her remote work:

Every second weekend I was able to spend more time with my family during COVID-19 and take care of my parent's health. It has been very difficult for me especially because like for the last two years, that's always been a stress point for me that I am not spending enough time with them because I am always at work. I was very anxious to come back to work because both of my parents have common disabilities, so like I am always worried that something is going to happen to them (Interviewee 6).

She further expressed that remote working promoted good quality time with family and an opportunity for them to provide support for their parent's health care. Interviewee 6 expressed happiness as she was able to avail herself and take care of their parents when they needed it. Aligned with the above participant, Interviewee 7 reported remote working on how she was able to perform family responsibilities such as cooking and assisting with children's homework. Moreover, she indicated having the ability to focus on work tasks whilst also being able to monitor work and house chores without any work pressure and disturbance.

She also indicated that in- person working conditions, had limited her ability to balance work and home responsibilities than it was with remote working:

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I feel like the work-life balance has now shifted with my return to campus. Whereas, with remote working, I was able to easily put up a pot of rice whilst working on the other side (Interviewee 7).

The interviewee's limitation to maintain work and family responsibilities did not promote happiness and motivation for their adjustment to in-person working conditions. She indicated that in-person working did not allow for her work-life balances. By using language such as "easily" and "other side" to describe her positive experience from remote working, since she was able to take care of her work and family chores such as cooking which was considered common for other participants from remote working.

Interviewee 5 indicated to be unhappy with their return to work since she was not psychologically fit for in-person working conditions. She said that psychological adjustment became a challenge. For example, she seems to struggle to have ability to cook and at the same work from in-person working as she would do from remote working. In contrast, other participant expressed positive experience impact and meaningful from her return to work, since received support from managers/supervisors to be able to perform their work better with guidance, such escalated to motivation and employee engagement :

In my faculty, the managers were very helpful, and very supportive and they also understood it was a big change and a big transition for everybody. However, working from home was a bit peaceful and less stressful since there was no disturbance (Interviewee 5).

Interviewee 5 expressed being happier with remote working than in person work as she experienced support with her work, which helped with reducing stress and bringing peace. She responds by use of words such as, helpful and less stressful which means motivation and employee engagement were present during their remote working. Interviewee 7 and Interviewee 9 expressed how access to work resources such as internet connectivity, assisted and promoted a sense meaning in work since we're able to work without being worried about internet connectivity challenges:

The university does have resources in such a way to help us work. I feel like I get more work done as well when I am at home. However, when I was on campus, I was able to receive support by getting enough data which made work much better for me (Interviewee 9).

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Interviewee 9 narrates that remote work allowed for work productivity because she notes that it “provided us enough” and “support” which describes that remote working comprised of enough and efficient support from access to data which allowed for easy work performance.

The above extracts show how remote working informed their work and family roles with their adjustment to in-person working conditions. Also, data extract reports on how isolation motivated their return to campus to benefit from socialisation and work resources. The participant's experience of being able to manage both work and family responsibilities, without any work disturbance and work pressure meant happiness with this working condition. As opposed to in person working conditions, since they felt were not mentally fit to be separated from their family and spend time with them. For example, it was found that remote working did not just allow for work-life balance only, it enabled participants ability to take care of their parents’ health by taking them to hospitals, while this was impossible with in-person work. However, some participants felt the need to return to in-person work to access support and internet for their work productivity.

Findings on remote working and increased long hours from international or national studies report resonate with the findings from the current study. Barello et al. (2021) found that remote working experience meant an inability to support isolated employees led to fear and stress from not being around people, they would work overtime and on weekends, so to keep busy, this contributed to job strain from their work pressure. Similarly, Ghislieri et al. (2021) found that work-life conflict challenged and influenced working overtime since children demanded their parents’ time and attention, which lead to work distraction.

This study adds that administrative staff were prone to emotional exhaustion and anxiety as a result of COVID-19-related challenges from remote working. Aligned with these findings, Parkin et al. (2022) found that communication and text messages that came from management made employees feel obliged to reply quickly, which increased anxiety and stress for employees with internet challenges.

