

Master of Arts in Organisational Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand.



Experiences of Human Resource Practitioners in Managing Workplace Bullying

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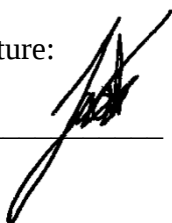
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Plagiarism Declaration:

I, Sarah Mayne, declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or for examination at this or any other university.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sarah Mayne', is written over a horizontal line.

Date:

28/04/2021

Abstract/Summary

Workplace Bullying (WPB) is a counterproductive work behaviour which has been illustrated through decades of research to have detrimental effects on the well-being of targets, bystanders and organisations as whole. It is therefore of paramount importance that WPB is managed effectively by Human Resource Practitioners (HRPs) who are tasked to investigate and resolve this counterproductive behaviour. Limited studies, however, have considered HRPs voices in managing WPB. This is highly problematic as in order to effectively resolve WPB incidents which emerge, it is important to understand the challenges and experiences of those tasked to manage it. Further to the above, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the research therefore explored the potentially new experiences and challenges of HRPs when managing WPB within a workforce who are working from home (WFH). To the researcher's knowledge, no research has explored the above stated area.

Considering the above, the present study utilised Ulrich's multiple roles model as a theoretical approach to contextualise and gain a more in-depth understanding of the challenges HRPs face when managing WPB. This study used a qualitative research method and used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to collect data. Nine HRPs from a large organisation within Gauteng were interviewed and a thematic content analysis (TCA) was used to analyse the data collected. The main findings of this study indicated that HRPs often find themselves divided as they have to adopt the role of a strategic partner or the role of an employee champion when managing WPB, thus leaving HRPs unable to address the needs of both the organisation and employees in WPB incidents. HRPs further felt that their subordinate power position, higher-level managers determining outcomes of bullying incidents, the lack of a bullying policy, the organisation's highly competitive environment, autocratic and toxic leadership styles, and managers' lack of people skills were their main challenges that impeded their ability to mitigate WPB. Further to the above, HRPs face new forms of bullying and new challenges when managing a remote workforce, namely cyberbullying, through the use of harsh tone, the merging of work and home life leaving employees without rest, insensitivity to employee's home contexts, and micromanagement. The emergence of these new challenges and forms of bullying under COVID-19 conditions were discussed in accordance with the Job-Demands Control (JCD) Model to account for how COVID-19 conditions have created a fertile ground for the emergence of WPB.

The implications of the study's findings are that they contribute to the awareness of the traditional challenges facing HRPs when managing WPB within South African organisations,

as well as bring awareness to new forms of bullying HRPs are tasked to manage within a work environment when employees are WFH. This study's findings may encourage organisations in traditional work environments to develop a comprehensive WPB policy which empowers HRPs to better manage WPB incidents both in face to face and WFH situations. This empowerment may enable HRPs to better manage WPB when powerful organisational members are involved, as well as enable them to better meet the needs of both management and employees in WPB incidents as they adopt the role of a change agent. Moreover, organisations are encouraged to provide managers with leadership training as well as people skills training which may serve to lower the number of WPB incidents which arise within the organisation.

This research may further encourage organisations who have successfully had staff WFH to adopt flexible working hours and focus attention on outputs of employees rather than enforced hours 'present' at the office. Lastly, organisations need to establish a more supportive work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic which is cognisant of employee needs, their ability to manage work-home boundaries and their long-term safety concerns.

Keywords: *Challenges; COVID-19; Human Resource Practitioners; Management of Bullying; Work Place Bullying; Working-From-Home.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Framing the examination of the challenges facing Human Resource Practitioners when managing workplace bullying

Workplace bullying (WPB) is a counterproductive behaviour that occurs in organisations around the world (Coetzee & van Dyk, 2018). WPB can be understood as a negative, frequent behaviour that is intended to cause physical or psychological harm to a targeted individual who is unable to defend themselves (Harrington et al., 2015; Ritzman, 2016; Dzurec et al., 2017). Bullying has been found to harm targets, bystanders and organisations as a whole, making the resultant consequences felt throughout organisations (Einarsen et al., 2020). Examples of such consequences include, but are not limited to, reduced well-being and satisfaction of employees and bystanders, reduced organisational productivity and declining organisational profits (Lipinski & Crothers, 2013; Ritzman, 2016). Bullying's wide-spread consequences illustrate that it is imperative that Human Resource Practitioners (HRPs) are able to manage WPB effectively as they have been found to play a key role in managing WPB incidents (Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019). Yet, despite the above, HRPs perspectives on WPB have been largely omitted in research (Fox & Cowan, 2015).

This research will therefore utilise Ulrich's multiple roles model to explore WPB from the perspective of HRPs in order to address this gap. According to Ulrich's multiple roles model, HRPs serve dual constituencies within the work context as they are expected to act as the "employee champion" which advocates for employee's interests and are simultaneously expected to act as a "strategic partner" with management who pursue organisational objectives (Ulrich, 1997). This alludes to a potential role conflict, which may prevent HRPs managing bullying in an effective manner (Harrington et al., 2015; Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019). It is important to explore the above as, according to Jackson, Schuler and Jiang (2014), WPB cannot be comprehensively addressed until HRPs "inter-role" conflict between managers and employees is fully considered. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in managing of WPB, as this may assist in the development of intervention strategies needed to overcome these challenges as well as add to the existing body of literature.

Further to the above, this research is being conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and within this time many individuals are working from home (WFH) in order to lower infection rates. The COVID-19 viral outbreak has resulted in heightened fear and uncertainty regarding employees' future which has the potential to result in people feeling stressed,

anxious, and powerless as to how their life unfolds (Robinson & Smith, 2020). In accordance with the Job Demands Control (JDC) Model and Frustration Aggression Hypothesis, such conditions may foster and promote the emergence of WPB as individuals may elect to vent their frustration and anger onto others in order to regain control of their new, and continually changing environment resulting in new WPB perpetrators (Broeck et al., 2011). This need for control can further result in managers adopting adverse managerial tactics, such as micromanaging their employees in which employees may feel bullied as managers doubt their professionalism and ability to work from home, and they are unjustly made to continually explain and account for their behaviours and actions (McCormack et al., 2017).

In the above instances such employees vent their frustrations onto others who, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, experience their low sense of control over their work, higher-levels of role-conflict as work is being conducted from home, and increased levels of job insecurity due to economic implications of the COVID-19 outbreak. All of the above stated conditions have been found to make individuals more vulnerable to becoming a target of WPB (Baillien et al., 2017; Van den Brande et al., 2017). In accordance with the above, it is therefore likely that WPB may thrive under COVID-19 conditions. This research will accordingly aim to explore the experiences and potential challenges of HRPs when managing WPB within a remote workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. The above may assist in the development of intervention strategies needed to overcome these challenges, as well as research an area which to the researcher's knowledge, has not yet been explored within South Africa.

Thus, this research will contribute to two gaps within the existing literature by exploring the experiences and challenges of HRPs in managing WPB pre-COVID-19 and exploring HRPs potentially new experiences and challenges in managing WPB within a staff who are WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic. The above areas will be explored in order to contribute towards the literature and facilitate a deeper understanding of the challenges facing HRPs in the management of WPB. This is necessary as it will provide a building block, upon which more research can be developed to ensure that HRPs challenges can be mitigated in order to reduce the prevalence of WPB.

The research report's structure

To address the aforementioned aims in a rational and structured format, this research report is divided into various chapters. These chapters are outlined below:

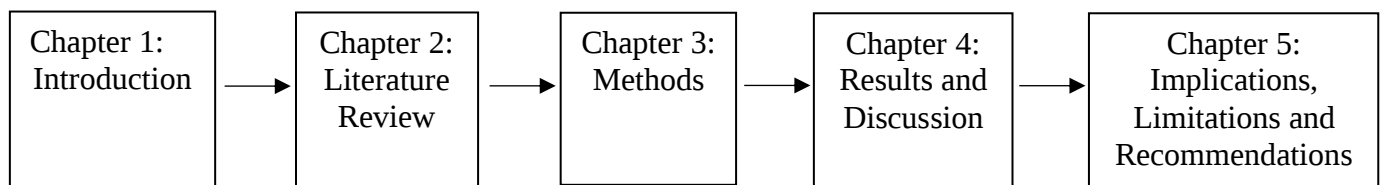
Chapter 1 has introduced the rationale behind conducting this research as well as the aims and contributions that this research may have within South African organisations.

Chapter 2 is a review of literature which explores the construct of workplace bullying, the consequences of workplace bullying, the antecedents of WPB, the theoretical framework of this study namely Ulrich's multiple roles model, and HRPs conflicting role demands when managing WPB. The literature review then moves onto the second research question exploring COVID -19; working from home and remote forms of WPB.

Chapter 3 addresses how the study was conducted within a Gauteng organisation. This chapter broadly states the various research methods and techniques utilised by the researcher within this study to gather the data required to adequately answer the two research questions posed. This above includes the study's aims, the research design and research paradigm used, sampling, instruments used, the data analysis process, establishing trustworthiness as well as the ethical considerations and ethical measures taken.

Chapter 4 reports the findings which emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The report's findings are presented as themes and are integrated with, and discussed in relation to, literature. To ensure trustworthiness of the identified themes, direct quotes from the transcripts are incorporated in the write up.

Chapter 5 discusses the study's practical implications, limitations, recommendations, and conclusion.



Chapter Two: Literature Review Defining Workplace Bullying:

For many years, researchers have struggled to compile an all-encompassing definition of Workplace Bullying (WPB) (Batchelor, 2019). There are, however, a number of recurring themes which exist within various WPB definitions, and exploring these themes allows for a comprehensive understanding of what WPB entails (Branch et al., 2013; Cornell & Limber, 2015). These themes stipulate that WPB entails a broad set of negative or aggressive behaviours that are frequent, and carried out with the intent to harm an individual who is unable to defend themselves (Agarwal & Rai, 2019; Ritzman, 2016). The bullied individual consequently experiences psychological and/or physical harm as a result of the bullying behaviours (Dzurec et al., 2017). In order to comprehensively explore the phenomenon of WPB, the above themes will be explored below.

Theme of Aggressive Behaviours.

The theme of “aggressive behaviours” is vague, and this lack of clarity is exacerbated as there is no exhaustive and definitive “checklist” of which behaviours constitute WPB (Fox & Cowan, 2015). However, in order to provide clarity on the topic bullying, theorists have attempted to operationalise WPB behaviours. Among the first theorists to do this were Rayner and Hoel (1997) who divided WPB behaviours into five categories namely: “Threat to professional status” which includes behaviours such as belittling a targeted individual’s professional opinion, “threat to personal standing” involving personal attacks such as insulting a target, “isolation” which pertains to excluding a target, “overwork” through placing targets under unreasonable work pressure, and finally “destabilisation” through actions such as failing to acknowledge the target’s contributions (Rayner & Hoel, 1997). This operationalisation, however, did not comprehensively address physical bullying behaviours. This led to theorists operationalising WPB behaviours in a different way.

A commonly accepted operationalisation of WPB behaviours is to divide them into two distinct categories, namely direct and indirect bullying behaviours. Due to its simplicity this distinction is widely used. Direct bullying behaviours can be understood as occurring between the bully and target, and involves overt behaviours such as public humiliation to tarnish a target’s image, insults, threats, and physical violence (Baldry, 2003; Cowie et al., 2002). On the other hand, indirect bullying behaviours intend to damage targets’ self-esteem and social relationships, and occurs through behaviours such as spreading rumours, refusing to work with an individual, or withholding information (Baldry, 2003; Cowie et al., 2002).

More recently, Einarsen et al. (2009) and Rai and Agarwal (2017) operationalised and classified WPB behaviours into three distinct categories, namely “Work-related bullying, Person-related bullying and Physically intimidating bullying”. Work-related bullying involves behaviours such as withholding information from targets, overlooking their suggestions and giving targets excessive workloads. Person-related bullying involves behaviours such as humiliating targets, excluding them, and gossiping about them. Lastly Physically- intimidating bullying involves behaviours such as shouting at targets, threatening to abuse targets, physically abusing targets and an array of intimidating behaviours such as finger pointing, throwing objects at the target or blocking individual’s paths (Einarsen et al., 2009).

Theme of Intent:

The above bullying behaviours are characterised as being carried out with the “intent” to harm a target. Intent has been conceptualised as wilful intent in which the behaviour was conducted in order to cause physical/psychological harm to the target, instrumental intent where the bullying behaviour was an unintended consequence of another goal/action, and unintentional in which the perpetrator lacked the sensitivity to foresee the negative impact of their action (Tehrani, 2013). In accordance with these various conceptualisations, WPB theorists argue that WPB involves actual or perceived intent of harm from the victim’s perspective, thus including unintentionally harmful acts from perpetrators as acts of bullying (Einarsen et al., 2011). The above victim focus of intent has been argued as necessary as the perpetrator’s intent does not alter the consequence of their actions.

While there has been some debate as to whether perpetrators do intend to harm, intent remains a defining characteristic as bullying occurs over an extended time period, and it is unlikely that the perpetrator will remain unaware of the harm caused by their actions (Einarsen et al., 2011). Intent further remains a characteristic of bullying, as bullying is conceptualised as a negative behaviour which requires intent by the perpetrator (Burger et al., 2015).

Theme of Frequency:

To further add to the complexity surrounding WPB, the theme of “frequency” may not be required for an extremely damaging behaviour to be classified as bullying. Bullying is traditionally understood as a calculated mistreatment over an extended time period, in which negative acts occur on a weekly if not daily basis (Ritzman, 2016). In this traditional understanding, it is the frequency of the mistreatment which makes bullying so damaging (Leymann, 1996). From a conceptual perspective, it is the feeling of being perpetually trapped

and constantly victimised through harassment which distinguishes WPB from other forms of workplace aggression such as incivility (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Thus, occasional aggressive behaviours are not understood as bullying as they do not meet the requirement of frequency (Tehrani, 2013).

Yet, some researchers argue that an extreme incident which lowers an individual's well-being, such as an incident of direct aggression, may too be classified as bullying (Baldry et al., 2017). This single incident is required to be of a sufficient extremity that it leaves the target in a "permanent state of fear and anxiety" (Tehrani, 2013). While there is a lack of consensus as to whether frequency is indeed a defining factor of bullying, WPB is commonly accepted and defined as an ongoing event which occurs regularly and repeatedly (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). According to Einarsen et al. (2011) bullying occurs frequently due to perceived power differentials which exist between the bully and the perpetrator. Power differentials is also a theme within the WPB definition, and this will be discussed below.

Theme of Power Differentials:

Whilst two persons of equal power experiencing conflict may be unpleasant, it is unlikely that this negative exchange would be conceptualised as bullying. This is because bullying involves an imbalance of power in which a more powerful individual or group tries to undermine and dominate a target (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Power differentials can result from actual differences in power which are organisationally derived, as well as from perceived differences in power (Baillien et al., 2017; Branch et al., 2013).

Actual differences in power arise from the organisational hierarchy which awards more power to individuals who are higher up within the organisational structure (Wright, 2020). Bullying in such instances occurs through positional power stemming from an individual's role or position; resources power such as possessing required technology or contacts required to complete certain work; knowledge power where possessing valuable information is withheld from others; and delegated power in which a perpetrator uses their relationship with a powerful individual in order to undermine and/or threaten a target by proxy (Baillien et al., 2017; Tehrani, 2013; Wright, 2020). Perceived differences in power may arise from a multitude of factors including: physical attributes such as the bully being physically stronger than their target, from the bully's perceived support from their workgroup, and from the number of co-perpetrators that the bully uses to gang-up on their target (Baillien et al., 2017; Cunliffe & Mostert, 2012). Bullying through perceived power occurs as the bully possesses psychological

power in which they exploit a target's vulnerability for their own personal gain, and personality power which they use to intimidate others. These various forms of power can occur singularly or in combination and make it challenging for other individuals, namely those without these forms of power, to challenge the bully's behaviour (Tehrani, 2013). These forms of perceived power make employees more powerful but are not necessarily a direct result of their position within the organisation's hierarchy.

Regardless of how such power differentials arise, bullying involves an imbalance of power in which a more powerful individual or group tries to undermine and dominate another individual (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). This imbalance of power supports the findings that targets are unable to defend themselves against bullies, as they believe they are weaker than the bullying perpetrator and/or his/her group (Baillien et al., 2017; Branch et al., 2013).

