



**The Impact of Working from Home on Support Staff Members of the
University of Free State at the QwaQwa Campus**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the field study hereby handed in for the qualification Master's in Business Administration at the UFS Business School at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at/in another university/faculty.

I also hereby cede copyright of this work to the University of the Free State.

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Date : November 2022

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First and foremost, I want to thank God for seeing me through; all of this was made possible by the strength He bestowed upon me. His **GRACE & MERCY** have been with me even when I wanted to give up; a constant reminder was the scripture that reads: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”- Philipians 4:13.*

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ABSTRACT

The University of the Free State, QwaQwa, never had to experience working from home (WFH) before the world was faced with the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study was to explore the different perceptions and experiences of the WFH era among the support staff. In a nutshell, the study aimed to investigate how employees at the UFS QwaQwa were affected psychologically, emotionally, and financially whilst working from home during the lockdown period. The reason for selecting UFS QwaQwa was because of the different geographical dynamics, as the challenges experienced in QwaQwa differ from its co-campus in Bloemfontein. Using the qualitative method, the researcher conducted semi-structured, open-ended questions thus one could obtain a broader range of responses. The method used allowed the researcher to examine the primary objective of the research to acquire more insight into the impact of WFH on the support staff.

The results showed that the participants went through different dynamics of making WFH work, despite the circumstances they faced, whether it would be distractions by the children, electricity, or the environment the participants stayed in. There were also many positive outcomes of WFH; many participants benefited financially by not having to travel to work and by spending more time with their families. It was evident in the findings that this study will be a great way for the institution to be more informed of what the support staff experienced, and it gave more clarity on what the impact of WFH was on support staff. The study is a valuable contribution towards enhanced staff well-being and the flexible working policy enhancement in future, not only for the UFS, but even for other institutions at large.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background

The devastating Covid-19 pandemic overwhelmed the whole world, particularly in 2020. The world was even more affected as it struggled to overcome this catastrophe, especially from the various waves supposedly caused by the different Covid-19 variant effects. The pandemic first appeared in December 2019 (Singhal, 2020). According to Wu et al. (2020), an unidentified coronavirus, known as the 2019 coronavirus, surfaced from Wuhan, China late in December 2019 causing a massive outbreak in numerous Chinese cities and spreading globally. Initially, it was alleged that it originated from Wuhan in China, but this was later refuted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which stated that the virus could have spread from anywhere. The WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). At the end of March 2020, the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, declared a national state of emergency in terms of the *Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002* (Lukani et al., 2020). South Africa went into a complete lockdown on 26 March 2020, and this entailed that no businesses, schools, universities, clubs, sports clubs, churches, and many other organisations could operate. Flights were grounded, borders were closed, and a curfew was put in place to restrict movement, to contain the virus. The only establishments that remained in operation were the essential service providers, such as hospitals and convenience stores (Wiyasonge, 2020).

Due to company closures, organisations were creative in ensuring resources and access were available to support employees in serving customers by working from home (WFH) to circumvent the consequences of the lockdown. As a result, working from home was officially introduced to many parts of the world and has become part of our daily life. WFH was not entirely a new phenomenon as it has been around for many years but was not practised by many organisations. Before the pandemic, working from home was not even an option in many countries. In the USA, the Pew Research Center Survey discovered that many employees whose job responsibilities can be performed from home, rarely worked from home before the pandemic. More

than 50% claimed that they would like to continue operating from home even after the pandemic, as revealed in the new Pew Research Center Survey (Parker et al., 2020).

Before the pandemic, remote working in South Africa was common in some organisations, mainly the private sector, but with the abrupt closure during lockdown, working from home (WFH) became the order of the day. The constraints of working from home created an ideal environment for the world's greatest mass teleworking experiment. While some organisations were already using teleworking, others swiftly had to catch up (Benhura, 2021). For many organisations, it came as a surprise that they were not prepared for, as they did not have the necessary resources to enable employees to work effectively and efficiently from home. The worldwide organisation shutdowns, enacted and enforced to prevent the virus spread, presented a variety of unique challenges for employees and employers (Kniffin et al., 2021). This predicament was exacerbated by the fact that many businesses still used personal desktop computers and had not yet transitioned to adopting laptops for virtual or remote working. This meant funds had to be disbursed to procure office resources for all the employees working from home. The office resources (laptops, routers, data, small printers, etc.) had to be procured to assist the employees in efficiently working from home.

Rapid changes had to occur, for example, arranging data contracts with the network service providers to provide decent, affordable packages to the employees. If organisations were not able to make the necessary procurement arrangements, then employees would be inactive in terms of workloads, thus compromising the productivity and sustainability of the organisation. Many organisations did not have the funds or resources to fully embrace remote employment (Zeidner, 2021). This meant that these organisations might lose clients, which would lead to retrenchments, and it would be downhill from there on. Organisations had to spend money to make money to keep financially afloat.

When considering the working from home scenario at the University of the Free State (UFS), the institution initiated several necessary and innovative processes to reach optimum functionality to be at the cutting edge of being a sound service provider in the

field of higher education. Before this, various departments lacked essential office equipment (e.g., laptops) to assist staff members working from home. The institution organised the necessary office equipment for some of the employees in a short space of time, while many other employees were assisted at a later stage. The staff members who could not be provided with notebooks were requested to utilise their laptops, smartphones, and tablets in the meantime to access emails and other information at large. Employees who used their devices found that it was a challenge (and a significant expense) as they had to use quite a considerable amount of data since most of them were not provided with data contracts and routers. Therefore, the university came up with a solution by allowing the employees to claim this expense (with proof of the data and router) to a maximum of R500 per month.

With the institution handling an enormous database with highly confidential information (students and employees), it necessitated a restriction that employees could only access specific data. With the work-from-home condition, the university had to find secure ways to grant employees access to systems that could only be accessed on campus in the past. After a few months of WFH, the IT department initiated Virtual Private Networking (VPN) applications that enabled employees to log in, browse systems, access emails, and surf the internet without consuming their own personal data. For connectivity purposes, two VPN applications were introduced to the university as advised by the IT department, *GlobalProtect* and *Duo Mobile Application*.

Essentially, a VPN is a way to increase privacy and security by connecting to the internet via a server of one's choice (McCann & Hardy, 2022). Hence, VPNs have many benefits: security, online anonymity, remote access to an organisation's network, sharing files in the organisational network, bypassing internet filters, and experiencing better performance of the internet (Gerwitz, 2021). In other words, an employee can browse through all the systems and the internet without data being deducted from the employee's data balance.

With time and experience, scientists found ways around the virus that has kept the whole world in suspense for a permanent solution, for good. The findings regularly led to the Covid-19 isolation rules and regulations changing with time. When the virus was

identified in 2019, if you tested positive for Covid19, workplaces would require you to stay in isolation for 14 days, even if you did not have symptoms. Given the changes that constantly happened, early in 2022, the government, with the advice from the scientists and medical advisors, indicated that the isolation period was reduced to 7 days if you have symptoms, and if you do not have symptoms, you do not require to be in isolation.

Many organisations are still of work from home, while others encourage their employees to return to the traditional office space. Initially, in 2021, the QwaQwa campus, University of the Free State, requested staff to return to the offices gradually. However, given the pandemic, the return was not immediately on a full-time basis but on a scheduled basis. This was to accommodate staff with getting back into the routine. Early in 2022, the institution approved a required Vaccination Policy, and all employees were requested to return to the office on a full-time basis. During this period, the institution encouraged employees to get vaccinated. The employees were granted the freedom to decide whether they want to vaccinate or not. If one was not vaccinated, the employee would have to undergo a Covid-19 test to access the institution.

Given that the lockdown levels spanned from the severe lockdown level 5 (from 27 March - 30 April 2020) to the less severe lockdown level 1 (from 1 October 2021 - 4 April 2022), the National State of Disaster was officially lifted by the 5th of April 2022. In June 2022, the University of the Free State lifted the Covid-19 regulation and required Vaccination Policy with immediate effect. The institution then introduced a HR Flexible Work Arrangement Policy in April 2022, and it took effect from the 1st of May 2022, and was piloted for a period of four months. After four months, the institution decided to suspend the policy for further refinement. All employees were requested to return to campus on a full-time basis from the 1st of September 2022. Any infections would be dealt with case-by-case, per government instructions.

Given the pandemic that will soon be coming to an 'end', working from home will not be a thing of the past.

In this research study, the researcher will look at the impact of working from home (psychologically, physically, financially, and mentally) on support staff members at the QwaQwa campus, UFS. This research study will also dissect employees' holistic perceptions of the notion of WFH.

1.2 Problem statement

Not much was known about the impact of working from home instead of the traditional office space. The specific problem arose because the QwaQwa campus (UFS) was not aware of how the support staff were adjusting and coping with working from home, which was led by several challenges (load-shedding, connectivity, and environmental conduciveness) that needed to be addressed. The consequences on the staff members were still unknown, and to some extent, the only issue the university could find was a reluctance from some employees to WFH in the future. Unhappy employees (staff morale) can even lead to a higher turnover, which will affect the organisation's operations. The study's outcome may provide the institution with multiple considerations regarding the remote work model for their staff.

1.2.1 Primary research question

What is the impact of working from home on the support staff at the UFS QwaQwa campus?

1.2.2 Secondary research questions

- How does WFH impact employees psychologically, physically, financially, and mentally?
- What challenges are the support staff facing when working from home at the UFS QwaQwa campus?
- What kind of directives can be provided to navigate WFH with work-life balance at the UFS QwaQwa campus?

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1 Primary objective/aim

To investigate the impact of working from home amongst the UFS support staff at the QwaQwa campus.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

- To determine how working from home affected employees psychologically, physically, financially, and mentally.
- To analyse the challenges the support staff faces while working from home at the UFS QwaQwa campus.
- To provide directives to navigate WFH with work-life balance at the UFS QwaQwa campus.

1.4 Research methodology

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the impact of WFH amongst the UFS QwaQwa support staff. A clear description of the researcher's approach to the study in terms of the sampling, population, sample size, data collection methods, the trustworthiness of the data collected and lastly and most importantly, the ethical considerations for the nature of the research, is provided below.

1.4.1 Research design

The research design assists the researcher in meeting the research objective(s) and in responding to the study's research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). A research plan is basically a plan for accomplishing certain objectives or goals. Considering the nature of the subject, it seemed sensible to use a qualitative technique for the proposed study. The qualitative method was chosen with the participants' social environment in mind. The nature of the research was inductive since the researcher needed to first gather the data and then analyse the results to reveal the findings. The qualitative method is less restricted, in this case, it was necessary to be more interested in the participant's point of view. The epistemological stance that was used

is interpretivism since this approach respects the difference between individuals and the objects of natural science. It is also concerned with the empathetic understanding of human behavior (Bryman et al., 2021). This research design was appropriate to satisfy the aim and objectives in the study by answering the questions mentioned above.

1.4.2 Sampling strategy

A sample is a subgroup or subset of a larger population that is selected by utilising a pre-defined selection method. From this group, the sample is generally a specific group of individuals that one collects data from (McCombes, 2019). In other words, the sample is made up of some, but not all, of the population's constituents. From the sample, the researcher seeks to, and should be able to make findings that are generalisable to the population of interest by analysing the sample (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

1.4.2.1 Population

The population that was sampled for the qualitative method's effective implementation was as follows:

- The sample population was made up of permanent members of the institution's support personnel. The key rationale for only including support employees in the research was that they had no experience of working from home, whereas academic staff had already been partially exposed to working from home, particularly during university recession seasons.
- The UFS has over 2 599 permanent staff members in 127 different departments at all campuses. The permanent staff members at the QwaQwa campus were a little below 500 at the time of the study, of which 200 were support staff from different departments within the institution.

1.4.2.2 Sample size

The intended sample size was not defined because the study was qualitative. The researcher went through the data gathering process until data saturation was reached.

The concept of saturation and pragmatic factors are most used to defend the qualitative sample size. Schwab (2021) formulates the following simple way to define this concept: when the collection of newer qualitative data no longer changes, or changes are minimal in terms of the coding or classification manual, saturation is reached. Vasileiou et al. (2018) state that the sample size arguments in qualitative research are restricted and are not dependent on the number of interviews. Saturation is regarded as the cornerstone of accuracy in establishing sample sizes in qualitative research, but there are no instructions on how to use it outside of grounded theory (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Failure to achieve saturation has an influence on the quality of the research; the researcher needs to extend data variety as much as possible to ensure that saturation is based on the broadest possible range of data on the category.

1.4.2.3 Purposive sampling

Since purposive sampling is a non-probability technique, the researcher chose it for this purpose and for its subjective nature in the selection of participants who were most likely to relate to the research questions.

Purposive sampling assisted in the following manner:

- It identifies a specific group(s) of people with critical knowledge that no one else has access to.
- The researcher needed to ensure that there are enough variations so that the sampled members differ in terms of key characteristics (Bryman et al., 2014). Therefore, the researcher selected employees from different faculties and position levels.

1.4.2.4 Participants

The participants were identified through the institution's Human Resources department. The researcher sent the HR Head an email explaining the need for a list of support staff for the purposes of a study, included in the email was the ethical clearance approval letter. The HR department responded positively to the request and ensured that the researcher understood how crucial it was to keep the support

personnel information confidential. The researcher then sent an email to the Heads of Department (HODs) of all the departments to request permission to proceed with the interviews, thereafter the researcher sent invitations to support staff who had been working for the institution for over a year to participate in the study and had experience in WFH. The participants that were invited were from different occupational levels within the support staff structure. The email invitation was sent out to 42 support staff members and included in the email was the ethical clearance approval letter.

1.5 Data collection method

1.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a form of data collection that involves asking questions that systematically explore each participant's theme. The questions, however, are not in any sequence or wording (Saunders et al., 2019). The qualitative technique is less structured, and the original study concepts were formulated broadly. In this instance, there was a need to be more interested in the participant's point of view. The interviewee has more freedom in a semi-structured interview because a list of questions on prominent subjects is referred to as an interview guide (Bryman et al., 2021). For this reason, the interview method was a suitable choice to address the impact of working from home for the permanent support staff at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa campus.

Semi-structured interviews support the interviewer to probe into a response to elicit more details or seek clarification. In the interviews the participants had to answer pre-set, open-ended questions to explore the participants' viewpoints on the working from home experience so that the researcher could obtain incisive knowledge on the research topic (Jamshed, 2014). The interviews were held individually, and each staff member was interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes. The interviews were conducted at a convenient time identified by the participants. All the interviews did not take place in one day; the timeslots and the day of the interview was dependent on the availability and preference of each participant. The researcher conducted the interviews virtually, recorded and transcribed them. All the interviews were conducted

in English. Additional notes of what the participant was conveying to the researcher were drafted during the interview session to enable the researcher to flag important quotes and to internalise what is being said. An interview guide (Appendix A) was prepared to produce data that could be analysed qualitatively.

