



**An Exploration of the Leadership Behaviours and Attitudes Employees Most Value  
During a Crisis: A Case Study of Academics in Remote Work During COVID-19**

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

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### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on organisations and the workforce, globally and in South Africa more specifically. This is true in many sectors, including that of higher education, where the economic, social, and psychological impacts of the pandemic are indisputable. However, it can be argued that organisational leaders have played a significant role in assisting employees to navigate the uncertainty of the events since March 2019. The primary aim of this research is to explore the leadership behaviours and attitudes most valued by academics at a residential university in South Africa. Secondary aims of the study focus on academics' experiences of well-being while working remotely during COVID-19. An exploratory case study design within the interpretivist paradigm was used, with academics at a residential university in South Africa as the case under study. Therefore, the unit of analysis is the individual. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were adopted, and a total of 15 participants were interviewed. Inductive and deductive approaches were used to analyse the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step Thematic Analysis technique. Two primary themes emerged during analysis of the data: (1) human-centric leadership; and (2) self-care and self-management. Each primary theme had a number of associated secondary and tertiary themes. The results identified the leadership behaviours and attitudes that the sample found most valuable in the transition to remote working. Along with this, the various coping strategies used by academics in the sample are noted. For example, the sample expressed their appreciation for leaders who adapted their behaviour and attitude to suit the COVID-19 context. Participants appreciated human-centric leadership behaviours and attitudes that were kind and caring, taking into account academics' various realities. Further results demonstrate that academics employed coping strategies, such as healthy lifestyle choices to maintain their overall well-being and leveraged professional and personal support networks to effectively transition to the remote working context.

*Keywords:* leadership behaviours, leadership attitudes, academics, remote work, exploratory case study design

**List of Abbreviations and Acronyms (in alphabetical order)**

APA	American Psychological Association
COVID-19	A novel coronavirus identified in 2019
ED	Executive Director
E-learning	Electronic/online learning
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HES	Higher Education Sector
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communication technologies
IOP	Industrial/Organisational Psychology
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange
OCB	Organisational Citizenship Behaviours
SA	South Africa
UCT	University of Cape Town
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VDI	Vertical Dyadic Interaction
VDL	Vertical Dyad Linkage
WFC	Work-Family Conflict
WFH	Work From Home
WHP	Workplace Health Promotion

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The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a considerable impact on businesses and organisations internationally, posing an economic threat to a range of industries (Bryce et al., 2020; Dobrowolski, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021). The rapid shift from face-to-face work to remote work<sup>1</sup> presented a wide array of challenges to employers and employees alike (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Rudnicka et al., 2020). Those in the workforce were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of ways. For example, some employees were forced to suddenly work remotely (i.e., work from home), while others continued to work outside their homes as essential workers, and still others lost their jobs (Eichenauer et al., 2021). Thus, employees are potentially at risk in the transition to remote work as they are expected to rapidly adjust to a novel working environment within a crisis context. Some of the immediate responses by leaders during crises are to reopen, recover and save organisations, and to rapidly shift into crisis management mode (Dirani et al., 2020; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). This points to the importance of effective leadership to ensure organisational survival and provide employees with the needed emotional and interpersonal support to manage fast-paced changes (Bartsch et al., 2021; Bidwell et al., 2020; Dirani et al., 2020; Restubog et al., 2020; Talu & Nazarov, 2020). For the purposes of this study, the term ‘leader’ is used to describe an individual who has direct authority over another in the organisation, such as a line manager or supervisor, while ‘subordinate’ refers to the individual led by a manager or a supervisor within the organisation (Martin et al., 2010). Furthermore, the term ‘residential university’ is used to describe universities which have students, staff and faculty physically occupying campuses and most likely include face-to-face classes, rather than online classes (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005).

### **Rationale**

The importance of leadership for the resilience of organisations is well established (Bartsch et al., 2021; Bidwell et al., 2020; Dirani et al., 2020). However, to date, studies focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South African (SA) organisations are sparse (Chakamera et al., 2020; Dirani et al. 2020). Additionally, there is a scarcity of literature surrounding leadership in remote working environments during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impact of the pandemic on SA higher education institutions (HEIs) (Bartsch et al., 2021; De Villiers et al., 2020; Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; Motala & Menon,

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<sup>1</sup> In the present study, ‘remote work’ will be used as the predominant term, as it is considered a broader category, including work arrangements from anywhere and not necessarily at an individual’s home (Allen et al., 2014; Kniffin et al., 2021).

2020). Research surrounding crisis leadership is also often criticised for its lack of specificity in terms of context (Bundy et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need for more studies surrounding effective leadership and the impact of context within sub-Saharan Africa (Muchiri, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on HEIs globally, resulting in educational institutions struggling to deal with the effects of the pandemic (Muftahu, 2020). COVID-19 has caused drastic changes to the higher education sector (HES), which can be viewed either as opportunities for positive sustainable change or threats to the survival of institutions. The global HES has faced challenges when adapting teaching and learning methods amidst the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Muftahu, 2020). However, unique to the SA context are high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, coupled with the challenge of adapting teaching to remote methods. These made distance learning especially difficult, as contextual factors strongly impact the HES landscape (Kele & Mzilen, 2021; Muftahu, 2020). This points to the importance of exploring leadership behaviours and attitudes, as well as employee well-being, within the academic context in SA.

To date, most research on leadership during crisis situations has focused on organisation-specific crises, such as accidents, scandals, war, or economic declines (Cohen, 2012; Desai, 2011; James et al., 2011; Meisler, 2013; Wooten & James, 2008). While these may pose similar challenges to those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the unprecedented crisis context brought about by the pandemic poses a different set of struggles to employees (Eichenauer et al., 2021).

The lockdown restrictions and social distancing measures introduced by most countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in wide-spread volatility and ambiguity, requiring rapid and far-reaching decisions to be made by leaders based on limited information, in the hopes of ensuring the survival of organisations (Kaul et al., 2020). For example, leaders in academia are increasingly tasked with making critical day-to-day decisions that will shape the future of institutions (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021; Kaul et al., 2020), concerning faculty, staff and students, teaching, the production of research, and important contributions for society at large (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021). Respect, positive reinforcement, and appreciation of employee work and efforts are some of the leadership behaviours and attitudes deemed valuable by employees when adapting to new methods of work and dealing with a crisis (Dirani et al., 2020; Talu & Nazarov, 2020). It is posited that leader behaviours play an important role in maintaining employee performance and guiding them through uncertainty (Bartsch et al., 2021). Overall, during periods of uncertainty, leaders play a pivotal role in sense-making and minimising employee anxiety (Madera &

Smith, 2009). For this reason, leadership behaviours and attitudes will be the central constructs of focus in this study.

To a large extent, the research surrounding leadership has been done using quantitative methods. However, qualitative research methods have offered important contributions, such as understanding leadership in relation to change processes and the achievement of strategic goals within the organisation (Bryman, 2004; Häkkinen, 2012). A qualitative approach to research on leadership broadens our understanding, leading to new ways of thinking about research in this domain (Bryman & Johnsson, 2006). Therefore, this study aims to understand leadership behaviours and attitudes through a rich and in-depth investigation of the role of embodied processes in the relationship between leaders and followers (Häkkinen, 2012).

### **Research Aims**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on vulnerabilities within the education sector globally (Ali, 2020; Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021). As universities around the world are adapting to online learning methods, academics' readiness for remote teaching is an important contributing factor in students' adaption to remote learning (Ali, 2020). Therefore, the chosen sample in the present study is academia. The aims of this study are two-fold. First, it contributes to existing literature on the perceived leadership behaviours and attitudes most valued by employees working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bartsch et al., 2020; Dirani et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021; Mani & Mishra, 2020; Stoller, 2020; Talu & Nazarov, 2020; Tannenbaum et al., 2021). Second, this study explores academics' experiences of well-being amidst the rapid transition to remote work at a residential university in SA. Overall, the findings in this study contribute to a more extensive understanding of the role of leadership behaviours and attitudes in the adjustment to remote work, as well as the impact of such behaviours and attitudes on employees' subjective experiences of well-being.

### **Main Research Question**

Which leadership behaviours and attitudes do academics' regard as most valuable during times of crisis? Using COVID-19 as the crisis case study for understanding leadership during a crisis within a South African higher education institution context.

### **Sub-Questions**

1. Which leadership behaviours and attitudes assisted academics in adapting to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How do valued leadership behaviours and attitudes impact on academics' experiences of well-being?

### **Theoretical Framework: The LMX Theory**

The following section presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory was used to understand employee experiences of leadership behaviours and attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as aspects of remote work and employee well-being which were influential in the rapid, unprecedented transition to remote work.

The LMX theory evolved from the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) approach (Dansereau et al., 1975), and proposes that there is a vertical dyadic interaction (VDI) between leaders and followers. Within the broad area of organisational leadership, the LMX theory evolved as a common approach among researchers to understand the link between leadership processes and outcomes. The LMX theory is distinguished from other leadership theories as it is centred around the dynamic relationship between leaders and followers (Dansereau et al., 1973; Dansereau et al., 1975; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975). It is posited in the LMX theory, that the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers is predictive of outcomes at an individual, organisational and group level (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

At a theoretical level, leadership support and its relationship to subordinates can be understood through the LMX theory, which posits that leaders develop different types of exchange relationships with their subordinates (Brower et al., 2000; Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995; Liden et al., 2006), and particularly focuses on the relationship between leaders and individual followers, as opposed to the organisational group (Lunenburg, 2010; Power, 2013). The LMX theory has gained widespread attention in the literature, and its success has been attributed to the documented benefits found to result from a positive relationship between leaders and members. These include more favourable employee job attitudes, less conflict, enhanced performance, more frequent organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs), increased creativity, and reduced turnover (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Dulebohn et al., 2012). OCBs are defined as voluntary work-related behaviours, unrelated to the formal reward system of an organisation, and which in effect promote the effective functioning of the organisation (Organ, 1988).

Furthermore, LMX focuses on the quality of the dyadic relationship between leaders and their direct reports during three stages: the *role-taking* (stranger) stage, the *role-making*

(acquaintance) stage, and the *role-routinisation* (partners) stage (Graen & Scandura, 1987). In the *role-taking* (stranger) to *role-making* (acquaintance) stages, leaders offer role responsibilities and assess whether followers can successfully fulfil them. In the transition to the advanced role stage, greater responsibilities, discretion, and benefits are given if the follower fulfils the role responsibilities. Therefore, in the initial phase, the main focus in developing relationships of interpersonal trust would be the follower's ability, benevolence and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995). Despite this, the leader's role attitude and competence are still important to move to a higher quality LMX, because followers are not considered passive role recipients (Deluga, 1994). Followers have the capacity to reject, embrace or renegotiate roles prescribed by their leaders (Kang & Stewart, 2007).

In accordance with the LMX theory, leaders cultivate high-quality relationships with some subordinates (known as in-group), and low-quality relationships limited to the group member's job description (known as out-group). The in-group consists of trusted followers who have expanded and negotiated role responsibilities with the leader, while the out-group consists of the remaining followers with whom leaders have a more formal relationship. Higher quality relationships occur when leaders and followers exchange greater physical resources, information, and enjoyable tasks (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). The above argument reflects the assumption that leaders have limited time and energy and are unable to give equal attention to all followers (Dansereua et al., 1975; Kang & Stewart, 2007).

LMX is a relationship-based approach to the study of leadership and demonstrates the nature of the exchange between leaders and followers (Yukl, 2012). Exchanges between leaders and employees can be material or non-material and contribute to the quality of the relationship. Non-material exchanges may include social exchanges such as support, while material exchanges may include economic exchanges such as a salary or remuneration (Yukl, 2012). Both leaders and employees have resources that the other values which can be used in the exchange, and which have the capacity to enhance the LMX quality. The exchange between leaders and followers can be behavioural or emotional (Yukl, 2012). This study will specifically be focusing on the non-material exchange between leaders and employees (e.g., support) to understand the LMX theory, and the LMX quality.

There is a significant relationship between LMX quality, job performance, satisfaction with supervision, overall employee satisfaction, employee commitment, and employee turnover intentions (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Furthermore, a qualitative study focusing on how team leaders and team members can enhance the LMX quality highlighted the need for leaders to listen, understand followers, and adapt their leadership style to the preferences of

members (Mishra & Shukla, 2021). Additionally, leaders should provide followers with clear unambiguous guidance and timeous feedback. Finally, leaders should connect with followers frequently, be open, honest, and approachable (Mishra & Shukla, 2021). A central component of LMX is the working relationship between leaders and various members of a work unit, team, department, or organisation. More specifically, the quality of the exchange relationship between a leader and a particular member (dyad) is the basic unit of analysis (Van Breukelen et al., 2006). The LMX theory is considered a process approach as it stresses the importance of the dynamic interaction between leaders and subordinates. LMX has also been seen as a transactional approach, because leaders and subordinates are active participants in the exchange relationship. This differs fundamentally from the trait approach, in which leader characteristics or qualities are taken as the starting point and are considered key factors in determining which people are effective leaders across situations (Northouse, 2004; Van Breukelen et al., 2006). LMX theory describes the dyadic process by which roles and expectations are developed for a leader with each subordinate (Dansereau et al., 1973; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Yukl et al., 2009), and is related to specific leadership behaviours which have been identified as relevant for understanding effective leadership (Yukl et al., 2009).

One of the primary goals of LMX theory is to explain the impact of leadership on members, teams, and organisations (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Leadership results from a dynamic reciprocal interaction between subordinates and superiors, involving leader behaviours, subordinate perceptions and resulting outcomes (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Lord et al., 1999). For this reason, the LMX theory will be applied to understand the perceived leadership behaviours and attitudes most valued by academics during the COVID-19 pandemic at a residential university in SA.

LMX has been critiqued for its potential to alienate some subordinates, failing to account for the effect of group dynamics and social identity, and lacking practical insights on how leaders can develop high-quality relationships (Power, 2013). Further shortcomings have been highlighted in the literature. First, LMX does not describe exchange processes in sufficient detail. Second, the theory does not account for cross-cultural influences on the exchange relationships between supervisors and subordinates (Khatri et al., 2011). While there are contradictory findings in the literature regarding the LMX theory and its outcomes in organisations (Chen et al., 2014; Cobb & Lau, 2015), the theory does provide a basis for understanding how effective leaders in HEIs behave in relation to their followers (Power,

2013). Therefore, the LMX theory was deemed an appropriate theoretical framework for application in this study.

### ***Application of the LMX Theory: LMX Antecedents and Consequences Theoretical Framework***

There is a substantial body of research surrounding LMX theory (Dansereau et al., 1973; Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Martin et al., 2018; Yukl et al., 2009), which has provided a detailed basis for understanding the antecedents, stages of development in LMX quality, and the occupational attitudes and behaviours which influence LMX (Martin et al., 2018; Schriesheim et al., 1999). Thus, leadership behaviours and attitudes can serve as plausible antecedents of LMX quality (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Liden et al., 1997). Furthermore, leader behaviours affect followers' perceptions of and their responses to leaders (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Lord & Maher, 1991; Nahrgang et al., 2009; Snodgrass et al., 1998).

The quality of the LMX experienced by employees influences outcomes or consequences, such as job performance and employee satisfaction with their leader (refer to Figure 1, p. 16). Therefore, the leadership behaviours and attitudes deemed valuable to employees in the rapid transition to remote work, as well as employees' experiences of well-being while working remotely, can be understood through the LMX antecedents and consequences theoretical framework (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Schriesheim et al., 1999). Furthermore, this framework was deemed appropriate for this study, as contextual factors are important to consider and may be influential in LMX quality. Thus, important contextual factors surrounding the sample of this study (e.g., remote work, family, availability of and access to resources) and the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., government regulations) are considered.

**Figure 1***LMX Antecedents and Consequences Theoretical Framework*

*Note.* Adapted from “A Meta-Analysis of Antecedents and Consequences of Leader-Member Exchange: Integrating the Past With an Eye Toward the Future,” by J. H. Dulebohn, W. H. Bommer, R. C. Liden, R. L. Brouer, and G. R. Ferris, 2012, *Journal of Management*, 38(6), p. 1717 (<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0149206311415280>). Copyright 2012 by SAGE Publications.

In the present study, leadership behaviours and attitudes are framed as antecedents of LMX quality, while contextual variables are considered contributing factors. In accordance with the LMX antecedents and consequences theoretical framework, employee experiences of well-being are positioned as outcomes or consequences (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Some aspects of the LMX theory, such as in-group vs out-group, role-taking, role-making, and role-routinisation (Graen & Scandura, 1987), will not be explored within the present study. The aims of this study are to explore the leadership behaviours and attitudes academics deem valuable during remote work, as well as academics' experiences of well-being amidst the rapid transition to remote work. The following chapter presents a critical review of the relevant literature in accordance with this study's outlined focus.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review aims to outline current knowledge about employees' experiences of leadership behaviours and attitudes, as well as their own well-being, while working remotely. Two aspects will be explored: academics' experiences of the transition to remote work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the perceived impact of leadership behaviours and attitudes on employees' experiences of well-being. It was therefore necessary to complete a review of the relevant literature on areas pertaining to leadership behaviours and attitudes in academia, and employees' experiences of remote work and well-being. The literature review was ongoing (from March 2021 to February 2022) throughout the research phases (i.e., data collection, data analysis and synthesis of the research sections). The review will explore relevant literature within both SA and international publications, providing context, history, and relevant aspects of leadership behaviours and attitudes in academia. Additionally, an overview of the remote working context and employees' experiences of well-being in previous literature will be reviewed.

### **Literature Search**

The literature reviewed results from a comprehensive search that spanned 11 months, between March 2021 and February 2022. Sources were accessed through the researcher's university library portal which utilises various database platforms, including Google Scholar, EBSCO Host, ERIC, Emerald, JSTOR, Sage, Springer Link and Wiley. Where possible, the literature search was restricted to peer-reviewed journals only through the 'advanced search function'. The following are examples of the search terms used by the researcher in various combinations: LMX theory, LMX theory origins, LMX theory seminal articles, LMX theory seminal authors, leadership behaviours, leadership attitudes, leadership behaviours and attitudes during COVID-19, definitions of leadership, crises in organisations, crises in HEIs, leadership in universities, leadership in SA during COVID-19, employee well-being in the workplace, remote work in HEIs, remote work among academics, transitions to remote work. To ensure that the most relevant and recent research was used, the researcher repeatedly conducted searches using derivatives of the above search items and a series of Boolean operators. Additionally, each article's references were examined for further primary studies. The articles were downloaded and stored electronically and can be found in the reference list. Initially, the search only included articles from the last ten years but was later expanded to include older articles for historically and contextually relevant information.

