The Impact of Covid-19 on Employees' Work-Life Balance: A Case Study of Botswana Unified Revenue

Douglas Chiguv (a)* Keneilwe Bakani (b) Segolame Kalayakgosi (c)

(a) Faculty of Commerce, Department of Entrepreneurship, BA ISAGO University, Gaborone, Botswana
(b) Botswana Unified Revenue Services, Gaborone, Botswana

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the effects of remote work arrangements implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic on the equilibrium between work and personal life among employees in Botswana. The case of the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) will be utilized as a specific context for analysis. The study utilized a descriptive qualitative research approach, including in-depth interviews with a sample of 18 employees from BURS who were engaged in remote work throughout the COVID-19 lockdown period. These interviews were done in order to collect relevant data for the study. An alternative sampling method, namely non-probability sampling, was employed to pick a sample size of 18 employees from the BURS organization. The collected data was subsequently subjected to thematic analysis for the purpose of analysis. The findings of the research indicate that employees reported numerous advantages, including increased sleep duration and enhanced concentration. They also highlighted the benefits of having flexibility and autonomy in a home environment, free from the distractions typically encountered in open-office settings. However, the study also identified certain challenges, such as disruptions caused by family members and feelings of isolation. The study suggests that further research should be conducted to examine the effects of remote work in Botswana. This research would provide valuable insights for policymakers in navigating the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to society, necessitating individuals to reassess several aspects of their daily routines, including job, residence, recreation, and even fundamental activities (Wang et al., 2021). In early 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the emergence of a worldwide respiratory illness known as COVID-19. Initially identified in Wuhan, China, this disease has rapidly disseminated, impacting numerous nations and posing a significant threat to global populations (Hamouche, 2020). The expeditious dissemination of the COVID-19 virus resulted in a profound impact on both the economic and social spheres. Numerous organizations globally have been compelled to modify their work practices and operational procedures (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified social distance as a crucial preventive step in mitigating the transmission of the disease (Pin & Bartels, 2020). Consequently, this necessitated the adoption of remote working practices. The implementation of teleworking or working from home policies was necessitated by the practice of social distance (Kramer & Kramer, 2020). Botswana recorded its initial three instances of COVID-19 on March 30, 2020. President Mokgweetsi Masisi, in reaction to the situation, officially proclaimed a state of emergency and implemented a 28-day lockdown within the nation (Komane, 2020). In order to sustain corporate operations, numerous firms have had to modify their operational practices to accommodate remote work arrangements. The abrupt transition possesses the capacity to induce significant and atypical consequences on employees' conduct, as well as their efficiency and welfare (Gatsi et al., 2021). This study has examined a number of these consequences. The present study has conducted an assessment on the...
effects of the abrupt and unforeseen transition to remote work in Botswana, specifically focusing on the influence on workers' productivity. The case of the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) has been utilized as a basis for this investigation.

The phenomenon of telecommuting and its impact on the equilibrium between work and personal life has been extensively examined by multinational corporations in industrialized nations (Raiien et al., 2020). The proliferation of internet connectivity and the expansion of IT infrastructure have facilitated the growth of remote work throughout time (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working (2016) reported that in 2015, a proportion of more than 12% of workers in the European Union engaged in remote work or partially engaged in remote work. According to Bick et al. (2020), research conducted in the United States reveals that during the month of May 2020, a total of 35.2% of the workforce engaged in remote work, indicating a notable rise of 8.2% compared to the month of February. This assertion holds true for nations across the globe. According to recent scholarly research, there is a growing inclination among a significant portion of the workforce to engage in remote work arrangements, driven by many factors (Deloitte & Touché, 2020). According to Wilhelmsen and Thulin (2016), remote work offers a viable option for individuals who require childcare or have physical or health limitations.

The concept of telecommuting was initially highlighted by Nilles in 1988. The term "telecommuting" or "telework" is used to denote the practice wherein employees are able to work remotely by utilizing technology to allow contact with their employer (Raiien et al., 2020). The concept of working from home has been described using various words, including remote work, flexible workplace, telework, telecommuting, and e-working (Mehta, 2021). These concepts encompass the concept of employees' capacity to perform their work remotely, utilizing technology to fulfill their job responsibilities (Raiien et al., 2020). According to the research conducted by Al Qalhati et al. (2020), the concept of working from home refers to a flexible work arrangement wherein employees carry out their activities, either in full or in part, outside of traditional office spaces. This arrangement involves the use of electronic communication tools to engage with colleagues and individuals both within and outside the organization.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the concept of remote employment was perceived as an unattainable aspiration by a significant portion of the population. The feasibility of implementing such a technique was deemed impractical for underdeveloped nations such as Botswana. This was additionally rendered unfeasible due to the necessity of internet connectivity and technological infrastructure for remote work, which presents a difficulty in Botswana where internet accessibility is restricted and several enterprises rely on desktop computers (Statistics Botswana, 2020). Moreover, the ability to operate remotely necessitates the availability of a tranquil and exclusive environment for carrying out professional responsibilities, a predicament that may prove arduous for individuals residing in compact dwellings and cohabiting with relatives and young offspring (Gatsi et al., 2021). According to a recent study conducted by Dingel and Neiman (2020), it was found that approximately 37% of work positions in the United States had the potential to be performed remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was notably evident in areas such as finance, business management, as well as professional and scientific fields. The global acceptance of remote work during the pandemic has prompted a widespread discussion on its advantages and disadvantages.