1.6 Data analysis

According to Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014), data analysis is the process of emerging meaning and knowledge from the numerous data sets that may be acquired throughout the research project as a foundation for future action and theory development. Whereas, Calzon (2022) explains data analysis as an act of gathering, categorising, and interpreting data to acquire insights that can be utilised to make decisions. There are several methods and tactics for doing analysis depending on the industry and the goal of the study (Calzon, 2022). At the data analysis phase, the written and recorded material was utilised to examine each staff member's experience of WFH during the pandemic at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa. The theory on the research problem was researched in advance to gain a clear grasp of the information that needed to be gathered during the interviews. The research method used by the researcher to analyse the data was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an emergent and participatory process of interpreting a series of data, with a typical conclusion of some group structure (Brough, 2018). Even though the researcher had made notes during the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings on a Microsoft Word document to help assist with the data analysis and interpretation of the interview data. The data was analysed by the researcher in four stages, which will be discussed in detail. Firstly, the researcher read through the data from the beginning to the end. According to Vaismoradi et al., (2016) researchers reach an overall comprehension of data as well as the real problems in the phenomena under study by reading and rereading the transcripts. Secondly, quotes and phrases from the interviews that were important to the study were highlighted by the researcher, it was more of a colour coding on Microsoft Excel programme. In its most basic form, coding is the simple process of identifying meaning segments in your data and labeling them with a code (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Thirdly, the researcher coded the

texts based on their content. This allowed the researcher to classify common codes that displayed some type of relationship, allowing them to be encapsulated into prospective themes. The coding process is a dynamic function, and its nonlinear directionality allows key themes to be identified, coded, and interpreted in the direction of a research study's emphasis, as well as contribute to the related literature (Williams & Moser, 2019). Finally, the researcher merged and refined the categories into themes, even going as far to assess if the themes were a suitable match with the assistance of the supervisor. Whilst there are various variances in the use of the terms "category" and "theme," meanings are expressed in terms of themes and their associated subdivisions as subthemes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In essence, the data analysis entailed probing and categorising the data in a way that the study's core primary and secondary objectives were fulfilled. The theory that was gathered predominantly consisted of data from accredited journal papers, newspaper articles, and many other sources that addressed the impact of WFH amongst their employees. The above-mentioned data analysis results, when integrated and compared with the literature study, resulted in a thorough final data evaluation.

1.7 Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness of qualitative research and the transparency with which the study is conducted are critical to the usefulness and integrity of the findings (Cope, 2014). Scholars define trustworthiness in a variety of ways. According to Schmidt & Brown (2017) trustworthiness is the quality, authenticity, and sincerity of qualitative research findings. It refers to the level of trust or confidence that readers have in the outcome. Whereas Polit & Beck (2014), define the trustworthiness or rigour of a study as the degree of reliance on data, interpretation, and strategies utilised to assure the quality of a research. To date, there is still a persistent concern about achieving rigour or reliability in qualitative research. The two most important features of any research are reliability and validity. According to researchers, the rigour of qualitative research equals to the ideas of reliability and validity, which are all crucial components of quality (Tappen, 2021). Based on the information provided, one can establish that the main purpose of this procedure is to guarantee that the data is valid and that the techniques

are reliable. Reliability is dependent on consistency and thoroughness in the application of research techniques, as expressed in the transparency of research practices, analysis, and conclusions, as represented in an open account that is mindful of the bias and limitations of the study results (Cypress, 2017). On the other hand, the accuracy with which a technique measures what it is intended to measure is referred to as its validity. One sign that a measurement is legitimate is high reliability. If a technique is unreliable, it is most likely invalid (Middleton, 2019). The researcher ensured there is reliability of the study by recording the interview sessions, taking notes during the interviews and also transcribing the results accordingly for each participant.

Several qualitative researchers have concentrated on topics like credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, highlighting the differences that arise from expressing similar concepts differently (Rose & Johnson, 2020). These concepts initially originate from Lincoln & Guba 1985, hence the researcher decided to employ these strategies to increase the trustworthiness of the study's findings. By triangulating the data the researcher reduced the risk of *credibility*. By integrating theory, methods, or observers in a research project, triangulation can assist guarantee that basic biases caused by the use of a single method or observation are addressed (Noble & Heale, 2019). Triangulation is an attempt to examine and describe complicated human behavior employing a number of ways in order to provide readers with a more balanced explanation. It is a data validation process that may be used in both quantitative and qualitative studies (Noble & Heale, 2019). To enhance *dependability*, the researcher created an electronic record that detailed how data was obtained, categories were created, and conclusions were made throughout the investigation. Dependability is also well known as consistency, it is frequently related with reliability and is evaluated through a constructivist viewpoint (Janis, 2022). Forero et al. (2018) and Kennedy-Clark (2012) furthermore defined dependability as a work that, when repeated in the same setting with similar procedures and participants, same results will be produced. The researcher furthermore applied good rich, explanations of the participants (demographics) and the research process (sample strategy), to allow

other readers to make *transferability* decisions. According to Korstjens & Moser (2018), transferability is concerned with the issue of relevance and as a researcher, it is your mission to provide a "rich description" of the participants and the study method so that the reader may determine whether the results are applicable to their own situation. Lastly, the researcher sought to minimise biases through *confirmability* by outlining the process of data collection, data analysis and the interpretation of the data. The researcher went on to further review the literature for examples of the phenomena which was included in the data analysis and interpretation. According to Nassaji (2020), confirmability may be established by explaining the information and findings in such a way that others can confirm their accuracy. An audit trail is a valuable method in which the researcher documents and attempts to justify all processes undertaken and decisions made related data coding and analysis. These documents are then available for additional review and validation.

As per the detailed approach above, as the study advanced and specific data points were revealed, efforts were made to confirm each piece of data against at least one additional source (literature). Hence data triangulation was crucial to the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. Overall, the researcher's technique for establishing the trustworthiness of this study was primarily comparing the interviews and field notes, which was successful.

1.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics are norms or principles in research that governs study ideas and procedures. Researchers must always follow a set of rules (Bhandari, 2021).

1.8.1 Risk-benefits analysis

When conducting research, the goal is to increase the research's benefit while reducing the damage or danger to participants. In terms of this research, the one advantage that stood out was that it will benefit employees in the future, not only at the UFS QwaQwa but also at other institutions abroad; hence, the risk-benefit analysis is vital. In terms of this research, Wood (2017) explains risk-benefit analysis as a tool that compares the risks and rewards of a scenario to determine if the advantages

exceed the risks. The risks of this research compared to the benefits for the participants were minimal.

1.8.2 Permission obtained

Firstly, ethical clearance was sought from the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC) to commence with this research study. A disclosure that the researcher was an employee of the university and forms part of the support staff was also included. The support staff managers were requested to grant permission to interview their subordinates. Before the study commenced, the selected participants were asked to sign consent forms after being given details of the intended research (verbally and written). The research participants' safety (physical and mental) was always prioritised.

All the information gathered in this study was stored in password-protected files on the researcher's computer. Identities, locations, and information was kept private and confidential by using codes or pseudonyms for anonymity (Taylor et al., 2015). The following are the established ethical principles that relate to human research.

1.8.2.1 Respect for participants

As a researcher, one should treat the participants with dignity in all their encounters, by not criticising or discrediting them to ensure that their perspectives are honestly documented and taken into consideration during the evaluation process. Whatever the nature of the data gathering process, the respondents' self-esteem, and self-respect should never be abused (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

1.8.2.2 Informed consent

Informed consent required the participants to be fully knowledgeable about the research process. This entailed details about the study's advantages, disadvantages, financing, and institutional permission (Bhandari, 2021). The researcher informed the participants in English of the aims and consequences of the research project. The researcher ensured that each participant had a clear understanding of the consent they signed.

1.8.2.3 Specific permission required for audio recording

According to Vanclay et al., (2013) if a researcher plans to record any participant, special permission must be obtained ahead of time (most countries' privacy regulations may make this a legal necessity). When signing the informed consent, there was a clause that clearly states that the researcher would like to record the interviews, and each participant was granted an option to either allow the recording to take place or not. When participants did not permit the researcher to record the interviews, since it is not mandatory to make an audio recording, the researcher took notes of the interview immediately afterwards. The memory of the interview would still be fresh, and the researcher was able to add more detailed notes to make the data more adequate.

1.8.2.4 No harm to participants

No harm must come to participants due to their participation in the intended research. Having an ethical basis against which to foresee challenges and risks and exercising choice to prevent conflict and damage, is not harmful (Saunders et al., 2019). This implies that participants must not be subjected to any form of discomfort or risk. The researcher guaranteed the participants that no harm will be brought about due to the interviews. Even after the research has been published, the data will not be used to their disadvantage.

1.8.2.5 Confidentiality

When a researcher is provided with information in confidence, it must be kept confidential (Bryman et al., 2014). The researcher confirmed in the interview that the information obtained will be kept confidential.

1.8.2.6 Voluntary participation and no coercion

All study volunteers can choose whether to participate, without being pressured or coerced. All participants could withdraw from or exit the research without feeling obligated to do the interview (Bhandari, 2021). At the start of the interviews, the participants were reminded that they voluntarily form part of the research.

1.9 Demarcation of the study

The focus of the proposed study was the impact of working from home amongst the support staff members of the University of the Free State, QwaQwa. The study was conducted at the QwaQwa campus; it was a good contrast given that QwaQwa is a rural area with several challenges regarding service delivery etc. The participants involved in the study were support staff operating from different departments and faculties from different operational levels. The participants were interviewed to elicit valuable knowledge on the research topic.

1.10 Chapter lay-out

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 4: Data analysis and interpretation

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

1.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to have a better understanding of how the QwaQwa campus experienced working from home. As a result, the reader is provided with a detailed study of working from home involving the institution's support employees. The main objective was to investigate the impact of working from home in terms of challenges, and to develop strategies to improve the working from home environment involving employee-manager collaborations. Below, an outline of the literature review on working from home is provided.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature on the research study of working from home. The chapter begins with defining working from home, from the viewpoint of different authors. The chapter further examines the history of working from home as well as how working from home in developing and developed countries. Given that the study is based on a higher educational institution (HEI), the chapter explored WFH at the HEI, the influence of productivity on WFH, and the policies in place for WFH. In addition, the chapter will outline the benefits and challenges of working from home and how working from home impacts the work life balance. Finally, it will explore the post Covid-19 intent to shift to remote work.

2.2 Defining working from home

Working from home is a form of remote work also known as telecommuting (Irawanto, 2020). According to Nakrošienė (2019), telework is a sizeable, multifaceted phenomenon with no universally accepted definition. Working from home describes job functions being performed remotely. The acronym WFH is used to describe the concept since more and more organisations permit WFH. In terms of WFH, digital adoption is a critical factor in determining how quickly and efficiently a company can function virtually (WalkMe Corporate Headquarters, 2021). The WFH concept has been defined as remote work, flexible workplace, e-working, and telecommuting (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). These terms allude to employees' capacity to work in flexible workplaces, particularly at home, by utilising technology to fulfil job obligations (Grant et al., 2019). It also applies to employees' willingness to operate in flexible and adaptive workplaces, especially at home. Many organisations transitioned their employees from being office-bound to a work from home model to adapt to the Covid-19 restrictions. While all businesses will need to adjust to remote working on an unprecedented scale in the aftermath of the pandemic, there are remote-first and remote-friendly businesses since the WFH domain is not as straightforward as it may

seem. However, there is a distinction between a remote-first organisation and a merely remote-friendly one. The terms remote-first and remote-friendly are frequently used interchangeably, even though the two remote work models could not be more different.

In short, a remote-first organisation is an organisation that operates entirely from a remote location, spreading across multiple time zones, also known as distributed companies (Butler, 2021; Tunggal, 2021). The work culture is more deliberate, and employee wellbeing is woven into the fabric. On the other hand, remote-friendly organisations do not only have physical offices in several places but also allow employees to work remotely according to corporate policy and individual preferences; they operate on a hybrid model (Tunggal, 2021; Simic, 2022). Companies that are remote-friendly strive to balance in-person and virtual facetime, which generally entails scheduling yearly retreats and other team building events for staff (Gupta, 2020). Furthermore, when it comes to calculating employee productivity, remote-friendly organisations prioritise the hours spent in the office (Simic, 2022; Tunggal, 2021), while the remote-first organisations provide flexible working hours and depends on output to measure employee productivity (Erkic, 2022). With varying degrees of commitment, both approaches intend to satisfy the demands of remote personnel.

To circumvent the restrictions that were put in place due to Covid-19, WFH has been strategic for many organisations. However, strategies must be developed collaboratively with managers and staff to avoid conflict and misunderstandings, as there would be specific implications for both groups in some way or another (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). WFH, in its simplest form, is work done from places rather than the traditional office. Sometimes, WFH could be mistaken as a new phenomenon that came into existence recently, but this is not the case; below is an outline of the historical background of WFH and its origin.

2.3 History of working from home

The history of working from home is quite enthralling, especially how it came to being and how new technology has influenced its popularity in recent years. According to Gupta (2020), remote working dates two centuries ago when the first Industrial

Revolution prompted this. However, working from home today is different from many years ago. Back in ancient times, artisans sold their merchandise in their homes, people operated their businesses in the comfort of their own homes (Butler, 2021). Because of a high demand, the period between the 1700s to 1800s marked the birth of mass production. There was a need for hiring manual labour to assist with the production of products and that is when the traditional working from the offices/factories came into play (Gupta, 2020). The employees were then scheduled to work for a certain number of hours and had to report to managers, as it is now in the 21st century.

In 1976 when the so-called telecommunications century began, the internet was still constructed into something affordable and usable. As a result, there was a lack of accessibility to company servers, something the current generation does not struggle with. This lack of accessibility left only selected jobs that could be performed entirely from an off-site home (Oliver, 2021).

Opinions on the natural birth of the internet differ however, the most often accepted date is 1969. In 1993, the World Wide Web, with the acronym www, was invented by computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee (Schafer & Serres, 2017). This software enabled people to read and retrieve documents from all around the world and with this intervention, remote work became more possible. The introduction of wireless internet was the final technology created to advance employees' capacity to work remotely. Wi-Fi, which first appeared on the internet in 1997 is the cornerstone for all remote work in the modern-day, and shortly after, in 1999, routers were invented, allowing Wi-Fi to be used at home (Admin, 2017). The sky was the limit for remote workers once Wi-Fi became available in households (Oliver, 2021). Even before the pandemic, there were already several breakthroughs in remote work. Working from home in other organisations emerged when entrepreneurs were struggling to branch out due to budgetary constraints, and not being able to rent or set up administrative stations. Instead, the entrepreneurs worked from their homes, lofts, and garages until they could gather adequate funds from investors (Gupta 2020). Useem (2017) mentions how IBM, one of the biggest companies in the world, allowed five of its employees in

1979 to work from home as an experiment. It put boxy, green-screened terminals in the homes of these employees to alleviate a bottleneck at the office mainframe, allowing them to work from home, which then seemed practical. In 1983, the company allowed 2 000 employees to work remotely as they were satisfied with the experiment's outcome (Gupta, 2020). In 2018, many companies in different parts of the world, were entirely remote, while 70% of the world's population were working remotely at least once a week, and 53% worked remotely half the week, implying that more than half of the world's population were working as remote workers (Casey, 2019).

The unexpected virtual office setup due to the Covid-19 pandemic was not an easy transition for some people, hence below, the operations of how the world adapted to working from home will be outlined in detail.

2.4 Working from home worldwide

Generally, the world reacted differently when faced with the pandemic, as the Covid-19 statistics were not the same in each country. However, one thing that was common worldwide was the hard lockdown, but a more notable finding was the variance in the design, timing, and implementation of the lockdown measures. The term lockdown does not have a precise meaning, even though it is widely used. Haider et al. (2020) define lockdown as a set of measures targeted at minimising the transmission of Covid-19 that is implemented indiscriminately to a broad population and contains certain constraints on the established pattern of social and economic life. In 2020, the world was at a stage of hard lockdown and the population was requested to strictly stay at home. Home confinement imposed constraints were implemented on the general population to remain at home for specified periods, curfew was commonly used interchangeably with home confinement, and exceptions were typically made for those whose jobs were deemed vital or for specified sanctioned activities like grocery shopping or exercise. That meant the non-essential occupation individuals could not go to work, therefore, working from home was the only option left to keep the organisations going and for employees to continue earning an income.