## **The Crisis Context**

A crisis is defined as a sudden, unexpected event which threatens to disrupt organisational operations, posing a financial and reputational threat (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Russell et al., 2021). A crisis may lead to significant change, upheaval, and deviation from the norm, and has the potential to impact all aspects of the organisation (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Russell et al., 2021). In this study, crises are conceptualised as sources of disruption and change, requiring leaders to take actions that bring about immediate change in behaviour, beliefs, and outcomes (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). Organisational crises are defined as low-probability and high-consequence events, generally characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty (Wooten & James, 2008). Crises often cause high levels of uncertainty among employees, leading to possible deterioration in their well-being (Liu et al., 2016). Furthermore, adverse psychological experiences such as emotional exhaustion may be experienced by employees when they encounter uncertainties associated with crises (Liu et al., 2016). Emotional exhaustion is one key component of job burnout, which occurs when employees are exposed to psychological stressors for an extended period of time and do not have the needed abilities or resources to cope (Thompson et al., 2020).

The events surrounding the pandemic caused uncertainties among employees working in academia in terms of job security, workload, and overall well-being. Moreover, the rapid transition to remote work may have led to academics experiencing emotional exhaustion, posing a direct threat to their well-being, pointing to the importance of effective leadership (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020; James et al., 2011). As a result, researchers have increasingly noted the role of leadership within crisis contexts. It can be argued that leaders require a different set of abilities during crisis-related contexts versus during periods of non-crisis (Eichenauer et al., 2021; Haddon et al., 2015; Haslam et al., 2001; James et al., 2011).

## **Crises and Organisations**

While some crises arise from internal faults within the organisation, others result from external contingencies, such as COVID-19, which has tested the resilience and adaptability of organisations globally (Bryce et al., 2020; Haddon et al., 2015; Haslam et al., 2001; James et al., 2011). In navigating these periods of crisis, leaders of organisations have to manage conflicts while effectively planning amidst rapidly changing circumstances (Vargo & Seville, 2011). In crisis situations, leaders are tasked with exercising strategic thinking amidst a great deal of uncertainty to ensure the organisation's survival. Leaders are also expected to inspire

employees with a sense of hope and direction, while being firmly aware of the realities of the context, fostering an organisational culture which inspires innovation (Vargo & Seville, 2011). Organisational culture is defined as the underlying values and shared practices that provide the foundational structures of organisations (Spicer, 2020). It can be argued that the pandemic has shifted the underlying culture of organisations, presenting a challenge to leaders to adapt to the changing circumstances (Spicer, 2020). Therefore, leaders should acquire the ability to plan and make careful decisions which are structured effectively, while being responsive to the current context (Bundy et al., 2017; Vargo & Seville, 2011).

### **The Case Study: Remote Work During COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unpredictable changes worldwide, forcing various sectors to design and implement flexible solutions to remain operational. Various countries across the world implemented lockdown measures to contain the spread of the virus (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021), such as the United States of America (USA), where leaders of academic institutions were forced to transition to remote learning and teaching arrangements as a result of lockdown measures. The rapid transition to remote work called for transformative learning for all stakeholders, as well as adaptive work arrangements (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020); this was unusual in the academic context, which is often perceived as resistant to rapid change (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). In this study, remote work is described as flexible working arrangements in which employees work off-site from their organisation's premises, using information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Molino et al., 2020; Sullivan, 2003; Wang et al., 2021). The unprecedented transition to this system makes it difficult to pinpoint its effects on individual's lives (Rudnicka et al., 2020). However, some of the challenges facing individuals reported in the literature are digital self-control, maintaining work-life balance, and productivity (Rudnicka et al., 2020). Key findings in a study involving employees' remote work experience in SA indicated that, despite the positive aspects of remote work, there are risks, such as work overload and pressure to perform timeously, which may adversely affect employee well-being (Matli, 2020).

### ***The Remote Working Context and HEIs***

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a global threat to education systems (Daniel, 2020), with many tertiary institutions having to switch to online teaching, and this has heavily impacted private, international universities (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020). The findings of a meta-analysis demonstrated that universities are moving toward online learning, or E-learning (i.e., learning by electronic means), but that numerous factors

impacted on institutions' readiness for this, such as resources, employee readiness and confidence, student accessibility, and employee motivation (Ali, 2020). Insufficient online teaching infrastructures and experience, as well as limited knowledge, accessibility, and affordability, may pose further difficulties in the transition to remote teaching (Ali, 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in more HEIs struggling to maintain teaching and learning while facing the threat of extended closures (Ali, 2020).

Leadership is considered one of the most important determinants of organisational performance. Therefore, it is important that leadership behaviour and attitudes are explored within a crisis context (Ali, 2020; Martin et al., 2010). Since many HEIs moved to remote learning because of the pandemic, technology can be seen as a catalyst, aiding academics in lesson preparation and online class delivery (Ali, 2020). The American Psychological Association (APA) encouraged lecturers to implement ICT integrated learning environments for students (Li et al., 2018). However, while institutions may have the necessary facilities, there may be other shortfalls to implementing this, such as lack of time for lesson preparation, as well as an unsupportive curriculum design (Bhandari et al., 2017; Vrasidas, 2015). However, having the necessary resources does not ensure the success of ICTs and remote learning, as staff readiness is considered essential (Vrasidas, 2015). Thus, before ICTs can be effectively integrated into learning, academics need adequate training and support in ICTs and pedagogy (Yunus, 2007). Staff members' attitudes and their willingness to implement ICTs are influential in students' transitions to remote learning environments. Therefore, faculty working remotely should be sufficiently supported and trained by the institution (Ali, 2020). Similarly, employees who do not have the resources for remote teaching, such as internet connectivity and the necessary equipment, may battle to support students to transition to remote learning. Therefore, it is essential that academics be supported by the organisation to effectively transition to remote working arrangements (Ali, 2020).

## **Leadership**

The following section provides an understanding of leadership behaviours and attitudes in SA and international contexts, and why the researcher explores leadership behaviours and attitudes perceived as valuable among employees within SA HEIs.

### **Defining Leadership**

Leadership is rooted in context, which informs the type and efficacy of leadership that emerges (Liden & Antonakis, 2009). For the purposes of this study, leadership is described through key defining features: the leader as an individual, the leader's behaviour, the effects

of a leader, interaction between leaders and followers, and contextual factors (Bass, 2008). Furthermore, leadership is considered a purpose-driven action which brings about transformative change based on values, ideals, visions, symbols, and emotional exchanges (Bryman, 1992; Day & Antonakis, 2012). In contrast, management is commonly objectives-driven, grounded in rationality, bureaucratic methods, and techniques, and aims to fulfil a contractual obligation (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

### **The Importance of Leadership in the Workplace During a Crisis**

Studies suggest that leadership directly and indirectly affects critical individual and organisational outcomes, such as employee self-efficacy, employee commitment, OCBs, and employee performance (Engelbrecht & Chamberlain, 2005; Engelbrecht et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2007; Zhu et al., 2009). Conceptualisations of effective leadership vary across different contexts, making contextualisation crucial (Haddon et al., 2015). Thus, this study focuses on the SA context to investigate the leadership behaviours and attitudes most valued by employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is global interest in leadership and management, due to its perceived importance in developing and maintaining successful education systems, there is less clarity about which leadership behaviours and attitudes are most likely to produce favourable outcomes (Bush, 2007). Therefore, the leadership behaviours and attitudes deemed valuable to employees are essential to explore further, especially within a crisis context.

### **Leadership Behaviours and Attitudes**

Leadership behaviours have been shown to influence employee job satisfaction, productivity, and organisational commitment (Loke, 2001), and specifically impacted job satisfaction among employees in HEIs (Lin & Tseng, 2013; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Webb, 2009). Two critical types of leadership behaviours were identified in the literature: behaviour centred on task accomplishment, and behaviour directed toward interpersonal relations (Rosenbach, 2018). Leadership behaviours are considered especially important for the effective management of organisational crises and to encourage employees to actively engage in knowledge behaviours (Adamu et al., 2016; Wooten & James, 2008). Along with this, leadership attitudes are said to arise from and be reinforced by experiences. Attitudes are defined as a learned tendency, wherein an individual evaluates something as favourable or unfavourable, which results in a particular behaviour or response (Rose & Brown, 2021). Leadership attitudes play an integral role in influencing the attitudes of employees (Rose & Brown, 2021). Findings suggest that when leaders are supportive of the organisational change

being implemented in the workplace, they are more likely to positively influence employee attitudes toward change. Therefore, leadership attitudes are as important as leadership behaviours in influencing employee adaptation (Farahnak et al., 2019). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the leadership behaviours and attitudes employees value during times of crisis.

Leaders may benefit from seeking information from relevant health professionals, researchers, managers, and related sectors during periods of uncertainty, as well as from shared stories and experiences from international colleagues, networks, and collaborative partners (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Researchers have suggested that leadership behaviour is a key indicator of employee perceptions in the workplace and overall workforce engagement (Attridge, 2009; Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Xu & Thomas, 2011). Evidence highlights the importance of certain leadership behaviours during a crisis, such as an ability to understand and discuss the difficulties of their subordinates with transparency and communicating a vision which employees can work toward. Finally, leaders should demonstrate confidence that strategic objectives can be achieved (Antonakis et al., 2016; Kniffin et al., 2021). Therefore, it is critical to outline the leadership behaviours and attitudes that employees value in the transition to remote work, as these insights may be beneficial for both leaders and employees.

### **Leadership in HEIs**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on HEI practices in numerous ways, particularly the transition to online teaching, closed libraries, changed methods of communication, new and adapted assessment methods, and enhanced workloads for some (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The intensified competition of the global, market-based knowledge economy requires adapted leadership practices in HEIs, but due to differences in university traditions and national economies, the speed of change in the global HES varies. National policymakers have increasingly viewed knowledge as the core resource and dynamic of modern economies, and a prerequisite for a nation's global competitive advantage. The main source of productivity and competitiveness in the Information Age is knowledge, both as an input and an output, in terms of the knowledge production process (Bell, 1976; Castells, 1996; Stehr, 1994). Within the global knowledge economy, universities are the primary point of focus for economic and industrial policies (Tjeldvoll, 2011). For universities to competitively meet the demands of the global higher education market, production (e.g., research, teaching, and service) should be adjusted and relevant to suit

contextual factors. Thus, there is a need for adequate leadership practices (Tjeldvoll, 2011; Welle-Strand & Thune, 2003). For this reason, valued leadership behaviours and attitudes are important to explore contextually.

In the present study, universities are conceptualised as complex, dynamic organisations that must adapt in unpredictable ways (Davis & Jones, 2014). As a university is commonly a large institution made up of various faculties and departments, it can be argued that leaders cannot act autonomously in a crisis (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021). Furthermore, a university is defined as an open system, characterised by interactions between the institution and its environment, involving the exchange of ideas and resources (Cilliers, 1998). Globally, universities face continued challenges due to large-scale economic, social, and political disruptions (Collins, 2014). Thus, universities should not be viewed as closed self-regulated entities, but rather as highly complex systems whose properties of non-linearity, disequilibrium and emergence require the reconceptualisation of leadership. In light of the above, universities cannot be deemed as closed to external influences, self-perpetuating or self-sufficient (Scott & Davis, 2007; Walters, 2021). Being large institutions, universities are governed by diverse structures and management bodies, including, chancellors, vice-chancellors, deans, academic councils, department directors and administrative boards (Settles et al., 2019). Due to this, leadership in academia refers to different management roles and titles, varying from strategic management and administrative roles to transformational and innovation-focused roles (Settles et al., 2019).

### ***Leadership in SA HEIs***

HEIs globally, and in SA, are constantly facing major transformation challenges, requiring effective leadership (Herbst & Conradie, 2011; Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2014; Stensaker & Benner, 2013; Vukasović et al., 2012). One example of this in the SA context was the significant political unrest within HEIs during the #FeesMustFall protests, which began in March 2015, and resulted in the HES experiencing its first post-apartheid national crisis (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021). A further example was the decolonial perspective during the #RhodesMustFall movements in SA in 2015, which was a symbolic gesture of decolonisation and confronting the system of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). During 2015 and 2016, leaders in academia realised the need for, and the value of, collaboration and collective responses to a crisis. Moreover, the aforementioned disruptions taught academic leaders to appreciate the importance of dispersed decision-making and empowering people across the organisation to manage certain situations (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021).

Important to note is that protest action and socio-political unrest are not unique to SA. In the USA, HEIs such as Yale, Harvard and Princeton have also experienced socio-political unrest, evoking transformative change and bringing about large-scale uncertainty (Walters, 2021). Similarly, the 2015 #RhodesMustFall movement in the United Kingdom (UK) resulted in the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at his alma mater in Oriel College at Oxford University (Jansen, 2017; Walters, 2021). These are examples of periods of transformation in which universities have had to adapt and rapidly transition (Collins, 2014). These crises have reshaped leadership approaches in the HES by highlighting the lack of leadership experience in responding to a crisis (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021). Leaders in academic institutions are expected to ignite social change in regional, national, and international arenas, as well as being public intellectuals, providing an independent perspective on national and international issues, and the driving force in seeking reconciliation when the country and society are divided (Sirat et al., 2012).

### **Valuable Leadership Behaviours and Attitudes During Crises**

The following section presents the current state of knowledge in the literature on the leadership behaviours and attitudes deemed valuable during previous periods of crises, and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Supervisory Support**

Studies reported that it is integral for leaders to display supervisory support as a means of enhancing employee engagement and performance during a crisis (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Mani & Mishra, 2020; Saleem & Amin, 2013). Employees have faced numerous challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, while adapting to a novel remote working environment. Therefore, it is essential for leaders and supervisors to be flexible in their leadership approach. Supervisory support assists leaders in maintaining employee retention, which in turn positively affects organisational performance (Dirani et al., 2020; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Organisational support refers to the extent to which employees believe an organisation values their contribution and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). It can be argued that greater perceived organisational support mutually benefits employees, leaders, and the organisation in sustaining enhanced employer-employee relationships (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

#### **Psychological Empowerment**

Psychological empowerment is important for employees during periods of uncertainty (Cicolini et al., 2014; Dirani et al., 2020). It occurs when leaders provide employees with a

sense of motivation within the workplace, and is considered multidimensional, with four cognitive dimensions (Cicolini et al., 2014; Spreitzer, 1995). The first is meaning, which refers to the extent to which employees feel that their work is important in relation to their own beliefs, values, and behaviours (Cicolini et al., 2014). Second is employees' ability to successfully carry out the inherent requirements of the job. Third is self-determination, which is defined as employees' sense of autonomy toward their own work. Fourth is impact, referring to the level to which individuals feel they are able to have an influence in the workplace (Cicolini et al., 2014).

### **Building Trust**

Both leaders and followers play an important role in creating and sustaining relationships of mutual trust (Ahern & Loh, 2020), but leaders play a significant role in its cultivation. In order for leaders to delegate responsibility and share decision-making with followers, it is important that they foster relationships of trust with subordinates (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Trust is considered an invaluable quality of leadership and can be cited as the source of organisational integrity (Sirat et al., 2012). Relationships of trust have the ability to inspire followers and promote meaningful change and, where there are trusted leaders, positive transformation can occur (Kang & Stewart, 2007; Sirat et al., 2012). Trust is defined as an individual's expectation or belief, often in circumstances of vulnerability, that the actions or motives of another person are honest, fair, and based on integrity (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Lee, 2021). It may function at an organisational or at an individual level. Past behaviours are considered beneficial in cultivating relationships of trust between leaders and followers, but trust is a dynamic process and often evolves from individual or organisational relationships. Trust is a key foundation of relationship-oriented leadership frameworks, including situational leadership, authentic leadership, and servant leadership, with transformational leadership also relying on leader and follower value congruence (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Therefore, in this study, trust is considered a core aspect influencing the LMX quality between leaders and followers (Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Mayer et al., 1995; Schriesheim et al., 1999).

Establishing a foundation of trust is crucial to creating a following, and requires a leader to generate shared values, goals, visions, or objectives with those they wish to lead (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2003). Thus, instead of mere short-term goals, leadership strategies should engender trust and respect, and leaders should aim to communicate with credibility and integrity (Kang & Stewart, 2007; Sirat et al., 2012). Leaders gain the trust of their

followers by providing access to information and allowing followers to ask questions. It is also suggested that leaders behave openly and transparently to maintain the trust of subordinates (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Leaders should be accessible, available, open, and willing to answer questions, while providing credible and up-to-date information on the situation at hand. Moreover, it is suggested that leaders demonstrate honesty by admitting to mistakes and where relevant, past failures (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Therefore, it is recommended that leaders avoid micromanagement and trust employees to address the crisis with a moral purpose, while giving employees the liberty to implement appropriate solutions (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).

### **Psychological Safety**

For the purposes of this study, psychological safety is defined as a safe condition, in which the perception of threats is reduced, possible barriers to change are removed and errors are permitted without fear of retaliation (Lee, 2021). Furthermore, psychological safety refers to an individual's perception of the social environment within the organisation (Carmeli & Hoffer, 2009; Lee, 2021). When individuals feel free to express their true self and opinions without fear of negative consequences, a 'safe condition' is said to exist, promoting psychological safety between leaders and employees (Lee, 2021, p. 100), and enhancing relationships of mutual trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Lee, 2021). Employees' experiences of high or low psychological safety are defined as employees feeling free to express feelings, as well as a shared belief of support (Carmeli & Hoffer, 2009; Kahn, 1990; Lee, 2021).

### ***Trust and Psychological Safety***

Trust and mutual respect are considered important factors in creating psychological safety for individuals to foster a sense of security and capability, enhancing employees' ability to adapt to change (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Lee, 2021). Trust is embedded within an organisation's processes and practices, such as decision-making, sharing of information, expression of voice and opinions, as well as fairness. Furthermore, trust as a characteristic of dyadic relationships is defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon the positive expectations, intentions, or behaviour of another (Kang & Stewart, 2007; Rousseau et al., 1998). Conversely, feelings of distrust may lead to organisational scepticism (Bommer et al., 2005; Jiang et al., 2019). Thus, psychological safety, empowerment of decision-making and communication are intertwined (Lee, 2021; Yanchus et al., 2014).

## **Positive Reinforcement and Appreciation of Employee Performance**

Positive reinforcement and appreciation of employee performance were seen as crucial when navigating a crisis in workplace settings (Dirani et al., 2020; Wei & Yazdanifard, 2014). Positive reinforcement is used to elicit and strengthen new behaviours by adding rewards and incentives, rather than eliminating benefits (Catania, 2001). Examples of workplace rewards and incentives include promotion opportunities and pay (Wei & Yazdanifard, 2014). Furthermore, leaders should recognise the way employees cope with stressors, their jobs, and personal circumstances (Dirani et al., 2020). Positive reinforcement enhances loyalty and overall employee commitment to the organisation (Dirani et al., 2020; Prewitt, 2003). Leaders' appreciation of employee work and efforts was considered integral during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, recognition of employee work positively impacts employee motivation (Dirani et al., 2020; Manzoor, 2012). Effective leadership involves reinforcing and motivating subordinates to improve performance (Luthans, 2000), and should demonstrate the connection between performance and rewards as a means of enhancing employee motivation. Thus, leaders can effectively manage employees through motivation, reinforcing value-enhancing behaviours and regular communication (Luthans, 2000). The behaviours of leaders do not only influence overall organisational productivity and consumer satisfaction, but also employee behaviours and attitudes (Popli & Rizvi, 2016).