Moreover, some International studies on remote working, isolation, and transition to in-person working during COVID-19 were found to connect with the findings from the current study. A study by Dlouhy and Casper (2021) conducted in Germany found that the lack of mental health services related to role ambiguity, role conflict, and work-life conflict because the transition from remote working to in-person working meant inability to manage and have time with their families.

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They found that work-life conflict meant overlap of having one role dominating over the other which contributed to work overload. Brennan (2021) argued that work-life conflict meant an inability to cope with in person work because of less supportive measures that contributed to stress and frustration from remote working. In support, staff resistance to return in person, a study by Liu et al. (2020) found that administrative faculty staff were happy with remote working as opposed to in-person work during COVID-19 since they experienced work and family flexibility without any work disturbance and improved productivity.

Similarly, Wang (2021) found that compulsory return to in-person work meant work pressure and inability to control both their roles since work demands required more commitment over family roles thus contributing to employees return to work as psychological stress. Work demands also instigated pressure from having limited time to take lunch breaks, because of increased work intensity and job demands they experienced (Wood, 2022). However, return and adjusting to in-person work was influenced by the continuous support for work through meetings. In a study by Svicher and Fabio (2021) workplaces that promoted supervisor support through regular check-ups and better ways of communication increased motivation among employees, as this created and allowed for time-spatial fit which enlightened a sense of belonging in their workplace:

We also have a good support structure in the office, which is great. So, it motivates people to look forward to the whole return, to work campus. I am only coming Monday to Friday, so there is a lot of flexibility attitude. I really enjoy work now (Interviewee 4).

Data from the extracts showed that adjusting to in-person work for most participants meant increased support from their co-workers and management. Crawford et al. (2020) found that adjusting to in-person work was motivated by co-worker and management support that included performance feedback and online team building sessions that brought connection to their work performance. Crawford et al. (2020) findings resonate with Interviewee 8 who report experiencing socialisation and support from meetings by their management that assisted with their adjustment with in-person working conditions that contributed to their happiness:

So being back at work I had a really positive effect on my mental health and on my work life. So I really quite enjoyed coming back to work, we had like meetings now and then just so everybody could meet up and still have that social interaction to feel

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ready and happy in their work. So I am happy with the way it's working now
(Interviewee 8).

In support of Lindgren et al. (2022) study it was found that remote working promoted isolation since some employees were separated from their families making it difficult for their socialisation. This resonates with Interviewee 8 and Interviewee 5 who highlighted having faced mental challenges such as stress and depression from isolation with remote working thus returning to campus was a solution to connect, socialise, and improve work performance. The university's role of tracking employees' work progress and work performance to access and provide help when needed also motivates adjustment of these employees. In support, Svicher and Fabio (2021) study found that workplaces that promoted supervisor support through regular check-ups and better ways of communication increased motivation among employees as their work was created to allow for time-spatial fit which enlightened a sense of belonging in their workplace. For example, Theron's (2022) findings resonate with the above narrative that universities that had invested in providing psychological counselling through telephone calls and online videos to seek help, created the feeling of an accommodative work environment that encouraged and prepared for their mental readiness and employee engagement.

Remote work also had social benefits. Crawford et al. (2020) found that the university provision of data and support on their work enabled their work-life balance reducing worklife conflict and promoting happiness. For example, Dlouhy and Casper's (2021) findings report on how their negative experiences from remote working that include work disturbance and work overload challenged employees as a result in-person working conditions were a source of motivation. Similarly, Phungsoonthorn and Charoensukmongkol (2022) found that despite the employee's negative experiences from fear of contracting COVID-19, returning to work among other university employees was found to be a solution, to have access to internet connectivity and other work-related resources.

These participants felt in-person working conditions with a lot of support prevented them from experiencing pressure from work and family responsibilities that were common during remote working.