Due to the disparities in the financial status (poor, middle, and high class) worldwide, working from home is not welcomed in the same manner. According to Dingel and Neiman (2020), several occupations can be performed from home, within fractions of detailed occupations. Only a few can work from home and the metric-based its response on the features of each employment. Unfortunately, not all job responsibilities can be done at home. The capacity to work from home is defined by physical and social elements that impact the nature of work and workplace behaviors, such as information input, usage of mechanised equipment, and engagement with people, among other things. According to Hatayama et al. (2020), 37% of employment in the United States can be done from home, with variances depending on city and industry. Domestic workers, drivers, hotel chefs, and security guards, for example, must be present at their workplaces, whereas lecturers, accountants, and software developers can engage in online programs from home (Benhura, 2021). In the findings, most positions in management and professional occupations, at 76.8% and 70.6%, respectively, can be done from home. Table 1, below demonstrates the percentage of work that can be performed from home using the professional category in the United States of America.

Table 1: Percentage of work that can be done from home using the main professional category according to the United States of America.

	Occupation (Done on ISCO)	WFH (in %)
1	Managers	76.8
2	Professionals (lawyers, accountants, etc.)	70.6
3	Technicians and associate professionals	39.6
4	Clerical support workers	49.6
5	Services and sales workers	20.7
6	Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers	8.3
7	Elementary	9.6
8	Plant and machine operators and assemblers	7.4
9	Craft and related trades workers	3.9

(Dingel & Neiman, 2020)

The above data relates with findings that were done in South Africa whereby the fundamental structure of occupations and industries of employment is an inhabiting factor for working from home (Benhura and Magejo, 2020). Existing information reveals that fewer jobs can be done from home compared to those that cannot, this varies from 6% of all occupations in Ghana to the 56% in Germany (Saltiel, 2020; Dingel and Neiman, 2020). When comparing managers and professionals, administrative support employees, service and sales workers, craft and allied trades workers, plant and machine operators, and individuals in elementary sectors are more confined to work from home (Benhura, 2021). With the above being said, it is evident that managerial and professional jobs account for a sizable proportion of employment in high-income nations (Gottlieb et al., 2020)

Below we focus on how differences in economic structure among nations lead to differences in the capacity to work from home.

2.4.1 Under-developed countries

Poorer countries have a high proportion of unemployed people, and their occupational variety is not favorable for working from home due to infrastructure limitation, access to certain services, lower education and general development (Matli, 2020; Viollaz, 2022). At national level, the percentage of work that can be performed from home in poor nations vs affluent countries is determined by farmers' capacity to work from home. According to Dingel and Neiman (2020), farmers can seldomly work from home because they must physically be on the farming land to monitor the progress of the crop or the livestock. It is unclear to what degree this applies to farming in developing nations, which occurs in various technical settings and geographical settings.

2.4.2 Developed countries

For developed countries, it was somewhat different from how the underdeveloped countries have navigated their way around WFH. By April 2020, half of the employed population in the United States worked from home (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020) and in the UK, the percentage is around 47% (Cameron, 2020). Furthermore, in 2020, social media platforms such as Twitter permitted their employees to work remotely

indefinitely. This mirrors the sentiments of 25% of the IT workers who want to transition to full-time remote employment (Gupta, 2020). It is evident that in different parts of the world, WFH is embraced in different ways. The literature below will outline the South African perspective of remote work and how other companies deal with the new normal.

2.5 Working from home in South Africa

The world of labor has undergone an extraordinary transformation. Some organisations, for example, have had to embrace teleworking to remain viable in the face of the pandemic. During that period, the South African government implemented a countrywide lockdown in response to the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic, which was announced by the President Cyril Ramaphosa in March 2020. The National State of Disaster was formally ended on April 5, 2022, after spanning from the most severe lockdown level 5 (27 March - 30 April 2020) to the less severe lockdown level 1 (1 October 2021 - 4 April 2022) (Disaster Management Act No.57 of 2002, 2002).

In a search conducted by Benhura (2021), males are more likely than women to be unable to work from home in South Africa. Of the four population categories, Black Africans, Coloreds, and Indians/Asians are more likely to be unable to work from home. Furthermore, those who live in informal settlements have fewer opportunities to work from home than those in urban areas. Regarding geographic location, employees in rural regions face more constraints while working from home than those in urban areas (Haider et al., 2020). Longitudinal studies reveal that certain businesses with low-skilled jobs cannot permit employees to WFH, as they require them to be physically present to perform their jobs responsibility (Kawaguchi & Motegi, 2020).

Variations in production organisations or degrees of technology adoption, according to Hatayama et al. (2020) means an occupation with the possibility of working from home. Metrics based on the United States may lead to skewed findings on the viability of working from home in developing countries. Therefore, within this constraint, Kerr & Thornton (2020) attempted to adapt Dingel & Neiman's (2020) categorisation to the South African environment using normative reasoning. According to their findings,

13.8% (2 million workers) of South Africans who were working before the strict lockdown can potentially work from home. Over and above that, 63% of workers are incapable of working from home (about 10.5 million workers). Therefore, the study shows that working from home is only feasible for highly skilled people.

Before the Omicron variant emerged, it looked like most South African organisations wanted to return to the office and implemented two to three days back in the office each week, according to Linda Trim, director of Giant Leap, one of South Africa's prominent workplace design consultants (Staff Writer, 2021). The fact that not all employment responsibilities can be completed from home, has created an essential question concerning the viability of occupations performed at home (Hatayama et al., 2020). The upcoming discussions will be on a vital concept to the world of higher education, including productivity in the workplace while employees work from home. Although some easily adapted to the idea of WFH, others struggled due to various valid reasons that will be uncovered in detail later.

2.6 WFH in the higher educational institutions

Universities have a long history of working in volatile, disruptive, and unexpected circumstances. They have seen political instabilities, economic meltdowns, technological and digital transformations, and globalisation trends (Wangenge-Ouma & Kupe, 2020). To satisfy the Covid-19 pandemic guidelines, employment patterns in higher education have ebbed and flowed. With working from home during the outbreak of the pandemic, the higher educational institutions were more concerned about the transition in academia and not so much about the support employees. Campuses that have been centres of study for decades were deserted, and institutions needed to figure out how to keep going while not abandoning anyone. This was no simple task with thousands of students enrolled, from various origins and socioeconomic backgrounds (Wangenge-Ouma & Kupe, 2020).

Academic staff, support staff, and students scrambled to find methods to adapt. The pandemic compelled South African universities to take a rapid leap into the future (Armstrong et al., 2021). Many university lecturers conducted classes online using

tools like Blackboard, Moodle, and Zoom. In contrast, support staff utilised video conferencing and executed tasks remotely, to assure the organisation's continued viability (James, 2020). Above all, the pandemic inspired higher education institutions to innovate and develop new instructional systems and evaluation methodologies (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The pandemic provided the educational system in general with a chance to pave the route for the use of digital learning.

According to researchers, there are several flaws in higher education, such as a lack of online teaching infrastructure, a lack of exposure for instructors to undertake online teaching, an information gap, a non-conducive atmosphere for home study, equality, and academic excellence (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). It became evident that universities, like the rest of society, rely on universal, affordable internet connectivity, a national imperative still to be achieved.

Device access, digital literacy, infrastructure, and systems are almost unavoidable in higher education and an increased investment in employee upskilling, training, equipment, and infrastructure is necessary (Armstrong et al., 2021).

Before the pandemic, many higher education institutions permitted academic staff to work from home but not support staff. However, during the pandemic, it was discovered that most of the support staff duties can be done remotely (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). According to a poll conducted by Boston University, academic and support personnel self-reported that they are more productive working remotely (Lederman, 2022). The most significant issue institutions have with working from home is culture (self-discipline etc) and maintaining it.

2.7 The impact of WFH on productivity

The main aim and the most crucial reason why many organisations exist, is to ensure that they make a profit. And for that to materialise, the organisations need to be fully productive by being effective and efficient. The main idea of productivity is for employees to spend their working hours wisely to produce great results. Productive employees concentrate on the right things at the applicable moments. Hence productivity is the primary driver of progress (Padayachee, 2021). To some extent, the

Covid-19 pandemic significantly altered perceptions of where and how individuals work best. Many organisations reported work-efficiency gains from WFH, but they also show that there are certain drawbacks to this system (Alaqra & Andersson, 2020). It has also been discovered that some people are productive by working in public places; coffee shops stimulate creativity in ways that workplaces and residences cannot (Lufkin, 2021). According to research, the stimuli in these public spaces make them a fantastic working environment; the combination of noise, easygoing crowds, and visual variety may offer just the right amount of distraction to help them be sharp and most creative (Lufkin, 2021). Even though 66% of professionals reported improved productivity while working from home, 24% of employers stated that employee productivity concerns are a significant obstacle to long-term remote working (Smith, 2021). Data was gathered from a firm, Robert Walters' 2021 Salary Survey, conducted amongst 2 000 professionals in South Africa. This survey shows that the employers and employees do not see the working from a home model in the same light.

Many organisations that were previously opposed to workers working from home have found that employees might be just as effective working remotely, even with the unfavorable conditions of the stay-at-home instructions and social distancing (DeRamus, 2020). In the higher educational institutions, it was reported that there was improved autonomy, flexibility in workday scheduling, elimination of undesirable distractions, and high levels of job productivity and happiness. However, there is an issue with inadequate communication and a lack of opportunity for skill development (Aczel et al., 2021).

Over the years, companies who were advocates of WFH started to recall employees to work from the office, one of them being the most prominent global company, IBM. In March 2017, IBM made a startling announcement and requested thousands of their workers to be back in its traditional office, to be physically present (Useem, 2017). Also, in 2018 a Facebook official was cited as saying that the business wants as few staff as possible to work from home, mentioning worries of decreased productivity and a lack of accountability (Gupta, 2020). However, due to the pandemic, Facebook has shifted its philosophy, and it expects more than half of its staff to be remote by 2025.

The Chief Executive of Meta, Mark Zuckerberg, in a memo to staff, stated that WFH has provided him with more room for long-term thinking and has even benefited him in spending more time with his family, which has made him happier and more productive at work (Cutter, 2021).

Some organisations such as Amazon, Adobe and Microsoft have discovered better ways to navigate and ensure better productivity management. There are applications (apps) that can measure productivity that can hold teams accountable when working remotely (Simic, 2022). Employee training technology is the key to the future of remote work. Learning and growth are key components of an employee's performance on the other side of the wall, particularly for remote and hybrid-working personnel (Ramani, 2021).

Companies, however, require the necessary digital tools to continue these projects. Some of the tools the organisations use are Google Docs and Hive for project management and collaboration. These tools track changes to documents and new projects so that teams can see how productive they are daily (Simic, 2022).

Team communication tools like Slack, Sococo and project management tools such as Asana provided managers and company owners with simple solutions that allow them to operate their teams efficiently no matter where they are (Butler, 2021). Pawaria (2021) mentioned that Asana is one of the best productivity tools to keep higher education institutions organised and integrated. Employee training technology is the key to the future of remote work. Learning and growth are key components of an employee's performance on the other side of the wall, particularly for remote and hybrid-working personnel. Companies, however, require the necessary digital tools to continue these projects (Ramani, 2021).

To many organisations and employees, WFH is a new paradigm they have never experienced, therefore, they did not have the experience or necessary equipment. The following discussion will be on how employers assisted employees to ease into the new normal of WFH.

2.8 Employers' assistance to employees and the importance of creating a safe working space

Organisations unfamiliar with the WFH era and how it works had to follow the operations of other companies like Automatic and Gitlab since they have been telecommuting for many years (Gupta, 2020; Oliver, 2021). See below:

2.8.1 Creating a workspace from home

The first step towards remaining productive is to adopt a proper frame of mind. Having a dedicated workstation at home will assist in setting the tone. The workstation is not the only important thing in developing the technique but rather the ergonomic adjustments to ensure comfortability, even if it means putting a comfortable cushion on the work chair (Simic, 2022).

It is also important to place the devices near the internet hotspot; one might say this is a no-brainer, but it is imperative to ensure that the workspace has complete access to high-speed internet (Boyarsky, 2021; Simic, 2022). Lastly, it is essential to ensure the workspace has excellent lighting, preferably natural light; however, if it is not possible, any well-lit area in the house will be sufficient.

2.8.2 Secure network

Using mobile devices for work enables hackers to gain access to critical company information. A virtual private network (VPN) can connect remote employees to an organisation's internal network, providing enough protection against hackers while preventing remote risks (Simic, 2022). According to Gewirts (2021), VPN establishes a private tunnel across the public internet, the concept is that everything that is being communicated is enclosed in this private communication channel and encrypted, making it impossible to decode the packets even if they are intercepted. As a result, it conceals a person's online identity, allowing the user to access the internet safely and anonymously (McCann & Hardy, 2022). VPNs are practical tools for protecting the organisation and its data.

2.8.3 Telephony among employees of a distributed team

With WFH, organisations need to engage with employees via other methods besides regular emails. An elegant solution to this form of communication was a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) that enabled employees to make, receive and forward calls. The likes of Skype for Business were installed in this sense. Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) is an IP communication name for various offices that manage the transmission of voice data over the internet. A key advantage of VOIP is that it allows for economical long-distance communication, the flexibility of applying various pressure improvements, data transfer capacity effectiveness, and inconvenience-free communication (Chaudhari, 2018). Simic (2022) also mentions that it records call traffic and allows you to trace the device's users that make the calls. Callers can also leave voicemails on VOIP systems, making it a platform for unified communication.

2.8.4 Making use of the cloud

Living in unpredictable times has forced many businesses to depend more on cloud apps. One of the main reasons to rely on cloud apps is to avoid losing or misplacing vital information. Currently, organisations increasingly rely on cloud apps and services to enable remote workers to remain productive while also gaining access to the corporate resources they require to complete their jobs (DeRamus, 2020).

The most significant advantage of working on a cloud is that one knows when documents are uploaded, they will stay there and can be recovered at any time.

2.8.5 Password management

Unfortunately, there is a considerable risk in the world of technology, like cyber-attacks, etc. Password management is a tool used to safeguard and manage passwords throughout their lifespan. Organisations use Password Management to protect the employee credentials from unauthorised access to accounts and services (Security Tech, 2021). Many organisations now incorporate policies that monitor access controls, safeguarding devices with a two-factor authentication by enabling users to regularly change passwords across devices e.g., changing passwords every three months (Simic, 2022).

2.9 Working from home policies

Due to the pandemic, most, if not all, employees were required to work from home. As a result, most organisations were compelled to make the WFH policy a priority. In doing so, policies had to be developed with the practicality of both employers and employees in mind (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Earlier in the year 2000, standards were required, and the Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act legitimised remote workers and made telecommuting practices essential for businesses (Butler, 2021). For an organisation to succeed and operate accordingly, policies are imperative. The main aim of having a policy is to simply have guidelines and principles on how an organisation operates.

Another reason for having a policy is to ensure consistency, accountability, efficiency, and clarity around specific issues, whether human resources or everyday operational matters. According to Kelly (2020), the goal of policies and procedures is to bring consistency to company operations and consequently reduce the chance of undesirable outcomes. Pollack Porter et al. (2018) explain it in a very simple way; it is a standard set of principles to govern a course of actions. Rules and procedures direct employees to operate in certain ways, helping the organisation to achieve its objectives more successfully.

Policies and procedures can occasionally assist in achieving operational goals like creating a new product or handling customer service calls.

