Examining the effects of remote work arrangements implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic on the overall wellness of employees at Botswana Unified Revenue Services (BURS)

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ABSTRACT

During the initial years of the 1990s, there was an expectation that the practice of working from home (WFH) would become a customary mode of work, offering advantages to organizations in terms of job performance and employee contentment. The concept of working from home (WFH) has gained significant traction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily because of its potential to ensure the continuity of organizations under certain circumstances. The primary objective of this study is to examine the effects of remote work arrangements implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic on the various dimensions of employee well-being in Botswana. Specifically, the case of the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) will be utilized as a focal point for analysis. The study utilized a descriptive qualitative research approach, including in-depth interviews to collect data from a sample of 18 employees of BURS who were engaged in remote work during the COVID-19 lockdown. The researchers employed a non-probability sampling technique and conducted a theme analysis to analyze the data. The findings of the research suggest that working from home (WFH) offers several advantages, including the ability to sleep for extended periods and enhanced concentration. Additionally, the flexibility and autonomy provided by working from home allow individuals to avoid distractions commonly encountered in open-office environments. However, the study also highlights certain challenges associated with WFH, such as disruptions caused by family members and feelings of isolation. The study suggests the need for further research to be conducted on the effects of remote employment in Botswana. This research would provide valuable insights for policymakers in navigating the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

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Introduction

The practice of working remotely from one's residence, commonly referred to as working from home (WFH), has become a prevalent mode of employment, offering advantages to organizations in terms of job performance and employee contentment. The concept of working from home (WFH) has gained significant traction with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily because of its role in ensuring the continuity of organizations in challenging circumstances. The COVID-19 epidemic has given rise to an unparalleled environment for the proliferation of remote work. The implementation of new work organization methods necessitated swift adaptation from both companies and employees. Employees faced the challenge of balancing familial obligations with job responsibilities while also striving to maintain productivity and effective communication with colleagues. These efforts were further complicated by the heightened anxieties brought about by the pandemic (Kifor et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a rapid transformation in the operational practices of numerous institutions on a global scale. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the implementation of work-from-home (WFH) arrangements by firms that employ individuals who have
limited or no prior experience in remote work, as well as organizations that were inadequately equipped to handle this transition (Vyas & Butakheio, 2021). Furthermore, the implementation of the work-from-home (WFH) arrangement was not a voluntary decision and would not have been implemented if it were not for the ongoing COVID-19 problem (Matli, 2020). The phenomenon of remote work has resulted in numerous challenges faced by both employees and managers, including but not limited to feelings of isolation, exclusion, diminished motivation, difficulties in supervision, limited access to resources, and the challenge of maintaining work-life boundaries (Grant et al., 2013; Wheatley, 2020).

The concept of remote work 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 phrases together pertain to the capacity of employees to engage in remote work, leveraging technology to fulfill their job responsibilities (Raiien et al., 2020). Al Qalhati et al. (2020) posit that remote work, also known as working from home, is a viable alternative work arrangement wherein employees carry out their activities or a portion thereof outside of traditional central offices. This is facilitated through the use of electronic media, which enables interactions with individuals both within and outside of the firm.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the concept of working from home (WFH) was regarded as an aspirational notion for numerous individuals, as it was deemed impractical within the business landscape of Botswana. This may be attributed mostly to the fact that working from home necessitates the utilization of information and communication technology (ICT) as well as the provision of a tranquil and focused environment for carrying out work responsibilities. Additionally, it necessitates the presence of well-defined and unambiguous job assignments as well as committed and dedicated personnel (Wheatley, 2020). Statistics Botswana (2020) reports that the availability and affordability of internet connectivity in Botswana are constrained. Moreover, a significant proportion of the workforce in Botswana resides with their families in constrained living quarters, posing a considerable obstacle to establishing a specialized workspace (Eide & Mmatli, 2015). The habit of working from home is a recent development in Botswana. To date, there has been no instance in which personnel of BURS have performed their work duties beyond the confines of the office. The implementation of this system was entirely novel for both the business and its personnel. The overarching managerial challenge pertained to the transformation of the work environment due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization known as BURS encountered challenges in implementing a work-from-home arrangement as a means to sustain its operations.