The practice of remote work offers advantages to both businesses and individuals. The advantages encompassed in this context may encompass a decrease in the duration of trip, a decrease in the expenses associated with travel, a reduction in the amount of office space required, an increase in employee motivation, a decrease in absenteeism and turnover rates, an enhancement in job satisfaction, and an improvement in productivity (Elshaiekh et al., 2018; Al Qalhati et al., 2020). Several studies have demonstrated that remote work offers benefits such as time savings in commuting for employees, lower rates of employee turnover, and enhanced productivity and job performance (Torten et al., 2016; Bhalla, 2016; Delanoëije & Verbruggen, 2020). Grant et al. (2019) also made reference to the notion that remote work has the potential to enhance productivity, flexibility, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and reduce commuting time and expenses. Purwanto et al. (2020) provided more evidence for this viewpoint, as their research shown that remote work offers employees the advantage of flexibility in job completion and financial savings in commuting expenses.

Similarly, the practice of remote work is not devoid of its own limitations. The decision to immediately deploy the notion of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic was made without any explicit direction (Raiien et al., 2020). The aforementioned limitations encompass the lack of clear demarcation between professional and personal life, diversions, less social interaction, and the financial burden placed on employees as a result of remote work (Grant et al., 2019). According to Purwanto et al. (2020), remote workers had the need to bear the expenses associated with energy and internet services. According to Kazekami (2020), employees experienced distractions from children and family members while working remotely. The phenomenon of blurred boundaries between work and family life has the potential to result in excessive work hours and an inability to effectively detach from work-related activities (Grant et al., 2019). According to Purwanto et al. (2020), there was a perceived sense of isolation among employees, leading to concerns among managers on potential declines in productivity associated with remote work. Additionally, the authors noted that remote work arrangements could potentially have negative implications for interpersonal relationships among co-workers. The authors of the study (Gatsi et al., 2021) did not take into account the constraints imposed by limited resources, such as restricted internet connection, energy load shedding, inadequate home working environments, insufficient access to electronic devices, and inadequate training. In the context of Botswana, a significant proportion of families lack access to internet connectivity and technological devices such as PCs and laptops.
Research has indicated that the implementation of remote work arrangements can contribute to the improvement of work-life balance. According to Grant et al. (2019) and Gatsi et al. (2021), individuals who engage in remote work experience enhanced productivity as a result of their remote work arrangements. According to the study conducted by Bloom et al. (2015), it was observed that remote work arrangements were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction. Arntz et al. (2019) provided more evidence suggesting that remote work arrangements have a positive impact on the overall enjoyment of family life. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a heightened emphasis on the implementation of remote work arrangements by governments and organizations. Therefore, it is imperative to establish policies that promote a mutually beneficial working environment for companies and employees in the context of remote work.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the impact of implementing remote work arrangements in Botswana during the COVID-19 epidemic on employees' ability to maintain a balanced integration of their personal and professional responsibilities. In order to increase the level of precision in our research, we will focus on the case study of the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BUPS). The study utilized a descriptive qualitative approach, involving in-depth interviews with a sample of 18 employees from BUPS who participated in remote work during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The primary objective of conducting the interviews was to augment the understanding of the participants' experiences. This paper continues with literature review, analysis, findings and conclusion parts.

**Literature Review**

The literature review explained the theoretical foundation and the empirical literature that were used to support the study.

**COVID-19**

According to WHO (2020) COVID-19 is an acute respiratory illness in humans caused by a coronavirus, capable of producing severe symptoms and in some cases death. Furthermore, WHO (2020) stated that Coronaviruses are a group of related viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. Similarly, Balkhair (2020) defined COVID-19 as a respiratory illness with a clinical spectrum of 80% mild to moderate disease, 15% severe disease, and a 5% critical illness, with an overall case fatality rate of 0.5–2.8%. According to the Australian Government Department of Health (2020), COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that causes illness similar to the common cold and can cause more serious diseases, including severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). According to WHO (2020) the virus that causes COVID-19 is presented as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2); and it was formerly described as 2019-nCoV (the novel coronavirus). In humans, coronaviruses cause respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal (Wang et al., 2020). The first known case was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2020), the disease spread worldwide, leading to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, headache, fatigue, breathing difficulties, and loss of smell and taste (WHO, 2020). It is alluded by Wang et al (2020) that, in more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome and sometimes death. According to Rothe et al (2020), COVID-19 is transmitted when people breathe in air contaminated by droplets and small airborne particles containing the virus. Cui, Li and Shi (2019) further allude that, the risk of breathing these in is highest when people are in close proximity. Transmission can also occur if splashed or sprayed with contaminated fluids in the eyes, nose, or mouth, and through touching contaminated surfaces (Kampf, 2020). People remain contagious for up to 14 days and can spread the virus even if they do not develop symptoms (Chen et al., 2020). At the early stages of the outbreak in December 2019 there were 2,761 laboratory-confirmed infections in Wuhan, China and 80 deaths have been confirmed, and there were reports of 33 cases in 10 countries as of 26 January 2020 (Zhou et al., 2020). By March 2020, the disease had grown exponentially with 351,731 COVID-19 confirmed cases, and 15,374 deaths worldwide (WHO, 2020). According to the WHO Covid-19 dashboard, as of May 2022, there are approximately 530 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, and 6.3 million deaths reported globally.