## **Communal Behaviours and Attitudes**

Communal behaviours, such as the provision of support and display of sensitivity, were considered critical leadership behaviours and attitudes during remote working arrangements (Offstein et al., 2010; Snyder, 2012). However, it is important to note that the literature on supervisor and subordinate relationships during remote work is based on the assumption that both supervisors and subordinates willingly participate in remote work arrangements (Eichenauer et al., 2021). Individuals experienced challenges in the transition to remote work, such as inadequate childcare and insufficient resources to efficiently accomplish work tasks (Eichenauer et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, while agentic and task-oriented behaviours and attitudes are important, subordinates may view communal behaviours, such as providing flexibility, social support, and sensitivity to work-family balance, as more significant behaviours within the current COVID-19 context of considerable disruption and uncertainty (Eichenauer et al., 2021). While both agentic and communal leader behaviours and attitudes are deemed important, a key part of developing a strong and safe workplace culture involves listening to the concerns of employees, providing further evidence

for the importance of communal behaviours during periods of disruption and uncertainty (Eichenauer et al., 2021; Possamai, 2007). Evidence in the literature suggests that active listening is important for developing LMX relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995; Lloyd et al., 2017). Empathetic listening by leaders in a non-judgemental manner enables employees to feel accepted and appreciated (Lloyd et al., 2017). During a highly disruptive event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid shift to remote working, it is considered essential to form connections with people (Li et al., 2020). Developing relationships in remote working arrangements is important as many employees are trying to adjust to a new and unprecedented context (Cooke et al., 2019). An investment in relationships during periods of crises within HEIs is expected to strengthen the bond between students, staff, and the institution (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). As the uncertainty surrounding the current pandemic may cause anxiety among employees, leadership behaviours such as honesty, concern and benevolence toward followers is considered integral for effective coping (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Eichenauer et al., 2021). Finally, empathy, coupled with leaders' acknowledgement of the disruptions, is important for employee coping (Ahern & Loh, 2020).

### **Communication**

A recurring theme in the literature is the importance of communication by leaders to employees and relevant stakeholders during periods of crisis (Denner et al., 2019; Dirani et al., 2020; Moodley, 2019; Nekmat & Kong, 2019; Zhang & Borden, 2017), suggesting that effective communication is valuable to reduce the possible adverse psychological impacts of the pandemic on employees (Denner et al., 2019; Nekmat & Kong, 2019; Zhang & Borden, 2017). Besides effective communication, important sources of social support for employees in the workplace are supervisor and co-worker support (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020).

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations are facing communication challenges, pointing to the need for transparency from leaders (Dirani et al., 2020). Employees value leaders who acknowledge the severity and difficulty of the situation at hand (Dirani et al., 2020). Additionally, frequent communication, providing perspective and ensuring the well-being of individuals directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, is one of the main responsibilities of leaders in navigating periods of uncertainty and fast-paced change (Dirani et al., 2020). It is imperative for leaders to be consistent in their communication with stakeholders to decrease stress and feelings of uncertainty (Dirani et al., 2020; Ramlachan & Behary-Ramraj, 2021). During a crisis, communication should be

relevant, realistic, positive, balanced and sent out via appropriate communication channels (Dirani et al., 2020). For example, regularly scheduled one-on-one calls and video-enabled meetings may foster open communication about concerns for welfare and possible frustrations and may provide leaders the opportunity to reinforce the mission of the organisation (Newman & Ford, 2021).

### ***Crisis Communication***

Crisis communication has been widely explored in the literature surrounding the workplace (Denner et al., 2019; Nekmat & Kong, 2019; Zhang & Borden, 2017), and is defined as frequent communication with employees about the current state of the organisation and is considered a crucial component of effective crisis management. The quality of crisis communication is measured by the clarity and accuracy of the information provided, as well as the viability of the actions the organisation will take (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020; Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021). Furthermore, to effectively manage crises, leaders should communicate as early as possible on the strategies that will be used to manage the crisis (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021), as well as collaborate with various experts to formulate a clear strategy with well-defined indicators of success.

Additionally, leaders should communicate decisions and commit to action, adapting methods in accordance with feedback from followers (Claeys et al., 2010; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Crisis communication should be effectively managed by the organisation's leadership (Liu et al., 2018), and is crucial in improving employee perceptions of the uncertainties caused by the crisis and allowing employees to implement effective coping strategies (Neuliep, 2017). Furthermore, prompt, and effective communication boosts employee confidence about leader's handling of the situation (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020).

### ***Efficient Communication***

During a crisis, it is important for leaders to communicate clearly and frequently to all stakeholders. However, the message being delivered is of equal importance to the channel being used (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Marshall et al., 2020). As a result of the present COVID-19 pandemic, as well as social distancing protocols, leaders should adapt communication channels to suit the preferences of employees (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Leaders should remain mindful that communication techniques used in face-to-face interactions may not work as well in remote working conditions (Newman & Ford, 2021). Messages sent too frequently may leave employees feeling overwhelmed and bombarded with information, but infrequent communication may elicit feelings of anxiety and concern

(Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Leaders in academia should communicate a compelling and thoughtful shared vision for the institution which is realistic and attainable, as this may inspire members and foster feelings of trust among employees in their leaders and in the organisation as a whole (Bundy et al., 2017; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Guzzo et al., 2021).

### **Distributing Leadership Responsibilities**

Due to the unique professional context of HEIs, a less hierarchical approach to leadership is considered most effective (Jones et al., 2012). Therefore, collaboration between faculties and departments is deemed essential, and should involve academics, executives, and professional staff (Jones et al., 2012). Distributed leadership supports leadership being dispersed among members of an organisation, instead of being concentrated among a small set of individuals (Gronn, 2002; Oliveira & Cunha, 2021). It is important for leaders to delegate responsibilities to a multi-disciplinary network of teams, taking cultural differences and diversity into account, who will play a significant role in the implementation of crisis management strategies (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Distributed leadership emphasises the importance of leading and following based on a relationship that is not restricted to a specific person, identity, or role, but which focuses on the process managed by people (Cope et al., 2011). Distributing leadership responsibilities is considered effective in improving the quality of decisions made, due to input from multiple perspectives (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020), as well as giving teams the opportunity to work effectively by managing themselves and their own productivity. Providing autonomy allows employees to feel empowered to make decisions. Distributing leadership responsibilities leaves team members feeling more motivated and incentivised, as they have more freedom in problem-solving than they would have in a top-down institutional leadership approach (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).

### **Diversity-Oriented Leadership**

Leadership behaviours and attitudes which recognise the value of diversity are considered essential for successful leadership during crises (Lee et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2021). Diversity-oriented leadership goes beyond highlighting leader's behaviours and attitudes, by emphasising the importance of a commitment to a workforce that is representative of all segments of society, in terms of demographics and expertise (Lee et al., 2020). Within organisations, supporting diversity motivates individuals to view problems from a range of perspectives, while also challenging them to embrace disagreeable yet useful ideas, contributing to the successful mapping of strategic direction within the organisation (Lee et al., 2020). Furthermore, diversity-oriented leadership encourages leaders and

employees to think creatively about alternatives and to respond with flexibility (Lee et al., 2020). Diversity-oriented leaders are likely to motivate employees to share and exchange knowledge with others within an organisation, without fear of being stigmatised (Boh et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2020).

### **Inclusivity, Visibility and Accessibility of Leaders During a Crisis**

Traumatic events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may shatter the assumption of the workplace as a safe space for many employees (Ahmed et al., 2020). Thus, it is suggested that leaders demonstrate behaviours and attitudes of inclusivity, visibility and accessibility when interacting with subordinates (Carmeli et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2020). Inclusive leadership focuses on factors that value employee diversity in decision-making processes, which allows employees to feel comfortable sharing opinions and views without being afraid of power or status differences (Hassan & Jiang, 2019). Research has demonstrated the relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety (Mikyong & Moon, 2019), innovative work behaviour (Javed et al., 2019), development of employee belongingness (Randel et al., 2018), and the improvement of subordinates' creativity (Zhu et al., 2020). Leadership behaviour has a significant impact on employee behaviour, performance, and experience of well-being (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Inceoglu et al., 2018). Thus, a secondary aim of this study is to explore employee experiences of well-being in the swift transition to remote working.

### **Leadership Behaviours, Attitudes and Well-Being in the Remote Working Context**

#### **Well-Being**

There is no single, universally agreed upon conceptualisation or definition of well-being in the literature. However, for the purposes of this study, well-being is considered a multidimensional phenomenon (Ryan & Deci, 2001), defined according to two distinct perspectives. According to the hedonic perspective, well-being is described as happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This emphasises the importance of three components: life satisfaction, the presence of a positive mood, and the absence of a negative mood (Diener et al., 1998). In the eudemonic perspective, well-being is described in terms of self-actualisation, proposing that true happiness is found in expressing virtue (Dewe & Cooper, 2012). The eudemonic perspective values engagement in activities which foster human growth, such as autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, positive relatedness, and essential well-being (Keeman, 2017; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). During a crisis, leaders play a vital role in reducing potential adverse effects and costs of employee anxieties surrounding health (Hu et al., 2020).

Due to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, lives and livelihoods are endangered and many non-essential employees have had to shift to work from home (WFH) arrangements. Many employees working remotely experience isolation, loneliness and anxiety, which may affect individual behaviours in and outside the working environment (Hu et al., 2020).

Broader dimensions of well-being include psychological aspects. (i.e., subjective happiness and satisfaction), as well as physiological well-being (i.e., physical, and physiological wellness) and social well-being (i.e., interpersonal relationships) (Grant et al., 2007; Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership support was considered an essential component of successful workplace health promotion (WHP) (Milner et al., 2015). Senior leadership has a strong influence on all aspects of organisational functioning, so gaining support from leadership for WHP demonstrates that leaders and the organisation understand the importance of employee health and are prepared to devote considerable time and resources to identify, prioritise and address issues pertaining to employee well-being (Milner et al., 2015).

### ***Employee Well-Being***

Employee well-being is significant for employees, employers, and society as a whole. One definition of employee well-being conceptualises it as psychological health versus job satisfaction (Lawson et al., 2009). Initially, research on employee well-being was primarily focused on employee mental health, personality traits and stress (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Hayman, 2010). However, employee well-being is linked to various aspects of organisational performance such as productivity, employee turnover, job satisfaction, stress, and work-life balance (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011; Keeman et al., 2017; Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021). Furthermore, employee well-being not only relates to overall well-being and life satisfaction, but also affects healthcare on a national level (Bowling et al., 2010).

Due to the events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, employee well-being in the workplace has become increasingly important (Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021). Dimensions of employee well-being include physical, mental, social, and financial well-being (Bruggen et al., 2017; Netemeyer et al., 2017; Strout & Howard, 2012; Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021). Adverse experiences of well-being in the form of stress, depression and anxiety can result in reduced work performance and absenteeism (Carolan et al., 2017).

However, despite the many positive organisational attitudes associated with employee well-being, organisations have traditionally focused on reducing employee stress rather than enhancing employee well-being (Hone et al., 2015; Keeman et al., 2017). It is understood that

stress occurs when there is an imbalance between personal resources and perceived demands in a given situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In previous research, stress was linked to decreased productivity, resulting in reduced profit for organisations (Ford et al., 2011; Keeman et al., 2017). Therefore, organisations placed a large focus on stress-reduction interventions (Keeman et al., 2017). Traditional well-being interventions have focused on individual stress management, but evidence suggests that these are often ineffective in the long term and do not result in improved organisational outcomes. Stress and well-being constitute two distinct and separate constructs, and the absence of stress does not equate to well-being (Keeman et al., 2017). However, work-related stress may lead to an adverse impact on the well-being of employees (George & Zhou, 2007), and it can be argued that there is an increased need for employees to be supported during a crisis. Furthermore, authors argue that the behaviours of leaders significantly impact the consequences of stressful events (Ahmed et al., 2020; Hannah et al., 2009).

Leader behaviours such as support, empowerment and a good-quality relationship with subordinates may prevent stress and improve employee coping and effective well-being (Skakon et al., 2010). Experiences of stress may be influenced by relationships in the workplace with colleagues, employees and leaders, and effective leader behaviours have the ability to reduce employee stress and improve overall experiences of well-being in the workplace (Skakon et al., 2010).

### **Work-Family Boundaries and the Role of Leadership**

Globally, employees have experienced a sudden, unprecedented shift in their work and family lives due to COVID-19 (Kramer & Kramer, 2020). Loss of jobs, lower subjective well-being and struggles in the implementation of work-family boundaries are only some of the challenges experienced by employees working remotely (Kniffin et al., 2021; Vaziri et al., 2020). Subjective well-being refers to the level of well-being individuals experience according to their subjective evaluations of their own lives (Diener & Ryan, 2009).

Employees often experience work-family conflict (WFC) while working remotely, finding it difficult to maintain work-family boundaries (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Ghislieri et al., 2021; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). WFC refers to inter-role conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains are incapable of being compatible. Furthermore, the conflict between work and family domains may be exacerbated by the pandemic, making it more difficult for employees to initiate and maintain adequate work-family boundaries (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Winefield et al., 2014). Effective scheduling, and supervisor support for

family and home-life may aid employees in managing WFC (Kelly et al., 2014). One of the most significant sources of WFC is individuals not having enough time to devote equal attention to work and home domains. Furthermore, family responsibilities such as caregiving and household maintenance may adversely impact employee well-being and result in the experience of WFC (Lu et al., 2011). Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic invites reflection on the best leadership practices to enhance employee coping in a period of rapid change and uncertainty (Stoller, 2020).

The above literature review provided an overview of the existing scholarship, serving as a foundation for the present research study, which looks at the leadership behaviours and attitudes that employees perceive as valuable, using remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic as the case study, and explores employee experiences of well-being during the transition to remote work. In doing so, the present research study contributes to the crisis literature by exploring effective leadership from the perspective of employees. Practically, this research may shed light on how leaders can better respond to the needs and expectations of their employees as the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold (Caringal-Go et al., 2021).

## **Method**

The primary objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of academics and the leadership behaviours and attitudes they found most valuable during a crisis, using remote work during COVID-19 as the case study. The study used a qualitative, interpretivist approach. This section is divided into six parts: the research design, sampling and participants, data collection procedure, data analysis, assuring quality of the data (rigour), and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design**

To gain insight into the lived experiences of participants, a qualitative, exploratory approach was adopted within the interpretivist paradigm. Exploratory research provides an opportunity for the researcher to gain rich and in-depth descriptions of the phenomena under study (Khan, 2014), while qualitative research is primarily focused on providing meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Caringal-Go et al., 2021). Therefore, using a qualitative design allowed the researcher to establish the meaning academics attributed to leadership behaviours and attitudes while working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a residential university in SA, as well as academics' experiences of well-being during remote work. Furthermore, one-on-one interviews provided participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences, giving the researcher new perspectives into the area of interest.

A case study design was deemed appropriate for the present study, as contextual factors were relevant and important (Yin, 2003). The case, academics' experiences of remote work, could not be explored without the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in SA (Crowe et al., 2011; Meyer, 2001), as the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions caused the rapid transition to remote work. Additionally, a case study design allowed the researcher to answer 'how' and 'why' questions (Leonard-Barton, 1990; Meyer, 2001; Yin, 1994; Yin, 2003). Thus, a qualitative, interpretivist, exploratory case study design was used for the study.

### **Single Case Study and Unit of Analysis**

The case under study was academics at a residential university in SA. Participants' working experiences and perspectives were specific to their employment as an academic at a residential university, with a specific focus on the leadership behaviours and attitudes academics found most valuable while working remotely. The case study also explored academics' experiences of well-being while working remotely. Thus, the unit of analysis in this study was the individual (Crowe et al., 2011; Meyer, 2001).

## **Sampling**

Purposive and snowball sampling were used to collect the primary interview data. Purposive sampling is commonly used by researchers to examine specific populations by providing meaningful manifestations of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, it focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of a community rather than generalisable findings (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate to address this study's main research question and sub-questions, as it allowed the researcher to gain in-depth insights into the case under study, as well as the context in which it occurred (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Njie & Asimiran, 2014; Yin, 2003). The inclusion criteria required participants to be a permanent academic at a residential university in SA. Therefore, participants had to have worked face-to-face before the COVID-19 pandemic and must have experienced the transition to remote working conditions because of lockdown restrictions in SA arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. A snowball sampling strategy was also used as a purposeful method to enhance the specific sample, as it enabled the researcher to access new participants (Naderifar et al., 2017; Noy, 2008).

### ***Participants***

A total of 15 participants were interviewed for this study, ranging in age from 28 years to 60+ years, with an average age of 40 years. All participants were permanent employees in academia at a residential SA university and a total of 11 participants had children (refer to Appendix A), for a summary table of participant demographic information. Having participants with various backgrounds and experiences increased the possibility of shedding light on the research questions from various perspectives (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Patton, 1987)

### **Data Collection Procedure**

To maximise the sample within the stipulated research time, two researchers shared the data collection process: researcher 1 is the researcher in the present study, while researcher 2 is another researcher within the 2021 Industrial/Organisational Psychology (IOP) master's class. An informal meeting was held with the two researchers and their respective supervisors to formulate a combined interview schedule that included both researchers' study's aims and objectives (refer to Appendix B). Each researcher's sampling, interviews, data collection procedures and data analyses were conducted separately, and the transcripts and video recordings were then shared to make a total of 15 interviews. Due to COVID-19 social distancing protocols in place, and the academic institution's concerns regarding face-

to-face interactions, all communication with participants took place via Outlook email for the first researcher, and via Gmail for the second researcher. Prior to data being collected, both researchers obtained ethical clearance from the Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Committee at the University of Cape Town (UCT), with the reference number: REC2021/06/006 (for the first researcher) (refer to Appendix C). Both researchers adapted the interview schedule and the interview protocol to suit the APA ethical research guidelines, which stipulate how research should be conducted when involving human participants. When conducting data analysis, each researcher used different data from the interviews conducted, with specific reference to the research questions guiding each study.

### **Procedure**

Once ethical clearance was granted by the faculty (refer to Appendix D), the university's Executive Director (ED) of Human Resources (HR) was contacted via email by both researchers to gain permission to interview permanent university employees. Once permission was granted to access university staff members, Form HR190 was completed separately by each researcher (refer to Appendix E). Subsequently, each researcher was given a random and anonymised list of employees from each faculty within the university (10% of staff from each faculty), to make a total of 800 participants. The researchers then each randomly chose 200 employees from this list, for a total of 400 random employees. Once the random sample was chosen, the ED of HR distributed the details of each researcher's study separately, including the research cover letter, to the random sample of academics (refer to Appendix F).

The first researcher contacted the ED of HR a second time to pull another sample of 200 permanent university employees as a means of increasing the sample size. A further 200 employees were contacted and given the opportunity to take part in the study. Contact details of the researcher were included in the cover letter. University employees who wished to take part in the study contacted each researcher directly. Thereafter, suitable dates and times for an interview were arranged with the researcher and potential participants. Both researchers began the interview by greeting participants and asking how they were to build trust and rapport (Clarke, 2006). Ethical guidelines were then read, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw, their right to anonymity and confidentiality, and that their responses would be used for academic purposes only. Additionally, both researcher's obtained written consent from participants using a consent form which each participant was required to fill out before taking part in the interview, as well as verbal consent before starting the interview

recording (refer to Appendix G). To ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the current study, participants were assigned numbers when results were reported (i.e., participant 1, 2, 3) (Saunders et al., 2015). Permission from all participants was received by both researchers to record and transcribe the interviews verbatim before the interview commenced.