Despite the longstanding existence of remote work practices and their demonstrated efficacy, it appears that the implementation of such practices at BURS has not delivered favorable outcomes. It appears that employees of BURS who engaged in remote work encountered insufficient access to essential resources, such as computers and internet connectivity. The Bureau of Internal Revenue and Statistics (BURS) is an agency that prioritizes customer satisfaction. However, within a specific time frame, BURS staff faced challenges in swiftly serving customers due to the unavailability of internet access and appropriate computers for usage outside the office. Customers had to patiently await the lifting of the lockout in order to receive assistance. The management seems to have challenges effectively overseeing and monitoring performance. The utilization of personal resources by employees in order to fulfill assigned job responsibilities posed a challenge for supervisors in effectively monitoring performance. Additionally, there have been indications that employees have expressed grievances regarding the impact of work on their familial responsibilities. Consequently, this study has been initiated to examine the effects of implementing remote work arrangements on the overall welfare of employees at BURS. Moreover, there is limited knowledge regarding the effects of COVID-19 on the employment scenario of individuals who transitioned from conventional office settings to remote work arrangements in Botswana. This study will also offer valuable insights into the practice of working from home in the context of Botswana. 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), those who engage in remote employment experience enhanced levels of wellbeing. In a study conducted by Bloom et al. (2015), it was discovered that the practice of working remotely from home was associated with a notable boost in job satisfaction. Arntz et al. (2019) suggest that the practice of working remotely has been found to enhance levels of pleasure in family life. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly elevated the importance of implementing the work-from-home paradigm for the majority of governments and organizations. Therefore, it is imperative to establish policies that promote a mutually beneficial working from home arrangement for both businesses and employees.

**Literature Review**

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

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

**Working from home (WFH)**

Working from home is also referred to as remote working. According to Bick et al., (2020), 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). Bonacini et al., (2021), defined working from home as performing work activities at home or at a location other than the workplace by using technology. Similarly, Mehta
(2021) 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. Hollis (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 (Nijp et al., 2012). Even though the concepts 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 (Stich, et al., 2018).

**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, Števanović & Milojević, 2021). There are various reasons for working from home; these are illustrated on the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
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<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>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyas &amp; Butakhieo (2021); 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>
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**Source:** Authors, 2022

**Oil Embargo and Clean Air Act**

In 1973 there was an oil crisis caused by a ban in oil trade to countries in America and Europe (Hamilton, 2013). The embargo caused an increase in oil prices; this caused a shock to the world economy. This shortage of oil sparked the concept of working from home in the USA (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 due to shortage of oil. Additionally, the Clean Air Act was passed in 1970. The purpose of the Act was to encourage countries to reduce pollution to protect human health and the environment (Clean Air Act). According to Tillman et al (2012), emission of gasses from automobiles was considered a major contributor to air pollution. Hence, work from home was one of the ways countries used to reduce air pollution from automobiles. This practise has also been necessitated by climate change. Most developed economies now prefer WFH as a mitigation measure to reduce climate change and clean the environment.

**Advancement in technology**

The development of the first website in the 1990s revolutionised remote working. The Internet Age brought smaller, more affordable devices and access to connectivity, making it easier for people to be mobile. Additionally, the invention of Wi-Fi further made the ability for employees to work remotely easier and more possible. Wi-Fi is the foundation for all remote work in the present day, and it first showed up on the internet scene in 1997. Furthermore, routers were developed, in 1999 which allowed Wi-Fi to become
available for home use (Allen et al., 2015). Further, Allen et al. (2015) alludes that, once Wi-Fi became available in homes, remote workers became more feasible. Computers and the internet paved the way for modern day remote work.

The rise of the Millennials

According to Aydogmus (2018), 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. The 2000s saw the Millennials generation joining the workforce. This generation wanted to work and maintain their lifestyles (Hunter, 2019). According to Yap & Badri (2020), millennials desire for balance between work and family life, flexible work life and autonomy. Currently, up to 68% of millennials who form approximately half of the global workforce in 2020 does not want to work fixed hours in a traditional office setting (Erasmus, 2020). This is further supported by major advances in digital technology that allow employees greater flexibility of work (Donnelly & Johns, 2020).

COVID-19 Pandemic

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 (Vyas & Butakhio, 2021). Subsequently, remote working became largely relevant to businesses as the only viable solution to keep institutions and businesses operational and avoid employees getting infected (Erasmus, 2020). Based on experiences during the year, remote working has proved itself to be a useful alternative with multiple advantages.