Since the first reports of COVID-19, the infection has spread worldwide, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to announce a public health emergency in late January 2020 and describe it as a pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). WHO then issued recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, that include mandatory public use of face masks, regular hand-sanitizing and handwashing, social distancing, and cancellation of public events. Pharmaceutical companies have since developed COVID-19 vaccines, that help minimise symptoms and sometimes prevent death (Li et al., 2020). However, there is still no known cure for COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). According to official reports from the WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard, as of May 2022, about 11.77 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered worldwide.

**Effects of COVID-19 to the business**

To control COVID-19, unprecedentedly strict public health measures were implemented worldwide (Wu & McGoogan, 2020). Cities were shutdown, travel was restricted, outdoor activities and gatherings were restricted, human movement was also restricted, as such businesses were closed (Wu, et al., 2020). Owing to these measures, Belitski (2021) alludes that business operations were directly affected. There are many effects of COVID-19 to the business.
Table 1: Effects of COVID-19 to The Business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Effect(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belitski et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Business shutdown, reduced operating hours, job cuts, supply chain disruptions, jeopardizing the R&amp;D processes, cessation of operations, business model changes, loss of key customers, restrictions on products/services, and the use of digital technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrero, Bloom &amp; Davis (2020)</td>
<td>Job losses, business closure, reallocation of labour, shift to working from home, and shift to the use of digital technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrieri et al. (2022).</td>
<td>shutdowns, layoffs, firm exits, and supply disruptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apedo-Amah et al. (2020)</td>
<td>Business closures and reduced operations, mass layoffs, depressed demand, and shift to greater use of technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donthu &amp; Gustafsson (2020)</td>
<td>Business closure, reduced demand, loss of jobs, and cashflow problems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors 2022

Working from home (WFH)

Working from home is also referred to as remote working. According to Mehta (2021), working from home is the practice of working outside of the traditional office. This can be working from home or working from anywhere. Working from home has been described by different researchers using multiple terms such as teleworking, telecommuting, remote working, and agile working (Bloom et al., 2015; Grant et al., 2019; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Galanti et al., 2021). Mehta (2021), defined working from home as performing work activities at home or at a location other than the workplace by using technology. Similarly, Matí (2020), described the method as a working agreement that allows individuals to carry out their work obligations from another location through the use of the internet and technology to communicate with the organization. On the other hand, Wheatley (2012), describes remote working as paid work outside the normal place of work such as at home, or actively on the move via ICT.

History of working from home

Many years ago, longhouses existed in England, where farmers lived and worked. Usually, longhouses had, “working areas” in the middle where one could find, spinning, weaving, and dressmaking spaces etc. (Holliss, 2011). So, the longhouses were where people lived and worked. Holliss (2011), further adds that, even after the industrial revolution when the working environment changed still there was some professions and works that were done from home, such as funeral parlors, teaching from home etc. In the USA the concept of working from home was sparked by the oil crisis in the 1970s (Torten et al., 2016). The concept was initiated by Jack Nilles (1988), a NASA engineer back in 1973, he termed it “telecommuting” or “telework”. The idea was to move people from the office to home and stop them from moving from home to the office. Because there were concerns over employee’s potential inability to travel to and from the office (Nilles et al., 1976). Even though the concept of working from home have existed for a very long time, companies officially began trying to implement it after the 1980s. Organizations like IBM introduced what they called “remote terminals” in some workers’ homes, so that they could work in a more flexible way (Streifeld, 2020). According to Streifeld (2020), in 2009, 40 % of the employees at IBM were remote working from home which resulted in reduced working office space, thus, leading to higher annual profit for the company.

The 1990s brought about the emergence of the internet. With the development of the websites in 1999, it triggered the emergence of garage start-ups, a new age way of doing business (Bhidé, 1999). It was initially taken up by struggling college students and those who left the corporate world in search of success and freedom. By the 2000, the USA produced guidelines to legitimise remote working and made it mandatory for companies to have telecommunication policies (Streifeld, 2020). In 2010, the Telework Enhancement Act was introduced in the USA (Bick et al., 2020).

Earlier research (Nilles et al., 1976; Bloom et al., 2015; Berkery et al., 2017) on WFH has been focused on the increase in productivity, and cost reductions of remote work, as well as reducing congestion in major cities. Later studies on remote working added the emotional and social aspects of remote work (Jyothi & Jyothi, 2012; Grant at al., 2013). However, the rise of remote work can be heavily attributed to the development of technology that enables long distance communications (Pauleen et al., 2015). In Africa WFH practices were popularised by the advent of COVID-19.

Reasons for working from home

The concept of working from home has around for a very long time, however, it was mostly practiced in developed countries (Jalagat & Jalagat, 2019). Urbaniec et al (2022) states that, “Stay at home” orders issued due to COVID-19 outbreak radically changed the day-to-day operations of many organizations, prompting organizations to move employees from offices to homes. Even companies
that never thought a home-based business was possible had to make the change (Radović-Marković, Stevanović & Milojević, 2021).

There are various reasons for working from home as illustrated on table 2.