This broad understanding of power differentials further explains how bullying can occur horizontally between employees on the same organisational level, or vertically between employees on different organisational levels (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). Vertical bullying may be 'top-down' from a higher level manager towards a lower-level employee, or 'bottom-up' from a lower-level employee towards a higher-level manager (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). In this regard lower-level employees, especially if they are able to organise themselves into a group, are able to bully a more senior employee. Bullying, however, mostly occurs from the top-down making organisational hierarchy an important source of power (Einarsen et al., 2020). Top-down bullying is more complex as it is difficult to discern which behaviours constitute reasonable management action through holding employees accountable with regard to accomplishing their work tasks, and which behaviours constitute WPB (Omari & Paull, 2017). According to Dollard et al. (2017) bullying incidents do not include management action taken in a reasonable way. However, this distinction is difficult to make as management actions such as instructing employees to work overtime, refusing leave, or rejections of employee requests, may or may not be reasonable depending on the circumstances and context in which they occur. This is supported by (Jerkins, 2011) who found that reasonable but unpopular managerial practices and decisions were regarded as WPB. This has large implications as bullying accusations may therefore be employees who have become disgruntled with reasonable management actions and organisational practices.

This distinction is even more complex than it first appears, as in some instances victims have reported increased productivity after being bullied (Omari & Paull, 2017). This may

illustrate that the victim's performance was sub-standard to begin with; that the managers behaviours positively impacted the individual's output, work quality and efficiency; or that the behaviours pushed targets to work harder in attempts to prevent the 'so-called' bullying continuing (Omari & Paull, 2017). Given the above example, would this form of robust performance management then be classified as "reasonable management action" as it is done to enhance staff's productivity? Or does the resultant harm of the managers actions require that the behaviour be defined at WPB?

According to Omari and Paull (2017) a fine line exists which separates reasonable management action and an undue pressure on individuals within the workplace. However, the difficulty in distinguishing WPB from reasonable management action complicates HRPs ability to manage WPB incidents, as they are tasked with disentangling whether the reported behaviour is indeed WPB, or falls within the scope of reasonable management action (Omari & Paull, 2017). The above can be understood as yet another component which complicates the establishment of a comprehensive WPB definition.

To conclude: As illustrated in the above section, the overarching themes within various bullying definitions are broad and, in some instances, contested. This explains why there is no exhaustive "checklist" that specifies exactly which behaviours are seen as bullying, and why there is no single definition which is universally accepted (Branch et al., 2013; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012). This could be a potential challenge for HRPs as it may be difficult to manage behaviour which lacks a clear definition.

Consequences of Bullying

The above section provides an understanding of what WPB entails. However, to truly comprehend this counterproductive behaviour, one must further understand the resultant consequences. WPB has been found to have serious inimical individual, bystander and organisational consequences which will be discussed in more detail below.

Consequences for Individuals:

As previously stated, bullying results in psychological and/or physiological harm to the bullied individual (Dzurec et al., 2017). Systematic reviews of the literature by Lever et al., (2019) and Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) found that bullying resulted in targets experiencing psychological harm as they suffered from issues such as stress, anxiety, burnout, depression and lower self-perceptions due to bullying incidents. In some extreme cases, severe psychological stress from bullying has been found to result in targets having suicidal thoughts,

targets attempting or committing suicide, and targets suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Iglesias & Vallejo, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2015). Symptoms associated with PTSD from bullying incidents include victims being hyper-vigilant, fearful, exhausted, continually angry, forgetful and unable to sleep (Nielsen et al., 2015). The harm caused from bullying, however, is not limited to psychological harm, as bullying victims may also experience physiological issues such as high blood pressure, heart and circulation issues, chest pains, fatigue, headaches, sleep troubles, weight fluctuations, gastrointestinal issues and musculoskeletal problems (Herrmann-Lingen, 2019; Lever et al., 2019; Vignoli et al., 2015). Both the physiological and psychological consequences above can account for bullying targets taking more sick leave than other employees (Lever et al., 2019). It is important to note that the consequences of WPB extend further than the target, as bystanders are also negatively affected which will be discussed in more detail below (Einarsen et al., 2020).

Consequences for Bystanders:

Bystanders have been conceptualised as secondary targets of WPB as their “perceptions, fears or expectations” are altered as a consequence of being secondary victims to WPB incidents (Barling, 1996, p. 35). Despite bystanders being conceptualised as secondary bullying targets due to proximity, few studies have examined the consequences of WPB on witnesses of bullying incidents. In one of the studies conducted, bystanders were found to experience increased conflict in work-relationships, instability at work, unreasonable workloads, and role ambiguity (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). Further to this, bystanders have been found to be more likely than other employees, that is those that are not bullied, to experience anxiety, stress, depressive symptoms and reduced job-satisfaction as they fear they may become the next victims (Lipinski & Crothers, 2013). More recently, Medina (2017) found that bystanders of WPB experienced decreased productivity, an overall decline in wellbeing, and were more likely than other employees to leave their organisation. The above illustrates how WPB effects more than just targets, as witnesses of bullying too experience negative consequences (Einarsen et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that the consequences of WPB extend further than targets and bystanders, as consequences are also felt on an organisational level which will be discussed below.

Consequences for Organisations:

When bullying is left unchecked in organisations, employees learn that bullying behaviours are accepted which fosters and perpetuates toxic organisational cultures (Walsh et al., 2019). The above is explained by Cilliers (2012) who states that bullying behaviours and

experiences within organisations manifest as an “intense unconscious systemic dynamic” involving the victim, the bully, and the overall organisational culture. Employees functioning within these cultures often experience feelings of dread, fear, and hypervigilance while at work (Lipinski & Crothers, 2013). Consequences of the above include lower levels of motivation, decreased productivity, reduced commitment, missed deadlines, lower levels of employee engagement, reduced satisfaction and increased absenteeism (Coetzee & van Dyk, 2018; Fox & Stallworth, 2010). Toxic bullying cultures are further consequential to organisational performance as employees focus their energy into protecting themselves from negative bullying behaviours, reducing the amount of energy expended into work-related tasks and increasing workplace errors (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Ritzman, 2016).

Bullying behaviours also have cost implications for organisations as top performers leave, followed by other employees, resulting in a loss of skills, technical knowledge and experience (Lipinski & Crothers, 2013). The above mentioned turnover results in additional recruitment, training and replacement costs which place a financial burden on the organisation (Glambek et al., 2014; Sheehan et al., 2018). Further cost implications include worker compensation claims, tarnishing of companies’ reputations through bad word of mouth, and resultant loss of positive public relations (Fox & Stallworth, 2010).

To Conclude: The above consequences can be consolidated by Nzonzo (2017) who stated that bullying has a direct and negative affect on the wellness of both employees and organisations. Due to the negatively, widely-felt consequences of bullying it is imperative to study the antecedents of WPB. That is, which factors contribute to the onset, escalation and consequences of bullying within organisations.

Antecedents of Workplace Bullying:

The previous section has explored the consequences of WPB, but one also needs to examine the antecedents of bullying. Antecedents of WPB can be discussed on three levels namely: a micro-level which pertains to individual antecedents such as personality traits and propensity for conflict; a meso-level which pertains to work antecedents such as job characteristics and psychosocial working conditions; and lastly macro-level or organisational antecedents such as leadership, and organizational culture (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). It is likely that several antecedents may combine and interact to contribute to the development of WPB, although one antecedent may sometimes play a dominating role (Einarsen et al., 2020). Thus,

the various levels of these antecedents will be discussed below as they are all likely to contribute to WPB incidents.

Individual Antecedents of Workplace Bullying:

On an individual level, the Big Five personality traits as proposed by Eysenck (1991) are one of the most commonly researched antecedents of WPB (Nielsen et al., 2017). This finding could be attributed to the consistent cross-cultural validity of this measure (McCrae et al., 1998). A study conducted by Glasø et al. (2007) provided much insight within the study of the Big Five personality traits and WPB. This study illustrated that bullying victims are likely to have high levels of neuroticism and introversion, and low levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability. Other studies have supported these findings re-establishing that targets of bullying have higher levels of neuroticism, and lower levels of extroversion when compared to non-bullied individuals (Pallesen et al., 2017). Conversely, in some studies bullied individuals have been found to have higher levels of conscientiousness (Podsiały & Gamian-Wilk, 2017). The above can be accounted for by Kim and Glomb (2014) who state that individuals high in conscientiousness may outperform their colleagues, thereby making them targets of WPB due to their colleagues' envy. An interesting emergence within recent findings is that individuals who possess certain personality traits may be more likely to perceive themselves as victims of WPB. For example, it has been found that individuals who possess the Type A personality trait, high trait anger, and high trait anxiety are more likely to perceive themselves as being targets of bullying (Naseer et al., 2016; Reknes et al., 2019).

Research has also explored the personality traits of WPB perpetrators. When analysing Big Five personality traits, perpetrators have been found to possess lower levels of agreeableness, lower levels of conscientiousness and high levels of neuroticism when compared to bullying targets and control groups (Pallesen et al., 2017). Recent studies have further investigated whether bullying perpetrators possess the "Dark Triad" personality traits which comprises of Narcissism, Psychopathy and Machiavellianism. A study conducted by Pilch and Turska (2015) found that perpetrators of bullying are likely to possess aggressive, and Machiavellian traits within competitive work environments. A further study conducted by Tokarev et al., (2017) found that traits of manipulateness and callousness which are common to both psychopathy and narcissism predicted workplace bullying behaviours.

Another well-studied individual-level antecedent of WPB is conflict, with higher levels of conflict resulting in more incidents of WPB within organisations (Baillien et al., 2016).

Relationship conflict was found to mediate the relationship between task conflict and bullying in two recent studies (Baillien et al., 2016; Leon-Perez et al., 2015). Baillien et al. (2016) concluded that task conflicts contain elements of interpersonal conflict which wear out the employee's resources, making them an 'easy target' of WPB. In another study conducted by Leon-Perez et al. (2015) they concluded that task conflicts are likely to lead to long-lasting relationship conflicts, which are emotionally charged and may result in WPB behaviours. Both studies conceptualise conflict as an antecedent to WPB incidents, illustrating the need to reduce both task and interpersonal conflicts within organisations.

Further to the above, 'individual difference' factors can lead to bullying as individuals who possess specific or unique characteristics may be more vulnerable to WPB. The above is illustrated as gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation, educational level, disability, seniority and tenure have been found to intersect and influence the emergence of bullying in work contexts, with employees who possess unique characteristics experiencing an increased likelihood of becoming a WPB victim (Elder & Davila, 2019; Prevost & Hunt, 2018). In this regard, research has shown that anyone 'who is different' may be at risk of being a target of WPB. The above illustrates that people who are marginalized in terms of factors such as race, sexuality, or gender are more likely to experience bullying in the workplace (Banday et al., 2018). In support of the above, Soylu and Sheehy-Skeffington (2015) found that the lower status religious group could also be the target of bullying incidents, irrespective of the types of religious groups involved.

A study conducted by Cunniff and Mostert (2012) analysing bullying in South African organisations yielded contradictory findings to international research as the study found that the country's racial majority, namely Black individuals, experienced higher levels of WPB than the country's racial minority groups namely White, Coloured and Indian individuals. This is supported by later South African studies such as Motsei (2015) who found that Black employees were more likely to experience WPB, and is further supported by Motsei and Nkomo (2016) who found that Black individuals within South Africa experienced more bullying in the workplace, and believed they were targeted due to their race.

This occurs as bullying in organisations is a "reflection of the structural and power relationships in wider society"(Samnani, 2013, p. 32), thereby accounting for why WPB has been described as "a gendered and racialized phenomena" (Misawa & Rowland, 2015, p. 4). Further to the above, within South African organisations younger employees, employees with

lower education levels, and employees from minority religious groups have been found to be victims of WPB (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Motsei & Nkomo, 2016). Thus, Black individuals, less educated individuals, women, younger employees and those from religious minority groups can be conceptualised as forming an “out group” which are more likely to experience WPB as they are seen as different to the White, hegemonic management which still dominates most private institutions (Motsei, 2015; Saba, 2019). The South African literature and international literature thereby supports that those who are seen as “different” or don’t conform to the dominant values of the management coalition (White, male hegemonic) are more likely to be victims of WPB.

The previous section has described Individual- level antecedents to WPB, namely personality and conflict. However, it is important to note that individual-level antecedents are not sufficient in understanding WPB (Balducci, Fraccaroli & Schaufeli, 2011). This is because WPB is a strain which is initiated by individual, work, and environmental antecedents which together are likely contribute to the development and escalation of WPB incidents (Einarsen et al., 2020). Thus, work and organisational level antecedents will be discussed in the following sections in order to comprehensively understand how WPB emerges.

Work-level Antecedents of Workplace Bullying:

The next level which will be analysed is the meso or work level which will explore both job characteristics and psychosocial work conditions as antecedents of WPB (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). The above antecedents will be discussed in accordance with the Job-Demands Control (JDC) model (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). The JDC model is stress a model which states that job demands, coupled with low levels of individual control, leads to strain and reduced well-being (Karasek 1979). The JDC model is being increasingly used to study WPB in literature, as reduced well-being can increase employee perceptions of WPB (Ariza-Montes et al., 2016).

Recent studies have illustrated that job characteristics or job demands such as high levels of role conflict, role ambiguity, job insecurity, unreasonable workloads, and inflated cognitive demands are the most significant predictors of being a WPB target (Baillien et al., 2017; Van den Brande et al., 2017). This occurs as the above stated job demands result in work related strain, reduced well-being, and increased perceptions of WPB (Ariza-Montes et al., 2016; Karasek, 1979). The above accounts for why work-stress was found to escalate the number of WPB incidents (Ågotnes et al., 2020). Psychosocial working conditions are another work-related antecedent of WPB which has been well explored in research (Rai & Agarwal,

2018). Studies have shown that psychosocial working conditions such as a reduced sense of coherence, lower levels of individual control, and emotional exhaustion are job demands which increase employee perceptions of WPB incidents (Broeck et al., 2011; Goodboy et al., 2017).

Stressful environments not only increase the possibility of individuals being targeted but can also escalate perpetration. The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis is aligned with the JDC argument and can be used to describe how stressful work environments, which arise due to high job demands and low control, may result in employees becoming WPB perpetrators (Broeck et al., 2011). The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis was developed from Breuer and Freud's (1895) concept of Catharsis, which states that individuals need to express their emotions in order to lower the emotion's intensity (Denzler & Förster, 2012). In accordance with the above hypothesis, employees need to find an outlet to release their work frustrations, or these frustrations will lead to aggression. In the workplace, bullying perpetrators vent their frustrations and/or aggression by bullying others in order to gain a sense of control over their work environment, and lower their own emotional burden (Broeck et al., 2011).

The above links into a less explored idea, which is the notion that organisations' themselves are bullies. According to Carr (2015), organisations' hierarchical and bureaucratic structure places undue stress and pressure on managers and higher-level employees, which in itself meets bullying criteria (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). However, this can be explored further as from a psychodynamic perspective, individual's repressed energy from undue work stress is vented from higher-level employees towards other, lower-level employees (Tomei et al., 2012). The lower-level employees then become WPB victims and scapegoats that built-up frustrations of higher-level employees are projected onto (Tomei et al., 2012). This is in accordance with the finding that work-stress and time pressure are the most significant predictors of WPB (Einarsen et al., 2020). Thus, organisations can be conceptualised as bullies who place unreasonable work pressure on higher-level employees, and these higher-level employees in turn project their frustrations onto others and too become WPB perpetrators.

The above section illustrates how both job characteristics and psychosocial work conditions are antecedents of WPB, as both factors play an intricate role in facilitating an individual being a victim as well as a perpetrator of WPB. The following section will now discuss the organisational-level antecedents of WPB.

Organisational-level Antecedents of Workplace Bullying:

The next level to be discussed is the macro or organisational-level, which refers to aspects such as the organisations' leadership styles and organisational climate.

According to Onorato (2013), leadership style is a key antecedent of WPB. Research has found that perceptions of poor leadership predict increased WPB incidents (Francioli et al., 2018). Accordingly, the risk of WPB is increased in work environments where leaders fail to provide development opportunities, job satisfaction, and efficient work plans (Francioli et al., 2018). In line with the above, laissez-fair, autocratic and democratic leadership, as conceptualised by Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939), will be discussed below. Following this, Bass's (1985) model of laissez-fair, transactional, and transformational leadership styles will be then be discussed. The last form of leadership discussed will then be toxic leadership which was coined by Whicker (1996). All of the aforementioned leadership styles have been associated with higher or lower levels of bullying in the workplace, and this will be elaborated on below.