Both researchers conducted all interviews via Microsoft Teams due to social distancing restrictions and to suit the remote working arrangements of the residential university of employees in the studies. Interviews were conducted at the earliest convenience of participants to fit into their remote working schedules. Interviews were manually transcribed by each researcher, without the use of any transcription applications. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher who conducted the interviews, to allow familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once transcription of the interviews was completed, each researcher sent the transcripts back to their participants for member-checking (Carlson, 2010). The researchers then exchanged the transcripts and video recordings so that the other researcher could familiarise themselves with the data. The researcher in this study stored the interview transcripts and recordings on a password-protected laptop, as well as an external hard drive that only they had access to. Hard copies of the interview transcripts were kept private and secure by the first researcher. The second researcher saved the interview transcripts and recordings in a file on a password-protected laptop. Each researcher analysed the data separately according to the specific aims and objectives of their respective studies.

### **The Pilot Interviews**

Two pilot interviews were conducted by the first researcher and one pilot interview was conducted by the second researcher, to determine whether the interview questions were understandable and would elicit meaningful responses from participants. Moreover, the pilot interviews tested the interview schedule and, where necessary, was used to revise and edit the questions to increase participants' understanding and elicit rich, in-depth, and honest insights. It also allowed the researchers to practice their interviewing skills and to become familiar and comfortable with the interview process.

The first two participants who responded to the initial research invitation were randomly selected to participate in the pilot interviews by the first researcher. The second researcher conducted the pilot interview with their first research participant. Participants reported finding the questions clear and understandable and only required clarity to ensure that they were sufficiently answering the question and to confirm that they were being clear and concise in their responses. Subsequently, each researcher made minor changes to the

interview schedule to enhance the clarity of the questions, resulting in some questions being eliminated to avoid repetition. These changes were shared between the researchers and adjusted accordingly for consistency throughout the data collection process.

### **Data Analysis**

A semi-structured interview schedule was used, which allowed the researcher to probe for areas of potential significance to the research. This qualitative approach required continuous analysis and reflexivity to adapt to new discoveries within the data and was applied throughout the interview process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step Thematic Analysis was used as a technique to analyse the data, because it allowed the researcher to report on the different themes identified and analysed in the data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) technique uses the following steps: (1) familiarising yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. While a thematic analysis is a common tool to analyse qualitative data, it has been criticised for being poorly explained for inexperienced researchers, given the lack of literature (Nowell et al., 2017). However, a thematic analysis was still employed as it is considered highly flexible which allowed the researcher to provide a rich and detailed description of the data by exploring different perspectives from the point of view of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, a thematic analysis provides novice qualitative researchers with insight into skills that are easily transferable to other qualitative analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the first step, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher familiarised themselves with the data by transcribing interviews verbatim. Then, the researcher read through the interview transcripts and listened to recordings more than once, to further familiarise themselves with the data. Re-reading the transcripts, and making notes on important aspects of the interview, allowed the researcher to further immerse themselves in the data, which is considered an important component of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then completed multiple stages of open coding to identify patterns emerging from the data set, and to organise the data into initial themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Key aspects of each code, as well as continuously emerging patterns in the data, were then formulated into larger, more meaningful themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Themes were identified at both a semantic and latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data emerging from the interviews were coded theoretically and in accordance with the main research question and sub-questions (Braun, 2008). Headings that were deemed relevant and

representative of the patterns emerging in a specific theme were created and assigned to each theme by the researcher.

In the next phase, Nvivo 12, Version 12.6.1 was used, a software designed for coding in qualitative studies to generate both semantic and latent codes. Inductive and deductive methods were used during the data analysis process. In the first phase, deductive analysis was used as interesting patterns in the data relevant to the research questions and the literature reviewed were coded and collated throughout the data set (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thereafter, an inductive analysis was used as the interview data directly informed the identification of codes. A total of 30 codes emerged, with a larger number of semantic codes. In the second phase, codes and emerging data were combined to form potential themes and sub-themes. Thirdly, themes were reviewed and revised to establish whether they adequately captured the experiences of participants across the data set. The research supervisor assisted in the revising and review of themes to ensure a rigorous and accurate analysis. Then, a thematic map was formulated to give a clear and diagrammatic summary of the data and to present a usable representation of the patterns emerging through data analysis. The researcher and research supervisor reviewed and refined the primary, secondary and tertiary themes until they were both satisfied that the data was accurately depicted. The researcher kept a record of the number of participants that referred to each primary, secondary and tertiary theme, employing the counting method for conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, if at least 7 participants reported on an experience, it could be considered a significant enough result to be included as a theme. Additionally, the emergent results were accompanied by supporting extracts as evidence of primary, secondary, or tertiary themes, to ensure groundedness throughout the data analysis process. The selection of extracts was then reviewed to ensure their quality and appropriateness in relation to the identified primary, secondary, and tertiary themes, and the research questions guiding this study. The analysis process within the present study was not linear but followed an iterative process with frequent reviews and versions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis process occurred concurrently with data collection. This approach allowed for depth and quality in the data analysis process.

### **Assuring Quality of the Data**

#### **Trustworthiness in Research**

In all research, it is integral that rigour is maintained throughout. A certain type of rigour in qualitative research is referred to as 'trustworthiness' (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in the data produced, the interpretations made, and the method employed within a study (Connelly, 2016). Concepts such as, *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* describe various aspects of trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which should be considered interrelated. Credibility involves establishing confidence in the accuracy of the research findings using well-established data collection methods (Connelly, 2016; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability, also known as flexible generalisability, refers to the extent to which the research findings can be generalised to other settings or groups (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Dependability ensures that consistency is used throughout the research process including analysis techniques (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is defined as the degree of neutrality kept during the research study, which is the extent to which the findings were attributed to the participants and not the researcher's bias, preconceptions, and motivations or interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) and Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommended list of techniques to achieve trustworthiness, as these works are highly regarded and widely used in qualitative research. The following techniques were employed as the researcher identified them as suitable and applicable to achieve research trustworthiness in this study.

### ***Credibility***

Selecting the most appropriate method for data collection and the amount of data are important for establishing credibility (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Credibility was achieved using audio recordings and accurate transcriptions of video and voice recordings. Moreover, the researcher intimately engaged with the qualitative data and its analysis, reading and re-reading the data multiple times and conducting multiple reflexive analyses of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this process, the researcher attempted to reflect an accurate representation of the participants' responses to the interview questions, as well as an authentic and valid illustration of their views and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### ***Transferability***

Transferability of the study was achieved through providing a reasonably thick description of the participant group (Shenton, 2004). However, the researcher acknowledges that the current study's transferability is limited by the context in which it occurred. To enhance transferability, the present study aimed to provide rich and in-depth descriptions of the context, perspectives and research method used to achieve the study's overall aims

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A detailed method section allows future or prospective researchers to transfer the findings of this study to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The themes identified within the present study can be transferred to similar contexts because the research results were determined by the perceptions of valued leadership behaviours and attitudes by academics at a residential university in SA. The results are further supported by the theoretical framework of the LMX theory. Thus, the transferability of the research is relatively high.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability refers to the consideration of both, factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design-induced changes, which is the degree to which the data change over time, and alterations are made to the researcher's decisions during the analysis process (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was achieved through a dependability audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This involved the detailed examination of the process of inquiry (i.e., data collection process, how the data was stored and the accuracy of the data). Furthermore, detailed, and complete records of all phases of the research process were made and kept (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### ***Confirmability***

Confirmability was achieved through verbatim transcription of the interview data, with no attempt at altering any phrases or comments. Therefore, the researcher maintained a high degree of neutrality. Furthermore, confirmability was attained through reflexivity. In which the researcher kept an updated journal of field notes and personal reflections throughout the data collection process (refer to Appendix H and I).

### **Researcher Bias**

In qualitative research, the researcher plays a significant role as the research instrument (Adeagbo, 2021). Therefore, it is important that the researcher takes note of their emotions and feelings, as well as the impact of their identity, during the research process (Adeagbo, 2021). A reflexive journal was kept where the researcher wrote about themselves and their interactions with the research and the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (refer to Appendix J). Additionally, a reflexive journal was kept of interpretations made by the researcher (Engin, 2011; Silverman, 2010). This was done to ensure that the researcher was aware of their personal bias and to ensure that they remained objective and neutral throughout the interview and data analysis processes (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

## **Reflexivity**

Being a novice qualitative researcher, it was important to provide a description of the researcher's reflections and thought process during the data-collection process. The following sections speak to these reflections and provides an outline of how the researcher prepared themselves for the interviews to ensure the quality of the data-collection process.

The pilot interviews were an opportunity for the researchers to test the interview schedule and to become comfortable and familiar with one-on-one interviews. The researcher kept an updated journal of their experiences and reflections throughout the research process, to keep in mind their preconceptions, and to not bias the data or interview process. The researcher also made note of any subtle, non-verbal cues and dynamics during the interview process. Furthermore, the researcher reflected on their interviewing skills to remain consistent and objective throughout the research process. Self-reflection was essential to the data-collection process, and upon reflection, the researcher found that they had a natural ability to make participants feel comfortable and to build rapport in the first few minutes of the interview. This was beneficial as it allowed participants to feel comfortable sharing their views and experiences openly and honestly.

The researcher became aware of key pitfalls during the pilot interviews and corrected these for subsequent interviews; this process included removing questions that were redundant. Redundancy during the interview process created ambiguity in the questions and made participants feel that they were repeating themselves. Secondly, the researcher had prior knowledge and awareness of some of the leadership behaviours and attitudes found to be valuable during a crisis in the previous literature reviewed. Therefore, the researcher had to ensure not to be biased during the interviews and not co-create the data with participants (Chenail, 2011). Every effort was made to ensure that an appropriate and rigorous research method was followed, to effectively address the research questions outlined in the present study. As a further means of practicing reflexivity, the researcher ensured that the interviews were not scheduled too close to one another, to allow sufficient time to reflect on the interviews and to reflect in their personal journal before scheduling the next interview. Approximately one to two weeks were intentionally put between each interview to allow sufficient time for reflection.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Committee before carrying out the present study. To obtain ethical clearance, the researcher

developed a research proposal detailing the possible valuable contributions of the study, while providing sufficient evidence that they had the adequate competence and plans to complete the research (McNabb, 2015). The proposal outlined the key areas involved in the research process, namely, the title of the research, the purpose of the study, the possible theoretical contributions, the research questions guiding the study, a condensed review of the relevant literature, as well as a detailed methodology of how the researcher planned to conduct the research and the procedures that would be followed (McNabb, 2015). Once ethical clearance was received, permission to interview university staff members was applied for via the ED of HR. Once permission was granted, the researcher filled out a form which signalled that the ED of HR would provide the researcher with a random sample of permanent academic staff members. The researcher then randomly chose 200 participants whose names and contact details were kept anonymous in the process. Once staff members who wanted to participate in the research contacted the researcher, interview dates and times were then scheduled.

APA ethical guidelines for conducting research with human participants was adhered to at all stages of the research and accepted ethical procedures were adopted throughout the study. First, permission was obtained to contact academics to participate in the study. Second, consent from willing participants to participate and be audio-recorded was obtained, both verbally and in writing. Participants were assured that the study posed no direct harm to them, and that data would not be used without their consent. Third, consenting participants were briefed about the interview procedure and the type of questions to be asked (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Fourth, it was emphasised that participation was voluntary and that participants were able to opt out of the study at any time, with no adverse consequences. Finally, participants' data was securely stored on the researcher's personal laptop and an external hard drive; hard copies of the transcripts were stored safely and kept private by the researcher. Only the primary researcher and research supervisors had access to the data and personal identifiers were removed from the data to protect the identity of participants.

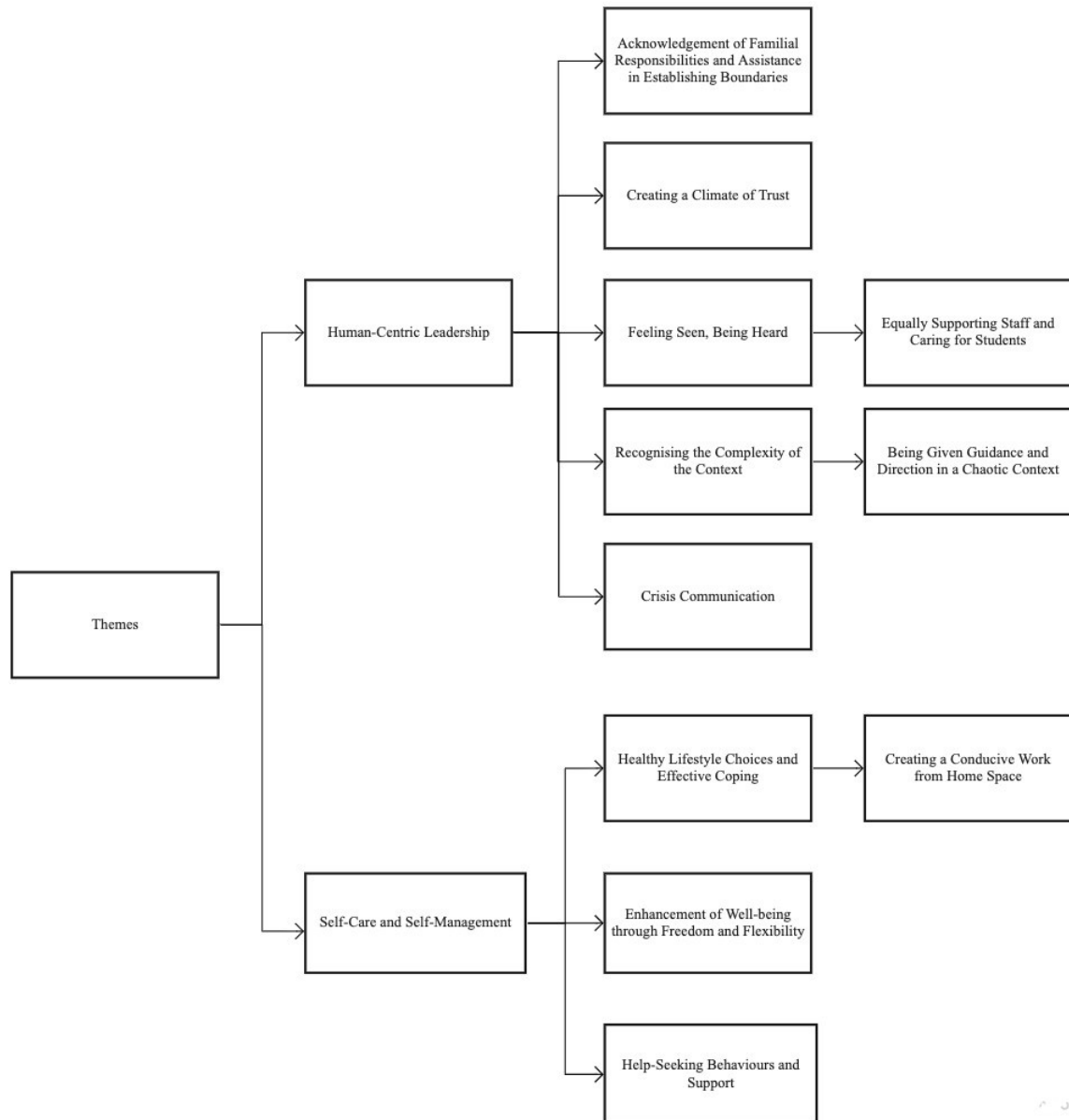
## Results

The following chapter presents the results drawn from the thematic analysis of the 15 in-depth interviews. The chapter begins by presenting a thematic map representing the primary, secondary and tertiary themes identified through a qualitative data analysis of the interview transcripts (refer to Figure 2, p. 47). A theme was coded as present for a participant if it was mentioned with strong effect during the interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, the method of counting for drawing and verifying conclusions was used in the present study to determine whether an experience could be constituted significant enough to be considered a primary, secondary, or tertiary theme (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, in this study, for a primary, secondary, or tertiary theme to be included in the analysis, an experience or perspective had to have been mentioned by at least 7 out of the 15 participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, it was required that each theme be relevant in answering the research questions guiding this study.

The primary theme, 'Human-Centric Leadership', provides insight into the explicit leadership behaviours and attitudes valued by participants while working remotely. The common thread with these is that they are particularly humane in nature. The primary theme, 'Self-Care and Self-Management' illustrates implicit and explicit factors relevant to the sample within the present study and their well-being. The two primary themes clustered around the research sub-questions in the present study. The primary theme, 'Human-Centric Leadership', clustered around research sub-question 1, while 'Self-Care and Self-Management' clustered around the research sub-question 2, regarding well-being. Selected quotations providing evidence to support the emergent results are included in the analysis to illustrate themes.

**Figure 2**

*Emergent Primary Themes, Secondary Themes and Tertiary Themes*



### **Human-Centric Leadership**

Participants were invited to describe the leadership behaviours, actions, and attitudes they found valuable during the transition to, and while, working remotely. This served to determine the types of behaviours, actions or attitudes participants appreciated from their leaders while transitioning and adapting to remote work. The primary theme, Human-Centric Leadership, characterises the significant leadership behaviours and attitudes appreciated by

participants while working remotely during COVID-19. This speaks to participants' appreciation of leadership behaviours and attitudes that are humane in nature. Participants consistently reported that they appreciated leaders who explicitly demonstrated behaviours and attitudes that were understanding and considerate of the individual, as well as an appreciation for participants having multiple roles and responsibilities outside of the workplace. The following secondary themes emerged: (1) acknowledgement of familial responsibilities and assistance in establishing boundaries; (2) creating a climate of trust; (3) feeling seen, being heard (and the tertiary theme: equally supporting staff and caring for students); (4) recognising the complexity of the context (and the tertiary theme: being given guidance and direction in a chaotic context); and (5) crisis communication. The value of human-centric leadership is highlighted in the following quote:

I think she really was exemplary, actually. Yeah, I mean she, she was very human about it all and really understanding and, and at the same time kind of kept the whole academic machine going and I think that was a very difficult thing to do, if, she could easily have let go of one to kind of focus on the other (Participant 13).

### **Acknowledgement of Familial Responsibilities and Assistance in Establishing Boundaries**

This secondary theme reports some of the perceptions of participants regarding leaders acknowledging and supporting the establishment of boundaries while working remotely. Almost all participants reported that work and personal responsibilities often overlapped while working remotely. A quotation from one participant's reflection on their experience is provided below:

Uh so so, the two responsibilities do bleed into each other, but I, I was able to manage it, but it's it took some time to get used to and it was difficult (Participant 15).