**Table 2: Reasons for Working from Home**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nilles et al (1976); Nilles (1988)</td>
<td>The oil embargo on the USA lead to shortage of oil, and also the enactment of the Clean Air Act which forced countries to consider environment impact of gases emitted by automobiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhidé (1999); Streitfeld (2020)</td>
<td>The emergence of the internet lead to companies to experiment with remote working, due to the easy in connection brought about by the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al (2015)</td>
<td>The Internet Age brought smaller, more affordable devices and access to connectivity, making it easier for people to be mobile. Computers and the internet paved the way for remote work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter (2019)</td>
<td>In the 2000s the phenomenon of remote working was driven by cultural changes, as employees progressively demanded greater flexibility to obtain a better work-life balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasmus (2020); Vyas &amp; Xiao et al (2021)</td>
<td>When COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic in 2020, countries had to shut down businesses and institutions almost overnight to protect the safety of their people. Subsequently, remote working, became largely relevant to businesses as the only viable solution to keep institutions and businesses operational and avoid employees getting infected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Authors, 2022

**Effects of working from home**

The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the mass adoption of remote working to enable organizations to keep operating in these turbulent times. Just like any other measures, WFH has various positive and negative effects.

**Positive Effects of WFH**

**Better work-life balance**

Employees in today's world frequently complain about the difficulty of striking a good work-life balance (Erasmus, 2020). Working eight or more hours a day leaves little time for family (Reilly, Sirgy & Gorman, 2012). Hunter (2019) alludes that, WFH allow employees to better manage their work life balance, as it eliminates lengthy commutes, enabling more time with loved ones. Additionally, Beňo (2021) opined that the relaxed dress sense when WFH gave employees a greater sense of comfort and better work-life balance leading to less stress.

**Higher productivity**

Research has produced evidence that flexible working hours and remote working leads to improved productivity, as remote workers are inclined to put in more extensive work effort and work more effectively (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Smith, 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021). According to Thompson (2019), remote workers reported stable or increased productivity while working remotely compared to in an office. Much of this was due to the elimination of daily commutes and lengthy in-person meetings (Thompson, 2019).

**Cost savings**

Remote working enables businesses to rent smaller office spaces (Niip et al., 2012). According to Lupu (2017), this saves organizations money on rent, utilities, and other office supplies. Similarly, Garg and van der Rijst (2015) suggested that working from home saves time, and employees who work from home save considerably on commuting/travelling costs.

**Flexibility**

According to Guinaliu and Jordan (2016), remote work means employees can work from anywhere not just their home. Due to this flexibility, organizations can even extend operations beyond a typical 9 to 5 workday (Elshaiekh, Hassan, Abdallah, 2019). This freedom is invaluable for companies looking to stretch their working hours with a limited staff (Donnelly & Johns, 2020). Donnelly and Johns (2020) further alluded that flexible working hours makes it easier to accommodate the needs of family, and other personal responsibilities.
Reduced absenteeism and decreased turnover

Remote working can help businesses retain employees and prevent absenteeism (Raišienė et al., 2020). According to Mungamia, Waiganjo and Kihoro (2016), when remote workers do not feel micromanaged and believe their employer trusts them, they are more likely to develop positive feelings toward organization leadership. As a result, workers will be less tempted to look elsewhere for employment, promoting a sense of loyalty and dedication (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). Furthermore, workers might be less inclined to call out of work at random (Monteiro, Straume & Valente, 2019).

Better Use of Technology

Remote working is not possible without the use of technology (Erasmus, 2020). Thanks to high speed internet connections, widespread Wi-Fi, cloud computing, project management software, and instant messaging options, it is now easier than ever to keep remote teams working in sync just as if they were working together in person (Beho, 2021; Ferreira, Pereira, Bianchi & da Silva, 2021). Additionally, remote workers become more empowered and confident in using an array of technological tools to collaborate remotely with confidence (Garg & van der Rijst, 2015).

Negative Effects of WFH

Undeniably, remote working presented itself as a welcome solution to cope with COVID-19 related challenges (Bonacini, Gallo & Scicchitano, 2021). However, the negative implications of remote working should be noted and attended to for future implementation.

Affiliation

Humans have a basic need for social interaction (Wang et al., 2020). Studies have shown that without this interaction, our health and well-being will degrade (Grant et al., 2013; Bentley et al., 2016; Molino et al., 2020). A traditional office work environment enables face-to-face management discussions, in-person team meetings, and just random interactions between people satisfy this need for affiliation (Wang et al., 2020). However, in a remote work environment, all team members’ interactions with their co-workers are through technology (Stich, Tarafdar & Cooper, 2018). Lack of personal interaction among colleagues may cause reduced stimulation in the long run, causing frustration and making it more challenging to resolve unexpected challenges, thus delaying work progress (Hunter, 2019).

Perceptions of inequality

Research has shown that people in higher-paid positions, such as managers, professionals, and consultants, can work remotely more easily, while most employees in lower income jobs cannot (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020; Bonacini et al., 2021). This may bring about perceptions of inequality among workers and may cause discontent (Liu et al., 2018). According to Suh and Lee (2017), working from home proved difficult for lower income workers as most did not have the right resources to do their jobs outside the office.

Not all workers are equally suited to work remotely

For some workers, it may be overwhelming to manage their work-life balance in a WFH situation, especially younger, inexperienced employees, and students at entry levels of their graduate studies who mostly perform better amid the buzz of a team (Erceg & Zoranović, 2020). In some cases, a workforce or research team should work on-site to keep team communication alive (Grant et al., 2013; Hunter, 2019).