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, Beho (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 (Nijp 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, Waigango and Kiboro (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 (Beño, 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. 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 Thomas (2020), 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) assert 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 (Inguscio1 et al., 2022).
Difficulties in managing employees

Flexible diaries may make it difficult to align colleague’s work schedules when arranging meetings (Golden & Gajendran, 2019). Meister and Mulcahy (2016) elude that, the complexities of managing both remote and onsite employees with the same job classifications may hinder line managers in delivering their work and connect with their team members.

Marginalization

The physical isolation of one or more members of a team can be a major challenge as remote workers are excluded from ad hoc conversations that take place outside of scheduled project meetings (Slavković, Sretenović, Bugarić, 2022). From an organizational standpoint, Wang et al. (2021) opined that the marginalization of certain team members can have an effect on the team as a whole. Remote workers are often not kept in the loop; meetings with remote workers are hampered by not being in the room; and incidental and unstructured conversations are missed (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštaitaitė, 2019). Nakrošienė et al., (2019), further suggests that remote working makes impromptu conversations among team members impossible, leading to delays in projects or remote team members being left out.

Impact of working from home on employee’s wellbeing

WHO (2020) provided a comprehensive definition for employee well-being and described it as a state of every individual employee to understand his capability, manage the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to her/his community. Pradhan and Hati (2019) defined employee wellbeing as the quality of work-life; the employee's wellbeing that is affected by workplace interventions; the psychological, physical, and emotional health of employees. Similarly, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) defined wellbeing at work as the quality of employee’s performance and experiences in the workplace.

Wellbeing in the context of working from home involves the state of how remote workers control their health and well-being while working remotely (Grant, et al., 2013). Employee well-being comprises of three main elements: physical, social, and psychological well-being. Physical well-being refers to health and physical functioning at work such as exercise and sleep and also safety such as equipment and workplace environment (Peters & Jan Blomme, 2019). Psychological well-being refers to personal experiences and the ability to function in the workplace (Goldberg, McCormick & Virginia, 2021). Lastly, social well-being involves having a supportive and meaningful workplace network with interactions and long-term relationships (Ipsen et al., 2021).

Well-being at the workplace has been a subject of interest among organizational researchers due to the notion of “happy-productive worker” thesis (Fogaça & Junior, 2016). Hosie, Willemsyns and Sevastos (2012) explain that this theory is based on the assumption that happy employees perform better than unhappy employees. On the other hand, Hoppmann and Klumb (2012) proposes that well-being at work is influenced by multiple factors including work-family conflict, job condition, labour market, macro-economic structures, change, and social structures. These factors, however, are not equally impactful as they function as a sequence of event, the factor that directly affects well-being at the workplace is job condition (Sonnenstag, 2015).

According to Felstead and Henseke (2017), employees who experience highly demanding work tasks with little control over the task execution are at a higher risk of developing symptoms of distress. Alternatively, employees with better autonomy and control over the work environment are more likely to experience better well-being (Yap & Badri, 2020). In addition, Prasad et al. (2020) explained that social exchange is necessary among workers to prevent the feeling of being isolated because this will affect their psychological well-being due to the absence of social exchange experienced by remote workers. Remote working strengthens the psychological contract between employees and organizations, and employees who use remote work perceive their employers as supportive of employee well-being. Employee’s psychological well-being depends on the social aspect and human interaction; however, this is considered a missing element in remote working (Pradhan & Hati, 2019).

Job Demand-Resource Model (JD-R)

There is a relationship between working from home and employee well-being (Gordon et al., 2015). According to Esmaeili, Mohammad and Soltani (2019), the Job Demand-Resource model offers a comprehensively framework on this relationship. The JD-R is a well-established and recognized model for employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). It offers the advantage of incorporating personal resources from a broader perspective, which is in turn helpful to explore well-being relationships (Signore et al., 2020). The JD-R focuses on the interaction of two specific sets of factors leading to employee wellbeing: job demands and job resources (Huang, Wang & You, 2016; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job demands can be physical, psychological, social, or organizational demands, requiring a permanent psychophysical effort, and are linked to higher psychophysiological costs if high (Barbieri, et al., 2021).

In the context of remote work, job demands can for instance be constant noise, high work pressure, a high number of phone calls and video conferences, and in-person meetings that take up important work time (Jamal et al., 2021). Charalampous et al., (2019) eludes that, high and frequent interactions with demanding clients on the phone, interruptions by family members or inadequate IT equipment can put a strain on employee well-being. Job demands are not necessarily negative in nature; however, they can evolve and cause stress to workers (Sardeshmukh, et al., 2012).
Comparably, job resources can be physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that are necessary to achieve work goals, cushion the effects of job demands and are connected to personal and professional development (Taris, Leisink & Schaufeli, 2017). Ideally, according to Barbieri, et al. (2021), job demands, and job resources behave in a dynamic, balanced manner that lead to or maintain employee well-being. However, when work demands exceed work resources and work resources are inadequate for work demands, an imbalance occurs that leads to work related stress over time, thereby affecting employee well-being (D’Emiljo & Du Preez, 2017).