This finding resonates with Interviewee 2 who expressed how remote working gave her an opportunity for work-life balance and enabled focus on her studies because of the amount of control and flexibility, which was important for her career development. In support, another

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study by Garcia et al. (2021) traces that return to campus and adjustment for employees were influenced by the university in providing enough support structures for their remote working standards and reducing any related job demands. However, Asaba et al. (2022) found that universities failure to provide support for their return to work contributed to psychological challenges such as depression, stress, and anxiety because of a lack of knowledge in implementing safety measures.

4.2.3 Theme three: “We do not have much choice or voice”: decision-making is one-sided.

The participant provided insight on how power from the management influenced returning to in person work. The theme also, documents how most participants voices did not have an impact on their choice and decision-making between remote working and moving to in person work. Moreover, the theme offered context into various psychological experiences such as anxiety that existed from fear of in person work conditions and contracting COVID19 for their families.

Participants spoke about different experiences that shaped their return to in- person work. They felt their health was at risk from this transition, and that they were powerless to stop or prevent their return. Also, this theme uncovers how power influenced their return to in-person work and how it contributed to emotional and psychological strain because of anxiety from contracting COVID-19 and the safety of family.

The data from most participants spoke about how the transition from remote working to return to campus contributed to uncertainty and exclusion in decision making, such as either hybrid working or in- person working. These interviewees expressed negative psychological experiences such as stress from their exclusion. They felt disempowered and uncertain from not being included in the planning process for the return to campus. For example, Interviewee 5 reported on how her voice did not matter, and instead a decision was to be made on whether to use remote work or in person work:

I am currently in a bad state. They are saying let us wait until the end of the year because they are not sure. So we need to do what we are told and it is just like I am waiting for something I do not know, this stresses me out a little (Interviewee 5).

Interviewee 5 seemed to be unhappy since she was not involved in any decision-making about the work that was to be practiced, so she would be prepared for the working style in place. She used language such as “stresses” and “ bad state ” which expressed feeling

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unhappy with uncertain outcomes by management. For example, it could be possible that some participants did not want to return to campus since they were able to work better from and stay safe. Aligned, with the above experience Interviewee 9 speaks about how unready and unhappy with adjusting to in-person working conditions, since it would require them to replan and use finances for their traveling:

I feel like we do not have much choice or voice about the decision for return or remote working, we will hear what the department says. I am not happy it is not nice we did not prepare well financially for traveling (Interviewee 9).

Interviewee 9 makes use of language such as “not prepared” and “traveling” to articulate frustration that came from not having the power to decide on preferred work, she was also not ready to adjust to working conditions, since it required too much time while traveling.

This interviewee’s experience of not accepting and being unprepared for returning to campus because of their voice exclusion surfaced difficulty with their adjustment to in person working. On the other hand, the difficulty of re- adjusting to in-person working conditions was brought by differences in working styles between academic and administrative faculty staff. The interviewee reported experiencing that academic staff were privileged compared to them since they were allowed to remain working remotely, but she had no option and had to be in-person working. These experiences contributed to frustration since most participants were not awarded remote working, even though academic staff were. This appeared to be unfair treatment and power imbalance:

It is mind-blowing that administrators need to be in the office, but the academics are not here. As I can tell you if you go into my department, none of the academics are there. I want reciprocation that's all and I want to be treated fairly and I want the same level of respect as them (Interviewee 3).

She further made use of language such as “reciprocation” “and “mind-blowing” to describe the experience that arose as a result of unequal fairness that occurred between academic and administrative faculty staff. Interviewee 3 expressed the need to experience the same level of respect, inclusion, and treatment in decision-making for all employees. Aligned with the above participants, Interviewee 2 reported on how academic staff had an opportunity to take care of their needs at their flexible time, while she did not have an opportunity to experience such benefits:

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It is the university culture because if it was the academic staff, they would have taken time off to meet their needs and family problems. It is a culture because they hate us as PASS staff (Interviewee 2).