Autocratic Leadership: Autocratic leaders can be defined as those who enact their own will, with limited or no consultation of staffs' inputs or opinions (Chukwusa, 2018). Autocratic leaders further dictate which processes, rules and structures are to be followed during task completion, determine employee goals, and share little information with others in order to exercise their control (Schaubroeck, Shen & Chong, 2016). Autocratic leaders therefore make decisions alone, expect staff to carry out these orders, and use unilateral communication which occurs from the top down (Chukwusa, 2018). Autocratic leadership is highly effective in time pressured situations, in industries when high-production is required, when followers are untrained or uncertain as to their tasks, and in instances when work needs to be coordinated with another department (Khan et al., 2015). Autocratic leaders further solve issues quickly and meet targets effectively (Cunningham et al, 2015). However, autocratic leadership can result in employees becoming fearful and tense (Khan et al., 2015).The autocratic leadership style has further been associated with WPB throughout literature (Feijó et al., 2019). This is seen as autocratic leadership styles, which are low in individual consideration, are a strong predictor of new bullying incidents emerging in work context

(Fontes et al., 2019; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015). It is further supported by Duffy and Yamada (2018) who stated that autocratic leadership is a large contributing factor to WPB incidents.

Democratic Leadership: In contrast to autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership, is based on the principles of amiability, helpfulness, and participation (Smolović-Jones et al., 2016). Democratic leaders provide their subordinates with direction, while still enabling employees to develop their own goals (Khan et al., 2015). In this group dynamic, leaders share decision-making and problem-solving with their team members, however, the leader still has the final say once information has been collected from group members (Fiaz et al., 2017). Participative leaders further keep group members continually informed about all aspects which influence their work tasks (Fiaz et al., 2017). The philosophical assumptions underlying democratic leadership are that people are trustworthy, intrinsically motivated, enjoy responsibility, like to engage in challenging work, and are encouraged by high performance (Smolović-Jones et al., 2016). Democratic leadership is most effective when leaders engage with highly skilled or knowledgeable employees, when resolving individual or group problems, or when developing new and innovative ideas (Derecskei, 2016; Fiaz et al., 2017).

Contrary to autocratic and laissez-fair leadership styles, democratic leadership styles have been found to protect the organisation against bullying behaviours (Feijó et al., 2019). Due to the above, institutions often wish to enhance democratic leadership to promote social justice (Parés et al., 2017; Wait, 2018). However, despite the above findings, democratic leadership is inappropriate under severe time constraints, in instances when the institution cannot afford to make an error, when easier and/or more cost-effective methods to make a section are available, or when employee safety is of concern (Khan et al., 2015).

Laissez-Fair Leadership Laissez-fair leaders give all authority to their followers who are responsible for determining their own goals, making their own decisions, and resolving issues on their own (Khan et al., 2015). Laissez-faire leaders tend to avoid making decisions, are usually hesitant to act, and avoid situations in which problems could arise (Daft, 2017; Islam et al., 2018; Northhouse, 2020). Laissez-faire has therefore been referred to as non-leadership, as leaders are largely unresponsive to subordinates needs and avoid leadership tasks (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Skogstad et al., 2014). Therefore, laissez-faire leaders give employees as much freedom as possible, abdicate control, and communicate only when it is required and (Fiaz et al., 2017). laissez-faire is most successful

when working with highly skilled and/or knowledgeable employees, when employees are internally motivated and take pride in their work, and when employees are trustworthy and experienced (Khan et al., 2015). A laissez-faire leadership style lies at the opposite end of the spectrum from an autocratic style of leadership, but has, too, been associated with increased WPB incidents. In this regard, Woodrow and Guest (2017) state that laissez-faire leadership styles can lead to WPB. This is seen as Nielsen (2012) found that subordinates whose leaders adopt a laissez-faire leadership style are more likely to be exposed to bullying behaviours. WPB has been found to occur under laissez-faire leadership style as the leaders seldom intervene in WPB incidents as they lack knowledge on the bullying events due to poor oversight, actively avoiding or ignoring bullying incidents, or lack the knowledge on how to best manage bullying behaviours and bullying incidents (Glambek et al., 2014). Bullying may further occur as laissez-faire leaders do not speak out against bullying, which results in the perception that bullying behaviours are acceptable within the work environment (Nielsen, 2013). Bullying is further more likely to occur as higher levels of laissez-faire leadership is generally associated with lower intervention rates in bullying incidents and low levels of preventative action to inhibit such events occurring (Ågotnes et al., 2020; Glambek et al., 2018). Laissez-faire leadership promoting WPB is further illustrated as supervisors who adopted a laissez-faire leadership style were positively related to higher levels of work-related bullying, person-related bullying, as well as physically intimidating bullying (Dussault & Frenette, 2015; Fleming, 2017). Moreover, WPB was 4.3 times more likely to emerge in environments in which supervisors had adopted laissez-faire leadership styles (Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015). This accounts for why laissez-faire leadership has been found as an important component in the escalation of WPB (Ågotnes et al., 2020). It further accounts for why Glambek et al. (2014) found that the laissez-faire leadership style continues and exacerbates bullying within the work context

The above illustrates that both autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles can be associated with increased incidents of WPB, yet democratic leadership styles have been found to protect organisations against bullying behaviour. This section will now move on to explore Bass's (1985) model of laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership styles in relation WPB. As laissez-faire leadership has already been discussed, only transactional and transformational leadership styles will be discussed below.

Transformational Leadership: Transformational leaders display four key components in varying degrees; that is *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*,

and individualized consideration (Chan et al., 2019). The above four components work in combination, and enable leaders to deeply inspire and motivate employees (Tharnpas & Sakun, 2015). These key leadership components will be discussed in more detail below.

Transformational leaders with *idealized influence* are seen as positive role models who are confident in the organisation's mission, and consistently behave in an ethical manner which develops their followers' trust, respect and admiration in their leader (Northouse, 2018). On the other hand, *Inspirational motivation* refers to leader's ability to instil confidence, motivation and purpose in their followers, thereby inspiring their followers to direct extra energy into the achievement of organisational goals (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2018). Furthermore, *Intellectual stimulation* arises when leaders build their followers problem-solving ability through developing their followers creativity and autonomy (Northouse, 2018). The above ensures that their followers are able to generate innovative solutions to future challenges (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2018). Finally, *individual consideration* refers to leaders who recognize their followers needs and underlying motives in order to ensure that their followers are able to achieve their goals, and feel fulfilled in their positions (Chan et al., 2019). These four components ultimately inspire the followers of transformational leaders to transcend their own self-interests in the pursuit of the organisations goals (Ågotnes et al., 2020). The above accounts for why studies have indicated that transactional leadership may reduce the number of WPB incidents.

Escartín et al. (2017) found that higher levels of transformational leadership resulted in a reduced number of bullying behaviours. This is supported by Fleming (2017) who found that transformational leadership reduced of the number of work-related and person-related WPB incidents. Transformational leadership is said to buffer against bullying in the workplace as followers are encouraged to model their leader's ethical actions, and are further encouraged behave in a manner which aids in the achievement of organisational goals (Escartín et al., 2017). Men (2014) similarly stated that transformational leadership was a compassionate form of leadership, which is removed from bullying, thereby reducing the number of bullying incidents. The above accounts for why Woodrow and Guest (2017) state that transformational leadership may help protect employees from WPB.

Transactional Leadership Transactional leadership focuses on a series of exchanges of gratification between leaders and employees, which are made with the intent of maximising both employee and organisational gains (McCleskey, 2014). In this exchange relationship, the

leader is aware of what employees want, and ensures that employees will receive rewards in line with their wants should their work meet organisational expectations (Purwanto et al., 2020). Transactional leaders are responsive to employees needs and personal interests, provided employees' wants are proportional to their value contributed (Purwanto et al., 2020).

The above exchange enables leaders to meet set objectives, complete their tasks, improve organisational efficacy, and direct the behaviour of employees towards established goals (McCleskey, 2014). This in turn enables employees to focus on their clearly set out objectives, reduces employees' levels of anxiety, and enables employees to fulfil their self-interests (McCleskey, 2014). However, transactional leadership has been criticised for creating a shallow, short-term, agreement which ultimately leads to resentment between leaders and employees (Purwanto et al., 2020). Additionally, transactional leadership is criticised for adopting a one-dimensional approach to leadership, thereby not adequately addressing contextual factors (Yukl, 2011). Despite the above criticisms, research has not found that transactional leadership styles lead to WPB. Rather, research linking transactional leadership and WPB has been inconsistent throughout literature with studies yielding mixed and inconclusive results (Fleming, 2017).

Ertureten et al. (2013) found that transactional leadership was related to a decrease in bullying behaviour due to its focus on groupwork and overall emphasis on performance and stability. This was supported by Dussault and Frenette (2015) who found that transactional leadership reduced work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physically intimidating bullying. Yet, other studies such Cemaloğlu (2011) found no significant relationship between transactional leadership and WPB, and Fleming (2017) reported mixed results, and subsequently inconclusive findings when correlating transactional leadership and WPB. The above mixed findings may account for why Bass postulated that effective leaders use a combination of both transactional and transformational leadership styles (Bass, 1985). It is the researcher's opinion that transactional leadership may lead to abuses of power where leaders withhold benefits, which can be seen as a form of bullying.

Toxic Leadership: Toxic leaders pursue only for their own self-interests, work against organisational goals, and create a dysfunctional work environment (Winn & Dykes, 2019). To ensure that their followers obey their demands, toxic leaders create a “demoralizing, dehumanizing and fearful atmosphere” which is detrimental to their followers, and the organisation as a whole (Indradevi, 2016., p. 106). This detrimental work environment is

developed and perpetuated as toxic leaders punish those who disagree with them, and reward and promote those who offer unwavering and unquestioning support (Özer et al., 2017).

According to Kim (2016), toxic leaders can be identified as they refuse to listen to others' feedback, excessively focus on their own needs, are dishonest, inconsistent in their actions, lack a moral code, incite cliquishness, and bully their followers, particularly those not in their in-group. The above is consistent with the four dimensions of toxic leadership identified by Çelebi et al. (2015) which are self-interest, selfishness, unappreciativeness and a negative spiritual state. Further to the above, toxic leaders often engage in behaviours such as avoiding, humiliating and intimidating their followers, displaying aggressive tendencies, refusing to disclose job targets and blaming others for their own issues or mistakes (Steele, 2011). The above accounts for why toxic leadership is considered a key factor in the development and maintenance of WPB (Malik et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2016).

The above occurs as when examining the literature, the behaviours of toxic leadership are the same as many WPB behaviours including humiliating and belittling targets, undermining targets' contributions, using abusive language, withholding information, and setting unreasonable work demands (Crozet, 2020). According to Kim (2016), at worst the above behaviours become blatantly abusive as toxic leaders use personal attacks, coercion and threatening behaviours when conversing with followers. The aforementioned bullying behaviours occur as toxic leaders view employees as a disposable resource, which can be disposed of and used as they see fit (Winn & Dykes, 2019).

To Conclude: The previous section explored how leadership style can be a key antecedent to WPB behaviours, but was careful to acknowledge that that leadership style is inextricably linked with the organisational contextual requirements, and cannot be changed easily in order to lower WPB incidents. This is because it is imperative a leadership style is adopted which enables organisational objectives to be met, as without this the organisation will not survive. Another organisational level antecedent that can foster or inhibit bullying behaviours is the culture of the organisation, which will be discussed below.

Culture refers to the organisation's core values, assumptions and approaches which ultimately determines the work environment (Polychroniou & Trivellas, 2018). Culture thus plays a key role in both inhibiting and facilitating WPB (Pheko et al., 2017; Rai & Agarwal, 2018). The section below will discuss organisational cultures in accordance with the *Competing Values Framework*, which classifies organisational culture into four groups namely

clan, adhocracy, hierarchy or market culture which will be described below (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

The Clan Culture: The clan culture focuses on collaboration and teamwork, and is ultimately concerned with developing a humane work environment (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). According to Power et al. (2013), WPB is less likely to be tolerated within humanistic or clan environments which focus on individual development. In support of the above, employees working within environments with a high clan culture are less likely to be bullied than employees working within environments that have a low clan culture (Samsudin et al., 2019). It further accounts for why employees working within clan cultures experience less workplace incivility and less WPB than employees working in other organisational culture types (Pilch & Turska, 2015). The adhocracy culture has further been associated with less WPB incidents.

The Adhocracy Culture: The adhocracy culture strives for adaptability, creativity, and flexibility in order to produce new and innovative products/services which fulfil societies ever changing needs (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Thus, adhocracy culture focuses on individuality and risk in order to ensure the production of novel ideas and organisational success (Tran, 2020). The adhocracy culture has been found to lower WPB incidents, as the culture promotes individual growth and success (Samsudin et al., 2019). Employees working within an adhocracy culture have been found to experience lower levels of WPB than employees working within hierarchy and market organisational cultures (Pilch & Turska, 2015; Samsudin et al., 2019). The hierarchy culture has been found to facilitate WPB, and this will be discussed below.

The Hierarchy Culture: The hierarchy culture is dominant in work environments guided by formal structures which achieve stability, predictability and efficiency (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Hierarchy cultures advocate for strict adherence to rules, practices and policies in order to ensure that the appropriate output is maintained (Tran, 2020). WPB has been found to have a strong, positive correlation with hierarchy culture (Pilch & Turska, 2015). This is accounted for by Samsudin et al. (2019) stated that hierarchy culture may encourage WPB due to the abuse of interpersonal power between employees on different levels of the hierarchy. Studies have further found that employees within a hierarchy culture are around two times more likely to be bullied than those within a clan culture (An & Kang, 2016; Cash et al., 2018).

The market culture has further been associated with WPB, and this will be discussed in more detail below.

The Market Culture: Lastly, the market culture focuses on external transactions with constituencies such as suppliers and customers (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). The focus of organisations with a market culture is to obtain a competitive external positioning in order to ensure the achievement of goals, tasks and high productivity which may create competitive and stressful working conditions that facilitates bullying behaviours (Samsudin et al., 2019). This explains why employees working within market cultures are more likely to experience WPB (Cash et al., 2018). This is supported by Salin et al. (2019) who found that WPB is likely to be exacerbated by competitive, performance driven environments such organisations who have market cultures.

To Conclude: The above section explored individual, work and organisational antecedents of WPB. These antecedents do not exist in isolation as individual, work, and environmental antecedents together are likely contribute to the development and escalation of WPB incidents (Einarsen et al., 2020). Thus, WPB can be understood as a multifaceted phenomenon which is triggered by various individual work, and organisational characteristics.

Research context of the current study: An internationally competitive, innovation driven, and hierarchical organisation.

The above literature has explored WPB with particular focus on organisational cultures and leadership styles; however, it is important to anchor this literature within the context of this study. This study explored HRPs perceptions of bullying within an organisation which competes both locally and internationally, and emphasises research and innovation in order to ensure its continued survival. The organisation within this study further has a clear, hierarchical split between employees grouped at the lower-level of the organisation in clerical positions and the line managers who manage them, and the second group who are employed in highly qualified, managerial positions and possess high level postgraduate and professional qualifications. The latter, highly qualified individuals possess critical skills and are at the forefront of research, development and innovation and therefore play a key role in positioning the organisation as both a local and global leader within a highly competitive and fast changing environment.

A brief overview of this organisation suggested that its culture and its leadership were of a specific type. This type, and its possible implication for creating a climate in which bullying may flourish, are examined below.

The Current Organisation, its Culture and Potential for Bullying: The organisation within this study, as described above, was seen to have a largely market culture as the organisation emphasises the need to remain internationally competitive, and the need to achieve high levels of productivity (Samsudin et al., 2019). Employees within the organisation in question may therefore be at risk of exposure to WPB due to the organisation's market-orientation, as research has shown that employees within market environments are more likely to experience WPB than employees in other organisational cultures (Cash et al., 2018). The organisation under study may further be seen to have a hierarchical culture, as it is dominated by clear lines of authority which distinguish clerical-administrative staff from other, higher-level staff such as managers and other key role players who contribute to innovation. The organisation's hierarchical culture may therefore encourage WPB due to the abuse of interpersonal power between employees on different levels of the hierarchy (Samsudin et al., 2019).

The organisation in question may therefore have both a market culture and hierarchical culture, both of which could have been linked to increased WPB incidents. The culture at the above organisation may therefore promote and exacerbate experiences of WPB.