Many organisations initially did not have the WFH policy before the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, many organisations had to draft WFH policies, also known as a remote work policy, allowing employees to work from home either full-time or whenever it is most convenient for them. New guidelines have been constructed in some higher educational institutions, allowing many employees to work from home up to two days a week. Institutions like human resources at Virginia Tech have implemented such policies, and 10% of the workforce already have qualified to work 100% off-site under the university's evolving flexible work policy (Lederman, 2022). For employers, the increase in WFH during the pandemic challenged the policymakers

worldwide, as they had to ensure they had the same rights and benefits for the employees as they had in the traditional office (ILO Brief, 2020). In the same light, policymakers kept in mind that not all occupations within the organisations can work from home. According to Leone (2020), policymakers also had to concentrate on methods to offer financial security for the poorest populations during moments of lockdown.

As stipulated, policy plays a significant role in any organisation, and it is like the rule book. On the other end, the pandemic somehow highlighted the benefits and challenges of working from home that will be discussed below.

2.10 Benefits and challenges of working from home

When Covid-19 reached the world, several businesses were forced to let their employees work from home to keep their operations running. However, many employees did not find this transition of working remotely accessible. There are some challenges and benefits of working from home, and it is outlined below:

2.10.1 Benefits

2.10.1.1 Savings costs for the organisation

When employees work from the office, there are several expenses the company will incur, but if many employees work from home, the company will save on some operating costs. According to Garg & van der Rijst (2019), the company will save on infrastructure, electricity, water, internet bills, phones, cleaning services, and security. Erhic (2022) emphasises that working from home proved to help companies reduce overall operational expenses, the most significant cost being office space rentals for organisations that do not own property for office space.

2.10.1.2 Travel benefits

When it comes to traveling, one of the most significant benefits of WFH is that the employee no longer has to worry about commuting to work, which saves them both time and money (Simic, 2022). Many employees find themselves spending a lot of time in traffic congestion since most of them start work at the same time. If an

employee is mainly based at home, they will enjoy not being in traffic, which lowers stress levels (Garg & van der Rijst, 2019). Working from home benefits the employee and employer and has significant benefits for society regarding air pollution, traffic congestion, and energy consumption. According, to Hart (2019), employees who work from home often have a better work-life balance and are more productive because they save time driving to the office and can accomplish things more quickly in a focused setting.

2.10.1.3 Flexible working hours and reduced absence,

WFH gives employees more flexibility in time, they get to feel independent since they have more control in managing their own time. This implies that employees can start and stop their days whenever they like, if their task is completed, resulting in positive consequences (Courtney, 2021). According to Garg and van der Rijst (2019), employees who work from home for at least 2.5 days a week experience a significantly lower work-life conflict.

2.10.2 Challenges

Working from home does not only have benefits; the challenges/pitfalls that the employees face is discussed below.

2.10.2.1 Travel-related pitfalls

Research confirms that active walking, using public transport, or even cycling is healthy for people, and employees that regularly travel have this advantage over those who do not regularly travel (Garg & van der Rijst, 2019). There are so many health issues that can impact individual health when working from home, that Dr. Berzin (2020) picked only one to highlight. Sitting for long hours can lead to weight gain, blood sugar issues, and a lower metabolism, while when one is around the office, one tends to walk around perhaps to make coffee and visit the canteen.

2.10.2.2 Professional isolation and organisational identification

To some extent, when employees are working from home, they do not feel connected to the organisation's work culture (Garg & van der Rijst, 2019). The lack of face-to-

face contact can quickly impact the team's cohesion, which can cause a disconnect among colleagues (Simic, 2022). Hence some employees will experience professional isolation, which causes employees to lose confidence in their skills and experience, putting them at a disadvantage in their job performance.

2.10.2.3 Manager-employee relationship

Employees are responsible for driving innovation, creating goods, and shaping the consumer experience. Management teams understand that engaging with their employees is critical to the overall success of the organisation (Chopra, 2020). The WFH transition inevitably changed the regularity and quality of interactions between the managers and the employees. One of the common disadvantages of WFH between a manager and an employee is communication (Garg & van der Rijst, 2019).

Subsequently, working from home reduces face-to-face communication coupled with less feedback from managers, which harms the quality of the manager-staff relationship (Oliver, 2021). In this instance, managers may not timeously be aware of employee dissatisfaction.

2.10.2.4 Load shedding

The word load shedding originally entered the South African vernacular in 2007, when the country's primary electrical supplier stated that it would be unable to deliver power to the entire country simultaneously (Thompson, 2019). The electricity supplier indicated that it would establish a blackout schedule termed load shedding to save the whole electrical infrastructure from collapsing. According to a journalist Grootes (2019), in 1998, an Energy White Paper had already predicted that in 2007 the generation capacity surplus would be fully utilised, which was something that the electricity supplier was already aware of however, provision was not made for the foreseen circumstances. The energy supplier initially announced that the blackouts would only last five to seven years. However, to date South Africa is still experiencing blackouts. During that time, experts warned that the blackouts would affect the country's economy since some organisations would be significantly affected and unable to operate without electricity (Thompson, 2019).

Load shedding has such a significant impact on the business world, even during the pandemic, when people had to work from home, load shedding was an issue that affected employers and employees tremendously. In an article written by Moodley (2021), experts indicated that disruptions in the power supply affected those working from home's productivity levels. Other employees were able to make means by having generators or inverters, however, because of the entire area being down, this affects suppliers of Wi-Fi. During load shedding, many fibre users lose their access to the network. When the power is restored, too many users attempt to reconnect simultaneously, and this creates considerable delays because the network's control mechanisms become overburdened. It might take two to three hours for everyone to reconnect (Moodley, 2021). To date, this gap has made it very difficult for companies to handle daily operations.

2.11 Working from home and work-life balance

The balance between work and people's personal life is a recent quest many organisations are concerned about. Work life balance is defined as the capacity to balance work and personal life without experiencing a setback as a result of insufficient attention (Olanipekun et al., 2021). Whereas, OECD (2020), defines work-life balance as being able to balance family obligations, leisure, and work both a paid and unpaid effort. According to Wiradendi Wolor et al. (2021), work-life balance is supported by two concepts: accomplishment and happiness, and both are required. It has been shown that working from home has a positive impact on employees, such as improved work-life balance and fewer family disputes (Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020). Employees who can work from home can better manage work and personal commitments, which can lead to higher employee retention due to happier and more productive employees (Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2021). The transition toward more efficiently combining work and life is part of a cyclical tendency that precedes the Industrial Revolution. Home and work were not considered distinct geographical or conceptual components of life (Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2021).

According to Abdel Hadi et al. (2021), WFH is a blessing and a burden since it gives additional flexibility to deal with many (conflicting) demands in the work-home

interface. WFH has an impact on flexibility and workplace engagement since it allows employees to do their work at their own speed and does not require them to stick to office hours (Bina Bangsa et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2019). Homeworkers believe that working from home provides them with the freedom to manage their time efficiently, allowing one to reconcile the demands of their paid employment with the responsibilities of caring for others. It is said to provide people with greater freedom in balancing work and leisure (Sirgy & Lee, 2018) and it is linked to a higher level of family life satisfaction (Arntz et al., 2019). However, Palumbo (2020) discovered that working from home is adversely related to work-life-balance, with homeworkers being more prone to have work-life and life-to-work complications. Researchers found that work fatigue contributed to a reduction in work-life balance (Palumbo, 2020). Another study discovered that combining work and home environment issues, increased stress, which may reduce the benefits of WFH in comparison to work-life-balance (Beauregard et al., 2019). WFH was reassuring in terms of care because of the freedom to combine multiple jobs and family commitments, except that worktime was not segregated. While individuals who assigned a distinct location for work were able to better focus on work, the research results revealed a blurring of WLB (Gorjifard & Crawford, 2021). Some researchers identified two major issues: working longer hours for lesser compensation and an inability to shut off (Felstead & Henseke., 2017). Bouziri et al. (2020), confirms that overlapping borders between home and work time causes psychological danger.

Maintaining a strong work-life balance has far-reaching consequences for many outcomes, including excellent health and well-being, good social and personal relationships, and individual and organisational performance and productivity (Olanipekun et al.,2021). In other words, a healthy work-life balance benefits both the employee and the organisation. Perhaps the working balance will be seen post Covid-19 when working from home is no longer a forced obligation but a flexible option.

2.12 Post Covid-19 intent to shift to remote work

Since its existent, Covid-19 has shown to have a long-term influence on the future of work (McRae & Aykens, 2022). The increasing popularity of remote work is not a

passing trend, because of the extra freedom it provides, working remotely has become a mantra to the younger generation in recent years (Kong et al., 2022). Many businesses are considering making WFH a permanent option and are ready to enrol their employees in enterprise-wide collaboration platforms.

Findings by a survey that was conducted in January 2022 of full-time workers from Ergotron found that workers have become more acclimated to hybrid and remote office environments since the pandemic's inception, they said to be experiencing better physical and mental well-being (Robinson, 2022). As a result, many companies are considering a hybrid virtual approach that combines remote work with time spent in the office. Companies should pay any attention and look beyond today to create more progressive workplace practices that will help them prosper, according to the findings, executives must rethink their workplace culture to be more accepting of remote and hybrid work—as this is the new normal (Robinson, 2022). This cautious step will lead to significant productivity improvements, this is supported by Barrero, Bloom & Davis, (2021), who stated that they anticipated that greater WFH levels will increase productivity by 4,6% because WFH saves time on travel which accounts for more than half of this productivity boost.

However, while productivity has increased, many employees report feeling nervous and worn out (Alexander et al., 2021). It appears even though there is a quest for the new normal that encompasses the future of work and the role of the office, there seems to be an emerging concern about the mental health effects WFH can have on some employees (Ipsen et al., 2021). On the other end, individuals who work from home need flexibility for several reasons. WFH is a popular option for people who need to care for dependent children. Many parents believe that the expense of day care is prohibitively expensive, and that it may even consume your whole pay check, therefore working from home is another option that allows you to maintain their income while caring for the children (Cinelli, 2022). Still, many employees just want a better work-life balance and the convenience of working in a different location. During the pandemic questions like do we really need to be together, in an office to work our work? We received our response during the pandemic. We discovered that many of

us don't need to be located with colleagues on-site to complete our tasks. Individuals, teams, and whole workforces can all operate well while being completely distributed—and they have (Choudhury, 2020). Remote working is considered the way of the future in a post-pandemic era. In higher education, there has been a tremendous shift whereby institutions made sense of the impact of working from home. It has been a moment to be innovative, proactive, and to adapt for a post Covid-19 world (Wangenge-Ouma & Kupe, 2020).

Baker's (2021), research project involving 229 human resources (HR) departments showed that approximately 50% of the organisations had more than 80% of the employees working from home during the early stages of Covid-19; and predicted a substantial long-term increase in working from home after the pandemic (Kniffin et al., 2021). Facebook estimated that 50% of its employees might be working from home within five to ten years. It promises to modify compensation for employees who relocate to places with a lower cost of living (Dans, 2020). In addition, Google declared that employees whose jobs do not necessitate their presence at the Googleplex, its fictional headquarters, would be able to continue working from home as they wish. They would receive a certain amount for purchasing computers, additional monitors, cameras, and office furniture (Dans, 2020). According to Samantha-Jane Gravett, associate director at Robert Walters Africa, while the pandemic did not necessarily bring about completely new trends in working style, it undoubtedly accelerated the inevitability surrounding flexible working by as much as 5 to 10 years for many organisations (Smith, 2021).

In recent research, 74% of companies want to relocate staff to remote employment, and 48% of workers will likely work remotely at least as part of their post Covid-19 strategy (Baker, 2021; Butler, 2021). As a result, workers who have more experience working from home may be more responsive to tacit social structures like loyalty and organisational connectedness (Garg & van der Rijst, 2019). The recent trend in thinking regarding post Covid-19 prospects is that most organisations are looking into investing in employees to either work from home full-time or to have a flexible work schedule where they can either be at the office or home-based. Despite the challenges

remote work presents, Forbes thinks WFH will be the most significant legacy of the pandemic (Labeau, 2021).

2.13 Conclusion

Thus far, WFH was a vital tool for mitigating the economic consequences of social-distancing efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic (Gottlieb et al., 2020). Increased employee productivity and contentment are more than enough for some organisations to continue allowing work from home after the stay at home orders lessen (DeRamus, 2020). Covid-19 overwhelmed the world, challenged society in previously unknown ways, pushing individuals to reevaluate a wide range of habits, from work to pleasure to fundamental travel and everyday duties. Not only has this had an individual impact, but it has also had an economic impact on countries, putting a variety of economic sectors to a halt (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020).

While research has revealed that WFH has both advantages and disadvantages, it is crucial to highlight that these can have an impact on the well-being and performance of people. Proper training is essential if this technique (WFH) becomes a viable choice or the new standard. Perhaps the working balance will be seen after the pandemic when WFH is no longer a forced obligation but rather a flexible option. It is evident through research that has been conducted that remote work is here to stay.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on what the literature stipulates about WFH in general and how it affected different parts of the world and the higher education institutions. This chapter will outline the research design that was used to mainly respond to the aim and objectives in Chapter 1 of the study. The sampling strategy is presented in terms of the population of the study, the sample size of participants and the recruitment process of the participants. Since qualitative methods was used, the data collection comprehensively elaborates on how semi-structured interviews were conducted. The last part of Chapter 3 highlights the clear description of the ethical considerations. The starting point is to highlight the research design of the study.

3.2 Research design

A research plan assists the researcher in meeting the research objective(s) and responds to the study's research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). Research strategy is mainly a plan for accomplishing certain objectives or goals. Due to the nature of the topic, it was prudent to select the qualitative approach for this study. Qualitative research is interpretative in the sense that researchers must make sense of the subjective and socially created interpretations stated about the topic under study (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Naturalistic research is frequently used to describe this type of study because researchers must operate inside a natural environment, or research context, to develop confidence, involvement, access to meanings, and a detailed comprehension (Saunders et al., 2019). This approach was chosen with the participants' social environment in mind. The nature of the research was inductive since the researcher needed to first gather the data and then analyse the results to reveal the findings. The qualitative method was less regimented and there was a need to be more interested in the participant's point of view in this case.

The qualitative research design that was used is the phenomenological study. This method was selected because it enables research participants to add meaning to their

emotional and social intelligence experiences (Thompson, 2018). In a phenomenological study, one employs a variety of approaches, such as conducting interviews and reading documents, to better understand the meaning that participants place on whatever is being studied (Frechette et al., 2020; Greening, 2019). To get insight into the participants' motivations, the researcher relies on the participants' own opinions to validate the researcher's findings (Ortlieb, 2021). The study explored features of working from home while taking into account the objectives stated in Chapter 1 and the literature review in Chapter 2.

The focus of the research was on the selection of criteria for creating knowledge and information, as well as assessing the dependability of those criteria by utilising epistemological considerations. Epistemology relates to beliefs about knowledge, such as whether knowledge is acceptable, valid, and legitimate, and how data might be communicated to others (Saunders et al., 2019). The epistemological stance that was used is interpretivism, since this approach respects the difference between individuals and the objects of natural science, which is also concerned with the empathetic understanding of human behaviour (Bryman et al., 2014). This research design was appropriate to satisfy the aim and objectives of the study by answering the questions in Chapter 1.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

A sample is a subgroup or subset of a larger population chosen by utilising a pre-defined selection method. From this group, the sample is generally a specific group of individuals that one collects data from (McCombes, 2019). In other words, the sample is made up of some, but not all, of the population's constituents.

From the sample, the researcher seeks to and should be able to make findings that are generalisable to the population of interest by analysing the sample (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

3.3.1 Population

The population that was sampled for the qualitative method's effective implementation was represented by the support staff members at the QwaQwa campus, who were permanently employed by the institution. The University of the Free State has over 2 599 permanent staff members in 127 different departments at all campuses. The sample was drawn from only the QwaQwa campus' support staff. The academic staff was excluded from the sampling as they had been partially introduced to WFH before the pandemic. From the overall number of employees, the QwaQwa campus staff, in total, were a little above 500 permanent staff members; 200 of the staff members were support staff and 300 were academic staff. The population that the sample was taken from was the 200 permanent support staff members from different departments within the institution.