She expressed how unhappy they were with the treatment they experienced at the university. Despite being an asset to the university, their experience made them feel like we're not a priority or less important than other employees. The extracts depicted how unhappy they were with the return to in-person working conditions because of unfair treatment. Most interviewees such as Interviewee 7 and Interviewee 5 reported experiencing psychological and emotional strain from fear of contracting and spreading COVID-19 from co-workers and students to their family members from in person working conditions.

The compulsory requirement for in- person work by the university meant these participants had to frequently interact in person with their colleagues and students:

I felt a bit concerned with having so many students and staff around me and all of that, you know. I think my biggest concern was getting germs from the pandemic. The pandemic infections have made me aware of it and I do not want people near me because our systems have gotten weak. I am worried and fearful because people tend to get sick very often (Interviewee 7).

Interviewee 7 indicates how unprepared is she for being around other people in the same area because such an experience meant her health and safety were at risk and she did not trust people around her. She employed languages such as “worried” and “fearful” to describe psychological and emotional negative experiences from being back on campus and being around people as COVID-19 was still in existence. During the interviews, Interviewee 7 showed how worried and anxious she was about her health and safety from being around people since return to work was made compulsory for them which made them feel powerless and voiceless upon deciding on working remotely.

Aligned with this participant's experience, Interviewee 5 felt unsafe with in-person working conditions that her well-being was not important and there was a lack of support with their adjustment.

She felt the university did not show an understanding of how to treat people who had been exposed to COVID-19 without any judgment in in-person working conditions:

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Like there was a sense of safety that I did not feel in my workspace because of that lack of understanding, that when we return to campus, we physically expose ourselves, and our families because we have to come back to work. It is a mandate. You have to go back to work even though you know that you might get sick. Then when you get sick there is going to be a lack of understanding and judgment being around people just like that (Interviewee 5).

She stated that her experience around safety was challenged since their workplaces were not safe enough to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Interviewee 5 was stressed and frustrated with having to expose herself and her family because of the decision made by the university management. She expressed a query on how the university did not cater to those who have been exposed already. For example, interviews who had been exposed to COVID19 were not separated from other, people who had been exposed to COVID-19 already.

Thus, in-person working conditions required all employees to be within the same space with other people which posed a high risk of easily contracting the virus, fear and anxiety around these conditions posed work as an unsafe space. The above extracts narrate how returning to campus was a challenge because of university management's power in decision-making and how their voice had contributed to unfair treatment and anxiety from the fear of contracting COVID-19. These participants experienced psychological challenges from being forced into in-person work even though were not willing to and ready. Moreover, what stands out from the extracts were fear of contracting COVID-19 to their families and the university's failure to provide measures that protect health and safety in their workplace.

International or national studies on power, voice, and decision-making between return to in person working and remote working resonate with findings from the current study. Van der Ross et al. (2022) study found that stress for employees returning to campus got common from the management work pressure on achieving organisational objectives and productivity.

In relation to this, Nayak et al. (2021) found that university employees who failed to accept new work changes such as in-person working conditions struggled to cope with work arrangements, which reduced their employee productivity. Van der Ross et al. (2022) study concluded that organisations that employed the top-down approach to the working style post COVID-19 contributed to uncertainty and frustration for employees. On the other hand, challenges with adjustment contributed to fatigue and fear of returning to work, and this was

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exacerbated for those employees who might still believe that they will contract the virus (Bilotta et al., 2021).

These findings aligned with interviewee 9's and 5's experience of being uncertain of the outcome of the working style that were to be practiced. To describe the extent to which these interviewees reflected on language such as "not sure" and "we will hear" to narrate the frustration and uncertainty that came from not being involved and communicated with in decision making for their work preference.

In support, a study by Theron (2022) found that university employees were uncertain and unhappy with their return to campus since there was no form of involvement suggesting that communication for this work style. Theron findings (2022) concluded that university employees remained unhappy from exclusion and lack of their sense of belonging that existed to working style. For example, Interviewee 9 expressed unwillingness and readiness to in-person work as she had to replan and budget for traveling finances, whilst remote working did not require such costs:

I am not happy it is not nice we did not prepare well financially for traveling
(Interviewee 9).