Participants reported that they appreciated leaders who acknowledged their familial responsibilities and who explicitly encouraged them to establish and assert work-life boundaries. Many of the participants had multiple responsibilities, besides being an employee, including general caregiving and home-schooling tasks. Thus, it was important for participants to feel that their leaders gave them explicit support in establishing and maintaining boundaries between work and home. Participants found it easier to impose boundaries and manage the demands of work and life if their leader supported and encouraged them to exercise control over both domains. They explained the value of explicit

actions by leaders which demonstrated an overt understanding of the conflict in managing multiple roles.

Participant 12 reported that it was easier for them to establish and exercise boundaries between work and home if their leaders overtly encouraged and supported them in the formation of boundaries. A sample of quotations to substantiate participants' appreciation of leaders encouraging and supporting the establishment of boundaries between work and home are provided below:

Uhm, this idea of not answering emails in the evening, and this idea of having set cut-off times and start times and end times was something that was kind of communicated to us from the start of lockdown, as being okay. Uhm, and as having full support for that decision so when you kind make those rulings, there hasn't actually been kind of kick back because it comes from the Dean, or because it comes from the Head of department, it's kind like you're well within your rights to say it (smiling), or to practice it [crosstalk] (Participant 12).

Yah, and I guess it also helped me that I did feel a sense of support from the university (Participant 1).

Participant 6 noted that, while working remotely, it was important to have a leader that explicitly acknowledged and accommodated their family responsibilities. She reported that her leader was accommodating when allocating teaching and would make decisions which would explicitly reinforce support for employees with care giving responsibilities. Quotations demonstrating a participant's appreciation for her leaders acknowledging and accommodating her family responsibilities are provided below:

Uhm, and she has been accommodating when it comes to allocating teaching. So, she's been great in that way, uhm and that's really helped a lot, knowing that I have her understanding if there's an emergency and I, you know I need to take time off to, to attend to sick children...

I just find that he, the biggest help to me has been having a head of department that has been accommodating of family responsibilities...

my line manager has been incredibly understanding, uhm, she has been amazing when it comes to taking care of us who have small children (Participant 6).

Participant 6 further expressed that if her leader had not been understanding of her family responsibilities and did not assist in the establishment of boundaries; she would have felt very angry and stressed while working remotely. Even for those participants who did not have general caregiving responsibilities, this theme emerged. For example, despite not having

young children to care for at home, participant 1 identified leadership actions which encouraged them to maintain a balance between work and life as valuable.

### **Creating a Climate of Trust**

A vast majority of participants reported that it was easier for them to transition and adapt to remote work if their leader created a climate of trust. Participants experienced trust when leaders were accessible, available, and responsive.

Participant 11 reported that being able to call on her leader for anything gave her a sense of security, while participant 12 specifically noted that her leader being present and available to her was important for her while working remotely. Quotations as evidence to demonstrate participant's appreciation of leaders being available and accessible are provided below:

...always available has actually been a key thing for me. So sometimes if there's a crisis, or if there's something that kind of can't wait until morning or needs to be like now. Uhm (pause), I can very easily just pick up the phone or send a WhatsApp and kind of get a response as opposed to waiting for them to read an email. So that's, that's something that's been really useful (Participant 12).

Participant 4 reported that, although it may have felt like he was 'thrown into the deep end,' in that his leaders gave him minimal guidance in converting face-to-face teaching modules to an online format, or in working remotely, it was an indication that his leaders trusted him to make decisions autonomously. This helped to cultivate a climate of trust. Supporting quotations demonstrating an appreciation for leaders demonstrating trust is provided below:

I enjoyed that they trusted me, you know, uhm, if there's something I really value about the XXX department and being a course convenor, there is, they trust you. I mean it, yes, it may look like they are throwing you in the deep end but it is also nice to be like, hey we trust you...

So I really like that, being trusted with it to, to, to put this thing together and you know, and make the right decisions (Participant 4).

Participant 2 felt that being able to call her leader at any time was indication that she could trust her leader, that it made her feel supported, and established a sense of trust between

her and her leader. The following quotations provide evidence of a participants' experiences of building trusting relationships through leader accessibility and availability:

...having an ear, being able to call the boss at any time, uhm, and when she wasn't, uhm, being sort of hands on I thought she would, she should be, I would simply send her a WhatsApp saying I think our team needs to meet okay?...

Yah, I always felt supported, I always felt like I could pick up the phone at any time (Participant 2).

Furthermore, participant 1 reported that being given the freedom and autonomy to make decisions implied that her leader trusted her. Moreover, it was clear that the overt behaviour of her leaders giving her freedom was indicative of their trust in her abilities. The quotation below provides evidence of a participant feeling trusted by her leader when given freedom:

So sometimes, you know there's, the balance is, that when you are given freedom, it also develops, it says you know, they've got trust in you (Participant 1).

On the other hand, in response to a question regarding the leadership behaviours and actions participants appreciated less, some participants expressed that they did not appreciate being micromanaged. For participants, micromanagement demonstrated the opposite of being trusted. The overwhelming majority of participants felt that they did not want to be micromanaged while working remotely.

Participant 1 reported that if her leader were to micromanage her, and if she was required to constantly report to her leader, it would insinuate that her leader distrusted her. Furthermore, participant 9 specifically noted that considering the context of remote working during a global pandemic, being micromanaged was a leadership behaviour that she felt to be inhumane and inconsiderate of the context. Quotations providing evidence of participants not appreciating being micromanaged in a remote working context are provided below:

So, but again, it's because that implies that they don't trust you. And that's what I would have more an objection with. I would, I would find it hard to work with someone who core down, didn't have my back (Participant 1).

The micromanagement and not the recognition that, that we are human beings, we are not robots, we do not operate at this high level (Participant 9).

In response to the questions surrounding the leadership behaviours appreciated most by employees, participant 3 reported that the best behaviour their leader had demonstrated

during the transition to remote work was to leave him alone. A supporting quotation is provided below:

But in different ways, uh I would, I would, I would say the thing they best at is leaving me alone (Participant 3).

### **Feeling Seen, Being Heard**

The analysis of the interview data revealed that the majority of participants appreciated leaders who were willing to listen to them. The vast majority of participants valued being seen and heard by their leaders while working remotely. Participants explained that if they felt that their leaders listened to them, this made them feel cared for and gave them a sense of security and comfort. The quotations below provide evidence of how ‘feeling seen’ and ‘being heard’ by their leaders assisted participants in the transition to remote work:

...also wanting to give us space to you know space to have our voices heard (Participant 1).

...just allowing space for that and kind of not making feel, people feel that their responses were over the top, or uhm, or kind of out of bounds or anything. That it was perfectly fine to feel that way, that you should express how you felt and maybe others in the room could also assist you with whatever it is you were doing and so on, yah, I really enjoyed that [smiling]...

I would say that, I would say that. And just allowing, just allowing the space for people to vent. Because, you in a situation where there actually, there is no plan, and uh, uh, everybody wants certainty, and everybody’s looking to you [louder] for certainty (Participant 2).

A few participants reported feeling a sense of comfort and security in their work roles due to their relationship with their leader, as shown below:

Yeah. [short pause] Uhm yeah. I mean it, it, it gives you. It gives me a level of security in my day today that I know that if there’s anything major really major that I can go to him. So it gives me that level of security (Participant 11).

### ***Equally Supporting Staff and Caring for Students***

A few participants reported that they experienced student well-being as prioritised and emphasised over and above staff well-being. While working remotely, it was important for participants to have leaders who acknowledged that they were also trying to adapt within a crisis context. Therefore, human-centred leadership that was empathetic in nature was

important for participants to cope with demands. Through an analysis of participants' narratives, it was also clear that, for them, an acknowledgement that they were in the same position and conditions as students, in terms of the adaption to remote work and online learning, demonstrated that their leaders were understanding of their realities and context. An understanding of the well-being of staff and students equally, was important as a means of coping with the demands of remote work. An illustrative quotation of the above perspective by a participant is presented below:

We in the same conditions. We, are, yah, so, I mean the same thing is happening to us. So, I think like, if the humane touch or empathy that we have to have towards the students, you would want your leader to have towards you (Participant 9).

Participant 2 commented on the significance of building relationships, especially while working remotely during a period of crisis. Furthermore, the participant explained that the work task should be secondary to the individual, providing further support for the importance of a human-centric leadership approach, as highlighted in the first primary theme. Participant 2 explained that leaders focusing on the needs of the individual enhanced their experiences of well-being, as highlighted below:

So I paid a lot of attention to relationships, uh, to connections, I've checked in with people all the time, I WhatsApped, I called, uhm, did these teams meetings and so on, uh, really regularly, so there was a lot of uh, uh, connection with people, so I would say those relationships are really, really strong, yah...

And perhaps that's because, uhm, when you manage people, that's the most important thing. The task is, it, it sounds crazy, the task is almost secondary. If the relationship is not strong, if there's not trust, if there's not uhm, support, if there isn't, uhm, uh, respect then nothing, for me, nothing will follow (Participant 2).

### **Recognising the Complexity of the Context**

Over half the sample noted that it was important for them to have leaders who regularly acknowledged and expressed their consideration for the unique context and working conditions. Participants highlighted that empathy, as well as an appreciation and understanding of the current context, were critical leadership attitudes that assisted them in managing the transition to remote work. Leaders who made allowances for the generalised trauma and the losses over the previous months gave participants a sense of comfort. Similarly, participant 15 noted that leaders expressing understanding and support made them

feel that they were part of a team. The quotations below provide evidence of how leaders acknowledging the complexity of the context assisted academics' transition to working remotely:

...trying to be considerate in terms of the context that we are living in. Uhm, and trying to think about, uhm, our health you know as, as academics that we are, we can't be online all the time and we can't deliver uhm, all the time you know especially during this time (Participant 8).

Not relaxed to the sense, to the point of no, not, not meeting them, but relaxing them to the point of being accommodative for the situation that we're in (Participant 10).

So, our HOD at the moment is very supportive, so it's made me feel part of a team (Participant 15).

### ***Being Given Guidance and Direction in a Chaotic Context***

This tertiary theme highlights participants' appreciation of leaders providing clear and focused guidance and direction while working remotely. A number of participants reported that guidance and direction from their leaders and the organisation was an important contributor to a seamless adaptation to the unfamiliar space of remote work. The majority of participants reported that working remotely within the COVID-19 context meant a rapid shift to convert all face-to-face teaching methods into an online format. Therefore, participants considered being given guidance and direction from leaders as important leadership behaviours in that context. The quotations below provide evidence for this:

But, uhm, sometimes you, you could benefit more from being directed (Participant 1).

But it would have been great to have those, guidelines, you know being given some sort of direction and also meeting with other colleagues of the department so that we can share what works, what doesn't work (Participant 4).

Like, guidance, guidance on the new task, it's equipping with the tools to be effective in that task (Participant 9).

So, there's level of assistance in terms of let's learn from what has happened in the first semester and last year and let's try to fix that and implement more things that could make the student experience more wholesome, more beneficial, and all of that or positive (Participant 10).

### **Crisis Communication**

The overwhelming majority of participants reported that leaders who communicated efficiently was a valued leadership behaviour for them. Most of the participants appreciated

frequent communication from their leaders, and from the organisation as a whole. Furthermore, participants valued communication which was timeous, efficient and effective. A quotation demonstrating participants appreciation for leaders communicating regularly is provided below:

I think that the communications from kind of the executive have been filtered down relatively timeously, which helps me and my role. 'cause obviously people ask me for information I've gotta rely on all the various chains. Uhm, so that has kind of helped (Participant 12).

Participant 1 described the communication during the transition to remote work as being sufficient. She explained that while communication was important during a time of uncertainty, she also did not feel that she was being bombarded with information. The following quotation provides evidence for the importance of sufficient communication, that does not overwhelm participants:

Because I think the greatest problem is uncertainty and so when there are things that we don't know the decision he can usually say well I was in this meeting with the Deans of this and the talk is this and that gives you a sort of idea of where things might be heading and then as soon as you know the communications from XXX. Uhm, yah I, I don't know if it's once a month or how often it is, where there's a summary of XXX news, with this, that and the other with links to stories that you can go back to. And usually, those stories that they are talking about are ones that I've already read through other UCT notices. And I think, they've got the balance quite okay, I don't feel bombarded (Participant 1).

On the other hand, some participants reported communication challenges during the remote working period. Minimal communication from leaders resulted in participants feeling isolated. Some participants expressed that they felt the organisation as a whole, as well as leaders themselves, needed to improve communication while working remotely. A minority of participants experienced leadership communication as unsatisfactory. This counter experience to conscientious communication further validates the importance placed on good communication and fostering trust, and hence is included as a result of the study. Supporting quotations are provided below:

And, I think, I think overall the, the main difficulty is the, the communication is shocking (Participant 7).

So it's that contact, the communication. Because, you can easily in this job pre-COVID feel alone there's a sense of each lecturer doing their own thing, on their own course. There isn't really a group interaction so I think what COVID did make this alienation thing feel like real (Participant 9).

Participant 8 explained that she commonly experienced miscommunication and misread tones in emails and messages due to all communication being virtual which, for her made communication while working remotely more challenging and difficult, as shown below:

Uhm, you know and the communication, you know because it's a little bit more weird if you communicate all the time via email and you can't really hear the tone of that email (Participant 8).

Participant 12 noted that the institution had not put into practice what they had communicated regarding well-being. It was important for participants not only to have sufficient and timeous communication; but to have action in line with communication, as demonstrated in the quotation below:

So, yah, I feel like the university hasn't exactly practiced what they've preached in their communications around wellness (Participant 12).

One participant noted that a credible form of support would have been to have the availability of short courses regarding online teaching be more clearly communicated. Participant 4 reported that if there were short courses offered, they were not aware of it, which leads into the importance of clear communication, especially when working remotely. Supporting quotations are provided below:

I would say, it would have been nice to be given, like support, have some sort of course, with a [inaudible speech], I think there's a division of XXX that deals with that, XXX people, you know. It would have been nice to have such courses, or maybe there were and I was not aware...

You know, where like there were guidelines. Because I think we were emailed or something like that, if I'm not mistaken but it would be nice to have a compulsory, like sort of short course where we are told what is expected, and the support that's there (Participant 4).

The above quotes show participants' responses to the first research sub-question: 'Which leadership behaviours and attitudes assisted academics in adapting to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic?' The next set of themes responded to the second research sub-question within the study: 'How do valued leadership behaviours and attitudes impact on academics' experiences of well-being?' The emergent primary theme in response to the second aforementioned research sub-question was, 'self-care and self-management'.

## Self-Care and Self-Management

This theme illustrates participants' responses to questions surrounding well-being and their experiences thereof while working remotely. Common or related experiences and perspectives were grouped into corresponding secondary themes, namely: (1) healthy lifestyle choices and effective coping (and the related tertiary theme, creating a conducive work from home space); (2) enhancement of well-being through freedom and flexibility; and (3) help-seeking behaviours and support.

### Healthy Lifestyle Choices and Effective Coping

This secondary theme refers to the kinds of strategies participants used to better cope with and manage the demands of working remotely. There were various examples of coping mechanisms described, such as exercising. Participant 1 reported that working remotely gave her more time with her family and gave them time to exercise together. Whereas participant 2 explained that, although she may not have seen any family members and was working non-stop, she has always exercised while working remotely. The quotations below provide evidence of how exercise was used by participants as a coping mechanism in the transition to remote work:

...so it, it was okay, in fact we just had more time to be together. To exercise together, you know had change in routines and you know, porridge for supper my family go yay, porridge for supper! [laughs]...

...so it's like all of these things have sort of boosted my ability to be able to react quite, quite healthy yeah to stressful situation so I know very well that exercise is so important or just keeping you feeling better. So my best days are when I exercise in the morning and I know that if I don't exercise for a few days, uhm well A, it's harder to exercise that you're seeing it feels so good and now in winter so it warms yeah so there's things like that (Participant 1).

No, I, uhm, besides time for exercise, because that's always important, I did, I did exercise and work, and a bit of sleep, that was about it. I didn't do any social things, I didn't see anyone, I didn't get in the car and drive anywhere, I just worked. And when I say, work I'm talking about every single day, including weekends (Participant 2).

I tried to at least go to gym twice a week in the evenings (Participant 12).

One participant reported that taking time off was a valuable means of coping with the transition to remote work, as shown below:

Yet, I was speaking to my coach last week and I said, I went away for a few days, I was off 3 days this year about a two weeks ago, took leave, 3 days. I did not once think of

work, it was amazing, I didn't take my laptop with, I didn't think about work, it was a break we needed. Just really needed it (Participant 9).

It was important to note the contradictory experiences and perspectives reported by some participants, in that taking leave is a useful and suitable coping mechanism in dealing with the demands of remote work and personal life, but analysis of the data revealed that some participants found taking leave to be counterproductive because there would be more work to catch up on when they returned, as demonstrated below:

...let's assume that they understand it, and that's okay, well take, take as much time as you want, as you need. When you come back, when you come back, there's still a backlog of things that you missed that you must still somehow catch up on (Participant 10).

But even before, even when I was just senior lecturer, it's a catch taking leave because you need to take leave to recuperate. But that's also time that you needed to do teaching or supervision or marking or whatever the case is. And so when you come back from leave, I found every single time that I come back from leave I always regret taking the days because then I've got to work extra hard to catch up (Participant 12).

A few participants proactively sought professional help to cope with the demands of working remotely. Participants reported that they sought the help of coaches, psychologists, and dieticians to put positive coping strategies in place to balance the demands of work and life and to maintain well-being. Supporting quotations demonstrating participants seeking professional help are provided below:

And that's one of the things that I've had to work with, with, uhm, a therapist and a dietician, like when I got into trouble this year. Was to try and push back on that, so I now try to set an end of the day time, I try to do a transition activity between work and home (Participant 5).

So you know what got me through was my family support and really, really just um the support from the Psychologist too (Participant 9).

The extract above demonstrates that not only did participant 9 gain the support of a psychologist but having the support of their family was also a useful coping mechanism in dealing with the demands of remote work. Meanwhile, participant 5 reported that a useful positive coping strategy in dealing with remote work was to keep work and life domains separate as far as possible to maintain well-being, as demonstrated below:

I think, I think keeping your professional life in one place and your personal life in another is a really good sanity strategy (Participant 5).

Participant 12 spoke to the fact that putting boundaries in place in order to separate work and life domains was a further coping strategy they used, and if they had their leaders support, they felt less guilty about implementing boundaries between work and home. The following quotation provides support for the importance of boundaries as a coping strategy in maintaining well-being while working remotely:

Uhm, so yeah, and I suppose one of the other things that because I've made it because I've made it very clear that my start time and end times are at certain points, when other staff email me to have a meeting. I've had a couple of requests for 5:00 o'clock meetings for 6:00 o'clock meetings in the evenings, and I've declined them, and I've said sorry, that's my family time and I haven't felt bad (Participant 12).

Participant 10 reported how leaving the house and doing outdoor activities was a means of enhancing overall well-being and helped him to cope with the demands of working remotely. Participant 10 expressed that he had enhanced well-being and he felt that his overall health was in a good state because of his strategy to take regular breaks and 'get out' when necessary, as indicated in the supporting quotation below:

Maybe I go to the beach and then I come back, and I work (Participant 10).