Blurred lines between work and home

Psychological well-being is jeopardized when the boundaries between remote worker’s work and private lives begin to collapse (Molino et al., 2020). Employee’s WFH may be perceived by family members to be working all the time, seven days a week, or family members may perceive them to be absent although they are at home (Evanoff et al., 2020). Moreover, worker’s family time is often interrupted by short notice, “after-hours” meetings and office calls (Grant et al., 2013).

Suitable designated work area

Remote workers, especially young employees, do not necessarily have suitable, designated work areas in their homes where they can be focused and work privately (Klopotek, 2017). This could jeopardize worker’s performance because they have to cope with noise and might have to move around in their home frequently, the situation may infringe on the privacy of the organization (Grant et al., 2013).

Lack of resources

According to Vasic (2020), large numbers of employees did not have proper equipment and resources to work from home. Employees had to do with slow to no internet due to high usage caused by the rise in demand as more people were at home at the same time (Vasic, 2020). Moreover, many employees faced other technology hiccups such as inadequate hardware or lack of certain software (Erceg & Zoranović, 2020). In Africa some experience problems of power cuts, which made WFH even more difficult (Gatsi et al., 2021).
Isolation

Remote working can isolate people and affect their careers negatively (Wang, Albert & Sun, 2020). According to Tavares (2017), when limited or no opportunity exists for face-to-face interaction with colleagues or a talk with a role model, supervisor, or someone who one trusts, and respects, it may lead to employees feeling lonely and out of touch with the organization they work for. Similarly, Kossek, Thompson and Lautsch (2015) asserts that, remote workers may not be offered the same career advancement opportunities and high-profile projects as their onsite colleagues.

Kill Organizational culture and spirit

Home offices can become very lonely spaces, and, over time, companies might lose valuable qualities that are difficult to measure, which home offices cannot make up for, such as the energetic buzz of colleagues discussing matters of the day or a corporate cohesiveness/identity/team spirit/staff sense of belonging (Inguscio et al., 2022).

Impact of working from home on employee’s work-life balance

Work-life balance refers to, the ability to experience a sense of control and stay productive and competitive at work while maintaining a happy, healthy home life with sufficient leisure (Bharathi & Mala, 2016). According to Wepfer et al. (2018), achieving a satisfactory work–life balance is normally understood as restricting one side, usually work, to have more time for the other. Work-life balance is also understood as the degree to which a person succeeds in meeting work and family demands. Normally, people do not have enough time to meet all work and life demands; thus, there is always a feeling of having too much to do and not enough time to do it (Paulleen et al., 2015). Hence, time is the scarce resource that employees need to allocate between work and family to achieve a harmonious goal (Lui et al., 2018).

There are two schools of thoughts regarding work-life balance (Beigi, Shirmohammadi & Stewart, 2018). The first school of thought argues that in today's world home and work are two opposing forces that often lead to an imbalance when the demand from one domain, either, home, work, personal, family, etc., interferes with the other (Allen et al., 2021; Bin et al., 2021). Many studies have proved that employees working remotely work more hours than they used when working in the office (Wepfer et al., 2018; Shareena & Shahid, 2020; Carillo et al, 2021). For some employees WFH has resulted in the need to be always available, working late, and checking work during their time off (Van Duin, Tims & Bakker, 2015).

The second school of thought on the other, welcomes this flexibility because it gives employees the freedom to integrate work and non-work life to suit employee’s needs and let them craft the work-life balance they want (Wepfer et al., 2018). This school of thought takes work-life balance to a different level, where work and life are not separate entities that require separate attention; instead, employees incorporate their professional experiences into their personal lives, and vice versa (Craig & Churchill, 2021). This is a holistic approach to working from home, which enables employees to perform the job while living a normal life (Shirmohammadi, Chan Au & Beigi, 2022).

According to Shirmohammadi et al., (2022), the desire for work-life integration had started a conversation around the need to integrate work and life to find the right balance, especially for those working from home. This desire has been made more appealing by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Boundary Theory

The boundary theory proposes that the limits between work and family are becoming increasingly blurred (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). This is making it difficult for employees to transition between work and personal/family life roles. As such, Smit et al., (2016) suggested that integration rather than segmentation is important to minimize burnout, maintain higher job performance levels and avoid conflict. According to Cortés-Pérez, Escobar-Sierra and Galindo-Monsalve (2020), conflict occurs when one of the two roles i.e., work, or personal life requires a greater quantity of resources than the person is willing or able to allocate to it at the time. Consequently, WFH contributes to better work-life balance because it increases autonomy, decreases stress, and increases availability to tend to personal and family matters (Dima et al., 2019; Galvez et al., 2020; Thulin et al., 2019).

It is on this notion that, Bharathi and Mala (2016) associated WFH with great impact in enhancing professional women’s work-life balance. Similarly, Abhari and Hopkins (2019), in their study stated that respondents believed that WFH contributes to work-life balance. Furthermore, Hopkins and McKay (2019) found that due to many employees believing that WFH contributes to better work-life balance, they are willing to participate in it. Cortés-Pérez et al. (2020) found that it is not only family responsibilities that leads to requesting WFH by employees, being able to dedicate some time to recreation is another reason to prefer WFH.