Working remotely affects employees in different ways. Studies have suggested that certain factors such as remote work experience, autonomy and self believe can promote positive job outcomes and the overall well-being during WFH (Van Wingerden, Bakker & Derks, 2016; Hakanen, Seppälä & Peeters, 2017; Kuijpers, Kooij & van Woerkom, 2020). The JD-R model offers a framework that underlines the importance of various factors associated with employee well-being in the context of remote work. Self believe can be a key element to reduce job stress and improve employee’s well-being. Furthermore, autonomy and remote work are concepts that can promote self believe where there are work-family conflicts.

This study therefore aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion by examining the impact of WFH arrangements on employee productivity, well-being, and work-life balance. Since the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing remote working, this study’s findings could be a key in helping organizations implementing WFH arrangement due to the pandemic and keep employee’s stress levels low during this time (Shamsi et al., 2021).

Empirical Literature

Galanti et al. (2021) explored the impact of work from home during COVID-19 outbreak on employees’ remote work productivity, engagement, and stress. The study investigated the impact that family-work conflict, social isolation, distracting environment, job autonomy, and self-leadership have on employees’ productivity, work engagement, and stress experienced when WFH during the pandemic. The cross-sectional study analyzed data collected through an online questionnaire completed by employees working from home during the pandemic. The assumptions were tested using hierarchical linear regression. The results of the study were that employees’ family work conflict and social isolation were negatively related, while self-leadership and autonomy were positively related, to work from home productivity and work from home engagement. Family-work conflict and social isolation were negatively related to work from home stress, which was not affected by autonomy and self-leadership. The study concluded that individual and work-related aspects both hinder and facilitate work from home during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Similarly, Xiao et al., (2021), in their study impacts of working from home during COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental well-being of office workstation users sought to understand impacts of social, behaviourial, and physical factors on well-being of office workstation users during COVID-19 work from home. They deployed a questionnaire and received 988 responses. They used linear regression, multinomial logistic regression, and chi-square tests to understand factors associated with overall physical and mental health statuses and number of new physical and mental health issues. They study revealed that decreased overall physical and mental well-being after WFH were associated with physical exercise, food intake, communication with co-workers, children at home, distractions while working, adjusted work hours, workstation set-up and satisfaction with workspace indoor environmental factors. The study highlighted factors that impact worker’s physical and mental health well-being while WFH and provided a foundation for considering how to best support a positive WFH experience

Mehta (2021), in his study; Work from home-Work engagement amid COVID-19 lockdown and employee happiness, alluded that the prolonged lockdown as a part of the community mitigation steps to control the spread of the corona virus has led to massive work reorganization throughout the world. He continued stating in attempting to adjust to this new world of work organizations as well as individuals shifted substantial parts of their work for certain sets of jobs to a “work from home (WFH)” format. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between WFH, work engagement and perceived employee happiness. WFH engagement was hypothesized to be influenced by WFH autonomy, WFH convenience, and WFH psychosocial safety. Convenience sampling was used for data collection. Partial least squares structural equation modelling was used for data analysis. Results from this study indicate that WFH work engagement was able to predict a 23.9% variance in perceived happiness, while exogenous constructs, such as WFH autonomy, WFH convenience, and WFH psychosocial safety, were able to predict a 25.2% variance in WFH work engagement. Further, the study found that the effect between WFH work engagement and happiness indicates high effect size. A blindfolding procedure was used to obtain values to be used to predict the relevance of their model, and values greater than zero indicated that the model has predictive relevance to the study.

Research and Methodology

The study population consist of targeted BURS employees cutting across managerial and non-managerial staff at Head Office. Therefore, the target population of the study was BURS employees at Head Office. Non-probability sampling technique was employed for this study. This research employed quota sampling because participants were only included if they worked from home during COVID-19 lockdown. The sample of the study only included BURS staff at Head Office who worked from home during COVID-19 outbreak. This research is a qualitative study, and many researchers conquer that qualitative research requires a small sample size of between 10 to 30 participants (Dworkin, 2012; Boddy, 2016; Vasileiou, et al., 2018; Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020).
Therefore, the sample size of this study is 20 participants who comprise of BURS employees cutting across managerial and non-managerial staff at 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.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify themes across the data gathered. All the interview responses were read separately and relevant codes within these responses were created. These codes were grouped together in several themes according to their similarities.