The Current Organisation, its Leadership Style and Potential for Bullying:

Studies have shown that internationally competitive organisations which are driven by research and innovation, such as the organisation within this study, usually have autocratic leadership styles (Chukwusa, 2018). This leadership style could be seen as appropriate as it ensures that high levels of output are maintained, and ensures that time constraints are adhered to (Khan et al., 2015). The above may be of paramount importance in ensuring that the organisation remains competitive both locally and internationally. Autocratic leaders further solve issues quickly and meet targets effectively which is necessary in high output institutions such as this one (Cunningham et al., 2015). However, autocratic styles of leadership styles have been found to be a strong predictor of new bullying incidents emerging in work context (Fontes et al., 2019; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015). Thus, the leadership style within the organisation in question may be promoting WPB incidents.

Further to the above, the autocratic leadership style has been found to overlap with toxic leadership (O'Hara, 2015). In support of the above, in a word frequency analysis conducted by Walker and Watkins (2020) it was discovered that toxic leadership "style" was associated with autocratic leadership. One could extrapolate from the above that the organisation within this study may therefore further display toxic leadership tendencies which has been found to be a key factor in the development and maintenance of bullying within the workplace WPB (Malik et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2016). The above therefore suggests that the leadership styles within the organisation under investigation may promote WPB.

To conclude: Both the organisation's culture and leadership may have the ability to promote the emergence of WPB incidents, as well as exacerbate existing bullying issues. It may therefore be likely that WPB could be prominent within the organisation under investigation within this research.

Theoretical Framework: Ulrich's (1997) Multiple Roles Model

This study will use Ulrich's (1997) multiple roles model as a theoretical framework to understand HRPs role in the management of WPB. Ulrich's multiple roles model is an appropriate theoretical framework as HRPs role is inextricably linked with the prevention and management of WPB within organisations (Einarsen et al., 2011). Ulrich's (1997) model is further appropriate as it is widely used to analyse the role of modern day HRPs (Catley et al., 2017). This model will be explained in more detail below.

Ulrich's (1997) Multiple Roles Model Explained:

Ulrich's (1997) Multiple Roles Model stipulates that HR professionals have four main roles in modern organisations that aid in the achievement of organisational excellence. HR's first role is a "strategic partner" of senior and line managers in strategy execution (Ulrich, 1997). In this role, HR help realise organisational strategy within the marketplace by aligning HR and business objectives to realise one, overarching organisational strategy. HR's second role is that of an "administrative expert" who builds efficient organisational infrastructure through the implementation of HR practices (Ulrich, 1998). In this role HR ensure that work is organized and executed in a manner which fosters administrative efficiency, helps reduce costs, and ensures good work quality. Thirdly, HR have the role of a "change agent" in which they manage and improve organisational change capacity by continuously shaping organisational processes and culture to promote adaptability and sustainability (Ulrich, 1998). This HR role is important as it ensures organisations are able to adapt to changes within the organisation's

industry. Lastly, HR must assume the role of an “employee champion” who vigorously presents employees’ needs to management, while simultaneously working to enhance employees’ commitment to the organisation and their capacity to deliver results (Ulrich, 1997).

It is important to understand HR’s various roles as research has shown that the paradoxical nature of the above role demands may prevent HRPs managing WPB effectively (Fox & Cowan, 2015). According to Jackson et al (2014), WPB cannot be comprehensively addressed until HRP’s “inter-role” between managers and employees is considered. This research will subsequently focus on HRP’s role as a “strategic partner” and “employee champion” within the management of WPB. These two roles will be explored more comprehensively in the sections to follow in order to illustrate their paradoxical demands.

HRP’s Paradoxical Role Demands:

As a strategic business partner, HR professionals are often members of the executive team that designs organisational strategy (Ulrich, 1997). As a part of this executive team, HR must drive and guide discussions on how the organisation will implement its business strategy through utilisation of the organisation’s human capital. In order to do this, HRPs need to define the organisation’s underlying model or “blue print” which states how the company conducts business, and how the various organisational units work together in order to achieve this strategy (Ulrich, 1998). HR should further conduct audits, in which they use this blueprint to clearly identify which organisational units need to change in order execute organisational strategy effectively (Ulrich, 1997). Finally, HR should team up with operating managers to clearly state various HR initiatives and prioritise them in order to ensure they align with, and facilitate business results (Ulrich, 1998). Ultimately, this position will enable HR to add value to the executive team and ensure that organisational strategy is effectively implemented. In this role, HR’s focus is organisational effectiveness and reducing costs through implementing effective organisational policy. However, in a market culture where the strategy is one of competitiveness – the pressure to extract more value is extremely high. Managers are pressured to get more out of their employees and employees are expected to work even harder. And it is here where the roles of the HRP as strategy partner and champion will collide as they become caught up in the double bind of strategy implementation and employee wellbeing.

HR’s role as employee champion is particularly important in modern organisations as work is highly demanding and less stable (Ulrich, 1998). This is illustrated as employees’ career paths have changed substantially, as a long-term employment relationship with one

employer is no longer the default (Biemann et al., 2012; Kornblum et al., 2018). Further to the above, due to increased competition internationally and an unstable business environment, organisations are under increasing pressure to achieve more with less input (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2016). This change has resulted in a more transactional relationship between employees and organisations, in which employees feel they are to contribute their time to the organisation and nothing else. This attitude is detrimental to organisations, as companies cannot survive unless employees are engaged fully, feel valued, share ideas, work harder than the bare minimum, and relate well to customers (Ulrich, 1997). In their role as an employee champion, HR professionals must therefore ensure that employees are engaged while at work, and are committed to the organisation. As an employee champion, HR must alert line management to the importance of high employee morale, and train line managers to ensure they can successfully foster morale (Ulrich, 1997). In addition to the above, HR should be employees' voice in management discussions through expressing employee views and advocating for employees' interests. This advocacy should be clearly visible to ensure that employees are confident that when decisions are made which affect them, that HR will clearly represents their views, and supports their rights (Ulrich, 1997). Employees must therefore trust that HR will voice their concerns to upper management decisions (Ulrich, 1997).

HRPs must thus attempt to *reconcile* their role as a “strategic partner”, where they represent the organisation's interests, with their role as an “employee champion”, where they advocate for employees' interests. These roles, however, are fundamentally paradoxical and this influences how HRPs are able to manage incidents of WPB (Fox & Cowan, 2015); incidents which will no doubt be more likely to arise as managers and their employees are more pressurised to achieve more with less as organisations are becoming increasingly driven by targets and high performance expectations (Harrington et al., 2015). The conflicting nature of HRPs role demands in an environment in which bullying may well intensify, will be explored further below in order to illustrate how they may hinder HRPs ability to effectively and objectively manage WPB incidents.

Paradoxical Job Demands and HRPs Management of Workplace Bullying:

A study conducted by Salin (2008) found that HRPs may avoid comprehensively managing bullying situations within organisations in order to preserve their relationship with managers. This illustrates how HRPs may not be able to look after both managerial and employee interests when managing WPB incidents, and thus cannot fulfil both their “strategic partner” and “employee champion” role. The above illustrated role-conflict experienced by HRPs is

represented in a quote from Cowan (2009, p. 142) where an HRP stated that their “role is to be the objective third party that represents the company”. HRP’s favouring their strategic partner role is further supported by Harrington et al. (2012) who found that the trust between HRPs and employees is sacrificed in order to protect HRPs their relationship with managers. This was further explored Harrington et al. (2015) who found that HRPs enact symbolic violence on WPB targets who lodge complaints as they perceive managerial bullying behaviours as legitimate practices, thereby protecting the interests of the organization at the expense of employees. This study concluded that HRPs may embrace their strategic partner role at the expense of their employee champion role when managing WPB incidents. Catley et al. (2016) further found that HRPs were not likely to acknowledge nor to investigate cases of superior-to-subordinate bullying, as HRPs had preconceived notions of the subordinate’s complaint which led HRPs to biasedly assess the complaints by privileging managers accounts of the situation. This accounts for why D’Cruz and Noronha (2010) stated that bullying targets view HRPs as a function of management, as it only focuses on the views of the organisation. It further accounts for why it has been stated that research consistently shows that HRPs fail to take targets’ complaints seriously (Duffy & Yamada, 2018). The above studies highlight the incompatibility between HRs various roles, and illustrates how these conflicting role demands negatively effects their ability to manage WPB incidents objectively and act as both a strategic partner to management as well as an employee champion.

However, HRPs may be filling their strategic partner role at the expense of their employee champion role due to insufficient power to advocate for employees’ interests. This is seen as one of the key findings from Cowan (2009) was that some HRPs felt powerless to address instances of WPB by top performers and management. This was again illustrated by Harrington et al. (2015, p. 381) who found that some managers accused of bullying were ‘too senior’ or ‘too valuable’ to tackle, leaving HRPs unable to effectively manage the bullying situation due to their inferior power position. Thus, one could state that HRPs feel powerless when the accused bully is high up the organisation’s hierarchy. Mokgolo and Barnard (2019) further elaborate on this view stating that due to HRP’s lack of decision-making power in the outcomes of bullying complaints, HRPs are often viewed by targets as siding with management and the organisation. The authors went on to explain that resolving WPB in a way which favoured the targets was not always possible, because HRPs lacked the power to make final outcomes regarding bullying complaints. Similarly, Cowan and Fox (2015) found that HRP’s power to manage WPB situations was largely dependent on their position on the hierarchy as

managers above them decided as to whether their recommendations were enacted. This is illustrated as one HRP within this study stated that they could make a recommendation based on their findings, but depending on who the bully is managers may “excuse it, turn their head and look the other way” (Cowan & Fox, 2015, p. 126). This accounts for why it has been stated that organisational leaders metaphorically tie HRP’s hands in instances of WPB, as managers fail to hold high-level perpetrators accountable for their bullying behaviours (Daniel & Metcalf, 2014; Harrington et al., 2012). Gill (2017) is of the opinion that managers use their position of power to ensure that HRPs preserve their utilitarian agenda, as all HRP’s recommendations regarding bullying need to be ratified by top management. The above accounts for why Duffy and Yamada (2018) are of the opinion that bullies who are positioned high in the organisational hierarchy can feel fairly confident that they can continue to use abusive management tactics, as HRPs will take their side or do nothing at all when managing bullying complaints.

Yet, contrary to the above, Cowan (2012) is of the opinion that HRPs are drawn to their field of work due to their concern for employee wellbeing and to that extend may continue to embrace their role as an employee champion who proactively works to ensure that employees needs are addressed during WPB incidents. This was supported by Cowan and Fox (2015) who found that HRPs do not perceive themselves as strategic partners who unable to address employees’ needs. Rather, HRPs see themselves as an objective party who wished to neutrally investigate WPB complaints from the perspective of both the complainant and accused in order to act as a champion of all employees. This is illustrated as an employee stated “Our role is a fact finder. To find out what is really going on. There are at least two sides to every story. In between the two sides is probably the truth because everybody biases it a little bit their way” (Cowan & Fox, 2015, p. 125). Duffy and Yamada (2018), after reviewing studies stated that there is sufficient evidence that HRPs may be able to take a balanced approach and look after the interests of both managers and employees. However, this will be explored within this study in order to uncover HRP’s challenges and experiences when managing WPB.

As previously mentioned, HRPs are a key actor within WPB situations yet their perspective on WPB has been largely ignored within bullying research (Cowan, 2012; Fox & Cowan, 2015; Salin et al., 2018). According to Mokgolo and Barnard (2019), by analysing various HRP’s perspectives on WPB, organisations may gain insight and understanding into how to better manage WPB incidents. This is supported by Jackson, Schuler and Jiang (2014) who stated that in order to effectively manage WPB incidents, both HRP’s roles and inter-relationships with employees and managers need to be explored. This research will

subsequently, within the organisation under study, seek to understand and consider HRP's perspective on WPB, while using Ulrich's framework to understand HRP's inter-relationship with both employees and managers. This will ensure that the issue of WPB is comprehensively explored, and will address the present gap in literature pertaining to the HRP's perspective on WPB (Cowan, 2012; Fox & Cowan, 2015; Jackson et al., 2014; Salin et al., 2018). This will also identify specific problem areas that HRPs encounter within the organisation under study and their experiences of how they manage such problems as well as their recommendations of how such problems could or should be addressed. The above will allude to the first research question within this study which explores *the experiences of, and challenges facing HRPs in the management of WPB* (See Research Questions: Page 42).

COVID -19, Working from Home (WFH) and Remote forms of WPB

The above section explored HRP's traditional challenge of "role conflict" when managing WPB incidents within office spaces. However, due to the present COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals throughout the world are working from home (WFH) in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. HRPs may thus be facing novel challenges, and be asked to manage different bullying forms within a staff who are working remotely. The above will be explored more comprehensively in the sections to follow, beginning with an exploration of what COVID-19 is, and why it has resulted in such a drastic change to the business environment.

COVID-19

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) Coronaviruses refer to a large grouping of viruses which have the potential to cause illness in both humans and animals. Coronaviruses may cause respiratory infections in humans that range from the common cold to more severe diseases such Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recent Coronavirus is COVID-19, and was unknown before its outbreak in Wuhan in the December of 2019. The common symptoms associating the novel COVID-19 virus is a fever, dry cough, and feelings of fatigue (WHO, 2020). On the 11th of March 2020, the WHO declared that the COVID-19 viral outbreak was a pandemic, as it had impacted over 110 countries globally and was anticipated to spread further due to its highly contagious nature (Jamie Ducharme, 2020).

COVID-19 is spread from infected individuals to non-infected individuals through small droplets from the nose or mouth (Africa CDC, 2020). These droplets are released when contaminated individuals cough, sneeze, or speak. People can become infected with COVID-

19 through breathing in contaminated droplets, or touching surfaces which the droplets have landed on, and then touching their faces (Africa CDC, 2020).

Due to the high number of COVID-19 infections globally, countries throughout the world are adhering to the practice of social distancing (Nikolaev, 2020). Social distancing is an approach whereby individuals are to regulate their interaction with others, and maintain a stipulated physical distance between themselves and others in order to lower infection rates (South African Government News Agency, 2020). This approach is effective as COVID-19 droplets are heavy and do not travel far when they have been expelled from infected persons, thus individuals lower their infection probability when maintaining interpersonal distance with those around them (WHO, 2020). South Africa is one of the many countries globally which has adopted social distancing as a means to lower COVID-19 infections (South African Government News Agency, 2020).

Working from Home (WFH):

The South African government has further put legislation in place that prohibits large gatherings of people under *The Regulation of Gatherings Act, 205 of 1993*. Organisations are thus to limit the number of staff members present within office spaces, by making relevant staff members work remotely from home (Regulation of Gatherings Act, 205 of 1993). The above is in accordance with the instructions given by the director general of the WHO, Dr. Tedros, who stated in a media briefing that “every sector and every individual must be involved in the fights” (Ducharme, 2020). The above legislation has created a new working environment, in which HRP’s task of managing WPB could become more complex.

Remote Forms of WPB:

HRP’s role in Managing WPB may be more complex as WPB incidents may now occur through other bullying forms. The alternative forms in which WPB may be emerging include cyberbullying, being overworked, micro-management, and misinterpretation due to communicating through technologies. These will be discussed in more detail below.

Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying has the same overarching themes as regular bullying, but is conducted through electronic media such as e-mails, messaging sites, and social media applications (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2013; West et al., 2014). Cyberbullying may, however, be more consequential to targets as the frequency of cyber-attacks is unlimited, and the bully’s ability to humiliate their target is amplified due to the wide reach of information technologies (West et al., 2014). The above, coupled with the fact that few organisations have online ethical

codes of conduct, complicates the management and punishment of cyber-bullying incidents (Piotrowski, 2012). According to D'Cruz and Noronha (2013) cyberbullying becomes more prevalent as technology is interlinked with individuals' jobs. In line with this finding, HRPs may now need to manage cyber-bullying incidents within South Africa as technology is becoming more inter-linked with individuals' jobs while they are WFH.

Being Overworked: Further to the above, technological advancements have blurred the boundaries between personal space and workspace (Routley, 2020). This finding has been amplified under COVID-19 conditions as family and work duties occur in the same environment (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). This “blurring” of work and personal boundaries has the potential to result in colleagues, managers and clients contacting individuals who are WFH outside of traditional working hours as they are viewed as permanently on duty (Routley, 2020). According to Routley (2020) this has the potential to overwork individuals and leave individuals without adequate rest. The above could explain the findings from Harvard Business School that individuals work on average 48.5 minutes more per day when working remotely under COVID-19 conditions (Ivanova, 2020). Anecdotal evidence obtained during the course of this study suggest that the amount of extra time may be very much higher but this remains to be rigorously investigated and thereby confirmed.

Perceiving employees as permanently on duty could constitute a form of bullying as individuals may be overworked, and placed under unnecessarily large amounts of work pressure as they are denied personal time (Einarsen et al., 2020).