3.3.2 Sample size

The intended sample size was not defined because the study was qualitative. The researcher went through the data gathering process until data saturation was reached. The concept of saturation and pragmatic factors are most used to defend the qualitative sample. Schwab (2021) articulated a simple way to define this concept; when the collection of newer qualitative data no longer changes, or changes are minimal in terms of the coding or classification manual. The theoretical saturation of a category is the criterion for choosing when to stop sampling the numerous groups relevant to that category. When a researcher discovers comparable occurrences repeatedly, the researcher has empirical confidence that a category is saturated (Saunders et al., 2018).

Failure to achieve saturation has an influence on the quality of the research; the researcher needs to extend data variety as much as possible to ensure that saturation is based on the broadest possible range of data in the category (Saunders et al., 2018). This approach will be acceptable as Vasileiou et al. (2018) states that the sample size arguments in qualitative research are restricted and are not dependent on the number of interviews. Saturation is regarded as the cornerstone of accuracy in

establishing sample sizes in qualitative research, but there are no instructions on how to use it outside of grounded theory (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The final sample size was 42 permanent support staff whom were identified through the HR department of the institution. The researcher reached data saturation by the 15th participant.

3.3.3 Sampling methodology

In this study, purposive sampling was selected, for its subjective nature in the selection of participants who were most likely able to relate to the research questions. This kind of sampling strategy involved the identification of specific group(s) of people, who had critical knowledge that no one else had access to. The researcher needed to make sure there was enough variations, so that the sampled members differ from one another in terms of key characteristics (Bryman et al., 2014). Some qualitative research specialists ignore the question of 'how many interviews are enough', as there is some variation in what is indicated as a minimum and there is no simple solution to this issue. According to Vasileiou et al. (2018), the sample size is believed to be determined by a variety of philosophical, methodological, and practical considerations that suggest that the sample sizes be large enough to enable the development of a new and fully textured knowledge of the topic under research, but small enough to allow profound analysis of quality data. Therefore, the researcher purposefully selected employees from different faculties and position levels.

3.3.4 Participants

The participants were identified through the institution's Human Resources department. The researcher sent the HR Head an email explaining the need for a list of support staff for the purposes of a study, included in the email was the ethical clearance approval letter. The HR department responded positively to the request and ensured that the researcher understood how crucial it was to keep the support personnel information confidential. The researcher then sent an email to the Heads of Department (HODs) of all the departments to request permission to proceed with the interviews, thereafter the researcher sent invitations to support staff who had been working for the institution for over a year to participate in the study and had experience

in WFH. The participants that were invited were from different occupational levels within the support staff structure. The email invitation was sent to 42 support staff members and included in the email was the ethical clearance approval letter. Approximately, 20 participants responded positively and once the participants showed interest, the researcher sent the participants a detailed email with the interview guide (Appendix A) to allow them to prepare for the interview.

3.4 Data collection method

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a form of data collection that involves asking questions which systematically explore each theme with each participant. The questions, however, are not in any particular sequence or wording (Saunders et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data pertaining to the information stipulated in Chapter 2. The participant has more freedom in a semi-structured interview because there is a list of questions on very clear subjects, which is referred to as an interview guide (Bryman et al., 2021). For this reason, the interview method was a suitable choice to address the impact of working from home for the permanent support staff at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa campus. Also, semi-structured interviews advocate for the interviewer to probe into a response to elicit more details or to seek clarification.

The recruitment of the participants was a critical phase for the success of the research. Gatekeepers' permission was first obtained from the UFS before the researcher could approach the participants. It can be challenging to get access to some institutions in order to do research on their data, personnel, clients, or service users. As a result, a gatekeeper is essential. The role of a gatekeeper is defined by Singh & Wassenaar (2016), as someone who regulates entry to an institution or organisation, such as a school principal, managing director, or administrator. This was a process that was done systematically, on the Research Information Management System (RIMS). Once the researcher obtained permission from the Gatekeeper, the researcher approached the Head of Departments (HODs) in the different faculties/departments through a

formal email for permission to approach the faculty support staff, thus confirmation of interest in participating in the research could be directly communicated to participants. The researcher set dates and timeslots for each participant as per their preference and availability. The interviews were held virtually, using the video platform the participant felt most comfortable with. The interviews systematically explored each theme, where the participants had to answer pre-set, open-ended questions to explore the participants' viewpoints on their working from home experience (Jamshed, 2014).

The interviews were held individually, and each staff member was interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes, at a convenient time for the participants. The interviews did not all take place in one day, the timeslots and the day of the interview depended on the availability of each participant. The researcher conducted the interviews personally and they were recorded and transcribed. Additional typed notes during the interviews was taken to enable the researcher to firstly, keep track of crucial points to return to in the interview and to also flag important quotes to use during the data analysis. With the goal to produce data that can be analysed qualitatively, an interview guide (Appendix A) was prepared.

According to Bryman et al. (2021) the basic elements of the interview guide that were followed in this study are:

- A certain level of order is formed on the subject matter,
- Interview questions are written in a way that makes it easy to respond to them,
- Comprehensible and plain language (English) was used,
- The interview guide (Appendix A) avoids leading questions.

The confidential information of the participants was saved in a password-protected file on the researcher's laptop. Since the identity was anonymous, the responses were coded or given pseudonyms. The responses of the participants were only accessible to the researcher and the supervisor. The supervisor required access because they were assessing the researcher's study. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Once the data is not to

be used, the hardcopy notes will be shredded by the researcher, whereas the electronic data will be deleted from the researcher's laptop.

3.4.2 Data analysis

According to Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014), data analysis is the process of emerging meaning and knowledge from the numerous data sets that may be acquired throughout the research project as a foundation for future action and theory development. Whereas Calzon (2022) explains data analysis as an act of gathering, categorising, and interpreting data to acquire insights that can be utilised to make decisions. There are several methods and tactics for doing analysis depending on the industry and the goal of the study (Calzon, 2022). At the data analysis phase, the written and recorded material was utilised to examine each staff member's experience of WFH during the pandemic at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa. The theory on the research problem was researched in advance to gain a clear grasp of the information that needed to be gathered during the interviews. The research method used by the researcher to analyse the data was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an emergent and participatory process of interpreting a series of data, with a typical conclusion of some group structure (Brough, 2018). Even though the researcher had made notes during the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings on a Microsoft Word document to help assist with the data analysis and interpretation of the interview data. The data was analysed by the researcher in four stages, which will be discussed in detail. Firstly, the researcher read through the data from the beginning to the end. According to Vaismoradi et al., (2016) researchers reach an overall comprehension of data as well as the real problems in the phenomena under study by reading and rereading the transcripts. Secondly, quotes and phrases from the interviews that were important to the study were highlighted by the researcher, it was more of a colour coding on Microsoft Excel programme. In its most basic form, coding is the simple process of identifying meaning segments in your data and labeling them with a code. (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Thirdly, the researcher coded the texts based on their content. This allowed the researcher to classify common codes that displayed some type of relationship, allowing them to be encapsulated into

prospective themes. The coding process is a dynamic function, and its nonlinear directionality allows key themes to be identified, coded, and interpreted in the direction of a research study's emphasis, as well as contribute to the related literature (Williams & Moser, 2019). Finally, the researcher merged and refined the categories into themes, even going as far to assess if the themes were a suitable match with the assistance of the supervisor. Whilst there are various variances in the use of the terms "category" and "theme," meanings are expressed in terms of themes and their associated subdivisions as subthemes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In essence, the data analysis entailed probing and categorising the data in a way that the study's core primary and secondary objectives were fulfilled. The theory that was gathered predominantly consisted of data from accredited journal papers, newspaper articles, and many other sources that addressed the impact of WFH amongst their employees. The above-mentioned data analysis results, when integrated and compared with the literature study, resulted in a thorough final data evaluation.

3.5 Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness of qualitative research and the transparency with which the study is conducted are critical to the usefulness and integrity of the findings (Cope, 2014). Scholars define trustworthiness in a variety of ways. According to Schmidt & Brown (2017) trustworthiness is the quality, authenticity, and sincerity of qualitative research findings. It refers to the level of trust or confidence that readers have in the outcome. Whereas Polit & Beck (2014), define trustworthiness or rigour of a study as the degree of reliance in data, interpretation, and strategies utilised to assure the quality of a research. To date there is still a persistent concern with achieving rigour or reliability in qualitative research.

The two most important features of any research are reliability and validity. According to researchers, the rigour of qualitative research equals to the ideas of reliability and validity, which are all crucial components of quality (Tappen, 2021). Based on the information provided, one can establish that the main purpose of this procedure is to guarantee that the data is valid and that the techniques are reliable. Reliability is dependent on consistency and thoroughness in the application of research

techniques, as expressed in the transparency of research practices, analysis, and conclusions, as represented in an open account that is mindful of the bias and limitations of the study results (Cypress, 2017). On the other hand, the accuracy with which a technique measures what it is intended to measure is referred to as its validity. One sign that a measurement is legitimate is high reliability. If a technique is unreliable, it is most likely invalid (Middleton, 2019). The researcher ensured there is reliability of the study by recording the interview sessions, taking notes during the interviews and also transcribing the results accordingly for each participant.

Several qualitative researchers have concentrated on topics like credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, highlighting the differences that arise from expressing similar concepts differently (Rose & Johnson, 2020). These concepts initially originate from Lincoln & Guba 1985, hence the researcher decided to employ these strategies to increase the trustworthiness of the study's findings. By triangulating the data, the researcher reduced the risk of *credibility*. By integrating theory, methods, or observers in a research project, triangulation can assist guarantee that basic biases caused by the use of a single method or observation are addressed (Noble & Heale, 2019). Triangulation is an attempt to examine and describe complicated human behavior employing a number of ways in order to provide readers with a more balanced explanation. It is a data validation process that may be used in both quantitative and qualitative studies (Noble & Heale, 2019). To enhance *dependability*, the researcher created an electronic record that detailed how data was obtained, categories were created, and conclusions were made throughout the investigation. Dependability is also well known as consistency, it is frequently related with reliability and is evaluated through a constructivist viewpoint (Janis, 2022).

Forero et al. (2018) and Kennedy-Clark (2012) furthermore defined dependability as a work that, when repeated in the same setting with similar procedures and participants, same results will be produced. The researcher furthermore applied good rich, explanations of the participants (demographics) and the research process (sample strategy), to allow other readers to make *transferability* decisions. According to Korstjens & Moser (2018), transferability is concerned with the issue of

relevance and as a researcher, it is your mission to provide a "rich description" of the participants and the study method so that the reader may determine whether the results are applicable to their own situation. Lastly, the researcher sought to minimise biases through *confirmability* by outlining the process of data collection, data analysis and the interpretation of the data. The researcher went on to further review the literature for examples of the phenomena which was included in the data analysis and interpretation. According to Nassaji (2020), confirmability may be established by explaining the information and findings in such a way that others can confirm their accuracy. An audit trail is a valuable method in which the researcher documents and attempts to justify all processes undertaken and decisions made related data coding and analysis. These documents are then available for additional review and validation.

As per the detailed approach above, as the study advanced and specific data points were revealed, efforts were made to confirm each piece of data against at least one additional source (literature). Hence data triangulation was crucial to the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. Overall, the researcher's technique for establishing the trustworthiness of this study was primarily comparing the interviews and field notes, which was successful.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethics are norms or principles in research that governs study ideas and procedures. When gathering data from individuals, researchers must always follow a set of rules (Bhandari, 2021).

3.6.1 Risk-benefits analysis

When conducting this research, the goal was to increase the research's benefit while reducing the damage or danger to participants. In terms of this research, the one benefit that stood out was that it will benefit individuals in the future, not only at the UFS QwaQwa campus, but other institutions nationally and internationally, hence the risk-benefit analysis was so vital. Wood (2017) explains risk benefit analysis as a tool that compares risks and rewards of a scenario, to determine if the advantages exceed

the risks. In terms of this research, the risks compared to the benefits for the participants were minimal.

3.6.2 Permission obtained

Firstly, ethical clearance to commence with this research study was sought from the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC). The managers of support staff were requested to grant permission to interview their subordinates. The selected participants, prior to the study's commencement, were requested to sign consent forms after being given details of the intended research (verbally and written). The research participants' safety (physically and mentally) was always prioritised.

All the information in this study were stored in password-protected files on the researcher's computer. Identities, location, and information was kept private and confidential by using codes or pseudonyms for anonymity (Taylor et al., 2015). The following are the established ethical principles that relate to human research.

3.6.2.1 Respect for participants

As a researcher, one should treat the participants with dignity in all their encounters, by not criticising or discrediting them to ensure that their perspectives are honestly documented and taken into consideration during the evaluation process. Whatever the nature of the data gathering process, the respondents' self-esteem, and self-respect should never be abused (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

3.6.2.2 Informed consent

Informed consent was required for the participants to be fully knowledgeable about the research process. This entails details about the study's advantages, disadvantages, financing, and institutional permission (Bhandari, 2021). The researcher informed the participants in English of the, including the aims and consequences of the research project. The researcher ensured that each respondent had a clear understanding of the consent they signed.

3.6.2.3 Specific permission required for audio recording

According to Vanclay et al. (2013), if a researcher plans to record any participant during an interview, special permission must be obtained ahead of time (most countries' privacy regulations may make this a legal necessity). When signing the informed consent, there should be a clause included that clearly states that the researcher would like to record the interviews, and each participant was granted an option to either allow the recording to take place or not.

Participants that did not permit the researcher to record the interviews, since it was not mandatory to make an audio recording, the researcher took notes of the interview. At the end of the day while the discussions of the interview would still be fresh and in the researcher's mind, the researched would write the detailed notes to make the data more suitable.

3.6.2.4 No harm to participants

No harm must come to participants due to their participation in the intended research. Having an ethical basis against which to foresee challenges and risks and exercising choice to prevent conflict and damage is not harmful (Saunders et al., 2019). This implies that participants must not be subjected to any form of discomfort or risk. The researcher guaranteed the participants that no harm will be brought about due to the interviews. Even after the research has been published, the data will not be used to their disadvantage.

3.6.2.5 Confidentiality

When the researcher is provided with information in confidence, it must be kept confidential (Bryman et al., 2014). The researcher confirmed in the interview that the information obtained by the researcher was to be confidentially kept safe.

3.6.2.6 Voluntary participation and no coercion

This implies that all study volunteers are free to choose whether to participate without being pressured or coerced. All participants have the option to withdraw from or exit the research at any time without feeling obligated to do so (Bhandari, 2021). At the

start of the interviews, the participants were reminded that they form part of the research voluntarily so, if they wish to no longer participate it was permissible.

3.7 Limitations to the Study

Since the research focused on WFH at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa campus, it was based on the experiences of support staff members during the period when the world was under lockdown, and no one could completely move around in terms of travelling. As a result, the encounter occurred at an unusual time and under unique circumstances. Many of the staff members were affected badly by personal life situations and WFH. The participants' comments ranged from the start of the lockdown to the time the lockdown levels gradually decreased. Another limitation was that the data obtained was only from support staff and not academics or service workers, which might indicate the data cannot be interpreted to apply to all the employees working for the institution. The researcher had to interview the participants according to their availability, which required more time, and as a result, data collection took longer, this caused the study to be time consuming for the researcher. The last limitation is the smaller sample size, it can raise the question of generalisation to the entire study population.