Findings

Wellbeing

All respondents commented on their overall health and wellbeing when working from home. Some respondents mentioned that they noticed improvement in their wellbeing when working from home.

“Working from home afforded me more time to take care of my health; I could cook healthier meals and get in a little exercise” (Respondent K)

“Working from home made my life a 100% easier, both myself and my family’s wellbeing are, and I am much happier than I was before” (Respondent A).

“Not going to the office everyday was great for me, I think I was happier and more relaxed during this time despite the pandemic” (Respondent B).

Respondents also highlighted that WFH gave them an opportunity to invest time on their health and make better health decisions.

“WFH gave me and my family the opportunity to focus more on our health, we did more exercises and cooked healthier meals” (Respondent P)

“WFH enabled me to focus on my health as I was able to put in some exercise and cook healthier meals” (Respondent N)

“WFH enabled me to focus more on my physical health, I did more exercises than any other time, I even changed my eating habits to the better” (Respondent M)

In relation to stress 16 out of 18 respondents indicated feeling less stressed when WFH.

Respondent C stated being less stressed, “WFH reduced my stress levels caused by work, commuting and other work-related demands.”

Likewise, respondent F outlined that, “flexible working environment was more relaxing and therefore reduced my stress level”

Respondent J also felt the same way. “the flexibility of WFH reduced my stress levels as I worked at my own pace and time.”

Respondent D similarly reiterated, “WFH reduced my stress levels as I felt less overwhelmed by my job tasks and clients”

It was also evident from the findings that time saved in commuting positively influenced respondent’s wellbeing.

Respondent R outlined, “not having to wake up early to travel to work was one of the greatest benefits, I really enjoyed my morning sleep which made me feel refreshed and less tired”

Similarly, respondent G commented, “I got much more sleep as did not have to wake up early and travel to and from work.”

Comparably respondent Q outlined, “Because WFH cut off travelling to and from work, I was able to have more sleep in the morning which improved my health as I had more rest”

Respondent L also commented stating, “WFH enabled me to relax more, as I did not have to commute to and from work.”

Discussions

The findings suggest that most respondents outlined having greater wellbeing while working from home. Respondents expressed that they noticed improvement in their wellbeing when working from home. Respondents highlighted that WFH gave them an opportunity to invest time on their health and make better health choices. Most respondents indicated feeling less stressed when WFH. It is clear from the findings of this study that social isolation was a major challenge for employees working from home. All respondents
expressed that they experienced total or some aspects of isolation when working from home. This supports previous research by Allen et al., (2015), Beho (2021), Garg & van der Rijst (2015) and Ipsen et al. (2021), who all suggest that WFH have negative impact on wellbeing due to social isolation. Literature suggests that lack of physical interactions with colleagues was a major challenge for remote working employees. Respondents highlighted missing out on office chats and feelings of not being fully involved when using virtual or emails to communicate with the office. This was highlighted by Allen et al., (2015), who alluded that, methods such as emails are poor at conveying emotions in interactions between employees. However, the majority of communication when working from home was through emails and virtual meetings.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Basic Human Needs includes love and belongingness as part of human needs (Aruna & Hanachor, 2017). This suggests feelings that employees WFH lack “belonging”, which is a basic human need. This highlights the importance of social wellbeing of employees. In support, respondents expressed feeling lonely and left out while remote working. According to Kowalski et al (2022) and Rusdha & Edirisooryya (2021), WFH improves employee satisfaction. The study findings are consistent with this, as many respondents indicated an increase in their job satisfaction levels while WFH. Respondents commented on feeling happier and less stressed when WFH. Research has highlighted that this feeling of satisfaction might be due to greater autonomy and schedule flexibility (Smith, Patmos & Pitts, 2018). Further, respondents highlighted that the elimination of travel to and from work enhanced their wellbeing as they were able to sleep more in the morning. Respondents commented on feeling less tired and more relaxed in the mornings. This is consistent with a submission by Beauregard et al., (2013) and Elshaiekh et al. (2018), which suggest that reduced commuting maybe linked to enhance work-life balance and wellbeing. Respondents alluded that their wellbeing improved due to better sleep and mental health due to less commuting, and additional time spent with family. Furthermore, the findings suggested that all respondents sighted feeling less stressed and less tired when WFH. The respondents highlighted that WFH reduced their stress levels because they felt less overwhelmed by their job tasks and clients. Prasada, Vaidyab and Mangipudic (2020) research suggested an enhanced wellbeing due to reduced stress levels. However, other researchers found that stress levels for women remote workers did not improve; this has been attributed to childcare responsibilities while working from home. Respondents from this study, however, did not highlight stress caused by childcare. Respondents also highlighted that WFH gave them an opportunity to invest time on their health and make better health decision. This is consistent with a study by Bloom et al (2015), which suggested that remote working may reduce sickness.