Micro-Management: Bullying may further express itself within micro-management practices. Micromanagement has no clear definition, but can be understood as a form of management in which those in power excessively influence, control and monitor subordinate's work (Allen, 2019). According to Ryan and Deci (2017) managers may engage in micromanagement when individuals are WFH in attempt to control work quality and work completion. Employees are subsequently placed under more pressure to produce larger quantities of work and “prove” they are working, and this could be interpreted as a form of bullying through unreasonable expectations (Rayner & Hoel, 1997). This can be exacerbated as individuals who are WFH may be required to account for every minute of their working time, continually reporting to their manager, in order to receive a full salary, This may lead to employees feeling obliged to reply to more emails, to attend more meetings and to be "seen"

as online in order to prove they were working (Ivanova, 2020a). According to Einarsen et al. (2010) this constitutes bullying through excessive monitoring of employees.

Misinterpretation: It has further been found communicating through technology when WFH may lead to misinterpretations of individuals' actions, intentions, behaviours, tones and emotional intensity (Laubert & Parlamis, 2019). The above occurs as people's tones are unclearly portrayed through text or email, and individuals may misinterpret written texts, leading them to incorrectly believe that their supervisors or colleagues are angry or displeased with them (Laubert & Parlamis, 2019). Findings have also shown that social support from managers and colleagues may feel less genuine when received electronically, which could make employees feel like outcasts and not valued within their work team (Routley, 2020). Thus, online communication forms leave much to interpretation, and may result in individuals believing they are targets of bullying or that they lack collegial or supervisor support, as they interpret their colleagues and supervisors' messages and actions as ostracising and unnecessarily harsh (Einarsen et al., 2020).

To conclude: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations are practicing WFH for the first time. As illustrated above, this new working environment may create new challenges facing HRPs in the management of WPB. As WFH is still relatively new in South Africa, to the researcher's knowledge no research has explored the experiences of, and challenges facing HRPs in the management of WPB within a staff who work remotely.

This research will thus contribute to two gaps within the existing literature by exploring the experiences and challenges of HRPs in managing WPB pre-COVID-19, and exploring HRP's experiences and challenges in managing WPB within a staff who are WFH during COVID-19. The above areas will be explored in order to contribute towards the literature and facilitate a deeper understanding of the management of WPB.

Research Questions:

Based on the above literature and the studies qualitative methodology (to be discussed fully in Chapter 3) two broad research questions have been proposed:

- What are the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in the management of workplace bullying incidents?
- What are the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in the management of workplace bullying within a staff who work remotely?

Both of the above research questions are important, and each will individually fill gaps within the present literature. It is thus important that both research questions are addressed. Despite individuals presently WFH, the first research question is still relevant as it will address the gap in the literature pertaining to HRP's experiences and challenges in managing WPB pre-COVID-19. It may further provide insight into how future management of WPB, once workers have returned to face-to-face work situations, may be improved. The second research question is also necessary as it is relevant to the current work situation. This question will fill the present literature gap by exploring the experiences of, and new possible bullying forms facing HRPs in the management of WPB within a staff who work remotely.

Conclusion and Summary:

The present chapter has described the various themes within WPB, the consequences of bullying behaviour, the antecedents of bullying, as well as how organisational leadership and culture influences bullying in the workplace. This chapter then went on to contextualise the study with the fast-paced environment of an organisation that is deemed to be a local and global leader in innovation and knowledge production. Thereafter, the chapter discussed the theoretical framework of this study, namely Ulrich's multiple roles model, as well as the present WFH climate and how this may impact how WPB is presently taking place. The following chapter (Chapter 3: Methodology) will examine the methodology (procedure, instruments, and method of data analysis) utilized to explore and analyse the aforementioned research questions. In addition, this Chapter will outline all ethical considerations undertaken and complied with in the present research.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter will provide an overview of the methodology which was used within this study. Firstly, this chapter will outline the research aims, research design, and research paradigm used within this research. Following this, the chapter will outline and discuss the sample and sampling frame used within this research. Next, an overview will be given of the research instrument, the procedure that was followed, and will lead into a discussion of the study's major ethical considerations. This chapter will then conclude with the data analysis technique which was used to answer the research questions.

Research Aims

The broad aim of this research was to explore the experiences and challenges that Human Resource Practitioners (HRPs) face when managing workplace bullying incidents.

Research Design and Research Paradigm

This research used a qualitative and exploratory research design which was appropriate for the study's above listed aim. Research designs are important as they provide a guide for the collection and analysis of data, and thus ensure that appropriate research methods are selected within research (May, 2011). The research design and paradigm will be elaborated on below.

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to a core set of shared beliefs which instruct how issues should be understood, and how a researcher is to conduct their research (Rahi, 2017). This research used an interpretive paradigm, also known as a qualitative research paradigm, which believes that "true knowledge" is only obtained through a deep, rich interpretation based on individuals' experiences and subjective meanings (Rahi, 2017, p. 1)

An interpretivist paradigm was used as the study explored individuals' subjective experiences in order to provide an understanding of HRP's reality when managing WPB incidents (Pham, 2018). The above was achieved by focusing on the perceptions and experiences of participants, which is essential when conducting interpretivist research (Nelson et al., 2014). Research within the interpretivist paradigms further uses one, qualitative method to obtain rich and detailed data which was the interview, within this research (Pham, 2018).

Qualitative Research Design:

The overall aim of qualitative research is to uncover patterns which emerge from the detailed documentation and diligent analysis of the collected data (Omona, 2013). A qualitative research design was used as it facilitated the collection of the rich, detailed, in-depth information needed to address the study's research questions (Fahie, 2014). The qualitative design, moreover, enabled the researcher to select a specific sample which possessed the necessary knowledge and experience, within the HR space, in the management of WPB incidents (Palinkas et al., 2015). This ensured that the sample used was able to provide the researcher with relevant, rich and detailed data which facilitated a comprehensive analysis of the WPB phenomenon in relation to its management by HR practitioners' (Palinkas et al., 2015). As the research questions explored the experiences of HRPs, this research adopted an experiential, qualitative approach in order to understand the participants' thoughts, feelings and actions (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

Exploratory Research Design:

This research design was also exploratory in nature as it was a preliminary investigation which facilitated understanding, and added to a limited body of knowledge on HRP's experiences and challenges when managing WPB incidents (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). The exploratory research design was required as previously conducted research had indicated that there is a dearth of research exploring WPB from the perspective of HRPs (Fox & Cowan, 2015; Jackson et al., 2014; Salin et al., 2018). The exploratory design thus enabled the researcher to gain further insight and understanding on this less researched area (Saunders et al., 2015). Further to this, to the authors knowledge there is no research within the South African context which has explored the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in the management of WPB incidents within a staff who are WFH. The exploratory design thus allowed for an in-depth exploration into *both* of these less researched areas mentioned above.

The qualitative research design informed the sampling strategy as a method of purposive sampling was selected which ensured that the participants were able to provide rich and relevant data (Palinkas et al., 2015). All participants were working within HR and had some experience in dealing with WPB matters. The sampling is discussed in more detail below

Sampling:

A sample refers to a portion of a larger population group, and is of vital importance within research (Laher & Botha, 2012). The sampling strategy within this study is based on the works of Robinson (2014) who identified four core sampling components which should be considered to foster better "coherence, transparency, and trustworthiness" within qualitative research studies (Robinson, 2014, p. 25).

Sample Frame:

In accordance with Robinson (2014), the researcher defined the sample frame by deciding from which group of individuals the sample will be drawn (Rahi, 2017). The sample frame selected within this research was mostly homogeneous as it consisted only of HRPs from a particular institution within Gauteng who had experience in managing WPB incidents, and were made to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The selected sample frame, however, had some degree of heterogeneity in terms of the samples positional level, age, sex, race, years of experience, and tenure at the selected organisation (Robinson, 2014).

Sourcing the Sample:

Another key component of effective sampling identified by Robinson (2014) is ensuring that the researcher can source a sample by gaining access to the identified sample frame. The researcher gained access to the sample frame by obtaining permission and approval for this research from the Human Resource Director of a large organisation in Gauteng. Following this approval, the researcher was provided with the names and contact details of HRPs within the organisation to ensure that the researcher was able to access the identified sample frame.

Sampling Strategy:

Robinson (2014) further emphasises that the researcher needs to select an appropriate sampling method for their qualitative research study. This research used a non-probability, purposive sampling strategy as only HRPs from one organisation within Gauteng who had experience in the management of WPB incidents were selected to participate within the study (Etikan, 2016). All individuals within this institution worked remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic meaning this criterion was automatically met. This study used a non-random, purposive technique as the researcher decided what information was needed to answer the research question, and found participants who were able and willing to provide the information by virtue of their knowledge or experience (Laher & Botha, 2012). This is in accordance with the study's phenomenological tradition which, in this instance, sought to explore and describe the shared experiences of HRPs (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This sampling technique is commonly used in qualitative research as it enables the researcher to identify and select information-rich cases, and thus best utilize the available resources (Etikan, 2016). This sampling strategy was beneficial as it enabled the researcher to acquire a sample who were able to provide relevant, rich and detailed data necessary to answer the study's research question (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Sample Size:

The researcher was further required to select a sample size (Robinson, 2014). In qualitative research, it is considered ideal to conduct interviews until the point of data saturation in which no new information is brought forth by interviewees (Guest et al., 2020). At the point of data saturation, the researcher can reasonably assume that collecting new data would simply serve to confirm the existing themes and conclusions (Matthes et al., 2017).

However, the seminal authors Braun and Clarke (2019) argue that conceptualising a point of data saturation may be contradictory to the coding process within reflexive Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) which was used within this study. Braun and Clarke (2019) state that the emerging codes within the data are continually evolving during the researcher's in-depth engagement with the collected material. Thus, an imposed point of data saturation by the researcher would indicate predetermined codes that the data is expected to fall into, and this belief is contradictory to the analysis used within reflexive TCA. Thus, there is an "incompatibility between data saturation and an organic reflexive TCA approach" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 7). This is further observed by O'Reilly and Parker (2013) who found that data saturation is not universally useful within all types of TCA. The researcher thus did not concern herself with conducting interviews until the point of "data saturation" as the seminal authors Braun and Clarke (2019) caution against it. Therefore, the researcher was focused on collecting sufficiently detailed data which comprehensively addressed the research questions.

The Studies Sample:

The sample utilised in this study comprised of 9 participants as this number yielded in-depth data that sufficiently described the common experiences of HRPs needed to fulfil the study's aim. Ideally, more interviews could have been conducted to ensure a richer and possibly more comprehensive account of the data, however, this was not possible due to time constraints imposed on the researcher by the University of Witwatersrand to complete this research report. Despite not adhering to data saturation as advised by Braun and Clarke (2019), the researcher did notice during later interviews that the interviewees were beginning to report much the same experiences as interviewees who had been interviewed prior to them.

Of the 9 participants, 5 were female and 4 were male. The sample consisted of participants from various racial groups namely black participants (n=5), coloured participants (n=3), and an Indian participant (n=1). Notably missing from this sample were individuals from the white racial group. The participants' ages ranged from 30 to 56 years, with an average age of 42.7 years. The participants mean tenure at the organisation was 7.38 years and ranged from 1.5 years to 18 years. The participants had a broad range of HR experience, ranging from one to 33 years, with an average of 14.7 years HR experience.

As illustrated above, the sampling within this study was guided by Robinson's (2014) four key components of sampling in order to comprehensively address the challenges of sampling in qualitative, interview-based studies such as this one. The researcher went back and

forth between each sampling component to ensure the sampling was “coherent, achievable, and appropriate to research aims” (Robinson, 2014, p. 38).

As mentioned, both the exploratory and qualitative research designs also guided the use of interviews as a data collection method, as the interviews facilitated the collection of rich, detailed, in-depth data needed to explore this less researched area (Fahie, 2014; May, 2011; Rahi, 2017). Below follows a discussion of the instruments of this data, namely the self-constructed research interview and the researcher as an instrument of data collection.

Instruments:

Guided by Ulrich’s multiple roles model, this research aimed to explore both the experiences and challenges facing HRP’s in the management of WPB incidents. To explore the above, the researcher conducted 9 semi-structured interviews, in which a self-constructed interview schedule was used as the basis of the interviews. In qualitative, interview-based studies such as this one, both the researcher and interview schedule are considered research instruments which will be discussed in more detail below.

The Interview Schedule:

The interview schedule was developed by the researcher in consultation with her supervisor and other subject matter experts, and was developed after an extensive review of the literature (Refer to: Appendix F). The developed interview schedule contained 30 questions which explored HRP’s understandings of WPB, their experiences in managing WPB situations, and the challenges which they faced when managing such situations. The interviews were conducted virtually over Microsoft Teams, and were conducted with the researcher’s face and participants’ faces visible when possible, in order to better build rapport with the participants and allow the researcher to observe non-verbal behaviour. If the participants felt uncomfortable with their camera being on, the researcher still kept her camera on in order to build rapport with participants despite not being able to view their non-verbal behaviours. Ideally the interviews would have been conducted in person, however, virtual meetings over Microsoft teams were necessary due to the present COVID-19 constraints.

The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated the collection of in-depth information, which is of great value within qualitative research. The semi-structured interview format enabled the researcher to ask probing questions where necessary to ensure that detailed information was obtained, while still ensuring that the participants were able to freely express themselves during the interview. The semi-structured nature of the interviews further ensured

that the information obtained remained relevant to both the study aims and the research questions, and ensured consistency across the full range of interviews.

The researcher began the above-mentioned interviews with an introductory narrative that encouraged HRPs to think back to a time prior to COVID-19, when the workforce conducted their work face-to-face from within an office building. This enabled the participants to enter an appropriate mind-set for the interview as they were reminded of their working situation pre-COVID-19. This was necessary as the employees working for the organisation were predominantly working from home while these interviews were being conducted. This introduction further built rapport between the researcher and participant, and allowed both parties to ease into the interview. The researcher then moved the introductory narrative to one which acknowledged the HRP's present, remote working situation. This served to assure the participants that their new experiences in the management of WPB in a remote workforce would too be explored and addressed within the interview.

In line with the introductory narrative to the interview, the interview schedule consisted of a number of questions which took the HRP back to the time when they were working face to face, exploring the WPB problems that they encountered in the past while still 'in the office', and their experiences of how they managed them. Following the above, the interview schedule questions then moved on to those which probed the management of WPB and the types of bullying, if any, that had become evident during the COVID-19 WFH situation (Refer to: Appendix F).

The Researcher:

Within this study the researcher was the primary research instrument as she used the interview schedule as a research tool when conducting the interviews. The researcher is considered the primary research instrument in qualitative, interview studies as the researcher's personal attributes may influence the data collection process (Pezalla et al., 2012). This occurs as the researcher interacted with participants in a manner which created a conversational space in which participants were able to safely share their experiences, and this space may have influenced what participants were prepared to share (Pezalla et al., 2012). The above illustrates the need for *reflexivity* or critical reflection in which the researcher focuses on self-acknowledgement, explores and comprehends their role in the creation of knowledge, carefully monitors how their own biases and beliefs influence the research process, and maintains a balance between what is personal and universal (Burger, 2015).

To achieve the above the researcher used a reflexive diary, continually making notes in it throughout the research process (Underwood et al., 2010). The reflexive diary served to acknowledge any subjectivity the researcher was experiencing, as she noted down her feelings, opinions, beliefs, anticipations, and emotions during the research process (Doyle, 2013; Roddy & Dewar, 2016). The reflexive diary therefore documented the researcher's personal responses in order to limit the extent to which the researcher's subjectivities influenced the data interpretation, thereby enhancing the study's quality and "trustworthiness" which will be discussed at a later point within this chapter (Petty, 2017).

The researcher further worked closely with her supervisor when collecting and analysing the data as a means to reduce bias. This close working relationship allowed the researcher's supervisor to evaluate whether the researcher's personal judgements had influenced the data interpretation in any way, thereby serving as an additional way of reducing any bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher actively ensured that she remained flexible and open to the supervisor's feedback provided by the supervisor throughout the research process.

The qualitative and exploratory research design further guided the selection and use of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) to analyse and uncover the emergent patterns and themes from within the data (May, 2011; Omona, 2013). The research designs thus provided a guide for the sampling strategy, data collection, the instrument used for data collection and the data analysis, thereby ensuring appropriate methods were used within this research to ensure that the most appropriate methods were used that best enabled the researcher to fulfil the studies aims (May, 2011). A detailed discussion of the data analysis process using TCA is discussed below.