Alternatively, participant 12 reported that it was important for her to change her working environment in her home so that she could remain motivated, as shown below:

So, I have that dedicated space to work at, uhm but then I also work at my dining room table and for me it's quite important to like shift between the two 'cause I kind of get tired of the same surrounding and I think even now, like now, I'm sitting at my dining room table speaking to you (Participant 12).

Participant 13 explained that socialising was a lifeline for them during remote work. On the other hand, participant 1 reported that she felt a great sense of support from the university she was working for; she felt cared for, which in many ways helped with the transition to remote work. Quotations demonstrating the importance of social support are provided below:

We had a couple of group chats, just social, social chats early on, and that helped a lot. cause that that the isolation of that first [touching her face] hard lockdown was incredibly shocking and difficult, and I think as it went on for like a week after week uhm and when we couldn't go out even to exercise, or, you know, you could barely leave the house if it really was tough. So those social chats were a bit of a lifeline (Participant 13).

Yes, no it does. Uhm, I think it's just this general sense of being cared for, but I've always felt that at XXX. Uhm, I've felt it's a very developmental institution to work for (Participant 1).

### ***Creating a Conducive Work from Home Space***

Another example of a coping strategy highlighted by participants was having a dedicated space in their homes to work. Participant 9 reported that she and her family had to extend their home in order for her and her spouse to have a dedicated working space so that they did not disturb one another, as indicated below:

Exactly, the space might not be conducive, it meant that we literally, were in lockdown maybe for few months and we just search for a house and right there moved last year in December which was the best thing we could do. Because we each have a study or each have a room that we can be in without disturbance etc (Participant 9).

### **Enhancement of Well-Being through Freedom and Flexibility**

All participants noted that having some degree of freedom and flexibility positively contributed to their experiences of remote work. It was clear from the data analysed, that participants found that having some autonomy supported their capacity for self-care and promoted well-being. Many participants reported that the freedom and flexibility experienced while working remotely allowed them to save time on activities that they usually would have needed to perform, such as commuting to work and getting dressed. Participants reported that remote work also gave them more time for caregiving responsibilities and household duties. Supporting quotations are provided below:

Uhm, but at the same time it has allowed me, this, because we live about, we don't live very far from work, but we live in a traffic dense place, so if I have to get to a lecture at 8, I have to leave at least an hour before hand. Uhm, so from a commuting perspective, it has saved me a lot of time (Participant 6).

I also think that I am getting used to working at home for the for the mere fact that I don't need to actually dress up and look like something. If today, I feel like I just want to be in whatever, I will be in whatever. My face doesn't need to be, my hair doesn't need to be combed. You know that time consuming activities, cause you kind of waking up early routine of getting ready to go somewhere etc (Participant 9).

### **Help-Seeking Behaviours and Support**

This secondary theme explores the mechanisms of support that participants used to cope with the demands of working remotely. Different forms of social support leveraged by

participants included personal networks (e.g., spousal support), and professional networks (e.g., work colleagues). Many participants spoke about social support as a means of enhancing well-being and coping while working remotely. Specifically, participants spoke about the crucial role of support from their spouses and close family networks in coping with the demands of remote work in balancing work and life. Supporting quotations demonstrating the importance of personal and professional support networks are provided below:

I mean my, my husband and I definitely share the domestic duties a lot, so yeah, I guess we, we made it easier for each other (Participant 13).

My broader family, and when my husband isn't available, uhm, you know it's really, it's just about calling on help if I need it...

occasionally my husband can step in, if I am not able to, or if I have an evening commitment, then he can step in, or grandparents can step in. And, that's what's helping me I suppose (Participant 6).

Similarly, participant 9 discussed that the support of her family has helped her to better cope when work became overwhelming. Specifically, the support of her mother was pivotal in the adjustment and transition to remote work. Participant 9 also reported that she reached out to one of her friends as a means of support, as indicated below in the supporting quotations:

The support would help you through it. My mom would always say and mention something like don't just give this 'don't give your whole life to your job because once you lose the job or you not there anymore, they replace you...

I eventually messaged a friend of mine, he's an XXX and really he knows these things and I said listen, this is what is happening to me explain everything and he immediately called me and when he spoke to me I just burst into tears and I didn't even know why am crying I was like what is going on to me (Participant 9).

Participant 12 reported that, at times, it was important for her to ask for help from her personal network of family to assist her with her caregiving responsibilities. A quotation demonstrating the importance of personal networks for participants adapting to remote work is provided below:

I try and ask other people in the family to help out and look after [child's name]. Uhm, twice during the week. Whether it my mum's normally one day and then either [partner's name] mum or my brother is on one of the other days (Participant 12).

Participant 1 further noted that she started to realise the value and importance of relationships while working remotely. Participant 1 explained that if she felt 'low', she would ask herself whether she had been paying attention to her relationships of late. Thus, she described social support and healthy relationships with those around her as an important means of coping while working remotely, as demonstrated below:

I'm going through like relationships are actually like, like the most important thing in terms of people's happiness so you know if I'm feeling low I I've but the sort of like well actually have you been have you been given any attention to relationships lately, it could be with colleagues or it could be you know friends or family but you know you actually have to make an effort at these things (Participant 1).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the results of the analysis of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 research participants were presented. Participants reflected on the leadership behaviours and attitudes they found most valuable while working remotely. Additionally, participants discussed and reported on their experiences of well-being during remote work. It is interesting to note that there were many similarities in participant's responses to the interview questions. However, important to note is that there were also counterbalancing perspectives and experiences reported by participants. In the following chapter, these results are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed and the relevant context, where applicable.

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of academics during the COVID-19 pandemic. It focused on the leadership behaviours and attitudes that academics deemed valuable while working remotely. The primary findings suggest that employees valued leadership behaviours and attitudes that were human-centric. Participants in this study appreciated leaders who adapted their behaviours and attitudes to suit the unique context of the crisis. A further aim of this research was to explore academics' experiences of well-being while working remotely during COVID-19. The results demonstrated that participants in the sample used a range of coping mechanisms to adapt to remote working conditions. Participants leveraged the support of personal and professional networks as a means of coping with the demands of working remotely, while balancing their personal responsibilities. Furthermore, the sample reported their appreciation for leaders who allowed them to work autonomously while working remotely.

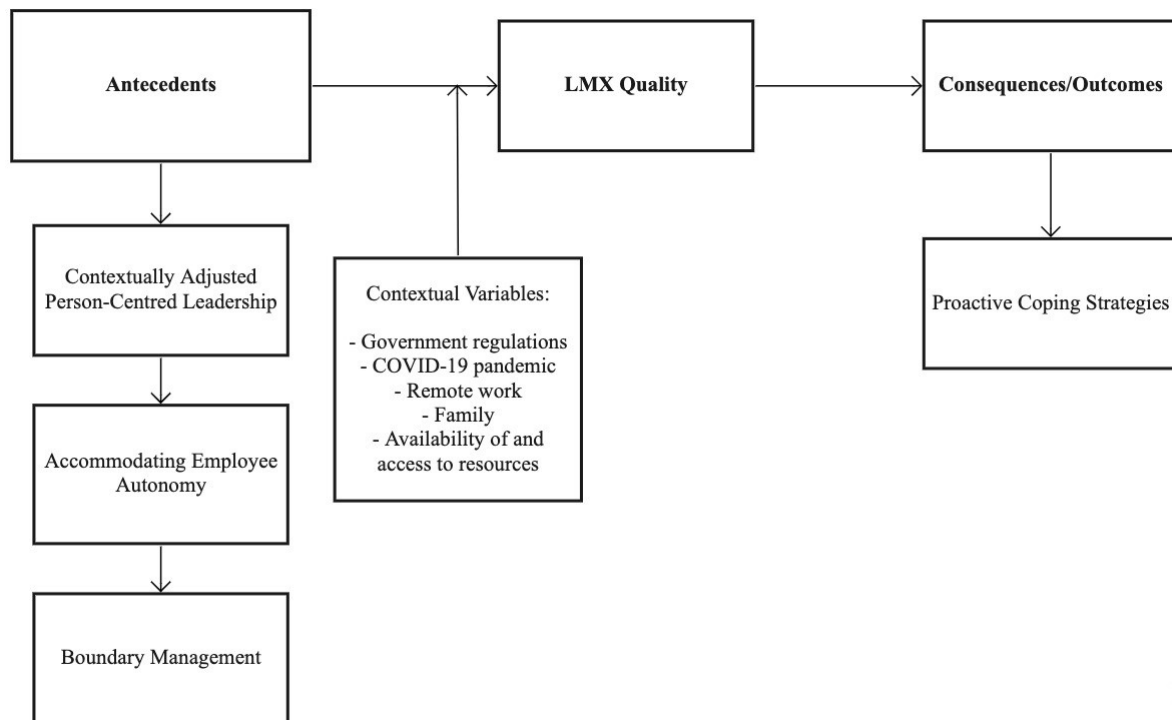
With reference to LMX theory, leadership behaviours can serve as plausible antecedents of the quality of LMX relationships and may influence employee outcomes (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Liden et al., 1997). Therefore, when considering participants' coping strategies in adapting to working remotely, the link between the leadership behaviours and attitudes academics valued reported in the primary theme, *Human-Centric Leadership*, and associated secondary and tertiary themes, was important to consider when interpreting participants' coping strategies under the primary theme, *Self-Care and Self-Management*. From the results of this study, it was found that human-centric leadership behaviours and attitudes enabled academics to establish positive coping mechanisms while adapting to remote work.

In the results chapter, the experiences, and perspectives of 15 research participants were presented in detail. This chapter provides interpretations of the results of this study in relation to the relevant published literature, and particularly LMX theory, which was presented as the theoretical underpinning of this study and is the organising interpretation framework for the emergent themes (Dansereau et al., 1975; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Schriesheim et al., 1999) (refer to Figure 3, p. 64). The results pertaining to the leadership behaviours and attitudes academics deemed valuable are positioned as antecedents of LMX quality, whereas academics' experiences of well-being were interpreted as outcomes or consequences of LMX quality. Contextual factors pertaining to COVID-19 and remote work were also introduced and considered. This discussion chapter is presented in four main sections: (1) contextually adjusted, person-centred leadership, (2)

accommodating employee autonomy; (3) boundary management; and (4) proactive coping strategies. This chapter concludes by presenting the limitations, the theoretical contributions, and the practical implications, as well as suggestions for future research.

**Figure 3**

*Themes Organised into LMX Theoretical Framework for Discussion Section*



### **Contextually Adjusted, Person-Centred Leadership**

The primary theme, *Human-Centric Leadership* summarises the sample's appreciation of leadership behaviours and attitudes that were humane, kind, compassionate and caring in nature, in the unique context of the pandemic. These findings align with previous literature which has shown that, in a period of immense disruption and uncertainty (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), employees appreciate communal behaviours and attitudes which demonstrate support, sensitivity, flexibility, and work-family balance (Eichenauer et al., 2021). In accordance with the literature, followers appreciate leaders who encompass behaviours of concern and benevolence during a crisis (Ahern & Loh, 2020).

Academics in the sample expressed their appreciation for leaders who were accessible, available, and open to questions. The alignment of the results under the primary theme, *Human-Centric Leadership*, combined with prior literature, further solidifies the importance of person-centred leadership behaviours and attitudes, taking contextual factors into account (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Carmeli et al., 2010; Newman & Ford, 2021). The results of the present study further align with previous literature in demonstrating the importance of leaders exhibiting behaviours and attitudes of inclusivity and visibility when interacting with subordinates, as crisis situations may distort the perception of the workplace as a safe space (Ahmed et al., 2020; Carmeli et al., 2010). Furthermore, it is postulated that leaders who are available to subordinates may allow them to feel free to share their views without fear of being judged (Hassan & Jiang, 2019). This is interesting, given that previous literature has pointed to diversity-oriented leadership as valuable, especially with regard to the construction of a diverse team of individuals to solve problems from various perspectives (Lee et al., 2020). However, under the primary theme, it was evident that the sample in this study valued leaders demonstrating behaviours and attitudes that were mindful of and prioritised the needs of the individual, more than they appreciated being part of a diverse team.

Building trust emerged as a key theme in the present study under the secondary theme, *Creating a Climate of Trust*. The importance of trust among employees within organisations is well-established in the literature (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Lee, 2021). Availability and transparency are posited as developing a foundation of trust in leaders among employees (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Paillet et al., 2013). In the present study, participants reported experiencing trust when their leaders were accessible, available, and responsive. In line with the above findings, during periods of uncertainty, leaders should cultivate a sense of trust among subordinates. This can be achieved through the provision of relevant information and being open to employee questions (Ahern & Loh, 2020). Moreover, trust is considered an important contributor to employees' sense of psychological safety within the organisation, and with leaders, positively contributing to employees' ability to adapt to change (Lee, 2021). Building relationships and a sense of mutual trust in a crisis requires leaders to be genuine, actively listen to their subordinates, accept criticism, and engage in transparent communication. As a result, the aforementioned behaviours may enhance psychological safety among employees within organisations (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). The results of this study demonstrate that the sample appreciated their leaders being considerate of their contextual realities. Participants appreciated leaders who did not micromanage them and who trusted their judgement. Trust is one of the most important

aspects distinguishing high and low LMX relationships and is considered a core antecedent of LMX quality (Chen et al., 2012; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Paille' et al., 2013).

### **Accommodating Employee Autonomy**

In addition to not being micromanaged, the sample in this study expressed their appreciation for leaders who allowed them to make autonomous decisions within their courses and classes. Thus, the connection between the two primary themes can be seen in the secondary theme, *Creating a Climate of Trust*, and the tertiary theme, *Enhancement of Well-Being through Freedom and Flexibility*. These findings are similar to previous literature in that remote working arrangements appeal to both organisations and employees based on the personal flexibility and autonomy it offers (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021; Mulki et al., 2009). Employees value spending less time and money commuting, having more flexibility in their jobs, and having more time to commit to family responsibilities (Mulki et al., 2009). Thus, providing employees with more job autonomy may also help mitigate WFC (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Using LMX as the theoretical underpinning of this study assists in making sense of this result. The sample reported feeling most autonomous in their occupations if they were given adequate information and resources and were given the opportunity to participate in decision-making. Participants valued feeling trusted by their leaders to solve problems. Similarly, in the literature, it is argued that employees should be empowered to make decisions regarding work-related matters in an environment based on mutual respect (Farr-Wharton et al., 2011), as this may affect their perceptions of self-determination in deciding when and how to undertake job tasks, as well as their perceptions of how satisfied they are in the workplace (Farr-Wharton et al., 2011).

The secondary theme, *Feeling Seen, Being Heard*, describes the sample's appreciation of leaders who openly listened to them. Participants expressed that being listened to gave them a sense of comfort amidst a context of uncertainty. These findings reiterate those of other researchers who highlighted that listening to the concerns of employees is an important communal behaviour during times of uncertainty (Eichenauer et al, 2021; Newman & Ford, 2021). Active listening is a well-established component in developing quality LMX relationships. Listening with empathy allows recipients of information to perceive it in a way that is non-judgemental and results in employees feeling accepted and appreciated (Lloyd et al., 2017).

In the tertiary theme, *Equally Supporting Staff and Caring for Students*, the sample expressed their appreciation for leaders who acknowledged that they were working in the same crisis conditions as students. Participants appreciated receiving the same consideration and support from their leaders as they were expected to give their students. This tertiary theme describes participants' appreciation for leaders who prioritised the individual and who provided staff with the needed support (i.e., understanding) to cope with the rapid transition to remote work. These results correspond with previous research work which demonstrates that employees need to be adequately supported for university operations to effectively teach and perform work-related tasks (i.e., online classes) (Ali, 2020). Furthermore, successful supervisors demonstrated communal behaviours such as the provision of support and sensitivity (Offstein et al., 2010; Snyder, 2012).

This tertiary theme highlighted that feeling cared for by their leaders had a significant impact on the sample's job performance, which aligns with previous findings in the literature (Ali, 2020). Furthermore, leader support is considered important for WHP, and beneficial in meeting a range of employee social and emotional needs (Milner et al., 2015; Paille' et al., 2013). Previous research has found that it is essential for leaders to clearly and explicitly demonstrate a sense of support toward their subordinates during a period of crisis (Paille' et al., 2013). Moreover, leaders providing support and displaying sensitivity toward employees was a significant indicator of successful remote working arrangements (Offstein et al., 2010; Snyder, 2012). Leadership behaviours such as support, empowerment, and the development of a high-quality relationship between leaders and subordinates may prevent stress and improve employee well-being and coping (Skakon et al., 2010). Similarly, relationship-oriented behaviours, such as the provision of support, have been shown to benefit the leader-member relationship and the LMX quality (Yukl et al., 2009).

The secondary theme, *Recognising the Complexity of the Context*, describes participants' appreciation of leaders demonstrating behaviours and attitudes of empathy and understanding of them adjusting to a new work environment in the COVID-19 context. Employees have to manage being productive amidst difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences. Thus, emotional and interpersonal support are considered essential from leaders (Dirani et al., 2020). Additionally, supervisory support, psychological empowerment, positive reinforcement and appreciation of work, as well as efficient communication from leaders during the pandemic, are considered important leadership behaviours and attitudes (Dirani et al., 2020). In the context of the present study, communal behaviours are considered to be relationship-oriented behaviours such as warmth and support (Eichenauer et al., 2021; Fiske

et al., 2002), which positively contributes to employees' perceived sense of organisational support (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Paille' et al., 2013).

The sample expressed their appreciation for leaders who provided clear guidance and direction while working remotely. This is captured in the tertiary theme, *Being Given Guidance and Direction in a Chaotic Context*. For many participants, the remote working context was new and unfamiliar. Therefore, participants valued leaders who communicated clearly and conveyed work direction without ambiguity. Similarly, in the literature, the importance of leaders providing followers with explicit and regular feedback as well as direction during periods of uncertainty is noted, providing evidence of the importance of leaders playing sense-maker during a crisis (Ahern & Loh, 2020).

A recurring theme in the literature, and in the results of this study, was the importance of communication by leaders during a crisis (Denner et al., 2019; Dirani et al., 2020; Moodley, 2019; Nekmat & Kong, 2019; Zhang & Borden, 2017). Effective communication is considered to be one of the most crucial leadership practices, reducing the possible negative impact of a crisis on employee's psychological well-being (Denner et al., 2019; Nekmat & Kong, 2019; Zhang & Borden, 2017). In accordance with findings in previous literature, it is considered essential that leaders communicate consistently to decrease stress and uncertainty, while addressing concerns from relevant stakeholders (Dirani et al., 2020; Neuliep, 2017; Ramlachan & Behary-Ramraj, 2021). Over and above being effective, communication from leaders should be relevant, realistic, efficient, and sent via appropriate communication channels (Dirani et al., 2020). It is recommended that leaders make use of communication channels preferred and most easily accessible by subordinates (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). This may be particularly significant within an SA context, where load-shedding disruptions are a common occurrence and have for the most part become a reality for many employees working remotely (Steenkamp et al., 2016).