Despite financial related challenges present from the above extract, most interviewees reported on how the existence of unfair treatment worsened their ability to accept and adjust to in person working conditions. Interviewees 2 and 5 narrated on difficulties that surfaced from accepting in-person working conditions since the academic staff had an opportunity to choose between remote working and in person working. In a study by Theron (2022) it was found that too much focus was on the academic staff needs other than academic faculty staff which contributed to the feeling of unfair treatment. Despite unfair treatment that was reported by the participants, adjustment to in person working was influenced by fear of contracting the virus and employee safety.

Aligned with findings, a study by Bilotta et al., (2021) found that employee challenges with adjustment related to fatigue and fear of contracting the virus. Bilotta et al. (2021) findings concluded that challenges with adjustment were instigated by participants' experiences of not receiving enough support for their mental health to prepare them emotionally and mentally for their in person working conditions. Interviewee 5 reported on how the university was less understanding and willing to support her in adjusting to in person conditions:

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Like there was a sense of safety that I did not feel in my workspace because of that lack of understanding, that when we return to campus we physically expose ourselves, and our families because we have to come back to work. It is a mandate. Then when you get sick there is going to be a lack of understanding and judgment being around people just like that (Interviewee 5).

To support the above extracts, Munoz et al. (2021) found that fear of safety to returning to campus contributed to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety since reattachment and adapting to another working style took a long time to get used to. Aligned, with these findings a study by Bilotta et al. (2021) found that employees were resistant to return to work because they experienced fatigue and fear from being at work as there might be a risk of them contracting the virus. Munoz et al. (2021) found that fear and uncertainty about returning to campus contributed to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety since reattachment and adapting to another working style took a long time to get used to among employees.

These findings provide relevance to the current study as Interviewee 7 expressed her experience of struggle to adjust to in person working conditions by using the language “safety” and “trust ” to describe the fear and the extent to which these participants were affected emotionally and psychologically by these working conditions.

With the mandate for the return to campus, the employee was found to be prone to threat, stress, and anxiety as they were uncertain about their protection by the university (Brulin et al., 2022).

A study by Crawford et al. (2020) found that university employees that experienced co-worker and management support with the new working conditions and infrastructure to ensure their safety and health were catered for were happy with in person work. Aligned with the findings, Liu et al. (2020) also found that return to work was possible with the involvement of employees in decision-making and COVID-19 transmission management strategies such as scanning and providing sanitisers before entering the premises. Similarly, workplaces that were able to monitor and control COVID-19 transmission, and promote work-life balance (Lindgren et al., 2022). For example, organisations that required employees to be tested for COVID-19 before entering the premises created a safe workspace since employees had no fear of being easily infected (Alonso-Munoz, et al, 2021).

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Findings from this theme, show that returning to work contributed to emotional and psychological experiences from the influence of power by management, such as making or making decisions for employees without their involvement. These experiences were likely to lead to stress from being excluded and their voice remains unheard by the management. Moreover, these findings reflected on how power contributed to lack of readiness to accept new working conditions by the administrative faculty.

4.3 Theoretical contribution

The study adds to the very limited literature on return to campus during COVID-19 from the South African context (Theron, 2022; Govender & Mpungose, 2022). This study draws attention to the complex and diverse universities in South Africa, where return to campus was approached differently, exploring and providing unique experiences of administrative faculty staff. JD-R model has been used to understand among healthcare workers psychological and emotional experiences during COVID-19, their work demand and support.

Lack of support resources to protect health and safety from return to campus was common among administrative faculty staff, this contributed to their fear of contracting the virus and being around people who have been affected (Phungsoonthorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2022). Moreover, Munoz et al. (2021) found that fear and uncertainty to return to campus contributed to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety since reattachment and adapting to another working style took a long time to get used to being around other employees.