On the other hand, some scholars have found that remote working is negatively correlated with work-life balance either because of the difficulties that workers face in disconnecting from work issues (Felstead & Henseke, 2017) or because of the conflict generated by expecting work-related things to be carried out outside of the usual work schedule (Sarbu, 2018). According to Zhang et al., (2020), this type of conflict is more pronounced for remote workers who have children, mothers tend to experience a negative impact on work-life balance as a result of WFH (Kurowska, 2020).
The boundary theory is relevant to mention in the context of remote work because remote work is about working more from anywhere else, often from home, than the traditional office. As already alluded by previous scholar’s boundaries can be blurred when WFH, especially for workers with children (Prin & Bartels, 2020; Mehta, 2021; Gatsi, Devi & Devi, 2021). The outbreak of COVID-19 made having boundaries between work and home roles more intense due to the rate at which it was implemented, and families being confined in their homes due to lockdowns (Raišienė et al., 2020).

**Empirical Review**

A recent study by Vyas and Butakheio (2021) has sought to investigate the impact of working from home during COVID-19 on the work and life domains in Hong Kong. Using an exploratory framework and SWOT analysis, this study investigated the experiences that the employer and employee face in Hong Kong while working from home. The study also critically investigated if working from home arrangements will remain as a transitory element responding to the exceptional circumstances, or whether it could be a permanent arrangement. The study found that working from home has not proved to be the best option for majority of Hong Kong workforce. There was interest in the arrangement but not in its current form. Vyas and Butakheio (2021), recommended that formal work from home guidelines for employers and employees should be introduced in the short run, and in the long run the possibility of remote working becoming a new normal should be re-examined by government and organizations to further promote family-friendly employment practices.

In their study, Gatsi, Devi and Devi (2021) explored the impact of working from home induced by COVID-19 on working women in Harare, Zimbabwe. The research was concerned with examining the impact of working from home on female employees during the imposed lockdown. Qualitative research was employed and in-depth interviews with working women from different professions were conducted to gather data. Purposeful and convenient sampling was used to select working women from different professions and data was analyzed using MAXQDA software. The research found out that, women are working overtime due to their gender roles as caregivers and the fact that they are mothers, daughters, aunt, sisters, and daughter in-laws, they end up multi-tasking. Additionally, since they are at home, they find it difficult to convince people that they are working since they will be at home, and they cannot ignore visitors during working hours. This is so as women are known for their hospitality role in the family hence resulting in mental exhaustion. The study recommended more studies to be carried out on the impact of working from home to assist policy makers on the way forward during Covid 19 era. 

In their working paper, working from home during COVID-19: Evidence from time-use studies, Teodorovicz et al., (2021), assessed how the sudden and widespread shift to working from home during the pandemic impacted how knowledge workers allocate time throughout their working day. They analyzed the results from an online time-use survey that collected data on 1,192 knowledge workers in two waves, a pre-pandemic wave collected in August/2019 (615 participants) and a post-pandemic wave collected in August/2020 (577 participants). Their findings indicate that the forced transition to WFH created by the COVID pandemic was associated with a drastic reduction in commuting time, and an increase in time spent in work and/or personal activities. However, their results also revealed that this reallocation was heterogeneous across different workers and organizations. According to their findings, managers particularly reallocated the entire time gained from commuting into more time spent in meetings, possibly to recoup some of the extemporaneous interactions that typically happen in the office. The transition to WFH did not appear to affect self-reported measures of wellbeing. They further mentioned that these results from the time-use studies will also be used when discussing implications for the development of new technologies.

**Research and Methodology**

The researchers opted for an interpretivist perspective in this study in order to gain a comprehensive understanding and gather the viewpoints of individuals who were engaged in remote work during the COVID-19 lockdown at BURS head office. The interpretivist paradigm enabled the collection of data that allowed for the individual's subjective interpretation and personal experiences on the impact of remote work on their productivity, well-being, and work-life balance. The research design utilized in this study was descriptive in nature. The study employed a descriptive research approach to collect and evaluate qualitative data in order to examine the idea of working from home (WFH) and its impact on productivity, wellbeing, and work-life balance within the context of BURS. The research employed a descriptive methodology to gain a comprehensive theoretical comprehension of the concept of working from home (WFH), the circumstances that prompted the implementation of WFH policies, and the impact of WFH on both productivity and well-being. This was achieved through an extensive review of relevant literature. The investigation additionally aimed to ascertain the effects of remote work on productivity and employee well-being within the context of BURS.

**Population of the Study**

The research population comprises of a specific group of employees from BURS, encompassing both management and non-managerial individuals located at the Head Office. Consequently, the study focused on the target population of employees at the Head Office of BURS, as stated in the BURS Annual Report of 2022. The researchers utilized a non-probability sampling strategy in their investigation. Quota sampling was utilized in this study to ensure that only those who worked from home during the COVID-19 lockdown were included as participants. Quota sampling is a sampling strategy that is not based on random selection, but rather on specified criteria. This method ensures that the distribution of these traits in the overall sample closely mirrors that of the larger population (Wilson, 2016). The study's sample was limited to employees of BURS at their Head Office who were engaged in remote
work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study especially targeted BURS employees who engaged in remote work during the lockdown period, as they were the primary focus of analysis in this study. This research is classified as a qualitative study, and it is well acknowledged by researchers that qualitative research typically necessitates a limited sample size ranging from 10 to 30 participants (Dworkin, 2012; Boddy, 2016; Vasileiou, et al., 2018; Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020). Hence, the study encompasses a sample size of 20 participants, consisting of both management and non-managerial staff members from BURS (Botswana Unified Revenue Service) employed in the Head Office.