Good communication is considered one of the most important leadership behaviours during remote working arrangements (Offstein et al., 2010). Leaders are responsible for ensuring that organisational operations are running smoothly by providing direction and meaning through language to execute necessary strategies (Sarros et al., 2014). The results of this study under the secondary theme, *Crisis Communication*, indicate that academics appreciated timeous and effective communication from leaders. Participants appreciated frequent communication from their direct line managers and the leadership of the organisation while working remotely during the COVID-19 crisis. The sample reported that minimal communication from their leaders left them feeling isolated. These results are in line

with previous literature in that remote work has meant changed means of communicating (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Therefore, leaders need to be adaptable as appropriate communication was found to develop trust (Bundy et al., 2017; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Guzzo et al., 2021).

Leaders should demonstrate the ability to understand and discuss the challenges of their subordinates with transparency (Antonakis et al., 2016; Kniffin et al., 2021). Evidence in the literature suggests that leaders who provide followers with direct communication can help to reduce ambiguity and strengthen trust and respect among followers and within the professional relationship (Adewale & Ghavifekr, 2019; Curran & Prottas, 2017; Lunenburg, 2010). In contrasting, leaders who do not communicate may create confusion and uncertainty among employees, resulting in subordinates becoming frustrated and unproductive (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020). The above findings in the literature are reinforced in the secondary theme, *Crisis Communication*. In line with the LMX theory, communication is considered a medium through which leaders and subordinates develop and maintain beneficial exchanges. Subordinates report a direct relationship between the quality of LMX and effective communication practices (Yrle et al., 2002).

### **Boundary Management**

There has been an increase in the work and family role demands due to remote working arrangements, making it difficult for employees to manage boundaries between work and home (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021; Vaziri et al., 2020). Family and child caregiving demands have increased as children are constantly at home, and parents with children in school have had to manage inherent work demands while managing home-schooling responsibilities (Carpenter & Dunn, 2020). Evidence in the literature suggests that remote working arrangements may have worsened the effects of WFC, demonstrating the importance of balancing work and home domains, which is an important consideration for organisational leaders (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Kramer & Kramer, 2020; Sinclair et al., 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020).

The secondary theme, *Acknowledgment of Familial Responsibilities and Assistance in Establishing Boundaries*, captures the sample's collective experience of valuing leaders who demonstrated awareness of them being 'real people' with families and interests outside of the workplace. For many participants in this study, an integral part of their day consisted of managing work demands as well as household and caregiving responsibilities. Similarly, studies suggest that maintaining a work-life balance and productivity is an ongoing struggle

for many employees while working remotely (Kniffin et al., 2021; Kramer & Kramer, 2020; Rudnicka et al., 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020). Within the present study, the sample indicated that it was important for them to have leaders who acknowledged their family responsibilities. What is particularly interesting about this finding is that, not only did participants appreciate leaders who acknowledged that they had multiple responsibilities, but they also valued leaders overtly encouraging them to implement boundaries (e.g., leaders encouraging academics not to schedule work meetings after a certain time of the day to prioritise time with family).

### **Proactive Coping Strategies**

Difficulties surrounding health and well-being, as well as challenges managing work and family domains, often led to WFC, and are highlighted as some of the challenges employees experience while working remotely (Kniffin et al., 2021; Vaziri et al., 2020). Thus, the secondary themes, *Healthy Lifestyle Choices and Effective Coping* as well as, *Help-Seeking Behaviours and Support*, under the primary theme, *Self-Care and Self-Management*, describe the coping strategies the sample employed to enhance and maintain their well-being while working remotely. The above-mentioned secondary themes also describe the sample's subjective experiences of well-being amidst the rapid transition to remote work.

### **A Dedicated Workspace**

Due to the rapid shift to remote work, many employees have brought their work home, resulting in blurred boundaries between work and home domains (Allen et al., 2021). A common means of managing boundaries between work and home is to create a dedicated space for work within the home (Allen et al., 2021). This was echoed in the results of this study, under the tertiary theme, *Creating a Conducive Work from Home Space*. The sample reported that having a dedicated space to work in their homes decreased their experiences of WFC and helped them to remain productive. Participants reported trying to separate work spaces and relaxation spaces in their homes as a further means of reducing experiences of WFC. The literature reviewed provides evidence that having a dedicated WFH space is important for employees as they transition and adapt to remote work (Rudnicka et al., 2020).

### **Leveraging Support Networks**

In the emergent secondary theme, *Help-Seeking Behaviours and Support*, help-seeking is defined as the act of asking others for assistance, information, advice, and support (Hofmann et al., 2009). Help-seeking is a term often used interchangeably with information- and feedback-seeking, which describe a proactive approach to acquiring specific resources.

Besides support from leaders, as mentioned in the tertiary theme, *Equally Supporting Staff and Caring for Students*, the sample spoke strongly to the fact that they readily relied on their personal networks (i.e., spouses, family members), as well as professional networks outside of work (i.e., psychologists and nutritionists) to cope with the rapid transition to remote work during COVID-19. However, social support from personal networks outside of work were a key component of coping with job-related stress while working remotely. The emergent results in this secondary theme align with previous literature in that employees require increased support during crisis situations (Ahmed et al., 2020; Shamir, 2011). Specifically, support from a spouse or partner was found to be one of the most important forms of social support for employees (Chen & Feeley, 2014). This finding substantiates arguments made by previous authors in the literature on the LMX theory, in that LMX relationships cannot be explored without taking into consideration contextual variables (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995; Liden et al., 1997; Van Breukelen et al., 2006).

The above section provided explanations for the results emerging in the present study. The contributions of this research are both theoretical and practical, for future work in both the leadership domains and the organisational context. For the most part, the results of the present study fell neatly within the LMX antecedents and consequences theoretical framework, explaining types of leadership behaviours and attitudes which are influential in the leader-member relationship and the LMX quality, as well as further explaining how these relate to academics' experiences of well-being. The following section outlines the limitations of this study.

### **Limitations**

It is important to note that findings in the present study cannot be generalised to wider populations. Aspects of generalisability, trustworthiness and bias are discussed in length in the method chapter. However, limitations are important to document to place findings in context and to demonstrate what can and cannot be concluded from this study, despite measures being taken to alleviate some of these limitations, where feasible.

A potential limitation within the present study is the large number of women within the sample, which may bias the data somewhat. Evidence in the literature suggests that traditional, stereotypical gendered parenting roles still exist (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). Women are still expected to take on the majority of the caregiving responsibilities, consistent with the traditional role of 'homemaker', while men are expected to make their careers a

priority to fulfil the traditional role of 'breadwinner' (Berdahl & Moon, 2013, p. 343). Studies examining the shift to remote work during the pandemic found that caregiving responsibilities still primarily fell on females, and this was also true for women in the SA context (Parry & Gordon, 2021; Sinclair et al., 2020). Even among dual-career couples, women are more likely to shoulder childcare responsibilities, and are also more likely to manage the emotional health of families than their male counterparts (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Shockley & Shen, 2016). Therefore, the results demonstrating participants' experiences of leader behaviours and attitudes, as well as well-being, during remote work may have focused heavily on the balance between work and caregiving responsibilities within the family domain, because most of the participants in this study were female.

Due to the lack of diversity in the sample in terms of academic discipline and gender, further themes may have emerged if a more diverse sample had been located. While the researcher tried to mitigate this challenge by sharing the data collection process with another researcher, as discussed in the method section, the sample size may still be a limitation for transferability of findings to other contexts, due to the homogeneity in the sample in terms of gender and faculty.

As a result of social distancing protocols, all interviews were conducted virtually, and all communication took place via e-mail, as mentioned in the method section. However, there is research to suggest some limitations of virtual interviewing (Davis et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2020). Although virtual interviews allow the researcher to gain access to a wider population (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Gray et al., 2020; Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009), and the researcher is able to make up a larger sample due to the elimination of travel (Gray et al., 2020), some data may be lost due to technical difficulties (Davis et al., 2020). The researcher tried to mitigate this limitation by clarifying questions with participants if they were unclear, as well as sending transcripts to participants after the interview for member-checking.

As the LMX theory was used as the theoretical underpinning to understand the results of this study, it is important to make note of potentially significant caveats when interpreting the results. The LMX theory posits that employees who have a favourable relationship with their leaders will experience a dramatically different work atmosphere compared to those who have a low-quality relationship with their leaders (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Kacmar et al., 2003; Sin et al., 2009). Therefore, the relationship employees have with their leaders should be seen as an influential antecedent to how they will experience leadership behaviours and attitudes while working remotely. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to do an in-depth exploration of academics' relationships with their leaders.

Despite the above limitations, the intentional use of purposive sampling in the present study was aimed at generating information-rich perspectives and extensive insights on the topic of interest. Despite the limitations presented above, the results can still be deemed relevant in lieu of the previous literature reviewed.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

Studies investigating the impact of the pandemic on SA organisations are sparse (Chakamera et al., 2020; De Villiers et al., 2020; Dirani et al. 2020). Additionally, there is a scarcity of literature surrounding valued forms of leadership in remote working environments during COVID-19 (Bartsch et al., 2021), as well as limited studies on the impact of the pandemic on SA HEIs (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; Motala & Menon, 2020).

The findings of this research are therefore relevant as they provide an understanding of the leadership behaviours and attitudes most valued by employees working remotely within the SA context and showing that academics appreciate leader behaviours and attitudes that are human-centric, encompassing kindness, compassion, and empathy. This finding is particularly valuable for the SA context, as previous crises facing HEIs have brought into focus the lack of experience leaders have in managing a crisis in a multicultural SA context, with a diverse workforce (Garg & Ramjee, 2013; Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021; Sabir et al., 2011).

The results in this study also contribute by confirming that relationship-oriented behaviours and attitudes, such as support and recognising, benefited the LMX quality. Researchers in the IOP domain may find this valuable as they could explore and understand the effects of LMX quality on employees' perceptions of leader behaviours and attitudes. Furthermore, practitioners and researchers could seek to understand how differing relationships among leaders and followers may have impacted employees' experiences of the transition to remote work in the unprecedented context of the pandemic. Along with this, the use of an inductive approach to understanding employee experiences of well-being in the present study provides significant insight for the WFC literature, demonstrating how employees have rapidly transitioned into new, dynamic remote working environments (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

### **Practical Implications**

The results demonstrated that help-seeking and support were significant contributors to enhanced employee well-being. Relationships between leaders and followers are indicated

as an important determinant of employee help-seeking behaviour (Van der Rijt et al., 2013). The findings in this study demonstrate the importance of investing in the quality of relationships within the workplace to enhance employee well-being. Leaders could focus on cultivating a climate of trust in an effort to enhance employee help-seeking behaviours and psychological safety (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Lee, 2021), as well as apply relevant elements of LMX to strengthen the quality of relationships between them and their subordinates, fostering an environment for employees to feel comfortable to ask for help and support when needed. As the present study provides perspectives from employees on valued leadership behaviours and attitudes during remote work, leaders may find it valuable in adapting their leadership behaviours, attitudes, and approaches to suit the preferences of employees, taking the unique context into account.

Within the primary theme, *Self-Care and Self-Management*, academics could find insights into coping with the demands of work and life. Employees from different industries may also find the results within this primary theme valuable, as it provides practical coping strategies which can be used and adapted to help decrease the strain resulting from working remotely while also having family demands, minimising the experience of WFC. The results of this study may also provide valuable practical contributions for organisations in supporting individuals with multiple role demands as a means of enhancing overall employee' well-being (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

As the present study only focused on the transition to remote work from the perspective of employees, future studies may benefit from a more comprehensive picture by including perspectives from a range of leaders (Volmer et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2010). An understanding of leaders' experiences and perceptions of the transition to remote work and well-being during the pandemic would add to our understanding of the interaction between leaders and followers; and may also provide the opportunity for a richer understanding of LMX quality and its role in the transition to remote work and employee experiences of well-being. An opportunity for future research would then be to understand leaders' experiences and perspectives of the transition to remote work. Coupling the information from the present study with that of leaders' perspectives may lead to a greater understanding of the complexities of leadership and followership behaviours and the dynamics within these relationships, ultimately enhancing the working and learning environment for faculty and students alike (Johnston, 2001).

This study provided an indication of the leader behaviours and attitudes valued by employees, and employee experiences of well-being, within a unique and unprecedented context. Future leadership and well-being literature may benefit from adopting a longitudinal qualitative design, which could be used to develop an understanding of how valued leader behaviours and attitudes change with time and differing contexts. This approach may also be beneficial in determining how employee experiences of well-being change with time and whether contextual factors significantly influence these perceptions. Most participants who reported having experiences of WFC while working remotely had fairly young children (e.g., children between the ages of 2 and 11 years old). Thus, a longitudinal research design may provide room to explore how employees' experiences of well-being and WFC change as their children grow older. A research study with a longitudinal design may also explore how employees' valued leader behaviours and attitudes change over time, as their personal or home demands change. As employees' children grow older, they might value a different set of behaviours and attitudes from their leaders, which would be a valuable avenue for future exploration.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the leadership behaviours and attitudes employees found most valuable, and employees' experiences of well-being, using remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic as the case study. The main findings of this study demonstrate that academics appreciated leadership that was human-centred. This study also contributes to the body of literature by highlighting that employees appreciate leader behaviours and attitudes such as support, sensitivity and benevolence when faced with a crisis (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Eichenauer et al., 2021). Furthermore, there were various coping strategies used by academics to deal with the demands of working remotely during the pandemic. A range of coping mechanisms aided the sample in the rapid transition to remote work, including exercise, and having a designated space dedicated to work in their homes. Moreover, participants noted that they leveraged professional and personal support networks in order to cope with the demanding and unprecedented nature of remote work. The sample also expressed their appreciation for being able to work autonomously and for the freedom and flexibility that remote work granted them in managing their work and home lives. These strategies have resulted in positive means of coping with the rapid transition to remote work during the pandemic. The emergent findings of this study mapped into the LMX theory and demonstrated the importance of this work for both theory and practice. The sample of

academics in this study demonstrated a passion and a perseverance for the pursuit of excellence in the academic project and were committed to ensuring students experienced a seamless and efficient transition to remote learning. The emergence of the empirical data within this study, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and the multiple demands placed on them as both employees and family members, speaks to the resilience of these individuals, as well as their commitment to the pursuit of academic excellence and valuable research.

As a young, aspiring IOP, the value of this study and its findings have been put more into perspective throughout the research process, offering evidence of the need to shift our focus back to the individual, as aspiring professionals, and researchers in this field. Thus, research should not only focus on the employee with workplace responsibilities and the completion of the task at hand, but take into consideration the individual as a parent, a provider, a nurturer, and a breadwinner, as well as a human being with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being. My purpose and passion as a young professional in this field has become clearer throughout the course of this study: to never lose sight of the individual.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Summary Table of Participant Demographic Information

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Participants*

Categories	Demographic features	Total number of participants
Gender	Female	9
	Male	6
Age	28-38	7
	39-49	6
	50-60	1
	60+	1
Marital status	Single	5
	Married	10
Number of people in household	1-2	4
	3-4	8
	5-6	3
Number of children	None	6
	1-2	7
	3-4	2
Faculty	Commerce	9
	Engineering and the Built Environment (EBE)	1
	Law	2
	Science	3
Rank	Assistant lecturer	1
	Lecturer	8
	Senior lecturer	4
	Associate professor	1
	Professor	1

## Appendix B

### Interview Schedule

#### Opening:

#### Inform interviewee of his/her rights:

- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntarily and if you should at any point feel you would like to withdraw, you may do so – without any penalty of any sort.
- You will not be requested to provide any identifiable information
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be upheld throughout the research process and the results of this study will be used for academic purposes only.

#### Then, obtain consent to record and proceed with the interview (this is the verbal).

... I would like to ask you questions about your experience of remote work during COVID-19.

#### 1. How long have you been working at your current university and in what role?

#### 2. Can you tell me what has changed in your academic responsibilities when your university moved to remote working?

- How was this experience for you?
- Where did you work from?
- What challenges did you experience? (Probe- space, time. Does family interfere with work or work demands interfere with family; **how many hours per day would you say, you work?**)
- Can you describe what your technology set up is like at home?
- Can you describe what your relationship is like with your peers and co-workers?

#### 3. Which aspects of remote work, work well for you (Probe: time, space and managing multiple roles)

- Were there any ways in which your family made remote working easier for you?
- In a day, which activities do you spend most time on?

#### 4. What is helping you manage all your responsibilities working remotely? (Probes: work/family)

**5. Reflecting on how your leader(s) has behaved during the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to remote work, what have you found most valuable?**

- Can you describe any behaviours/actions by leaders that you have particularly appreciated?

**Definition of behaviours:** the way in which your leader has acted or conducted themselves as you have been remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. A behaviour is usually described as an action which is measurable or observable.

**For example (leadership behaviours):** building trust, providing support, communication, decision-making etc.

- Can you think of a behaviour/action by your leader that you have appreciated less? How do you think your leader could have done this differently?
- To what extent, do you think – the behaviour of your leader(s) has impacted your performance?

**6. How satisfied have you been with the quality and frequency of meetings? (Specifically, with your line manager/direct supervisor)?**

- Was there anything that could have been done differently?

**7. How have you experienced the use of online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp since working remotely?**

**8. What are some of the major changes to your personal life that have resulted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and working remotely?**

**9. Demographic & background information:**

- Age
- Marital status
- Number of people in your household
- Do you have any children? If yes, what are their ages?
- Faculty and position (rank) currently?

**Closing**

Do you have any further comments or insights you would like to share?

The researcher thanks the participant for his/her time.

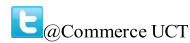
## Appendix C

### Research Ethics Application Approval



#### Faculty of Commerce

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701  
 2.26 Leslie Commerce Building, Upper Campus  
 Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 4375/ 5748 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 4369  
 E-mail: [jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za](mailto:jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za)  
 Internet: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)



@Commerce UCT



UCT Commerce Faculty Office

21 06 2021

Kelly Josiah

School of Management Studies

University of Cape Town

REF: REC 2021/06/006

**An exploration of the leadership behaviours employees most value during a crisis:**

**A case study of remote work during COVID-19**

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 30-Jun-2022 .

Your clearance may be renewed upon application.

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

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

We wish you well for your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JRousseau'.

2021.06.21  
 17:25:24 +02'00'

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

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

Office Fax: +27 (0)21 650 4369

E-mail: [jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za](mailto:jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za)

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

## Appendix D

### Approved Application to Interview UCT Staff

HR194	<b>ACCESS TO UCT STAFF FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES</b>	 <b>UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN</b> <small>IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD</small>
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**NOTES**

- Forms must be downloaded from the UCT Administrative Forms website: <http://forms.uct.ac.za/forms.htm> .
- This form must be completed by applicants who are requesting to access UCT staff for the purpose of research.
- A copy of the research proposal as well as the Ethics Committee approval must be attached.
- It is the **responsibility of the researcher/s to apply for ethical clearance** from the relevant Faculty's Research in Ethics Committee (RIEC).
- If you are requesting staff information, you are required to complete the [HR Information Request Form](#) (HR190) and submit it together with all the required documentation.
- The turnaround time for a reply is **approximately 10 working days unless specified as urgent**.
- Please submit your application including the completed application form and all the above documentation directly to Joy Henry via email ([joy.henry@uct.ac.za](mailto:joy.henry@uct.ac.za)) for the attention of the Executive Director: Human Resources (EDHR). Please do not submit these to the EDHR directly.