3.8 Conclusion

To conduct the research a qualitative, non-experimental research methodology, employing semi-structured interviews as a data gathering method has been outlined; thus, the investigation was carried out to unpack the impact of working from home for employees at the UFS QwaQwa campus. Data was collected using virtual platforms conducted amongst the fifteen employees at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa campus. The Head of Departments (HODs) were involved in the distribution of the interview requests. The outcome of this research study will be analysed and presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The research design and methodology of this study were discussed in the previous chapter. The results of the study are presented based on the data the researcher collected until they reached data saturation. The participants were spread across several faculties and departments within the institution's operations. The sample consisted of support staff members from different operational levels, from top management, middle management, and operational staff. The researcher ceased conducting interviews after the 15th participant's interview since no new data was discovered, which meant that the data had reached saturation. Saturation refers to a stage in data collection when no additional information or insights are found, and data starts to repeat itself, indicating that a sufficient sample size has been achieved (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Data saturation is a vital sign that the sample is enough for the phenomenon being studied and that the data collected has recorded the diversity, depth, and complexities of the concerns under consideration, and exhibits content validity (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). In essence, reaching saturation is an integral part of a study to ensure that robust and valid data is acquired.

The primary and secondary research questions that guided this study are as follows:

- What is the impact of working from home on the support staff at the UFS QwaQwa campus?
- How does WFH impact employees psychologically, physically, financially, and mentally?
- What challenges are the support staff facing when working from home at the UFS QwaQwa campus?
- What kind of directives can be provided to navigate WFH with work-life balance at the UFS QwaQwa campus?

The data to follow will firstly be the analysis and interpretation of the biographical data of the participants. The five main themes discovered by the researcher will be accompanied by their subthemes. The first theme and the second theme will include the benefits and challenges the participants were faced with whilst WFH. The third theme will be a discussion on the productivity and conduciveness of WFH, in which the researcher attempted to determine how productive WFH was and if WFH was conducive or not for the participants. The fourth theme is findings on relationships, mental health, and work-life balance of the participants while WFH; and the last theme will outline the institutional support and policies that were in place throughout the WFH time. Considering the aforementioned themes, below is a summary of how each theme relates to the research questions presented in Chapter 1:

Theme 1 and 2 answered two research questions on: *“How does WFH impact employees psychologically, physically, financially and mentally?”* and *“What challenges are the support staff facing when working from home at the UFS QwaQwa campus?”* Theme 3 addressed the researcher question on *“What is the impact of working from home on the support staff at the UFS QwaQwa campus?”* Whereas theme 4 answered the research question that spoke on *“How does WFH impact employees psychologically, physically, financially, and mentally?”* and *“What kind of directives can be provided to navigate WFH with work-life balance at the UFS QwaQwa campus?”* Theme 5 which is the last theme addressed the research question that stated, *“What kind of directives can be provided to navigate WFH with work-life balance at the UFS QwaQwa campus?”*

All the themes mentioned above will be discussed in detail below.

4.2 Analysis and interpretation of biographical data

Table 2, below presents the biographical information, including age, gender, length of service, and occupational level, of the participants interviewed in this study.

Table 2: Biographical data of the selected participants from different departments.

Participant	Male/ Female	Age Group	Length of Service	Occupational Levels From Different Departments
Participant 1	Female	30-39	6-10 years	Middle Management
Participant 2	Male	60-69	11-15 years	Top Management
Participant 3	Female	40-49	1-5 years	Operational
Participant 4	Female	20-29	1-5 years	Operational
Participant 5	Female	50-59	15+years	Middle Management
Participant 6	Female	30-39	6-10 years	Operational
Participant 7	Female	50-59	1-5 years	Operational
Participant 8	Female	30-39	1-5 years	Top Management Operational
Participant 9	Male	30-39	1-5 years	Operational
Participant 10	Female	30-39	1-5 years	Operational
Participant 11	Female	30-39	6-10 years	Operational
Participant 12	Female	50-59	15+years	Operational
Participant 13	Male	30-39	6-10 years	Operational
Participant 14	Female	40-49	1-5 years	Operational
Participant 15	Male	30-39	1-5 years	Operational

From Table 2, it is evident that many participants were female, and this is reflected the whole support staff population at the QwaQwa campus, UFS. In terms of age, many of the participants were young and were in the age group of thirty to thirty-nine (30-39) years of age. Many of the participants had a one to five year level of service with the institution, mainly the younger workforce. Regarding the occupation of the participants, one could conclude that many of the participants worked at the operational level of the institution, and less were on a managerial level. The following paragraph analyses and interprets the findings of the study.

4.3 Theme: 1 Data analysis and interpretation of the benefits of WFH

In this context, the objective of the study was to find out what was enjoyable and pleasant about WFH to the participants, and what the different trials and tribulations were that they encountered, in the same light. This theme will be followed by a discussion on the productivity and conduciveness of WFH, in which the researcher attempted to determine how productive WFH was and if WFH was conducive or not for the respondents at large. The findings on relationships, mental health, and work-life balance of the participants while WFH will follow; and the last theme will outline the institutional support and policies in place during the WFH period.

4.3.1 Individual Staff Members Benefits of WFH

Many of the participants stipulated that it was enjoyable to some extent to work from home, and the benefits will be delineated in detail. Many respondents indicated that WFH came with the pleasure of not having to wake up early in the morning to prepare and travel to work, especially where participants use public transport or travel long hours to work. The participants went on to point out that no traveling was necessary when WFH; one participant was able to save a lot of money without the expenses of petrol or taxi/bus fares.

Participant 7 said: *“Since I travel by bus to work, I did not have to purchase the bus ticket anymore, which saved me money, and with that money, I was able even to purchase myself a washing machine which I had not been able to do for so long. I was also able to buy my children nice food, which I cannot do regularly.”*

Furthermore, the participants indicated that the flexibility in how one would structure the day allowed the participants to accomplish all tasks for the day. The participants found that with WFH, there were fewer distractions than at the office, where at any given time, various stakeholders (students, colleagues, etc.) can easily do walk-ins to enquire rather than calling or sending an email.

Participant 10 said: *“I was able to plan my day and finish all the tasks I had intended to complete on that day, and there would be no disturbance of walk-ins to do queries in my office as the people now used emails or calls to enquire.”*

Participants also stated that because students needed to interact more via email when making queries or even prepare for the university academic registration period which took place online, they became more conscious of detailed components of their studies.

Participant 10 said: *“Moving from manual registration and doing it online has assisted our students to be more aware of the modules they are doing, and they now read the academic rule books as it is their responsibility to ensure they know what they should register for. I am glad that WFH has helped our students understand what the curriculum is all about instead of just coming to the office to enquire about everything and anything without reading.”*

Participants also pointed out that WFH offered them an opportunity to learn new skills. Mainly they mentioned that it assisted in enhancing their soft skills in terms of the different Microsoft Programmes in place, for instance being able to sign documents electronically, compress big files, use other Outlook functions, and set up meetings virtually through Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Skype for Business.

Participant 1, with great excitement, said: *“We thought we knew how good our systems in place work until we realised how extensive the systems are.”*

Participant 12 went on to say, *“We knew about all these programs and even had them on our laptops, your Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams; however, we did not know how to utilise them efficiently until we had to work from home and stay connected to the rest of the world. I must add that my technological skills improved because of WFH.”*

Lastly, the majority, if not all the participants, indicated that the cherry on top of WFH was being able to spend more time with family.

Participant 14 said: *“I enjoyed spending time with my children and husband; it was a good time to bond and catch up on ‘lost time’.”*

Participant 7 also shared the same sentiments by indicating, *“It was nice spending time with my family, especially because I barely see my children except when it is*

weekends. Since I travel from far to work when coming to the office on a full-time base, I leave the house very early in the morning and come back very late, hence I do not get to spend time with my children.”

4.3.2 Benefits for the Institution with WFH

On the institution’s side, participants indicated that WFH has allowed the institution to advance technologically. Many of the processes performed by staff have been enhanced to be more effective and efficient. Participants also mentioned that the institution no longer needs to purchase paper, as many functions have gone online. The need for big storage facilities has become a thing of the past since everything is now stored online. Not purchasing printing materials (paper and cartridges) will decrease the university’s expenses.

In line with this, **Participant 6** stated, *“Moving from the manual way of doing things to doing it systematically shows that the institution is slowly but surely moving into the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), and WFH has accelerated this notion. We have now gone paperless, and this has lessened the queues at our offices of students trying to request applications or forms and submitting them at our offices. In the same breath, we do not have to be filing all these documents the students would submit, now they are completed, submitted, and saved online, which makes them easily accessible.”*

The participants were applauding at how creative and innovative they have become since they started WFH to find better ways to work more efficiently.

Participant 9 said: *“With the new way of working, we can get more work done quicker, and not only that, given that we no longer have to print lots and lots of documents, that has saved a lot of time.”*

4.3.3 Interpretation

In Chapter 2, it was mentioned that WFH comes with the most significant benefit of no longer having to worry about commuting to work, which saves both time and money Simic (2022). This is evident in the results since most of the participants have expressed that it was genuinely beneficial not having to travel to work as it saved a lot

of money and time. The literature review in chapter 2 revealed that WFH allows employees greater time flexibility, making them feel more autonomous since they have more control over their own time. It further said that employees could start and finish their days whenever they choose, if their tasks are performed, and the results are favorable (Aczel et al.; & Courtney, 2021). The literature outlined above contains the same components disclosed in the findings, which revealed that WFH allowed the participants to arrange their time in a more effective fashion that works for them. They also claimed that activities were completed on time owing to the flexibility of managing their time more sparingly than when they were at the office.

Several of the participants valued the notion of spending time with family while WFH, according to the researcher. In the literature review, in an article by Cutter (2021), Mark Zuckerberg had similar feelings to those expressed in a note to his team, claiming that WFH helped him by allowing him to spend more time with family, which made him happier and more productive at work.

4.4 Theme 2: Data analysis and interpretation of challenges of WFH

On the one hand, the participants also experienced challenges while WFH, which will be discussed next. Many participants said that it was challenging to WFH due to the issues of electricity outages in the municipality area the institution is based in. This electricity outage is over and beyond the nationwide load-shedding, called load reduction, which is controlled by the municipality in the area. The participants said that power failures impacted regular working hours. Work would have to be done after hours, which disrupted the participants' sleeping patterns.

“I found myself knocking off late at night; this messed up my sleeping patterns.”
(Participant 5).

Also, the participants indicated that the electricity outage would cause the teams to regularly reschedule meetings and training sessions to best suit all employees when there would be electricity.

Participant 1 mentioned, *“Due to the load shedding issues, we regularly had to reschedule training because other people would not be able to attend. That made the attendance at these sessions very low, and we would have to repeat the same thing.”*

The participants indicated that WFH, to some extent, led to one being overworked to avoid being labelled noncooperative employees, because WFH was a new thing.

Participant 8 stated, *“I found myself overworking and not getting enough sleep.”*

The participants stated that many come from rural areas, and the disturbance rate in those areas is a real issue.

Participant 13, not in so many words, said, *“Because of our environment, people would just make noise in the streets or at times just knock at the door as they would see my car parked outside.”*

Participants further indicated that the kids did not understand that work was being done from home and would disturb during meetings or at any given time.

Participant 5, bursting out in laughter, said: *“My biggest challenge was that my kids would not understand that I am working. To them, it would not make sense as to how it is that I am working, but I am at home. I remember how they would disturb me during meetings and would also want to see what was happening in the meetings.”*

Below is a discussion of the interpretation of the above results.

4.4.1 Interpretation

Even though the participants indicated that they valued the notion of spending time with family, it was noted that WFH came with the implications of the children pestering the parents during working hours since they did not grasp the WFH concept. Kids are accustomed to their parents staying at home and devoting all their time to them rather than spending it in front of a work screen or laptop hence the confusion. This proved to be one of the reasons why the participants would need to work late at night when there would be no interruptions. The load reduction was another issue that seemed to really cripple the participants. As mentioned, it only affected the municipal area where

the campus is based in. The power outages seemed to affect connectivity; hence, the participants would have to postpone their virtual meetings, or they must work late at night when the electricity is back. The connectivity subject was also pointed out in the literature review (Chapter 2). Many fibre users lose their access to the network during load shedding because when the power is restored, too many users attempt to reconnect at the same time. This creates considerable delays because the network's control mechanisms become overburdened, and it can take two to three hours for everyone to reconnect (Moodley, 2021). The above two issues go back to the sleeping patterns of the participants, the participants were not only affected by distractions because of the kids, however the power outages experienced by the participants were also a great distraction. Unfortunately, as the literature in Chapter 2 states, employees in rural regions face more constraints while working from home than those in urban areas (Haider et al., 2020).

4.5 Theme 3: WFH productivity and conduciveness

The focus of this topic was to gain better knowledge of the productivity levels of the participants and whether their living environment was conducive. Many participants acknowledged that the home workstations were inadequate since there was no office space/study room equipped with the essential office equipment. Many of the participants indicated that their workspace would be at the dining table, on the kitchen counter, and sometimes on the couch or the bed. Most participants indicated that not having the office space made working from home unproductive.

Participant 2 described, *“I have a small house, it is a three-bedroom house, and it is an open plan. Totally not conducive for working, I would have to sit at the dining room table. With the family there, I sometimes got irritable and would have to move around when they were busy at the dining table. Unfortunately, you cannot even chase them away. When cleaning, they would not be allowed to use the Hoover. I do not have space to make a study room because of the size of my house.”*

Participant 5 expressed the same sentiments by saying, *“I did not have a conducive workspace whatsoever, as I was working in my own house as little as it is, I had to*

share spaces with the rest of the family. Or sometimes, I would work in my bedroom or at the dining room table. So, for me, the main issue was the type of house I had and the space. WFH came with sacrifices.”

Furthermore, the participants also mentioned that one of the reasons for not having a conducive workspace was the inappropriate office furniture that caused the participants to experience bodily discomfort.

Participant 3 described the office furniture issues by saying, *“Because of having to work from my children’s study table and chair or other areas within our home, I would sometimes find myself suffering from back aches.”*

A few participants stated that having an office or study area made their workspace more conducive and the environment in which the participants reside was friendly with no noises around.

Participant 6 said, *“I had a conducive workspace, fortunately, at my house, I have an office. So, I would be able to go into the office, especially during busy times, I would go there to get away from the kids in the house. When there was not much work, I would work in the house then.”*

One participant (**Participant 13**) said, *“For me, my workspace was conducive. I have an office at home, and I live in an environment whereby it is quiet therefore, it was nice because of the neighborhood I stay in.”*

In terms of productivity, many of the participants indicated that WFH enhanced their productivity levels because they were able to manage time more efficiently.

Participant 2 stated, *“My productivity levels were quite good, especially when I started getting the hang of this WFH era, I was able to manage my time much better.”*

Many participants found that working in the comfort of their homes, despite the office equipment issues, makes them more productive in terms of work delivery.

“I was more productive at home. Being in a comfortable space, the comfortable clothes made it more comforting. WFH came with so much peace.” These were the words of **Participant 3**.

When the researcher raised the question about productivity while WFH, **Participant 12** said, *“I must tell you this, my home was the coolest office I had, and I was very productive while WFH because I would be able to do everything as I had planned out accordingly.”*

The participants also stated that WFH did not imply being limited to merely working from one's home but that one could travel anywhere and still work and deliver results as if they were in the office.

“What was also nice was that I could travel and work from different places, which was refreshing to the mind and led to being more productive. The most important thing about working from home is ensuring you submit your work on time. I think what matters the most is getting my work done. I really enjoyed not being confined to my desk and the office space and being able to sometimes go work at the coffee shop or book shop.” (**Participant 4**).