These findings shared similarities with administrative faculty staff's experience of unwillingness to return to campus for their health and safety concerns. In a global context, studies from developed country university countries might have had different experiences from those in South African universities from a developing country, this means they might have a lack resources to protect employee health and safety on their return to campus. Importantly, Tsukada (2021) aligned with this current study, found JD-R model helped workplaces develop interventions and legal regulations that protect the health and safety of their employees.

The findings highlight the job demands and resources that participants experienced thus extending the JD-R model's application to an understudied phenomenon. The JD-R model also helped to show how work pressure may be reduced when support is offered by managers, when work is regulating to working long hours and not on weekend and after hours, and

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where workplace promote workplace flexibility to prevent work-family conflict, stress and exhaustion.

4.4 Implications for practice

The study's findings have practical implications for the universities and government. Government and universities have a crucial role in providing support and assistance with work resources such as funding, to maintain and develop measures that assist university staff adjustment through its policies which contributes to their psychological and emotional experiences. The current study showed how administrative faculty staff transition to in person campus work related to work pressure, working long hours, unequal treatment from their management, and fear of contracting the virus.

The above experiences are cited to contribute to negative experiences because of the lack of job resources such as supervisor support. Organisations should invest in training supervisors on supervisor support and invest in researching and implementing flexible working practices and policies specifically for administrative staff.

Such investment will benefit organisation. Research show that supervisor support promotes employee engagement and emotional stability in remote working and preparing employees for transitions. In this study, remote working had several benefits for staff- such as taking of family needs, whilst also being able to save money and time for traveling to work (Munnich, 2022). Universities can therefore consider hybrid model working schedules for staff. To reduce mental health problems such as burnout and anxiety from employees during COVID-19 and changes with remote working and return to work, hybrid working would allow for balance among employees such as being able to have autonomy, job control and importantly work-life balance (Akerstrom et al., 2021).

Also, Munnich (2022) suggests that hybrid working for administrative faculty staff would be appropriate for employees to benefit from work tools and spend time with their families which will allow for time-spatial flexibility in the post-COVID-19 era.

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4.5 Conclusion:

This chapter of the study provided different psychological experiences for administrative faculty staff from their transition of remote working to their return to campus. The derived themes, and the voices of participants from the study provided a deeper insight of the administrative faculty staff experiences during COVID-19. Findings noted that administrative faculty staff transition to in person campus work related to work pressure, working long hours, unequal treatment from their management, and fear of contracting the virus. Findings also noted that returning to work contributed to emotional and psychological experiences from the influence of power by management, such as making or making decisions for employees without their involvement. Lastly, recommendations and suggestions are made for relevant administrative faculty staff from university and organisational context.

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Chapter 5: Limitations and future recommendations

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter brings this study to a conclusion, hence the concluding remarks on each finding, recommendations and the limitations of the study are highlighted. This study only considered women's perspectives, and male voices are missing to understand their experiences from returning to campus. The JD-R model argued that women and men might have had different experiences from their return to campus on managing their work and family roles and how this transition had a psychological impact on these university employees (Saleem et al., 2021). Future research should set out to explore men's experiences.

This research focused merely on administrative faculty staff experiences, use of other staff such as those not in faculties, as well as academic staff, would have allowed for various experiences of return to work during COVID-19. Future research could adopt a mixed methods research approach by building survey questionnaire to be able to test specific relationships identified in the qualitative research. Moreover, the research focused generally on all university administrative faculty staff without considering specific levels such as support staff and external staff. Therefore, future research should explore how these results will differ among administrative staff from various levels. Relationship that could assist organisations in adopting hybrid working to reduce psychological challenges could be considered and those that explore the relationship between flexible work, work-life balance and other organisational outcomes (Munnich, 2022).

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, this current study job demands resources model by (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) assisted this study to understand the various psychological, emotional and social experiences of administrative faculty staff from their return to campus during COVID19. This model helped identified the common job demands in South African university and providing insight on what can university improve from to promote positive work environment for administrative faculty staff. The findings from various studies suggests that workplace need to allow for work preferences of employees as long it does not impact on work productivity.