**SECTION A: APPLICANT DETAILS**

Title	Miss	Name	Kelly Josiah
Telephone number	082 530 2836	Email address	jshkel002@myuct.ac.za
Student number	JSHKEL002	Staff number	N/A
Visiting researcher ID / passport number	N/A		
Faculty Officer contact details	Commerce Faculty Officer		
	Email address: Com-faculty@uct.ac.za		
University or institution at which employed or a registered student	University of Cape Town (UCT)		
Faculty or department in which you are registered or work	Commerce Faculty, Department of Management Studies. Section for Organisational Psychology		
Address (if not UCT)	8A 7 <sup>th</sup> Avenue		
	Retreat, Cape Town		
	7945		

**SECTION B: SUPERVISOR DETAILS**

	Title and name	Telephone number	Email address
Supervisor	Professor Suki Goodman	021 650 2472	Suki.Goodman@uct.ac.za
Co-Supervisor	N/A	N/A	N/A

**SECTION C: APPLICANT'S FIELD OF STUDY (if applicable) / TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT / STUDY**


Degree	Master of Commerce in Organisational Psychology		
Research project or title	An exploration of the leadership behaviours employees most value during a crisis: A case study of remote work during COVID-19.		
Research proposal attached	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
Target population	UCT Staff		
Number of UCT staff required (sample)	18		
Research method	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interviews	<input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire	
Amount of time required for the above	1 hour per participant		
Lead Researcher details	Kelly Josiah (jshkel002@myuct.ac.za) (0825302836)		

**SECTION D: FOR OFFICE USE (Approval status to be completed by the Executive Director, Human Resources or Nominee)**

UCT Proof of ethical clearance status attached	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
Proof of ethical clearance status from the University/Institution, if registered outside of UCT	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
Support or approval	Role		Signature
Supported?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
	Zoe Cosmopoulos (Specialist: HR Analytics)		<i>Z. Cosmopoulos</i>
Approved?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
	Miriam Hoosain (Executive Director: HR)		<i>M. Hoosain</i>
			05/07/2021
			09/07/2021

## Appendix E

### Completed HR190 Form

HR190	<b>HR INFORMATION REQUEST</b>	 <b>UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN</b> <small>IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD</small>
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**NOTES**

- Forms must be downloaded from the UCT website: <http://forms.uct.ac.za/forms.htm>
- This form is used to request data from SAP HR for the creation of reports (please allow 2 to 5 working days for report delivery).
- If you have any queries about this form, please contact your [HR Practitioner](#).
- All reports will be provided in electronic Microsoft Excel format.

**TERMS OF USE**

- HR and/or Payroll data distribution and report requests will be approved for reasons that strictly support official business and administrative needs of UCT.
- The information requested in this form consists of confidential HR/Payroll data. It is the responsibility of the recipient of this information to ensure that the data be used for the purpose approved, that it be stored securely and that unauthorised access to the data be prevented.
- The requestor is prohibited from distributing the data received without approval.
- The data reflects HR and/or Payroll data at a point in time and can only be considered accurate at that point in time.
- Violations of the above terms will constitute misuse of confidential personnel information and applicable UCT policies will be followed.

**REQUESTOR DETAILS**

Name	Kelly Josiah	Department	Department of Management Studies, Section for Organisational Psychology
Contact number	082 530 2836	E-mail address	jshkel002@myuct.ac.za

**DETAILS OF REQUEST**

Please include full details of the request and state the purpose for which you intend to use this data.					
I would like to ethically gain access to UCT staff members who do not currently hold any management position in order to interview them about their experiences of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as their perceptions of valued leadership behaviours during remote work.					
Date data required	10 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Report frequency	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Once – off	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/> Annually

**REPORT DATA SELECTION SPECIFICATIONS**

Reporting period	<input type="checkbox"/> Today	<input type="checkbox"/> Current month	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current year
	Specify your own date range	From: 10 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	To: 31 <sup>st</sup> January 2021

**FACULTY OR DEPARTMENT REQUIRED (Personnel area)**

Faculty / departments with academic and PASS staff categories			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Centre of Higher Education Dev	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty of Commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty of Eng & Built Env	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty of Health Sciences
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty of Humanities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty of Law	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty of Science	<input type="checkbox"/> Graduate School of Business
Office of the Vice Chancellor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> University Libraries	<b>All</b>	
Departments with PASS staff categories only			
<input type="checkbox"/> Baxter Theatre	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication & Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/> Development & Alumni	<input type="checkbox"/> Finance
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> IAPO	<input type="checkbox"/> ICTS	<input type="checkbox"/> Institutional Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Office of the Registrar	<input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Funding Office	<input type="checkbox"/> Properties and Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Research Office
Student Affairs	Student Housing & Residence Life	Research Contracts & Innovation	<b>All</b>
Other departments, areas and external organisations			
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Bodies (Union)	<input type="checkbox"/> Retirees	<input type="checkbox"/> CHEC	<input type="checkbox"/> SHAWCO
External Examiners	NHLS (National Health Lab Services)	WCG (Western Cape Government)	Honorary

**STAFF CATEGORY REQUIRED (Personnel subarea)**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic Clinical	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic Pre-Clinical	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senior Academic	
<input type="checkbox"/> PASS 1 – 3	<input type="checkbox"/> PASS 4	<input type="checkbox"/> PASS 5 – 12	<input type="checkbox"/> PASS Tech/Sci	<input type="checkbox"/> Senior PASS ≥ 13
<input type="checkbox"/> Independent Contractor	<input type="checkbox"/> Learnerships	<input type="checkbox"/> Students		

**EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT TYPE REQUIRED (Employee subgroup)**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Permanent (incl previous T3 open end contract)	<input type="checkbox"/> T2 Temporary > 2 – 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/> T1 Temporary ≤ 2 years
<input type="checkbox"/> TP Post Retirement Contracts	<input type="checkbox"/> Ad hoc	

**OUTPUT FIELDS REQUIRED ON REPORT**

(Note: The list below does not represent all fields available. The additional information in brackets below is for office use.)

<b>Organisational assignment</b> (Infotype 0001 or infotype 9700 for external)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty / PASS department (PA)	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff category (PSA)	<input type="checkbox"/> Organisational unit	<input type="checkbox"/> Employment type (EESG)
<input type="checkbox"/> Position	<input type="checkbox"/> Job (rank)	<input type="checkbox"/> Cost center	<input type="checkbox"/> Fund
<b>Personal data</b> (Infotype 0002 or as specified)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Title	<input type="checkbox"/> Initials	<input type="checkbox"/> First name/s	<input type="checkbox"/> Last Name
<input type="checkbox"/> Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Date of birth	<input type="checkbox"/> Country of birth	<input type="checkbox"/> Nationality
<input type="checkbox"/> Age of employee	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic origin (IT0077)	<input type="checkbox"/> Qualification (IT9025)	
<b>Other data</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Payscale/payclass/level (IT0008)	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of weekly work days (IT0007)	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly working hours (IT0007)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Permanent address (IT0006)	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly working hours (IT0007)		
<b>Memberships and unions</b> (Infotype 0057)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Academics' Union	<input type="checkbox"/> Employees' Union	<input type="checkbox"/> NEHAWU	

**AUTHORITY**

	PRINT NAME	SIGNATURE	CONTACT NO.	DATE
Applicant	Kelly Josiah	Kelly Josiah	082 530 2836	30/06/2021
HR Practitioner				
Head of Department	Dr Carren Duffy	Dr C.G. Duffy	021 650 3428	30/6/2021
HR Systems & Support Office				

**FOR OFFICE USE**

Is standard report available?	
Compiled by	
Date report sent	

## **COMPLETING AN HR INFORMATION REQUEST FORM**

### HR190

### **How to complete this form?**

This form should be completed together with your [HR Practitioner](#). The form must be signed by you, your HR Practitioner and authorised by your HOD.



#### **Note**

- Your HR Practitioner should provide you with the requested information within the time frame discussed and agreed with you and your HOD.
- If your HR Practitioner is unable to provide you with the required information, the request will be sent to the HR Systems & Support Office. Requests will be given an estimated time for completion once the report requirements have been reviewed. Some requirements may require special programming that will need to be prioritised.

### **Where do I send this form?**

To your [HR Practitioner](#).

### **Email address information**

Human Resources is unable to supply staff email addresses, this information is held by ICTS.

**Appendix F**  
**Research Cover Letter**



Dear Employee,

I would like to invite you to participate in my Masters research study which aims to explore the leadership behaviours employees most value during times of crisis. Using remote work during COVID-19 as the case study.

This research has been approved by UCT's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reasons, and without any penalty. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this study. You will not be requested to provide any identifiable information. Your responses will remain anonymous. The data will be kept confidential and the results of the study will be used for academic purposes only.

If you are willing to participate in this study and support my research, please fill in the information contained in this cover letter. Completing and submitting your responses will be considered as informed consent to participate in this study. There will be no incentive for participation in this study.

If you have any questions, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the email addresses provided below.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



---

**Kelly Josiah**

Masters Student

Section for Organisational Psychology

Department of Management Studies

University of Cape Town (UCT)

**Contact Details:**

Researcher Name: Kelly Josiah

Researcher Email Address: [jshkel002@myuct.ac.za](mailto:jshkel002@myuct.ac.za)

Supervisor Name: Professor Suki Goodman

Supervisor Email Address: [Suki.Goodman@uct.ac.za](mailto:Suki.Goodman@uct.ac.za)

---

**Professor Suki Goodman**

## Appendix G

### Participation Consent Form



Dear Employee,

I would like to invite you to participate in my Masters research study which aims to explore the leadership behaviours employees most value during times of crisis. Using remote work during COVID-19 as the case study.

This research has been approved by UCT's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. Approval to access UCT Staff has been granted by the Executive Director of Human Resources.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reasons, and without any penalty. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this study. You will not be requested to provide any identifiable information. Your responses will remain anonymous. The data will be kept confidential and the results of the study will be used for academic purposes only. Interviews will be recorded and stored on a password protected device.

If you are willing to participate in this study and support my research, please fill in the information contained in this consent form. Completing and submitting your responses will be considered as informed consent to participate in this study. There will be no incentive for participation in this study.

If you have any questions, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the email addresses provided below.

Thank you for your time.

I hereby agree (circle or underline the applicable option) to participate in the **interview** for this study.

I hereby agree/disagree (circle or underline the applicable option) to the **audio recording** of my interview for this study.

Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Details:**

Researcher Name: Kelly Josiah

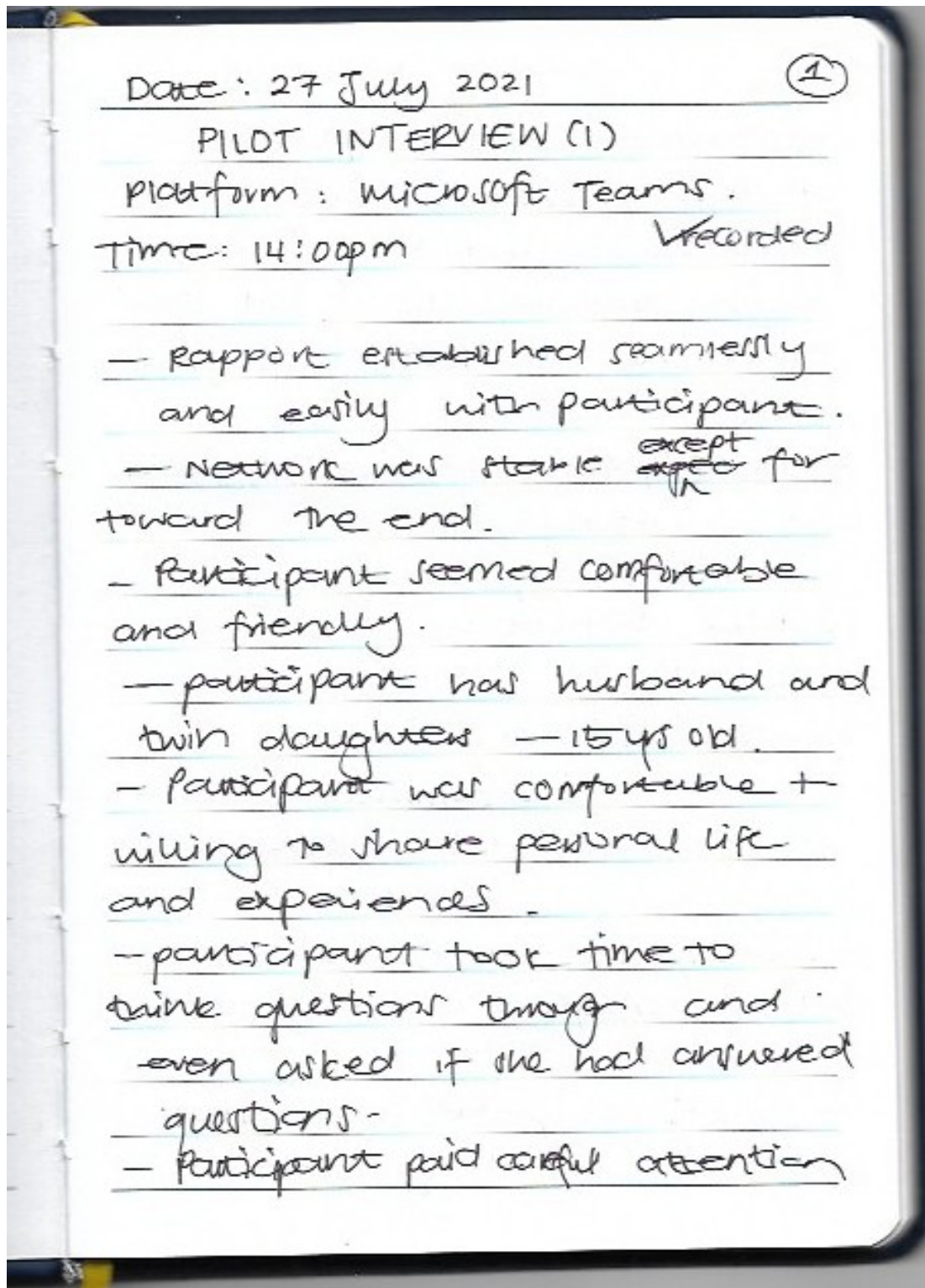
Researcher Email Address: [jshkel002@myuct.ac.za](mailto:jshkel002@myuct.ac.za)

Supervisor Name: Professor Suki Goodman

Supervisor Email Address: [Suki.Goodman@uct.ac.za](mailto:Suki.Goodman@uct.ac.za)

## Appendix H

## Pilot Interview Field Notes



②

to answer each component of each question.

- participant and I had an open discussion about her lived experiences of remote work thus far.

- Participant tended to provide long answers.

- NB: The explanation of leader behaviors + examples helped.

central themes: inflexibility

- communication

valued this by leaders

- Trust

- participant said interview helped her reflect on goals for 2nd semester.

- sometimes probes were already answered in initial question\*

③

- Reflecting on the interview - I felt very comfortable with the participant.

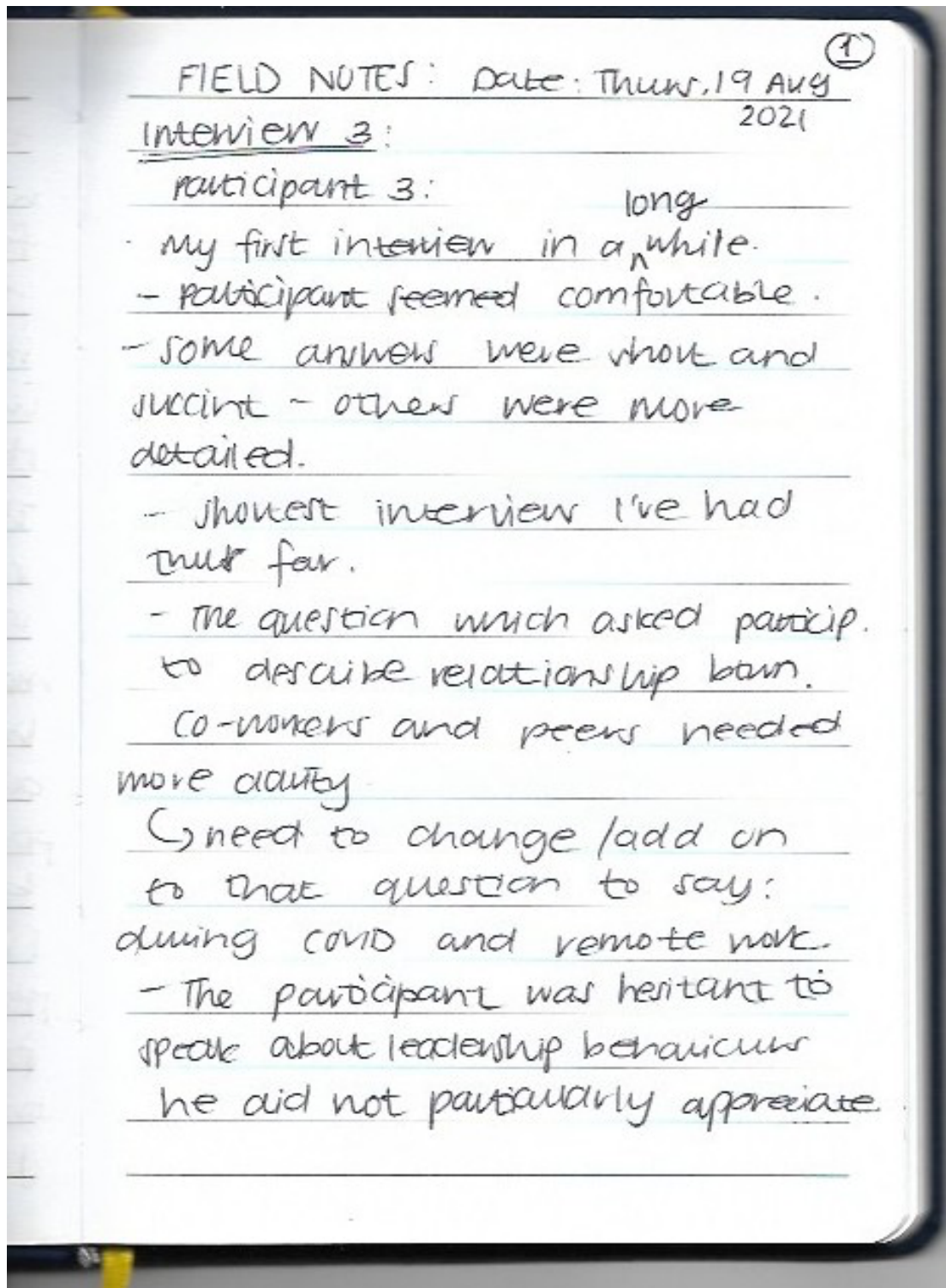
- she was open and willing to answer the questions.

→ pilot interview ①

UCT CHED

Centre for Higher Education and Development.

**Appendix I**  
**Interview Field Notes**



**Appendix J**  
**Reflexive Journal Notes**