4.5.1 Interpretation

The findings state that most participants did not have a conducive workspace, with only a few participants saying their workspace was conducive. Looking at the participants responses, it is evident that one of the main reasons the participants found their homes to be not conducive was due to the lack of a dedicated workspace, with the secondary issue not having the appropriate office furniture. The literature in Chapter 2 suggests that it is important for a person to have a dedicated workstation at home, which assists in setting the tone (Simic, 2022). This links back to the very thing the participants pointed out to say that there was no office space. This also aligns with a paragraph in Chapter 2, which says the workstation is not the only important thing in setting the tone but rather the ergonomic adjustments to ensure comfortability. This then speaks to the bodily aches caused by not having the right office furniture. This shows that comfortability is of great importance to the employee even when WFH.

Nevertheless, it seemingly showed, by the data findings, that it did not halt the participants from being productive, as many indicated that WFH was the best medicine for being more productive.

In accordance with the literature in Chapter 2, a poll conducted by Boston University showed that support personnel and academics are more productive working remotely (Lederman, 2022). Therefore, the world crisis that pushed institutions to work remotely has significantly altered perceptions of where and how individuals work best. As much as many organisations reported work-efficiency gains from WFH, they also show that there are certain drawbacks to this system.

In terms of conduciveness, the researcher found that many of the participants linked conduciveness to the conditions in the participant's household, the type of furniture, and the environment where the participants stayed. The participants that found their WFH situation to be conducive, have a study room or an office space in their home, which allowed them to be in an office set up. Given that the participants live in different areas, the ones that stayed in an environment whereby it was nice and quiet with no disturbances from the streets and neighbours mentioned that was the main reason it was conducive. This clearly shows that the conduciveness of WFH depends on the environment, workspace, and the type of equipment available to work with.

The participants were not only more productive in conducive WFH situations, but there was also an indication that working from different places also brought about the element of being productive. The finding also alludes to the literature mentioned in chapter 2, whereby in a report, it has been discovered that people are indeed productive working in public places. Lufkin (2021) further confirmed that places like coffee shops stimulate creativity. It seems like settings like these, with all the commotion, crowds, and visual diversity, appear to give the exact amount of distraction to help individuals be most creative.

4.6 Theme 4: Relationships, mental health & work-life-balance due to WFH

This theme seeks to unpack findings on relationships, mental health, and the work-life balance of the participants. As stipulated in Chapter 1, the researcher aimed to

determine how WFH affected the employees psychologically, physically, mentally, and financially. In terms of relationships, many participants pointed out that, when WFH, the relationship with the family and fellow colleagues was strengthened for various reasons. At the same time, a minority of the participants indicated that relationships were negatively affected to a certain level. Due to the distance, many participants indicated that their relationships were great with colleagues, and the main reason was that communication was improved.

One participant (**Participant 4**) expressed the above findings: *“Relationships with colleagues were good, I must say. The department had a motto: you should ask if you don’t know. We used to check in on each other to find out how we were regularly doing. So, it was good, we did not have issues, we had a nice working relationship.”*

Participant 11 shared the same sentiments: *“Relationships were refined because we would communicate more often than ever, they were truly reinforced. Communication with colleagues improved more than usual. Boundaries were broken down.”*

And then many participants indicated that the relationships were positively affected with the immediate family as they would spend more time together. In essence, the participants emphasized that WFH made them grow closer to one another as a family and even got to see the children growing up and experience each milestone with them. Some participants disclosed that relations with friends improved, as they would see one another more often.

This reflects what **Participant 12** said: *“At home, communication improved. Usually, when I go to the office, I come back late and get home very tired, whereas when we were WFH, since I was always at home, we had time for one another, and we would talk about everything and anything. It really brought the family together more, and we communicated a lot more during that time.”*

Participant 6 indicated, *“Relations with my family were positive because every day was family time. My little girl was still very small, I was able to see her through the different stages’ of growing up, and I was even able to potty train her myself, it made me a proud mom.”*

The participants had a lot to say about mental health, given the period the staff had to work from home. Many of the participants indicated that when thinking back, they realized that WFH came with a lot of ups and downs, and emotions were on top of the list. The participants used several words to express which emotions they experienced. Many participants said they were overwhelmed, anxious, scared, frustrated, fatigued, traumatised, and even felt lonely and had great uncertainty. There were many reasons why the emotions mentioned above were experienced. For one, most participants stated that there was a lot of self-doubt and wondering if WFH is something they could overcome.

Participant 1 shared how it felt by saying: *“When we started working from home, I was scared, not knowing whether I would be able to perform my duties accordingly. This was one of the biggest factors that affected my mental sanity.”*

Other participants indicated that one of their biggest contributions to their mental health issues was not knowing how to efficiently use the new programmes that were set up to enable the employees to WFH.

Participant 5 said: *“These new technologies affected me psychologically, and to some extent, my self-esteem was also affected as I would feel very stupid when we had meetings, as at many instances I would struggle to log in. I made sure I logged in 30 minutes before meetings thus I may not embarrass myself. This really affected me emotionally as you would find that some people would not understand that because of age, some of us struggle if we have to figure things out without guidance.”*

Ultimately, the participants admitted that at a later stage, the different emotions subsided, and they were able to deal with the emotions much better.

Participant 3 confirmed this by saying: *“At some point, I was very frustrated since working from home was not something we have ever been exposed to. Yes, the work pressures were there. However, I reminded myself of one mantra I live by, if you do not have control over something, do not even try to change it because that is what frustrates us.”*

The participants shared that even though their mental health was negatively affected, it took some form of routine to get back on track and balance out. Most of the participants indicated that the work-life balance was not balanced. The participants specified that the common denominator was working long hours, which they realised was not healthy whatsoever. The participants would find that they get overworked.

Participant 1 stated, *“I did not have a good work-life balance because most of my time was spent on work. Working longer hours meant spending more time at work and not looking at other personal life matters. Sometimes I would work from 8 am to 4:30 pm (the normal working hours). Then I would run errands, return from town, and jump straight behind my work laptop. It had started being a norm I could not snap out of.”*

Participant 4 reiterated the same sentiments: *“There was no balance between my work and personal life in all honesty because I would find myself working late at night. I spent a lot of time working. I feel like there was more pressure to submit our reports on time because I was not working from the office, I was overworked.”*

4.6.1 Interpretation

Relationships play a vital role in people’s lives. Relationships formed with those around us are vital for our mental health, emotional well-being, and even survival. Humans have an innate need to connect with and develop connections with other people. According to the literature in Chapter 2, it was noted that WFH changes the regularity and quality of interaction between managers and employees (Chopra, 2020). One of the disadvantages mentioned was communication; the literature stated that WFH diminishes face-to-face communication and causes minimal feedback from supervisors, both of which affect the quality of the manager-staff relationship (Oliver, 2021). With the above findings, the participants suggested that relationships with colleagues and managers were refined, and the communication was even better than at the office. This illustration confirms that it is not always the face-to-face interactions that enable people to get along, it is a matter of commitment and understanding one another that counts the most. There are many ways to stay connected, all that is needed is good communication skills.

On the other hand, the researcher found that many participants enjoyed having family time. It alluded to the researcher that balancing family time and work time could be the future the world is looking into, for people to stay more positive. As stated above, relationships are good for a person's well-being; Mark Zuckerberg mentioned that being with family while WFH made him happy.

In terms of mental health, the findings show that, even though the participants went through different emotions, the participants were able to overcome those feelings in various ways by seeking help and being with family to ease the destructive emotions. In Chapter 2, the literature stated that even though research has found that there is significant productivity in WFH situations, and productivity increased, however it was reported that many of them felt nervous and worn out (Alexander et al., 2021). And this was one of the statements the participants mentioned when they spoke about the emotions that came with WFH. Literature furthermore said that even though there is a quest for the new normal that encompasses the future of work and the role of the office, there appears to be a rising concern about the mental health consequences WFH can have on some employees (Ipsen et al., 2021).

The findings also displayed how at times, people find it hard to adapt quickly. The participants struggled to maintain equal focus between their careers and the demands of their personal lives. The imbalance seemed to cause burnout and fatigue among the participants. This contradicts the literature review in Chapter 2 that stated that working from home has been demonstrated in studies to benefit employees in ways such as greater work-life balance and fewer family conflicts (Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

4.7 Theme 5: Data analysis addressing institutional support and policies

The findings and interpretation of the institutional support and policies provided to employees while working from home, is discussed below.

The participants shared that when the institution officially announced that staff would be WFH, there was no clarity on how the institution will support the staff in terms of all the necessary devices, systems, and data needed for WFH. In the process, many participants indicated that there was very little support. At first, the participants had to

purchase their own data to stay connected and the institution would reimburse them, however, at a limited amount. The participants said the institution then went on to introduce vouchers for various mobile networks and Global protect, which enabled the participants to stay connected.

Participant 13 cited, *“I would say there was very little support. When WFH was introduced, given the pandemic that was in play, the institution was not ready because we had to use our data to stay connected at that stage. At a later stage, vouchers came along, and then the Global Protect was introduced, but it was after a long time.”*

The participants stated that the institution also aided with laptops. At the same time, other participants indicated that they were fortunate that the departmental management allowed the staff to take additional equipment home, from printers to paper and cartridges.

“My department supported us because we would buy data and get reimbursed thereafter. At a later stage, Global protect was provided to substitute for data purchases. They even permitted us to take our printers and scanners from our offices. They also provided us with paper and cartridges.” said **Participant 9**.

Another participant cited that *“They (management) were very supportive, all the equipment I needed to work from home with was delivered to my house without me having to go fetch the equipment at the office. And all the resources were provided”* (**Participant 15**).

Other participants indicated that no support was offered until later when they could no longer perform their duties due to insufficient data.

Participant 3 indicated that, *“There was not much support, the support received was only the tools of trade. The only time we were provided with assistance was when there were complaints about not being reachable, whereas we were not provided with data to stay connected, we had to utilise our own, which was not cost-effective.”*

Other support mechanisms the participants highly spoke about was the encouragement from managers through weekly meetings and wellness programmes presented by the Human Resources department.

Participant 2 said, *“The institution did provide us with virtual wellness programmes, I made sure I attended every session, especially when I was not busy. Truly speaking, those sessions helped me a lot.”*

The participants went on to indicate that the institution could do more to support the staff extensively, especially if the institution is planning to reinstate the policy of WFH. The participants indicated that since the institution is based in a rural area, the challenges the employees are faced with are more delicate than its co-campus. Many participants stated that more wellness programmes should be done based on the unique challenges within the campus scope. The participants further noted that there is a great need to refine the employees’ soft skills, and this was one support mechanism needed by many.

Participant 8 went on to reiterate the findings above by saying: *“One thing that should be taken into consideration is that given the environment the institution is based in, employees on the QwaQwa campus do not experience work the same way as its other campuses do, therefore when looking into the support granted to employees, the challenges the group is faced with will differ from that the challenges faced by their colleagues in other campuses. There should therefore be a platform for support staff to raise their issues. Also, the wellness programmes should be more linked to our specific work environment.”*

On the other hand, **Participant 5**, in short, just stated: *“Soft skills training is vital, as it stands, it is assumed that everyone knows how to work around the different programmes that were introduced to us while WFH and that is not the case.”*

The participants indicated that it is not that the institution was not supportive but rather that they would love for the institution to do better for its employees.

In 2022, the institution introduced the HR Flexible Work Arrangement Policy, which was implemented as a pilot policy for four months. Once the period had run its course,

the policy was taken down to be reviewed and refined further. The participants had a lot to say about the policy and even voiced what would be more sensible to have in the policy in the future. The first thing many participants mentioned was that the policy had a very complicated application process, making it very difficult to apply for WFH.

Participant 1 cited, *“The HR Flexible Work Arrangement application process is very long and requires a lot of supporting documentation. I agree with the idea of applying for this arrangement, however, the application should be simplified because, after all, the managers in the different departments know how their subordinates operate, and they will know whether WFH will work or not for each employee. The application process should not be structured so that you do not feel like applying, and rather you find that you would rather come to the office. And I must say being at the office does not necessarily mean people are working.”*

The participants also stated that given the WFH notion, there is a significant need to utilise smartphones to perform work due to the use of Whatsapp Groups for the employees to have instant access to institutional information. It was also used to connect to the university systems through VPNs and DUO Mobile. The participants indicated that the policy also needed to investigate the use of personal phones and should consider purchasing company phones for work-related issues. The participants indicated that in this way, there would be better control and employees would not be expected to purchase a smartphone to work on, whereas there was no provision like cell phone allowance, etc.

Participant 13 said: *“The policies should be in line with technology advancements in place. They should be in alignment with the new developments.”*

Finally, the participants underlined that while the policy is being reinterpreted, environmental differences should be considered. Many participants claimed that the approach in place was mainly centered on the status of its urban campuses.

Participant 8 said: *“The policymakers should take their time to thoroughly analyse the pros and cons of the WFH policy, especially the fact that the environment the campuses are based on are not the same.”*

Then **Participant 11** said, *“In connection with the policy as it stands, I would say that the institution should not use a blanket approach across all campuses.”*

As the researcher ended the interviews, the question popped up as to whether the participants would prefer to WFH or at the office. Many of the participants stated that a hybrid approach would work best. Many stated that WFH full-time would not work due to collegiality and others indicated that working from the office full-time also does not make sense when looking into the evolving dynamics of the future.

One participant (**Participant 2**) stated, *“Technology helps us do things more efficiently. If people can work from home and still be productive, that says a lot. So, we must make sure we measure productivity by objectives that people are meeting their objectives. WFH is the future of work. The world of work is no longer dependent on physical mobility only.”*

Participant 8 also said, *“Hybrid work would be better. I’ve experienced both and had the best of both worlds. Staying in one environment for me would not work, one needs to get in contact with people to some extent.”*

4.7.1 Interpretation

In accordance with the findings above, the participants agreed that the institution provided some necessary devices to enable employees to WFH. However, it was found that the participants were not all supported equally, but it was in accordance with the department in which they were based. In Chapter 2, it has been noted that in higher education institutions, it has become unavoidable not to have access to devices, as that is the nature of the world today. The literature further stated that digital literacy, infrastructure, and systems are much needed to have an effective WFH experience (Armstrong et al., 2021). As per the above findings, the participants indicated that there was a need to be trained on how to use the programs that are installed on their devices to assist in working from home better.

The participants were concerned with more than just having the required office equipment and training. The participants seemed to have a stronger need for the emotional support to be enhanced so that the assistance was more focused on the

demands of the participants' specific surroundings. The researcher found that this emotional support mentioned above was very much like the context covered in the mental health theme that was discussed in Paragraph 4.6. It is critical for the institution to guarantee that personnel can cope with their circumstances to deliver work adequately. According to the literature in Chapter 2, WFH can influence people's well-being and performance to some level; thus, it is critical to prevent frustrating employees by not offering all the essential assistance.

The participants were not only concerned about having all the correct equipment to efficiently deliver work, but showed a sense of a need to belong, not only workwise but to receive support at all levels of life. All this is a clear indication that to have a healthy team in the organisation, the institution needs to ensure that the needs of the staff members are met psychologically, mentally, and physically thus, the employees may deliver great services.

According to the findings, the participants would prefer the HR Flexible Work Arrangement to be more liberal in terms of the application process. This is closely related to what the literature mentioned in Chapter 2 by asserting that policies are necessary for the smooth operation of any business. Nevertheless, when guidelines are being produced, they should be designed in such a way that they are practical rather than merely nice on paper. This appears to be supported by how the participants responded to the policy. In Chapter 2, there was mention of a secure network that stated that using mobile devices for work allows hackers to obtain access to critical company information (Simic, 2022). The fact that the participants utilise personal mobile devices for work-related matters is a big risk to the institution's sensitive information in the long run. The researcher agrees with the participants that the institution should investigate providing its employees with company phones to combat the risk of the institution's data being exposed on participants' phones.