It is evident from the findings of the study that employee wellbeing improved significantly when WFH. Although, social isolation was present across the board it is clear that other wellbeing benefits outweighed it. Therefore, from the findings it is safe to conclude that WFH impacted employee wellbeing positively.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to examine the effects of working from home (WFH) on the overall well-being of employees at BURS. The primary discovery pertaining to individuals’ wellness revealed that respondents experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness as a consequence of working from home. The participants also provided feedback regarding their physical well-being while working from home. The results indicate that none of the participants were given the necessary resources to construct a suitable work-from-home environment. The participants lacked the necessary resources, such as appropriate workstations, desks, and seating arrangements, to effectively carry out their task remotely. The participants expressed dissatisfaction with their physical well-being, specifically reporting discomfort in their backs as a result of an inadequate work environment while working from home. In spite of the constraints posed by their work environment, participants conveyed that they were able to engage in increased physical activity and consume more nutritious meals as a result of having greater autonomy and flexibility in managing their daily routines. Based on the research findings and conclusions, this study puts forth the following recommendations for the management of BURS and other public sector organizations in Botswana. These recommendations serve as a guiding framework for policy development aimed at enhancing the adoption and implementation of work-from-home (WFH) programs. The findings indicate that the implementation plan for working from home (WFH) at BURS was not well defined. The abrupt shift can be ascribed to the unforeseen alteration caused by the global epidemic. In the future, it is advisable for BURS to contemplate the development of workforce strategy solutions that facilitate the transformation of their staff. The achievement of this objective can be facilitated by the formulation of policies and guidelines that provide a structured framework for the execution of work-from-home arrangements. The imperative of providing employees with the infrastructure and tools to maintain productivity in remote work settings. The study's findings unequivocally identified a dearth of resources as a significant impediment to production. It is imperative that the Business Unit for Remote Support (BURS) establish a transparent budgetary framework to ensure the availability of necessary resources for facilitating remote work. The establishment of training programs for both managerial personnel and employees is vital. These programs should encompass various aspects, including effective administration of remote teams and fostering a mindset that is more receptive to change. It is recommended that BURS should establish and implement procedures that facilitate the practice of remote working. Ensuring comprehensive staff engagement in the development of work-from-home (WFH) strategies and the effective resolution of employee inquiries and apprehensions. The active engagement of employees in the development of work-from-home (WFH) strategies is crucial for facilitating a seamless transition, as it fosters a sense of ownership among employees. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BURS) should undertake the task of identifying and evaluating the necessary modifications in the workplace in order to effectively utilize emerging labor methodologies. The assessment of cultural implications of remote working methods by BURS is necessary to ensure company culture is open to embracing novel work methodologies. The establishment of a strong organizational culture necessitates the
cultivation of trust and openness among employees. Additionally, it is imperative to implement a comprehensive performance management system and develop a functional framework that can effectively support work-from-home (WFH) programs. The findings indicate that individuals 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 do a comprehensive evaluation of the working hours designated for employees engaged in remote work, with the aim of optimizing their alignment with both the individual employee's needs and the overarching objectives of the organization. As an illustration, one could consider implementing alternative working hours such as 9–12 and 3–7, as opposed to the conventional 9–5 schedule. Another option could involve the introduction of flexible working hours, wherein job performance is evaluated based on deliverables rather than the duration of time spent on work-related tasks. The current investigation was constrained to the examination of BURS. Subsequent investigations may endeavor to duplicate the present study across other public sector organizations in Botswana, so facilitating the derivation of generalizable findings pertaining to the work-from-home initiative inside Botswana's public sector. Researchers might conduct a comprehensive investigation into the feasibility of remote work in Botswana, with a specific emphasis on resource availability and the capacity of organizations in Botswana to furnish these resources.

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377


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