Data Analysis:

The interviews were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) which enabled the researcher to identify the core themes and patterns which emerged from the data set in order to give a rich and detailed account of the acquired data (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). TCA further enabled the researcher to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis was based on the works of Braun and Clarke (2006) who identified six key phases in TCA. These six phases involved a constant movement back and forth, between both the data set and the coded notes made by the researcher, in order to ensure that the conducted analysis was comprehensive, and reflected the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six

phases of TCA were carried out by the researcher in consultation with her supervisor in order to ensure that the data was interpreted accurately. Each phase of TCA will be elaborated upon in more detail below.

Phase 1 of TCA

In the first phase, the researcher familiarised herself with the collected data by listening to and transcribing each interview-recording into a written format. To ensure transcription accuracy the researcher double-checked each transcription against its respective audio and/or audio-visual recording to make sure that it was an exact replication of the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thereafter, the researcher actively read and re-read these transcriptions in order to comprehensively understand them. During the transcription and reading processes above, the researcher made notes of her initial ideas and noted interesting features within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then moved onto the second phase of TCA.

Phase 2 of TCA:

In the second phase, the researcher developed initial codes of the transcriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These codes served to draw attention to important features within the data set, and data relevant to each code was noted. This was achieved by colour-coding words, phrases and sentences which related to each initial code. To ensure accuracy, which is essential to the coding process, the researcher went through each interview transcription systematically and gave each transcript full and equal attention (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher further ensured that her supervisor was satisfied that the coding was an accurate and true representation of the collected data. The above coding acted as an assistive device which allowed the researcher to identify and develop meaningful themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 3 of TCA:

The researcher then entered into the third phase of TCA, in which she began to identify broader themes. To achieve the above the researcher combined similar codes into larger themes, and gathered all data relevant to these potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To this end, the researcher created a “Thematic Map” which is a visual representation of the data in terms of its themes. Some themes within the thematic map were larger and more encompassing, and others formed smaller sub-themes within the main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once both the researcher and her supervisor were satisfied with the above thematic mapping, all extracts of the data were coded in relation to these themes and sub-themes in order

to achieve one, large, visual representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then moved into the fourth stage in which she reviewed these potential themes.

Phase 4 of TCA:

In the fourth stage, the researcher and her supervisor ensured that there was no repetition within and amongst the themes, and ensured that the identified themes were an accurate representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To achieve the above the researcher removed, combined, and created new themes in order to create ‘refined’ themes. The refined themes were then checked by both the researcher and her supervisor against the original transcriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The above process was repeated until a final “Thematic Map” was generated which both the researcher and her supervisor were content with.

Phase 5 of TCA:

The researcher then move onto the fifth stage, in which she clearly defined and named the generated themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher achieved this by refining and identifying the essence of the remaining themes, and identifying which remaining themes were dominant, and which were sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The above identification of themes and sub-themes produced a structure which made the analysis easier to read and understand. The researcher’s supervisor oversaw the above process in order to enhance accuracy. The researcher concluded this stage by listing relevant quotes which were linked to each theme, and relating these quotes to the main research question. The researcher then moved onto the final stage identified by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 6 of TCA:

In the sixth and final stage the researcher produced a report. This report went beyond simply describing the collected data, as it made an argument pertaining to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The report was written in a manner which told the complex and detailed story of the acquired data, and convinced the reader of the validity or trustworthiness of the conducted analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness is important to establish within qualitative analysis as it ensures acceptability, merit, rigor and usefulness of the research findings (Kawulich & Holland, 2012).

Trustworthiness:

Trustworthiness within this study was established by ensuring that its four associated characteristics were met, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability

(Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Kawulich & Holland, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017). How these four associated characteristics were achieved will be described below.

Credibility:

Credibility, which is comparable to internal validity in quantitative research, refers to the extent to which the report's findings fit the collected data (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Credibility thus establishes that the participants' views have been correctly interpreted in the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This was achieved through *peer debriefing* as the researcher consulted with her supervisor who provided the researcher with guidance, ensured that the data had been coded and described accurately, and checked that research findings were interpreted objectively (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Peer debriefing is done to make the data interpretation more credible, as the researcher's expert supervisor proved to interpret the data in the same way (Houghton et al., 2013). Credibility was further established through "referential adequacy" as the study's findings were checked against the original audio and/or audio-visual recordings in order to ensure that they aligned (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3).

Transferability:

Transferability, comparable to external validity in quantitative research, refers to the generalizability or transferability of the research findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The researcher cannot know how these findings may be transferred to other settings; however, she presented a detailed description and an in-depth interpretation of the findings to ensure that the reader is able to evaluate whether these findings are transferable to any other context(s) (Nowell et al., 2017). The above, detailed description further gave an interesting account of the data both within and between the identified themes to allow for a comprehensive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, transferability was to some extent dictated by the studies sample, more specifically the sample's demographics, and the organisational context in which they are employed (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). The samples demographic details were provided as this further enables readers to determine the transferability of the research findings.

Dependability:

Dependability, which is comparable to reliability in quantitative research, refers to the clarity of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). To ensure the above the researcher wrote the research process and the research findings clearly, concisely and logically to ensure that the reader could follow with ease (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher further fostered dependability by keeping an audit trail, which is a collection of documents and notes used

within the research in order to account for the researchers decisions, assumptions and actions (Cope, 2014). The trial audit in this study consisted of the interview transcripts, the thematic content analysis conducted, process notes, chapter drafts, and drafts of the final report which were all reviewed by the researchers supervisor to ensure that she would have drawn the same conclusions as the researcher (Cope, 2014).

Confirmability:

The researcher further needed to foster confirmability which is likened to objectivity in quantitative research (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of the study can be confirmed by other researches, and provides assurance that the findings are a result of the data obtained and are not a product of the researchers construction (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability was fostered as the researcher provided evidence of the identified themes by providing direct quotes from the original data and creating a link between the original words of the respondents and the interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017). The participants quotes further depicted the themes which emerged, fostering confirmability as it is clear the findings were attained directly from the data (Cope, 2014).

The above illustrates that the four characteristics of trustworthiness, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, were ensured by the researcher in the analysis of the data, and in the writing of this research report. Ensuring trustworthiness within these processes is imperative in qualitative research, as it facilitates acceptability, merit, rigor, and usefulness of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Krefting, 1991; Nowell et al., 2017).

Procedure:

Obtaining Permission for the Research:

As per the requirements of the University of the Witwatersrand, before any research was conducted the researcher was required to draft a proposal which details the purpose of the study, and how it will be conducted to ensure that it conforms to the university's ethical standards. Due to the nature of this study, the Universities Ethics Committee additionally required the consent of the Human Resource Director of the organisation under study in this research. The Human Resource Director of the organisation was contacted via email, and was provided with a participant information sheet (PIS) which detailed the study in order to obtain his/her permission (Refer to: Appendix A). Following the email request, the Human Resource Director agreed that the research could be conducted, and emailed the researcher the names, surnames and email addresses of the HRP's within the organisation (Refer to: Appendix: G).

Thereafter, ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) (hereafter (HREC) at the University of Witwatersrand (Refer to: Appendix G).

Contacting Prospective Participants:

The sample frame consisted of 66 HRPs who were approached via email and asked if they were willing to be interviewed. The invitation to participate had an attached Participant Information Sheet (PIS) which informed participants of both the nature and the purpose of this study (Refer to: Appendix B & C). Those who were willing to be interviewed then responded to the researcher's email, and the researcher then sent the participants a consent form which was to be completed and arranged the online interviews on a day and time suitable for the interviewees (Refer to: Appendix D & E).

Conducting the Interviews:

The interviews could not be conducted face-to-face due to COVID-19 constraints, and were therefore conducted on a video-calling application which the participants had access to. All 9 participants elected to be interviewed via MS Teams, but were able to request the interview on any online application of their choosing. The researcher is aware that interviewing participants through online applications limits the observation of non-verbal behaviours, however, the face-to-face nature of the virtual interviews still enabled the researcher to see non-verbal behaviours to some extent, and enabled the researcher to build better rapport with the research participants.

Major Ethical Considerations

Informed participants:

Participants were given a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) containing all information relevant to the study including: the nature and purpose of the research, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and the assurance that they may withdraw at any time (Refer to: Appendix C). The PIS informed participants that their participation was entirely voluntary, meaning they would neither be advantaged nor disadvantaged in any way for their participation or non-participation in the study. Further to this, participants were assured that they would not be made to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering, and were assured that they would not be disadvantaged in any way for electing not to answer any question(s).

Individuals were informed that participation would involve an individual, semi-structured interview which would be approximately 1 hour in length. Participants were further informed that the interviews would ensue at a time most convenient to them, via a video-calling

best suited to them. The PIS further stated that the data obtained in the interview would be used for research purposes only, and that the participants may elect (by ticking the box in the consent form) to receive the results of the study in terms of the general themes and trends upon the completion of this research (Refer to: Appendix C). The participants were also asked to give permission in the consent form to use direct quotes and were further informed that the study's data could be used for journal publications and conference proceedings but that within these, anonymity of the individual and the institution would be fully ensured.

This study was classified as a “low risk study” as the participants sought out for this research were not victims of bullying themselves. However, participants were assured that their well-being is of the utmost importance, and were informed that if they were to feel anxiety or distress as a result of a topic discussed, that the researcher would refer them to “Life-Line” or the Emthonjeni Centre at the University of Witwatersrand for post-interview counselling free of charge. Participants were further provided with the contact details of both counselling institutions, and were made aware that they were able to choose the method of post-interview counselling they are most comfortable with (Refer to: Appendix C).

Participants were further informed that ethical clearance for this study had been obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) (hereafter (HREC) at the University of Witwatersrand (Refer to: Appendix C). The PIS provided participants with the contact details of a member of the committee which they could direct any queries related to ethical clearance.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Anonymity refers to the state of being unknown. It was not possible to achieve anonymity within this study as the researcher saw participants during the online interview process, and was given the participants name, surname and email address by the head of the HE institution one they had been given approval for the study.

Confidentiality, however, was strictly maintained. To ensure confidentiality the researcher used pseudonyms when transcribing the data to ensure that the participants answers could not be traced back to them. All identifying information from the interview transcriptions was sanitised, and it will be further ensured that the research report and any future publications and/or conference proceedings which may ensue from this research will be fully sanitised. The participant's quotes, which were used to substantiate themes, were also sanitised to ensure that they did not contain any information which might link the participants or the institution they

work for to the given statement. The findings of this research report were further written in terms of general themes to once again protect individuals' identities. The institution's confidentiality was also strictly maintained, as no identifying information from the institution was mentioned. The transcriptions and final research report simply refer to a large higher education institution within Gauteng as agreed by the institution.

The obtained data was further kept on a password protected computer which only the researcher had access to, and all hard-copy information was stored in a locked cupboard in the researcher's study. In addition to the above, only the researcher and her supervisor had access to the data, that is recordings and transcripts. As illustrated above, participants' information was kept in the strictest confidence throughout the research process in order to ensure that confidentiality was maintained, and ensure that the participants are fully protected.

Informed Consent:

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews being conducted. Participants were asked to sign a consent form in which they agreed to being interviewed, agreed to being audio and/or audio visually recorded, and agreed that the researcher may use direct quotes (Refer to: Appendix D & E). Further to this, as per the consent form, participants agreed that upon the completion of this study the sanitised interview transcripts could be stored in an electronic form on a password-protected computer for possible future conference proceedings, publications, and/or future analysis once the study has concluded (Refer to: Appendix D). The participants further consented to the destruction of the audio and/or audio-visual recording upon the completion of this research (Refer to: Appendix D).

COVID-19:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown regulations imposed by the South African government, interviews could not take place in person. The interviews thus took place over electronic means, namely Microsoft Teams, in order to protect the health of both the participants and the researcher and ensure that the study adhered to legal requirements. As mentioned, the pandemic situation and its implication for WPB and forms of cyberbullying which could occur while staff was working from home was explored in the interviews.

In Summary/Conclusion

The above-described sampling, usage of instruments, and data analysis method resulted in the identification of the following themes, which captured the experiences of HRP's when

managing WPB incidents within Ulrich's Multiple Roles Model as a framework. These themes, in relation to the Research Questions 1 and 2 are listed below.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in the management of workplace bullying incidents?

Theme Numbers	Name of Identified Themes
Theme 1	Defining the Contested Construct of Workplace Bullying
Theme 2	Power Relationships and the 'Absolute Abuse of Power'
Theme 3	The Hidden Hand of the Cabal
Theme 4	The Spurious Conflation of Discrimination and Harassment with Bullying and the Need for Policy that Disentangles these Issues
Theme 5	Irreconcilable Constituencies – One role at the expense of the other
Theme 6	Culture and Leadership – Antecedent Factors that Foster Bullying

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in the management of workplace bullying within a staff who work remotely?

Theme Numbers	Name of Identified Themes
Theme 1	The COVID-19 Pandemic - A Breeding Ground for Bullying
Theme 2	Feeling bullied through online communication:
Theme 3	Blurring of work time and personal time
Theme 4	Insensitivity of Context
Theme 5	The Big Brother Eye or Perpetual Gaze

The above identified themes are discussed in greater depth in the following chapter, that is, Chapter 4: Results and Discussion.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences and possible challenges of HRPs when managing WPB within the context of Ulrich's multiple roles model. This chapter will identify and explore the main themes identified within the analysis of the data. Following the above, Ulrich's multiple roles model and existing WPB literature will be used to explore the identified themes. Furthermore, to ensure trustworthiness of the identified themes, direct quotations will be used within the write up of findings to link the themes back to the original data (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Moreover, this chapter will highlight the implications of the findings which emerged from the analysis of data. Lastly, the studies limitations will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be explored.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in the management of workplace bullying incidents?

The below bullying themes emerged from Research Question 1, which explored bullying incidents which occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic, that is, where bullying occurred while everyone was working from within their offices at the organisation. These themes thus explore workplace bullying incidents within the traditional office space.

Theme 1: Defining the Contested Construct of Workplace Bullying

For many years, researchers have struggled to compile an all-encompassing definition of Workplace Bullying (Batchelor, 2019). This difficulty was expressed by participants within this study, such as Participant 2, who stated that "The definition (of workplace bullying) is very difficult to coin".

However, it is important to ensure that a comprehensive understanding, and eventually a comprehensive definition of WPB is generated, as it is difficult to manage a counterproductive work behaviour which cannot be defined. According to Cornell and Limber (2015), in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what WPB entails, it is important to identify common themes from various definitions provided. Therefore, the common themes which emerged from the HRPs various definitions of WPB will be discussed below.

Sub Theme1.1: Categorising the Various Bullying Behaviours

Many definitions of WPB have stated that bullying consists of a broad set of aggressive or negative behaviours (Agarwal & Rai, 2019; Ritzman, 2016). The above understanding is exceedingly vague, and therefore requires further exploration and clarification as to what exactly these aggressive or negative behaviours entail. When describing the bullying

behaviours which they had come across, the HRPs within this study identified covert or more subtle forms of bullying, which have been found to occur within the workplace (Branch & Murray, 2015). This was supported by Participant 5 who stated bullying within the work context is “Done in a more malicious way that is very subtle, (and) if you're not really tuned in to pick up on those incidences, you will miss it”.

This was further illustrated by Participant 3 who stated that workplace bullying is “Not always the overt, aggressive types of behaviour one would typically think (of) when it comes to bullying”. The covert or subtle types of bullying behaviour described by the HRPs within this study will be grouped and discussed below.

The first category which emerged from the data is belittlement of the target. The belittlement of the target was expressed by Participant 8 who stated that bullying makes targets feel “Belittled” and, occurs through “Militants who can really put their point across and really make you feel belittled”. Belittlement was further identified by Participant 2 who said that bullies gave “Patronising and condescending speeches” through constantly criticising those they were targeting. Participant 3 spoke of this belittlement by giving an example of a higher-level manager disparaging a target who was a new employee by saying “You should know this” whenever a target was to ask their manager for help, or was unsure of something. Participant 5 further spoke of this categorisation by stating that WPB occurs when a bully is continually “Belittling someone's opinion”. This denigration of targets can further be enacted in the form of humiliation as bullies may publicly belittle their targets. This was acknowledged by Participant 5 who said individuals feel bullied when they are “Being humiliated at some time” in front of their peers due to someone’s constant criticism.