Data collection procedures

Participants who agreed to take part in the study were contacted via email to arrange a suitable time to attend the interview. The interview schedule was prepared, and participants were provided with consent form and contact details and the subject of the interview in order to provide them with an overview of what the interview will be about. Each interview lasted between 20 – 30 minutes.

Analysis and Findings

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data obtained from eighteen semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was carried out by highlighting, coding, and sorting the common answers into themes. Each transcript was reviewed individually then cross referenced with other transcripts to establish the most common themes throughout the data. The data was analysed and coded. Initially various themes were identified, however, further analysis revealed that some themes were overlapping-such as isolation and loneliness which can be categorised in one theme. Finally, four primary themes emerged from the data.

Findings

Flexibility

Flexibility was a common theme throughout the interviews. Respondents were asked to explain the impact of WFH on their work-life balance. Respondents mostly outlined flexibility in relation to work-life balance as one of the main factors. All respondent expressed positive views that WFH had on their work-life balance.

Respondent C, “The flexibility that WFH afforded me an opportunity to focus on other aspects of my life not just going to work and coming back home after work”

Respondent E, “The flexibility of working from home gave me a chance to plan my work and home schedule accordingly without it being imposed on me.”

Respondent G stated that, “Working from home gave me the opportunity to attend to personal commitments without having to request for days off from the office which was great.”

The findings also indicated greater levels of autonomy due to flexibility.

Respondent D, “The flexibility was a welcome change, I could do my work anytime and anyway I wanted.”

Comparably respondent F highlighted, “The flexibility was nice, I enjoyed being able to do my work at my own time and at my own pace”

Respondents also highlighted that the flexibility of WFH helped them balance family commitments and childcare.

Respondent N, “Working from home was great for family because I could look after my children and do some work at the same time.”

These sentiments were also highlighted by respondent K, “Flexibility of working from home ensured that I could spend time with my family while delivering on my job”

Respondent O also affirmed this by stating that, “The great thing about working from home was that I had more time with my family as I was home most of the time”

Both these findings indicate a greater balance in family life while working from home. This appears as an advantage as it seemed WFH afforded most of the respondents’ time with their families.

Isolation

Throughout the interview the majority of respondents expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation when working from home. A total of 12 out of 18 respondents all expressed a sense of loneliness and feeling like they are missing out due to not being at the office.

Respondent M expressed that, “Not being able to see and interact with my colleagues sometimes made me feel lonely and isolated, as if am missing out on something.”

Respondent H stated that, “Working from home isolated me from my co-workers. Communication was drastically reduced. I felt a bit lonely, and missed chatting with my co-workers”
This was further buttressed by respondent E, who expressed that, “I live alone, so being at home all the time sometimes felt lonely. I missed the chit chat I had with my co-workers.”

Respondent A and F both conveyed how they felt isolated when working from home, F expressed that, “sometimes I felt lonely/isolated due to reduced levels of interaction and social encounters with my co-workers.” While A revealed that, “WFH has made me miss the office environment, the chats with colleagues, face-to-face meetings, and feeling like I belong to something important.”

The overall findings for this theme were that social wellbeing is important to employees, and employees value their time with their colleagues.

**Boundary Management**

When commenting on work-life balance respondents retreated that, boundaries between work and home life were not easy to manage when working from home. Fifteen (15) out of eighteen (18) respondents expressed difficulty in managing boundaries and felt that boundaries tend to become blurred. Majority stated that they worked outside working hours, and sometimes family commitments encroached on work time.

Respondent R, “Separating work time and home time was difficult due to everyone being home and experiencing WFH for the first time.”

Similar statements were outlined by respondents’ N and P who both outlined, “mostly when working from home, I had odd working hours because I sometimes attended to family commitments during working hours.”

Furthermore, respondent J commented on lines between work and home life stating that, “sometimes boundaries between work and family became a bit blurred as I found myself working more and vice versa”

Other findings suggested that family commitments specifically those with small children contributed to boundaries becoming blurred as sometimes they were compelled to work at odd hours to compensate for not being able to work during the day.

Respondent Q, “I found myself working at odd hours, due to distractions from family commitments during the day”

Respondent D also expressed the same, “when WFH I found that I was working more hours because sometimes I would work late at night due to disturbances from family during the day.”

Respondent M added by stating, “blurred boundaries between work and home, I sometimes found that I worked beyond normal hours because I could not work properly during the day.”

**Work Environment and Resources**

Findings from this study indicate the work environment of the respondents played a role in influencing their wellbeing at work. All respondents commented on their working environment not being ideal when working from home.

Respondent C, “my home space was not geared for WFH, I did not have adequate working space. I had no desk or chair as such I used my bed or couch when working which caused a lot of discomfort for my back due to bad sitting position.”

Similarly, respondent E outlined, “I did not have a working space in my house. I used my bed or my couch to do some work, which affected me physically as it strained my back.”

Respondent K also highlighted, “I did not have a working space with the right desk and chair, I had to work sitting on my bed or couch.”

All respondents stated that they worked from their beds or couches when working from home, due not having home offices.

Respondents also highlighted that they did not receive any support from the organization in setting up work environment when WFH. Respondents also highlighted that they were not provided with other resources they needed when WFH.