The participants also touched on the policy being linked to the area the campus is based in, which is true as Haider et al. (2020) indicated that employees in rural locations have more geographical limits when working from home than those in metropolitan areas. The researcher suggests that the policymakers should ensure the

policy that will be put into place in the future, should consider the institution's environment. The main findings of the data obtained above is discussed below.

4.8 Conclusion

The study results show that the participants seemed to be highly impressed with the different dynamics WFH had to offer. The participants admitted that as much as WFH has positives, there were also negatives encountered along the way. And to some extent, some of the benefits of WFH also seemed to work against the participants. The participants were faced with quite a few issues that were more related to the environment in general.

Regarding productivity, most of the participants indicated that they were very much productive when WFH. The one contradiction presented was that the majority said that the workspace was not conducive. Nonetheless, the researcher gathered that even though most of the participants indicated that the workspace was not conducive, it did not stop them from being productive, as some went to the extent of saying, working from anywhere (coffee shop, etc.) made them more productive. However, in the long run, not having a conducive workspace negatively affects the participant's physical well-being.

The following three elements are interconnected: relationships, mental health, and work-life-balance. If any person has positive relations with family, friends, and colleagues, this contributes positively to one's mental health and vice versa. Also, if one's personal life and career do not balance, it easily affects one's mental state. The findings in this regard showed that the participants struggled to some extent, with work-life balance, and these were issues that affected the participants. The participants mostly admitted that they found themselves overworking because they do not want to be labelled as incompetent. This mentality was brought about due to the distrust of employees from the managers.

The results show that the employees have a variety of feelings about the institutional support and the policies in place. The participants seemed to be a bit uneasy with the

support received during the WFH period. Therefore, they put forth that the institution could better support the employees when WFH.

The participants felt that there is a need for the employees to be trained to better utilise the systems put in place to optimally work from home. Furthermore, the participants stated that the policy is essential and acknowledged it as the best way to manage the WFH era. However, the participants wish to have a more well-defined and straightforward policy that is not complicated.

The next chapter focuses on the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher concludes and provides recommendations based on the results presented above. The chapter summarises the conclusions of Chapter 1 to Chapter 4. The recommendations of the impact of working from home for QwaQwa support staff is then discussed. This will be followed by the study's limitations, whereby the researcher outlines any restrictions experienced during the study period. The chapter will end with a general overview of the research and how this study will impact the institution and other institutions at large should the recommendation be considered for implementation.

5.2 Conclusions

In Chapter 1, the study set out to investigate the impact of working from home for support staff at the QwaQwa campus, UFS. The secondary objectives are to determine how working from home affected employees psychologically, physically, financially, and mentally. Also, the researcher aimed to analyse the challenges that support staff faced while working from home at the UFS, QwaQwa campus. The last objective was to provide directive into navigating WFH with the work-life balance at the UFS QwaQwa campus.

Chapter 2's literature review provided the researcher with a comprehensive overview of WFH. The research explored the history of WFH as well as how working from home is handled in under-developed and developed countries. The researcher, moreover, observed WFH in higher educational institutions and the impact it has on productivity in general. Additionally, research was undertaken to determine the necessity of organisations in establishing a safe workplace for employees working from home and ensuring that correct WFH policies are in place to guide employees in that respect. Furthermore, the researcher sought literature on the benefits and challenges of WFH and how employees balance work and life while WFH. Lastly, the researcher examined the intent of the organisation to move to remote working for good.

In Chapter 3, the researcher gave an outline of the research methods followed in conducting this study. The chapter allowed the researcher to critically perceive the study's validity and reliability. A clear description of the research design was provided, followed by the sampling, which consisted of the population of the staff at the institution, the sample size, and the sampling methods followed. The researcher stated the data collection methods to be followed, which was a qualitative study and semi-structured interviews that were conducted virtually. The researcher further specified the ethical considerations; the critical ethical principles that would be applied to protect the participants who formed part of the study. Lastly, the researcher sought ethical clearance before commencing with the study, which was successfully obtained.

In Chapter 4, the researcher discovered how the employees were affected by the WFH experience through the interviews. It was discovered that the participants enjoyed working from home due to various reasons including not having to wake up early in the morning to prepare for work, not having to travel to work as some participants indicated staying far from the workplace and having to travel for an hour to come to work and to return home. The participants stated that they saved money because they didn't travel to work, and the money could be utilised for other expenses in the household. The study also revealed that the participants enjoyed spending time with family and working in a comfortable space that is their own homes. Additionally, WFH enabled the employees to be more creative and innovative; consequently, the participants were also able to do work quicker than usual since the technological or soft skills of the participants were enhanced.

Nonetheless, the benefits came with challenges. For one, the participants enjoyed spending time with their family; however, it brought about the challenge that there would be disruptions from the kids. Working from home seemed like a perfect situation for some parents, but in other cases, it led to personnel being burned out. Employees were also faced with the national difficulty of load shedding, load reduction, and connectivity issues, which resulted in employees being unable to fulfil responsibilities during normal working hours and having to work after hours to make up for lost time.

Furthermore, the study revealed that specific trends, like electricity issues and long working hours, affected sleeping patterns of the participants.

In relation to productivity and conduciveness, the findings revealed that many of the participants did not have a conducive workspace; nevertheless, the participants stated that they could be productive. The main reasons for being productive were that they were able to manage time more effectively, and there were fewer distractions at home compared to the office, which enabled the participants to finish all tasks as planned. The participants confirmed that not being confined to one place (e.g., the office) allowed them to be more productive as one could be at a coffee shop and still work.

In terms of relationships, mental health issues, and work-life balance; relationships were found to play a vital role in the participants' well-being in general. Many of the participants indicated that they experienced depression, mainly because of the worldwide uncertainty during that time. Also, the participants mentioned that, at first, working from home had created a lot of frustrations, and they were generally overwhelmed as they did not know whether they would be able to cope or not. The participants struggled to maintain a work-life balance because they overworked themselves and to some extent, it would be due to family.

According to most of the participants, the institutional support was limited, while the minority specified that it was enough. The researcher noted that each department or faculty supported their team as best as possible.

In terms of the Flexible Work Arrangement Policy, the participants believed that the policy was somewhat unclear and that the application for WFH is quite a long process that is unnecessary. Many of the participants do not necessarily wish to work from home on a full-time basis but they would like the institution to consider the hybrid approach to provide employees with the flexibility to enjoy the best of both worlds.

The participants were affected psychologically, physically, and financially due to the above, which was what the researcher was hoping to find out. The recommendations based on the above findings are detailed below.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

5.3.1 Consider a hybrid work model

The institution is a face-to-face university, therefore WFH full-time will not necessarily be beneficial. There is no denying that WFH is the future, whether on a full-time basis or in a hybrid format. With the data gathered, it is evident that a hybrid work model would best suit the institution's setup. For many occupations, the importance of being physically present at the office has significantly changed because of digital transformation, given the ways we communicate and collaborate with the workspace. For one, many of the participants mentioned that WFH has helped with savings, which will be beneficial for employees to have a healthy financial position. Should the institution continue with the idea of hybrid work, it will capitalise on having the best of both worlds, providing its employees with the flexibility that is much needed and has many benefits, both for the employer and the employee. After all, in this day and age, the institution must stay afloat in spite of its fierce rivalry.

5.3.2 Thorough research on employee preference

The researcher discovered that different employees have varied drivers of productivity. Our ability to function at the highest productivity and performance varies greatly, depending on our personal preferences. Hence it will be vital to consider the employees' preferences when it comes to developing a hybrid work model; and it is important to make it easier for others to understand and accommodate those preferences.

In introducing a hybrid approach to working from home, there is also a lot to consider. The living conditions of employees differ drastically, some have a well-functioning environment, and some do not. Even the number of years of experience in the organisation plays a significant role. Therefore, in looking into employee preference, the institution will be in a better position to know precisely what the needs of the employees are to flourish in the world of hybrid work. Evidently, not all jobs permit employees to WFH. As a result, an extensive study of employees' jobs will be

necessary. Given the study at hand, the institution can source from the above-mentioned to get a feel of the employees pertaining to the dynamics of WFH.

5.3.3 Provide soft skills training, appropriate hardware support & counselling

Given the recommendation that the institutions should consider hybrid working arrangements, it will be of great importance for the institution to establish and ensure that the employees have easy and equal access to efficiently communicate, collaborate, and carry out the work at hand. It will be vital for the institution to have an effective team collaboration between the onsite and offsite employees. To achieve all this, the institution will have to provide employees with the appropriate hardware to facilitate online collaboration as well as effective software. To ensure it is utilised to its full potential, some level of softskills training will have a great impact on it. The training should be coupled with counselling as it will help the organisation in identifying whether the employees are ready or not ready to proceed with the new way of working.

In essence, WFH requires the systems within the institution to change so that all employees whether on-site or off-site, can equally access the institution's data. This kind of change requires a change in the mindset of the employees, hence providing training and counselling will be vital.

5.3.4 Refine the policy to best suit the institution's needs - HR flexible policy

Policies are imperative for organisations, to ensure that there are well-defined boundary conditions. There is no denial that remote work, whether it is on a full-time basis or hybrid, it is a progressive idea. Therefore, the researcher proposes that the institution should refine the HR Flexible Policy through the findings of what exactly the institution's employees need and want. After all, one size certainly does not fit all. In refining the policy, the institution needs to examine the application processes, whether they are realistic or not. The institution should consider improving the policy in terms of people with children and how they fit into the bigger picture. An example is a parent (mother or father) who has a sick child and would need to look after the child without capturing leave as they will still be WFH. These matters should be accommodated, and of course they should come with conditions so that parents do not misuse the

policy. Also, in relation to pregnant women, they could be presented in the refinement of the policy, especially at certain stages of the pregnancy. Many of the participants stated that WFH offered them some flexibility, will it allow for it in terms of the working hours, or will one be confined within the normal working hours? Ultimately, having a refined, well-constructed HR Flexible Policy will benefit the intuition in the long run to have empowered employees, which will help their wellbeing.

5.4 Limitations of study

Since the research focused on WFH at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa campus, it is based on the experiences of support staff members during the period when the world was under lockdown, and no one could completely move around in terms of travelling. As a result, the encounter occurred at an unusual time and under unique circumstances. Many of the staff members were affected badly by personal life situations and WFH. The participants' comments ranged from the start of the lockdown to the time the lockdown levels gradually decreased. Another limitation was that the data obtained was only from support staff and not academics or service workers, which might indicate the data cannot be interpreted to apply all the employees working for the institution. The researcher had to interview the participants according to their availability, which required more time, and as a result, data collection took longer, this caused the study to be time consuming for the researcher. The last limitation is the smaller sample size, it can raise the question of generalisation to the entire study population.

5.5 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the researcher successfully achieved the objectives presented. The study revealed shortcomings from both the institution and its employees in terms of WFH. It is imperative that the institution carefully examines its existing approach and considers the recommendations offered for its mandate. Should the institution proceed with the recommendations made, they will accomplish one of the few points below, if not all.

Allowing employees to have flexible working conditions will increase their sense of worth and engagement, which leads to higher employee retention. This also demonstrates to employees that the organisation has confidence in them. And having trust in the workplace ensures that employees live in an environment of honesty, psychological safety, and mutual respect. The employees will be more eager to go above and beyond for the organisation because they are proud of where they work. Trust in the workplace makes people feel more secure in their careers. The hybrid working model approach will enable more conclusions to be documented, as some decisions are not documented at the office due to unofficial meetings when something is quickly discussed, and then a decision is taken. Whereas with remote work, many meetings are recorded, and all updates and decisions are documented.

The hybrid working model will also reduce absenteeism; for example, if an employer allows an employee to work from home when they become unwell, they will not transmit the sickness to their co-workers. As a result, the institution will have healthier personnel who are more productive since they are less sick. The employees and the institution will benefit financially from it. The employees won't have to always commute to work, especially those employees who travel long hours to work. When using the hybrid working model, the institution will spend less on office expenses in general. It will also promote employees to be more focused, at times being away from workplace distractions, which will allow them to maximise productivity, especially while performing tasks that involve planning and strategising. Lastly, having employees who can be more present in their family's life can result in having a team that is psychologically in a good space. Employees with healthy family and social lives are more productive. In essence, having a clear, well-defined HR Flexible Policy in place will provide the institution and its employees with a solid framework that will be effective for many years.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW GUIDE IS TO COLLECT INFORMATION TO SUPPORT AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF WORKING FROM HOME AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE, QWAQWA CAMPUS.

Briefing:

The interview is being performed as part of a research project for the researcher's MBA studies at the University of the Free State.

Answers are treated confidentially and with caution.

Responses will be used only for analysis and inclusion in the aforementioned academic study and will not be used for any other purposes.

1. Was an informed consent signed to authorise me to proceed with the interview:
Yes/ No
2. What was that one thing you enjoyed about working from home?
3. Working from home required one to have a comfortable workspace prepared, was your workspace conducive or not and what were the reasons behind that?
4. What daily routines that you normally do/used to do changed while you were working from home?
5. How would you describe the support you received from the institution whilst you were working from home?
6. When working from home, one was no longer commuting to work – how did you find that transition?
7. How did the working from home experience offer you the opportunity to learn new skills that you would not have before?

8. How would you say working from home affected your financial standing?
9. How was your relationship with fellow colleagues/manager affected by the virtual system?
10. How did working from home affect your relationships outside the office? e.g. Family life and friendships?
11. What challenges did you comprehend whilst working from home?
12. A lot of research has been done on mental health highs and lows whilst working from home, what was your experience when it came to your mental health?
13. Working from home was a new experience to the support staff members at the institution, how did that affect your work-life balance?
14. There has been debates on whether working from home enhances productivity or not. In your experience how would you describe your productivity levels when you were working from home as opposed to working from the office?
15. In terms of working from home, how would you advise the university to go about it, post-pandemic?
16. If you were to choose whether to work from home or the traditional office set up which one would you chose and why?
17. Post-Covid19 pandemic, what would your advice be to the institution pertaining to the future of working from home at the institutional level?
18. Do you have any other recommendations regarding WFH in the higher educational institutions?
19. If you were to choose whether to work from home or the traditional office set up which one would you chose and why?
20. Post-Covid19 pandemic, what would your advice be to the institution pertaining to the future of working from home at the institutional level?
21. Do you have any other recommendations regarding WFH in the higher educational institutions?

APPENDIX B: GATEKEEPERS CONDITIONAL APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



Office of the Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation
Kantoor van die Viserektor: Navorsing en Internasionalisering

19-Jul-2022

Dear Ms Naledi Mogotsi

UFS AUTHORITIES APPROVAL

Research Project Title:

The Impact of Working from Home on Support Staff Members of the University of Free State at the QwaQwa Campus

This letter serves as confirmation that your request to collect data from students and/or staff members at the University of the Free State for your research project has been approved **provided that you also have ethical clearance for the research from the ethics committee at the University of the Free State.**

Please make sure that you also obtain your ethics clearance letter containing your reference number from the ethics committee after you have received this letter before you conduct your research.

Kind Regards

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

PROF RC WITTHUHN

VICE-RECTOR: RESEARCH & INTERNATIONALISATION

CHAIR: SENATE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

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APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION APPROVAL



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

29-Jul-2022

Dear Ms Naledi Mogotsi

Application Approved

Research Project Title: The Impact of Working from Home on Support Staff Members of the University of Free State at the QwaQwa Campus

Ethical Clearance number:
UFS-HSD2022/0564/22

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Digitally
signed by Dr
Adri du Plessis
Date:
2022.07.29
16:34:35
+02'00'

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Dr Adri Du Plessis
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