The above can be likened to Rayner and Hoel’s (1997) category of threat to professional states as bullying targets are undermined in terms of their professional standing, by being continually put down and made to feel inferior. Belittlement can further be likened to direct bullying behaviours such as public humiliation to tarnish a target’s image, as bullies will treat individuals in condescending ways in front of others (Baldry, 2003; Cowie et al., 2002). Thus, the theme of belittlement is consistent with previous bullying literature.

The second category which emerged was threat and intimidation of the target. Participant 9 stated that bullying involved “Threatening” a target, and Participant 7 stated that a bully would give continual “Threats” to the those that are being bullied. Participant 1 spoke of the intimidatory tactics used by bullies stating that the bullies “Tone changes, and the bully

becomes more aggressive in their tone, (while) not actually listening to the views of the other person". Further to this both Participant 5 and Participant 8 spoke of how bullies use "Intimidation" in order to make targets fearful. The above bullying behaviours can be broadly defined into "Direct" bullying behaviours identified in previous research as they are occurring directly between a target and a bully (Baldry, 2003; Cowie et al., 2002). However, the specificity of the above categorisation could serve to assist in determining whether a behaviour is indeed bullying, and may therefore be of value to categorise on its own, outside of previous, broad bullying conceptualisations of bullying behaviour.

The next categorisation of bullying behaviour which emerged is that of isolation. This category included behaviours which made the victim feel overlooked, ignored and excluded. The above was spoken of by Participant 5 who stated that bullied individuals feel like they are "Being dismissed, or just being ignored", and this was further expressed by Participant 7 who said that bullied individuals perpetually feel as if they are "Not being heard" and feel as if they are "Excluded". This was further mentioned by Participant 8 who stated that being bullied is the continual feeling that your work colleagues are "Leaving you out". Further to the above, both Participant 3 and 4 mentioned gossiping as a tool used by bullies to make targets feel excluded and ostracised from their colleagues, and make them feel victimised. This category falls into what Einarsen et al. (2009) and Rai and Agarwal (2017) conceptualised as person-related bullying, in which targets were excluded and gossiped about. This would further fall into the category of an indirect bullying behaviour as it is designed to damage a targets self-esteem and social relationships (Baldry, 2003; Cowie et al., 2002). The bullying behaviours identified were therefore in accordance with previous literature conducted on WPB behaviours.

The fourth categorisation of behaviours is jeopardising an individual's work output. The above was expressed by Participant 4 who said bullying occurs when a bully allocates "Someone a task, and has the information or the knowledge (needed for the person to complete the task) but claims not to have any information and lets the person start from scratch while ... not sharing that, that knowledge".

This was further expressed by Participant 3 who stated that bullying can occur through "Withholding information and resources" from targeted individuals. Bullies may further jeopardise employees' work output by setting employees up to fail, which was referred to by Participant 5 who stated that bullies may "Interfere with (a target's) work tools or equipment in an attempt to sabotage them".

Jeopardising others' work was further explained in terms of placing individuals under unnecessarily large work demands in order to ensure that their output was threatened. The above was mentioned by Participant 7 who stated that managers can bully subordinates though giving them an "Unreasonable workload, and unreasonable deadlines". The above was further referred to by Participant 4 who stated that managers can bully employees though "Changing the goalposts of, of certain assignments or project" in order to place them under high levels of work pressure and stress.

Jeopardising an individual's work output can also appear in the form of denigration, in which the bully continually criticises their target's work outputs. The above is expressed by Participant 7 who stated that bullying can occur due to "A lot of criticism, and a lack of appreciation for effort" which the target puts into their work in order to jeopardise their output. The above was illustrated by Participant 6 from the perspective of the target. Participant 6 stated that

"Person Y always finds ways to say that I've not done enough in relation to my work. Person Y always finds ways to shout at me for no reason. I'm not treated the same as other colleagues within the department".

The above fits into Einarsen et al. (2009) and Rai and Agarwal (2017) category of work-related bullying which refers to a broad range of behaviours which are enacted in order to interfere with an individual's work output. This category of WPB behaviours is therefore too consistent with existing literature on bullying behaviours.

As seen above, bullying can take place in many forms as there are a wide range of bullying behaviours. The bullying behaviours identified by the HRPs within this study had many similarities with previous literature. There is thus merit in more broadly classifying various bullying behaviours as done in previous literature, as it ensures behaviours are not too narrowly viewed which could lead to oversight of various bullying actions of perpetrators. Moreover, more narrowly conceptualised bullying categories, such as those used within this study, may also have merit in making WPB behaviours easier to categorise as opposed to using the all-inclusive very broad categories such as "Direct" and "Indirect" behaviours which may complicate the identification of WPB behaviours.

Sub Theme 1.2: Intent of harm by the bully and experiencing harm as a target, a requirement for an act to be defined as bullying

In accordance with bullying research, intent remains a defining characteristic of bullying, as bullying is conceptualised as an aggressive or negative behaviour which requires intent by the perpetrator (Burger et al., 2015). The above was supported by HRP's within this study.

More specifically, the participants within this study were of the view that bullying is carried out with wilful intent, in which the bully conducts bullying behaviours in order to cause physical and/or psychological harm to the target (Tehrani, 2013). The view of wilful intent was supported by Participant 2 who stated that bullying is defined as “Unwanted conduct that is intended to insult, defame and demean the persona of another”. This was further supported by Participant 5 who stated that behaviours “Must be intentional” as well as Participant 7 who stated that bullying is an “Intentional behaviour” carried out by a bully towards a victim.

The above supports literature which stipulates that WPB entails a broad set of aggressive or negative behaviours that carried out with the intent to harm the targeted individual (Agarwal & Rai, 2019; Ritzman, 2016). In accordance with literature, the bullied individual consequently experiences psychological and/or physical harm as a result of the intentional bullying behaviours (Dzurec et al., 2017). This was supported by Participant 5 who further explained that bullying was conducted in order to “Cause anxiety and stress, and it leaves the person feeling as though their dignity or self-worth has been impacted on in some way”. In support of the above, Participant 7 stated that the bullying behaviour is intentional and has a “Huge, psychological and emotional impact on individuals”. Participant 7 went on to explain this impact, stating it can “Affect people's confidence, self-worth, and it even affects relationships and how we engage with each other”.

Thus, the participants within the study defined bullying in accordance with common themes identified throughout literature, which state that bullying entails a broad set of aggressive or negative behaviours which are carried out by a bully with the aim to cause physical or psychological harm to a target (Agarwal & Rai, 2019; Burger, 2015; Dzurec et al., 2017; Ritzman, 2016).

Theme 2: Power Relationships and the ‘Absolute Abuse of Power’

For an incident to be classified as bullying, the incident further needs to occur through an imbalance of power in which a more powerful individual or group tries to undermine and

dominate a target (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). The power dynamic at play between the parties within bullying incidents was explained by Participant 1 who stated that bullying occurs:

” where someone is trying to get someone else to do something which they do not want to do, and is trying to force their hand. And yeah, so it often takes the form of people feeling intimidated and at the same time even violated in terms of their right of choice not to do something.”

The above illustrates the power disparity between a bullying victim and perpetrator, as the victim is powerless against a more formidable perpetrator who is able to exert influence over them.

The literature notes that power differentials can result from formal differences in power which are organisationally derived, as well as from differences in personal power which arise from other factors such as tenure, personality, or specialised skills (Baillien et al., 2017; Branch et al., 2013). This was evident in the following sub-themes as noted by the participants.

Subtheme 2.1 Formal Power by virtue of the organisation’s hierarchy

The first source of power which be discussed is formal or positional power which arises from the organisation’s hierarchy and structure. Formal power is appointed to an individual of a high ranking and this power source gives the high ranking individual the authority to command and delegate to others (Wright, 2020). According to Morgan (2006) the organisational structure awards powerful individual’s with more rights and obligations which creates a large area of influence that higher ranking individuals can draw on to legitimately control and direct the actions of others. The above, formal power can encourage the emergence of bullying, which arises when more powerful individuals undermine and dominate less powerful individuals if they so choose (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

The abuse of hierarchal power is illustrated as Participant 4 stated that bullying occurs when “Someone that is in a more senior role exerts power over someone (in a less powerful position)”. Participant 1 further stated that “Bullying definitely happens between a person who is more senior and a more junior person”. In agreement with the above, Participant 2 observed that: “Bullying is often related to the abuse of power by those in authority”. This abuse of positional or formal power was further acknowledged by Participant 6 who said

“Quite frankly, we are in the environment whereby people...hide behind the position that they hold to the effect that they will tell you that I'm the manager ... so I have the powers of doing 1, 2, 3 and 4”.

The Participant then went on to explain that this kind of behaviour “Could give rise to what we could regard as bullying”. Participant 7 also illustrated the abuse of formal power, stating that “The structure of the organisation, the hierarchy in which we function does influence behaviours and relationships (which promotes workplace bullying)”. This finding is in accordance with Baillien et al. (2017) who stated that individuals in authority target victims in weaker positions, as they are unable to defend themselves against negative bullying behaviours. As bullying within the work context mostly occurs from the top-down, hierarchy is an important source of power to analyse in WPB situations (Einarsen et al., 2020). The above accounts for why many HRPs interviewed viewed bullying as occurring between more senior and less senior employees.

Therefore, the formal power described above facilitates the emergence of bullying, if the individual in that position feels so inclined (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). However, as mentioned, bullying behaviours can also arise from differences of personal power between individuals.

Subtheme 2.3: Personal Power

Individuals can further obtain and possess personal power through the skills they possess, their lengthy tenure within an organisation, or by virtue of their personality characteristics which give certain individual's great influence over other employees (Robbins et al., 2016). Personal power may therefore account for how bullying occurs, even from the bottom up, in which bullying perpetrators, due to their personal characteristics, are able to exert influence over their targets who possess more formal power (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016b).

Bullying through personal power was reported by Participant 9 who stated that there are

” Instances where it can be a subordinate (who is) bullying a person that would be classified as their line manager. This bullying was based on the fact that ... this (manager's) character was more accommodating and more lenient, and perhaps not a confrontational type of person” and therefore could leave them vulnerable to a bully who exploits this.

In the above stated incident, the perpetrator used their personal power, obtained through personality characteristics, to exert influence over their manager and bully their manager,

despite the perpetrator occupying a less powerful organisational position. Therefore, Participant 9 spoke of personal power occurring from the bottom up, in which a tougher, less agreeable subordinate bullies a more accommodating, kinder superior using their personal power. The above is supported by a study conducted by Pallesen et al. (2017) which found that bullies were rated lower on agreeableness than targets of workplace bullying, as well as the control group used.

Participant 5 further elaborated on personal power, however, they divulged that such individuals possessing personal power also may derive their power by virtue of the skills they possess. Participant 5 explained that employees who are at the forefront of research and innovation in the organisation are seen as far more important than employees in administrative roles. Therefore, irrespective of their hierarchical organisational position (that is, irrespective of whether they are formally appointed managers or not), research and innovation staff may have power over other employees by virtue of their expertise. Participant 5 stated

“There tends to be the perception...that administrative staff don't really matter in an environment (where we must serve those with critical skills) ...I think we (the administration staff) do feel undermined in a certain way, we do feel side-lined, (and) I think it's easy to feel this way”.

This abuse of personal power was further acknowledged by Participant 5 who said bullying arises as:

“Most of the senior staff are highly qualified experts and as such they feel they are the experts; they are the specialist... and project this image that they know they're not the kind of people you would want to be at loggerheads with or that you would want to challenge”.

The above bullying occurs through knowledge power which is a source of personal power in which individuals, due to their specialist skills and expertise, are able to exert their expert power over other individuals, with lesser skills and knowledge (Baillien et al., 2017; Tehrani, 2013). The above bullying occurs as staff involved in research and innovation within this organisation have the support of their colleagues and the organisation as a whole which gives them power over other staff members, who are perceived to be less supported as they are less important to the overall organisational enterprise. According to Morgan (2006) individuals with unique skills possess considerable power within organisations, as they influence the organisation's future success, making others more compliant to their requests which accounts for why skilled individuals have the support of both the organisation and their peers. The

personal power of skilled staff members therefore gives staff involved in innovation the power to bully others, and make sure that their wishes and interests prevail. This was especially true within the organisation under question, which relied on research and innovation to ensure its success.

Another area in which an individual's personal power may enable them to bully others is through tenure (Tehrani, 2013). According to Participant 8, "People who have been at this organisation longer tend to think that they've got more power over anything and everything that is happening around here". The above is further explained by Participant 6 who said individuals who had worked at the organisation for a long time walked around with a mentality of "I've been in the organisation for long, therefore, you can't tell me anything". Participant 6 continued to explain that staff who had been at the organisation for many years would say intimidating things to more junior staff members such as "I do not expect a person like you to take me head on and tell me that I'm wrong".

The above is in accordance with Walker (2017) who found that employees with longer tenure at their organisation were more likely to bully others, as tenure serves as a safety net which protects the bullies from the repercussions of their behaviour. As such, individuals with lengthy tenure have personal power, which they may exert over others with less tenure (Baillien et al., 2017; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012).

Subtheme 2.3: Power stemming from a mixture of formal and personal power

While some distinctions have been made between formal/positional power and personal power, many HRPs within the study acknowledged that bullying arose due to both of these forms of power. Participant 1 stated that bullying "Definitely has to do with either a perceived power relation, or a positional power relation". Participant 9 further stated that bullying is a "Threatening and overpowering behaviour over another individual in terms of both positional or dispositional traits". Participant 8 too stated that bullying extends further than power dynamics which are organisationally derived, stating that bullying does not only occur "Where managers bully, a subordinate. Subordinates (as mentioned previously) can bully managers as well". It is therefore important to acknowledge that bullying can occur from the top-down and from the bottom-up (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016) and that bullies can derive their power from both formal authority and/or personal power and in the latter case, that is bottom-up bullying a bully can derive their power from personal characteristics. Thus, bullying should not be limited to an abuse of positional power only in which a higher-level manager exerts coercive

influence over a lower-level subordinate but can occur when a perpetrator is merely possessed of personal power that is sufficient to enable them to bully others, even those in senior positions.

In an interesting observation, Participant 1 noted that bullying was exacerbated within the organisation by “The power relations between the management themselves and (those involved in research and innovation).” This participant therefore had noticed the power struggle between managers who have formal power from the organisation’s hierarchy, and those involved in research and innovation who had personal power as they are supported by the organisation and most valued in terms of their contributions.

The above is in accordance with WPB literature, which states that power differentials can result from actual differences in power which are organisationally derived, as well as from differences in personal power (Baillien et al., 2017; Branch et al., 2013). Further to the above, these various forms of personal and formal power can exist singularly or in combination which makes it challenging for other individuals, namely those without these forms of power, to challenge the bully’s behaviour (Tehrani, 2013)

Subtheme 2.4: Personal Power from intersectionalities and the Prevailing Patriarchy

In accordance with intersectionality theory, numerous forms of individual oppression such as racism, sexism, ableism and ageism may exist simultaneously (Crenshaw, 2017). These numerous manifestations of oppression can combine and compound to create privilege for specific groups, which gives them power over other, marginalised individuals who experience numerous forms of compounding oppression (Crenshaw, 2017). The above accounts for why participants reported that bullying may be linked with issues such as race and gender, making it difficult to disentangle bullying from other forms of discrimination. It was therefore suggested that individuals may be targeted by bullies due to demographic factors. The above can be seen by Participant 7 who stated that bullying issues “Are deeper; the conflicts are deeper as bullying also cuts across race and gender type issues”. Participant 1 further emphasises this intersection, stating that “Bullying can be linked to my identity, my race and my gender position”. The above supports that finding that WPB is “A gendered and racialized phenomena” (Misawa & Rowland, 2015, p. 4). Participant 3 spoke of an incident in which a man due to his sex, may be viewed as having power over a female irrespective of the woman’s role in the organisation. According to Participant 3:

“There are times when a woman has been given a position, and a man feels, I'm the man here, I have been here for a long time, so this woman can't tell me what to do. So even though the man is lower than the woman in terms of position, they're using their patriarchal privilege, and (possibly unconscious) bias, to bully a female individual.”

The above can be accounted for as a continuation of patriarchy, in which pervasive inequality continues to exist between men and woman as men continue to maintain their position of power over woman in terms of organisational rank (Higgins, 2018). The above is certainly true within South Africa, as South African men occupy 76.5% of top management positions within government (Saba, 2019). However, this intersectionality further has racial undertones. This is seen as Participant 6 stated

“Black African employees in the organisation do not feel they are heard... and that is the culture and it has been created in the organisation, a culture of supremacy... there's that suppression of views of specifically black females and black individuals at all levels.”