As respondent J outlined, “I was not provided with tools to do my job at home, I was using my personal resources which was a challenge as internet is expensive in Botswana.”

Similarly, respondent N remarked, “BURS did not provide me with tools to do my job, I had to use my own internet for work.”

Respondents L and G also highlighted that the organization, “did not provide the right tools to perform their duties at home.”

Almost all respondents highlighted the lack of resources while working from home.

**Discussions**

From the findings it is evident that flexibility in terms of work-life balance is positive for many of the respondents. Respondents alluded that flexible working hours made it easier to accommodate the needs of family, and other personal responsibilities. Many researchers on remote working have cited that the flexibility brought about by remote working improve work-life balance of employees (Donnelly & Johns, 2020; Wepfer et al., 2018; Craig & Churchill, 2021; Shirmohammadi, Chan & Beigi, 2022). It is
evident that flexibility is a major benefit of WFH for all respondents is this study. This is consistent with literature as Palm et al., (2020) and Shirmohammadi et al., (2022), suggest benefits of WFH to include greater autonomy and flexibility over work schedules. Furthermore, this finding appears to align with a study by Lui et al., (2019), which concluded that flexibility has a positive influence on employee work-life balance. Many respondents also outlined the benefit of flexibility in relation to childcare and other personal life demands. It has become clear from the findings that managing boundaries between work and home life was difficult and challenging for all respondents. As previously outlined in the findings many respondents felt their boundaries between work and home life have been blurred. Research by Wepfer et al., (2018) and Molino et al., (2020), implied that boundaries between work life and home life have become progressively blurred while working from home. Therefore, it appears evident that boundaries between work and home is difficult for employees WFH.

WFH highlighted the intrusion between work and home life brought about using technology (Guest, 2017). This is consistent with many respondents who stated they worked outside working hours due to the availability of technology. This may further impact boundary management. The findings also indicated that many respondents experienced working at odd hours when working from home. Research has associated remote working with inability of employees to switch off from their work (Felstead & HENSEKE, 2017). Other findings indicated that the need to be seen as present and delivering job tasks so as to gain trust from management was also associated with employees working abnormal hours. According to Avis (2018), employees may work longer hours to deliver more work thereby impressing supervisors, and therefore giving them satisfaction that they are not invisible to the employer. This was buttressed by respondent’s comments that they felt the needed to impress their leaders and gain their trust since there was little to no supervision. These findings are supported by an argument by Beauregard, Basile & Canónico (2019), which highlights a major barrier in remote working is due to manager’s lack of trust in their employees and a perception that being present at work implies higher productivity. Literature suggests that the increase in productivity by remote workers may be attributed to longer working hours. In nutshell, the findings suggest an improvement in work-life balance of employees while WFH. Some respondents even commented on how this experience opened their eyes on the fact that they were focused more on their jobs than any other aspect of their lives.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to examine the effects of remote work on the professional and personal domains of BURS personnel amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study suggest that employees are able to maintain a balance between their work and home life, as well as effectively manage boundaries while working from home. The responders unanimously identified flexibility as a significant advantage. The participants conveyed that the remote work arrangement provided them with a sense of independence in managing their own time, which proved advantageous in achieving a harmonious equilibrium between their personal and professional responsibilities. The results indicate that there was a higher level of job and home satisfaction among employees who engaged in remote work. The results indicate that the primary factor contributing to this sense of satisfaction was an increased level of autonomy, flexibility, and the ability to effectively manage both familial obligations and production. The research findings indicate that the work-life balance experienced by workers who work from home (WFH) was largely favorable. workers expressed that WFH afforded them increased autonomy in managing both their professional and personal lives.

Based on the results, it is evident that every participant encountered challenges in effectively regulating the boundaries between their professional and personal lives. All participants indicated that they encountered challenges in adhering to regular working hours as a result of flexible job arrangements and familial obligations. The study revealed that participants engaged in extended and non-traditional work hours while working from home. The reasons for this were ascribed to familial obligations, inadequate working environments, and a lack of autonomy in scheduling. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to the management of BURS and other public sector organizations in Botswana. These recommendations serve as a guide for policy making aimed at enhancing the adoption and implementation of work-from-home (WFH) programs. The findings indicate that the implementation approach for remote work at BURS was lacking clarity. The observed phenomenon can be ascribed to the abrupt shift resulting from the global epidemic. In the future, it is recommended that BURS should prioritize the development of workforce strategy solutions in order to facilitate the process of workforce transformation. The implementation of work-from-home arrangements can be facilitated by the development of policies and guidelines that provide a structured framework for their adoption. The implementation of training initiatives for both managerial personnel and employees, encompassing topics such as effective administration of remote teams and cultivating a mindset conducive to embracing change. It is recommended that BURS implement procedures that facilitate the practice of telecommuting. The data clearly indicate that those who worked remotely encountered challenges in effectively delineating the boundaries between their professional and personal lives. To effectively tackle this issue, it is advisable for BURS to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the working hours designated for workers who work from home (WFH), ensuring that they are optimally aligned with the needs of both the employees and the organization. As an illustration, the proposed alternative working hours of 9 - 12 and 3 - 7 might be implemented in lieu of the conventional 9 to 5 schedule. Another option could involve the introduction of flexible working hours, wherein job performance is assessed based on deliverables rather than the duration of time spent on work tasks.
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References


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