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In relation to the participants experiences some were productive from experiencing work-life balance on their remote working, while some preferred return to campus to avoid work disturbance and access appropriate office space and internet connectivity without having to worry. Importantly, voice inclusion within decision making was found to be important for sense meaning of employees, this was relevant from participants experiences. The JD-R model was beneficial for understanding the various demands that impact employees well-being in the workplace, more especial with their transition from remote working to in-person working during COVID-19.

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Appendix A

Demographics Table

Table 1: Table illustrating demographics of focus group participants

Participant Information

Participants number	Gender	Race	Job level	Highest Education level	People in Household	Marital status
1	Female	Black		Postgraduate		
2	Female	Coloured	10	Postgraduate	2	Married
3	Female	Coloured		Matric	4	Married
4	Female	Indian	09	Postgraduate		Single
5	Female	Coloured				
6	Female	Coloured				
7	Female	Indian	09		0	Single
8	Female	Coloured				
9	Female	Black	07	Diploma	3	Single
10	Female	Indian			0	Single
11	Female	Black	08	Diploma	3	Single

**EXPERIENCES OF RETURNING TO CAMPUS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE
FACULTY STAFF**

Appendix B

Focus- groups interview schedule

**Employment experiences in returning to campus during COVID-19 among
admin faculty staff?**

Tell me about your work.

What is your work role in the university? Could you please tell me about the people you work with to fulfill employment services?

Can you tell me how was your work before and during COVID-19?

Have there been efforts to improve the work while working remotely?

Could you explain how you find returning to campus during the pandemic? Think of a particular experience that you faced. Tell me what happened.

How has your experience of returning to campus changed over time?

Also, have there been any adjustments for the return to work for admin support staff?

The Job demand and resources model in the return to campus for admin faculty staff at the university

What does it feel to return to campus? Can you tell me what has the university done on returning to campus?

Tell me more about your relationships with other people during the pandemic, both professionally and personally.

Are there any coping strategies that the university employed to deal with these experiences for returning to work during COVID-19?

How was the university doing so?

Is there anything else that you want to tell me/us that we have not touched on in previous questions or something that you want to elaborate on?

What do you think can be done by the university to ensure that employees are motivated and willing to return to campus?

**EXPERIENCES OF RETURNING TO CAMPUS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE
FACULTY STAFF**

**Appendix C
Consent form**

Greetings

I am a student of the Commerce Faculty pursuing my master's degree in industrial and Organisational psychology at the University of Cape Town. As part of my degree, I am required to conduct research. I am inviting you to be part of my research on administrative faculty staff's shared experiences of returning to campus in the COVID-19 pandemic. This research project has been approved by the UCT Commerce ethics committee.

To participate, I would like to ask you about your experiences of returning to campus. As COVID-19 has been at ease, I would like to request an in person focus group interview. If you agree, please read and complete the informed consent with your details and please provide some of your demographic information so that I can describe the sample without using your name. Your details will be used strictly for the purpose of research, and I guarantee that your details will not be shared. Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any stage without any consequences. All data collected in this study will be completely confidential.

Should you have any further questions regarding the research or any concerns, you may contact the researcher Vika Majeke (MJKVIK001@uct.ac.za) or the Supervisor: Dr Ameeta Jaga (Ameeta.jaga@uct.ac.za)

I give consent to participate into this research

YES	NO
-----	----

I agree to have the focus group recorded for the purposes of transcribing your identity will be kept confidential.

YES	NO
-----	----

Participant Signature:

Date:

EXPERIENCES OF RETURNING TO CAMPUS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE FACULTY STAFF

Appendix D

Ethical clearance



Faculty of Commerce

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Vika Majeke

19 08 2022

School of Management Studies

University of Cape Town

REF: REC 2022/08/007

**Administrative faculty staff's shared experiences of returning to campus
in the COVID-19 pandemic: A job demands and resources approach.**

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 31-Dec-2023 .

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.

2022.08.19
15:10:55 +02'00'

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