The above is in accordance with a study conducted by Cunliffe and Mostert (2012) analysing bullying within South African organisations which found that black individuals experienced higher levels of WPB than White, Coloured and Indian individuals. This is further supported by Motsei (2015) who notes that black employees were more likely to experience WPB, and Motsei and Nkomo (2016) who found that black individuals experienced more bullying in the workplace, and believed they were targeted due to their race.

The above intersectionalities of oppression may arise from South Africa's Apartheid past, in which individuals were discriminated against on the bases of race and gender. The above is seen as Participant 2 stated that bullying felt “Like a cloud hanging because of the historical past”. Bullying reflecting South Africa's historic past can be accounted for as bullying within organisations has been described as a “Reflection of the structural and power relationships in wider society” (Samnani, 2013, p. 32) that favour White groupings that still remain intact post-apartheid despite all legislation such as Acts relating to BEE, Affirmative Action and Employment Equity, which are supposed to remedy the injustices of the past. This continuation of structural inequality is seen within South Africa as 60% of Black South Africans reside in extreme poverty, while only 1% of White South Africans are that poor (SAHRC, 2018). It is further illustrated as Black South Africans are the largest demographic group, making up nearly 80% of the economically active population, however, they hold only 14% of top management positions in South Africa (BBC, 2019).

However, participants believed these intersectionalities extended further than racial and gender discrimination. This was explained by Participant 3 who stated that bullying behaviours are “Meant to dehumanise the other person, either on the basis of race, class, power (or) gender”, and therefore individuals may “Feel bullied based on their status of disability, or (their) race, (their) class”. This accounts for why South African studies have found that younger employees, employees with lower education levels, and employees from minority religious groups are more likely to be victims of WPB (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Motsei & Nkomo, 2016). This is also in accordance with international literature, which states that individuals can be marginalised based on difference factors, making individuals vulnerable to bullying due to factors such as their gender, race, ethnicity, age, class and sexual orientation (Elder & Davila, 2019; Prevost & Hunt, 2018).

However, not all individuals within the study believed that bullying was entirely related to issues of intersectionality. Participant 2 stated that “Bullying can be race based, it can be gender based... (but) it doesn't necessarily have to be gender, or race based”. This therefore alluded to the fact that bullying may not include race or gender type issues at all, which was illustrated by Participant 6 who stated that “These bullying cases go beyond race. Sometimes it is between a white female and a white male... or sometimes it is between two Indians”.

The participants’ focus on bullying intersecting with, and often being conflated with racial and gender type issues could possibly be accounted for as the organisation in question has a strong policy on discrimination while lacking a specific WPB policy. Targets thus often report bullying complaints to this office that manages discrimination issues so it is possible that the issues of discrimination and bullying could at times be spuriously conflated.

As illustrated above, power in its various forms is of central importance within the emergence of WPB, irrespective of the form in which the power exists.

Theme 3: The Hidden Hand of the Cabal

Many HRPs acknowledged that higher level managers and executives may use their power in order to prevent HRPs reported findings from being implemented, leaving HRPs unable to effectively manage WPB. Thus, HRPs felt that they fell victim to the hidden hand of the cabal, which ultimately decided on how the outcomes of bullying cases were managed. The above is clear in a statement from Participant 6 who acknowledged “As much as there is independence in the work that I do, to certain extent, there's that hidden hand somewhere ...wanting not to implement the recommendation as per the report”.

Participant 6 continued stating one could take the side of an employee in a bullying incident and recommend that a manager may be guilty of bullying, but acknowledged “I don’t know whether there is compliance with the report”. This was supported by Participant 1 who said, “We do not have jurisdiction to discipline anyone. All we do is present findings and recommendations”. Participant 1 then went on to explain that what happens after this report generation is outside of their role. This is in accordance with Gill (2017) who stated that HRPs’ decisions or reports need to be ratified and approved by top management; and to this extent argued that HRPs merely propose decisions but these can be over-ridden by those in top management positions (Brewster et al., 2012; Namie & Namie, 2011). The above is further supported by Harrington et al (2015) who found that HRPs merely advised managers on what to do, however, the decision-making power as to the outcomes of WPB incidents was left in the hands of senior/top management.

Participant 6 was clearly frustrated with this lack of enforcement and went on to ask “Why can’t I monitor and ensure enforcement in instances whereby (the recommendations of the generated report) are not followed? Then I would have powers to...ensure that the perpetrator is taken through their processes”. Participant 6 acknowledged that even though they may choose to side with employees in instances where managers were accused of bullying, managers would seldomly be held accountable for their actions as these managers “Use proximity (to higher level managers) to influence the outcomes of their bullying report”. Also mentioning the issue of using proximity to power and influence, Participant 9 stated “There seem to be managers who (are) put in positions, because they (are) well-connected”. Participant 9 went on to explain that these managers now use their position to bully others and “Use their position to...run through people, disregarding people’s grievances and (disregarding) issues that (their employees) may have”. To illustrate the above power of senior management, Participant 2 mentioned

“The senior manager will override the HR person’s point of view. Because of course, the manager knows better. And in a sense, the HR person knows that maybe procedure isn’t being properly followed, but they’re just being bullied by the senior manager to make a certain decision”.

The above is supported by Cowan and Fox (2015) who found that HRPs were powerless to address instances of WPB when the bully possessed a position at the top of the organisation’s hierarchy. Participant 6 stated in order to overcome this challenge “There must be willingness

by itself, especially through its senior managers, to deal with this...and stop with a perpetual cabal approach”. The above reinforces the idea that HRPs are powerless in the management of WPB instances, as management willingness is deemed necessary in order to ensure that meaningful change is implemented.

Participant 4 further expressed frustration with the lack of enforcement of a particular WPB report in which a higher level-manager was implicated as a bullying perpetrator. Participant 4 spoke of an incident when the “HR manager escalated (the above incident) to the senior manager” but went on to explain that “Obviously nothing happened” as those in power continue to support one another and look after each other. The above lack of accountability and consequence for higher-level managers who bully lower-level employees further frustrated Participant 5, who said from “What I've seen in my experience is that (people continue bullying) due to...a lack of consequence, people seeing that you know what, I can do this regardless of whether the policy sanctions this behaviour or not”. This lack of decision-making power in the outcomes of WPB incidents was described in the literature by Mokgolo and Barnard (2019) as a factor which disabled HRPs and left them unable to effectively manage WPB.

Theme 4: The Spurious Conflation of Discrimination and Harassment with Bullying and the Need for Policy that Disentangles these Issues

As mentioned in the sub theme on Intersectionality (Subtheme 2.4 pg. 68) there may be times where there is a spurious conflation between discrimination and bullying and that only a clear-cut policy will possibly facilitate the disentanglement of this conflation. Studies conducted by Fox and Cowan (2015) and Mokgolo and Barnard (2019), both identified a lack of bullying policy as a key factor which inhibited HRPs’ ability to effectively manage workplace bullying. The above may be especially true within South Africa, which “Lags behind much of the rest of the world” in regard to researching bullying, creating a unified understanding of bullying, and implementing unified action against bullying such as implementing anti-bullying policies (Smit, 2014, p. 1).

When reviewing the above themes, it becomes apparent that there is, at times, a spurious conflation between discrimination, harassment and bullying, which accounts for why HRPs within the study expressed a need for a clear-cut bullying policy. This policy was indicated as necessary as it would make it easier for HRPs to disentangle bullying from other discriminatory

behaviours as well as stop inappropriate behaviour in its tracks as it would be clear that the organisation had a 'Zero-tolerance policy' when it comes to WPB.

Participants within the study spoke about the lack of bullying policy within the organisation, such as Participant 2 who stated that "We do not have a policy that comprehensively deals with bullying." This sentiment was shared by Participant 4 who said "There were limited guidelines" when trying to manage workplace bullying, and "No legal definition provided that one could use as a benchmark to identify am I being bullied or not". Participant 6 was in support of the above and said there is a definite need for "A management of bullying policy", and said it is imperative that the policy states "What is defined as bullying or what may be considered as bullying, how bullying will be handled, and this is how you go about complaining about bullying within the industry". The above was further emphasised by Participant 9 who said, "There isn't something in black and white stating this is what bullying is all about, this is how you best deal with it... so I think there we (are) lacking". Participant 3 was upset at the lack of bullying policy within the organisation and stated that WPB is exacerbated by "The failure of the organisation to put in place policies and (other) ways of dealing with bullying". The above supports the findings that a clear definition of workplace bullying is required to inform the development of an anti-bullying policy as well as the policy's execution in order to ensure that WPB is deal with effectively within organisations (Cowan, 2011).

However, the participants acknowledged that there were policies in place at the organisation which could be drawn on, in bullying incidents, such as the sexual harassment policy or discrimination policy, but the participants felt it would be more beneficial to have a policy specially analysing bullying. Participant 9 stated "There is a policy on harassment, sexual harassment and so forth. But I think...you can't always link bullying to sexual harassment, or you cannot always say those two are one and the same". Participant 9 concluded this thought by stating "There is a fundamental difference between just bullying and sexual harassment. So, in terms of just bullying itself within the workplace, I don't think there's enough policy". The above sentiment was shared by Participant 7 who stated "I think there is a fine line between bullying, victimization, harassment, poor performance, (and) all of these things. And maybe that's what causes the discomfort about how do we deal with this bullying particularly". Participant 7 then acknowledged that due to this, there is a dire need for "A conversation as to whether bullying should be one of those stand-alone type policies. You know, rather than having it embedded into a sort of broader discrimination policy". The above

findings are in accordance with a study conducted by Mokgolo and Barnard (2019) which found that HRPs in organisations referred to the sexual harassment policy, or other such policies when managing workplace bullying as there was no concrete WPB policy in place.

Many participants in the present study further felt it would be beneficial for a bullying policy to exist as a stand-alone policy as this would enable bullying to be dealt with more effectively within the organisation. For example, Participant 4 said that a bullying policy at work would “Definitely improve the culture at work, and empower people to deal with bullying more effectively”. Participant 4 went on to explain that a bullying policy would empower HR to better manage workplace bullying as “Bullies would be much more aware that they will be held accountable”, and due to bullies being held accountable “There will be a lot of more people approaching HR” in order to investigate and manage any incidents of WPB which arise.

Participant 6 supported this view and stated that it would be beneficial to have a distinct stand-alone bullying policy as it would enable bullying issues to be dealt with more seamlessly. Participant 6 stated “We need to have a policy that is tailored specifically for management of bullying, because if we have such (a) policy, we can respond effectively to staff members”. Participant 6 then went on to explain how much time is wasted going through various policies in order to ascertain if a behaviour is indeed bullying. The participant said if a clearly defined bullying policy was in place it “Would highly assist” and streamline the process of managing WPB, enabling HRPs to respond more effectively to WPB incidents. The above is in accordance with a study conducted by Cowan (2011) which found that HRPs believed that if the organisation had a clear anti-bullying policy, they would be able to manage WPB incidents more effectively. The above view is supported by a study conducted by Pate and Beaumont (2010) which found that once an antibullying had been implemented, there was a significant reduction in the perception of WPB. Thus, to the researcher it seems that while a policy could escalate reporting it could also serve to reduce and minimise reporting as reporting of vexatious, spurious non-bullying cases will decrease when so-called victims realise that their complaints do not stand the test of what constitutes actual bullying.

Cowan and Fox (2015) also advocate that the implementation of an anti-bullying policy would empower HRPs to manage WPB more effectively, and enable them to implement their recommendations more seamlessly. Lastly, these findings are in accordance with a study conducted by Pastorek et al. (2015) who concluded that organisations and human resource departments must implement effective, no-tolerance bullying policies in order to effectively

manage WPB. There is thus a need for organisations to develop a clear anti-bullying policy to ensure HRPs can clearly identify bullying behaviours, and can manage bullying more effectively when it does arise within an organisation.

However, even if a comprehensive WPB policy was implemented within an organisation, there may be further factors which prevent WPB from being effectively managed. In accordance with this study's theoretical framework, namely Ulrich's Multiple Roles Model, HRPs' alignment with management as a strategic partner may prevent them effectively implementing an anti-bullying policy. This will be discussed and explored within the theme below.

Theme 5: Irreconcilable Constituencies – One role at the expense of the other

When managing WPB instances, HRPs are expected to adopt the role of both a strategic partner of management in which they look after the organisation's prosperity, as well as to act as an employee champion which advocates for employees' interests (Fox and Cowan 2015). However, these role demands have been described as fundamentally paradoxical (Heizmann & Fox, 2019). This accounts for why this study saw that HRPs often pursued one of these roles at the expense of the other. In addition, there was also a split within the studies sample, namely some HRPs aligned themselves much more with the role of employee champion while other HRPs felt more aligned with their role as a strategic partner with management.

Sub Theme 5.1: Aligning with the Narrative of a Strategic Partner with Management:

In their first role HRPs are expected to act as a strategic partner of senior managers and line managers in order to aid in strategy execution (Ulrich, 1997). In this role HRPs are to act as a team member of managers and ensure that HR initiatives align with and facilitate business results (Ulrich, 1998). HRPs are therefore required to focus on organisational efficiency and cost reduction in their role as a strategic partner in order to ensure the continued financial prosperity of the organisation (Ulrich, 1997).

Some HRPs within the sample noted that they were perceived by employees to be strongly aligned with management, thereby identifying strongly with their role as a strategic partner. This alignment with management was illustrated by Participant 6 who stated that there was a strong perception that "Particular (HRPs) within the organisation perpetrate the agenda of managers". Certain HRPs favouring the role of a strategic partner was further supported by Participant 8 who stated that some HRPs are "Perceived as being on the employer's side

always... So, they (employees) would not paint us as people who are neutral, as people who are actually there to assist both employer and employee". Certain HRPs alignment with management is in accordance with a study conducted by Harrington et al. (2015) which found that HRPs pursued their strategic partner role at the expense of their role as employee champion, thereby placing managers and organisational needs above employees needs when managing WPB. However, it was noted by these participants that it is sometimes a necessity to do so.

The necessity of aligning with managers, and subsequent stringent following of organisational processes and policies was accounted for by Participant 2 who stated that "There's contestation between managerial tendencies and collegial tendencies. Collegial tendencies, obviously, do not sustain organisations ...(but) managerial tendencies will sustain institutions into the future". Participant 2 acknowledged that the outcome of this alignment with managerial policy was that "(HR) are commercialising the organisation", and thereby pursuing financial goals (although perhaps) at the expense of employee interests to (is also necessary to) ensure continued organisational prosperity. According to Participant 2, this is where the "Contestation comes in" and is the reason why HR is referred to as "the bloated centre, or the bureaucratic centre with managerialist tendencies".

The above is supported by literature as Harrington et al. (2012) report that the managerialist approach to HRM is becoming dominant due to its clear economic value and integral role in the continued existence and legitimisation of the organisation and HR profession. Due to HRPs' strong allegiance with their strategic partner role, an employee-centred discourse has been replaced with an economically centred discourse, illustrating that HRP's have dis-aligned with the advocacy of employee interests (Keegan & Francis, 2010; Pritchard, 2010).

In this economically centred discourse, employees are viewed as "Human capital" and simply become resources which need to be strategically managed (Ulrich et al., 2010). Due to the above, HRPs are more likely to side with management and see WPB complainants as a possible threat to the validity of the institution (D'Cruz et al., 2014; Harrington et al., 2015). This role shifts HRPs' decision-making from employee- centered to organizationally-centred, thereby aligning HRPs with their strategic partner role. This discourse could further explain why Catley et al. (2016) found that HRPs were not likely to acknowledge nor to investigate cases of superior-to-subordinate bullying, as HRPs had preconceived notions of the

subordinates' complaint which led HRPs to biasedly assess the complaints by privileging managers' accounts of the situation. It further accounts for why it has been stated that research consistently shows that HRPs fail to take target's complaints seriously (Duffy & Yamada, 2018).

However, HRPs further aligned with managers and acted as a strategic partner due to fear of negative repercussions if they do not align themselves with fully managerial interests. HRPs thus felt it would negatively affect their careers if they chose to act outside of their role as a strategic partner, even recalling incidents where they were criticised and targeted by higher level managers for wavering in their allegiance to their role as a strategic partner.

The above occurs as HRPs are often on a lower organisational position than higher level top managers and when such managers are accused of being a bully, this prejudices HRPs, who generally have insufficient decision-making power at this level. To be able to effectively manage WPB incidents (Collings et al., 2018; Gill, 2017). Due to the above, HRPs are unable to stand up to a very senior perpetrator of WPB who occupies a more powerful position than them (Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019). The above is explained by Yamada (2013) who stated that in all workplaces, HRPs have to answer to top management and not individual employees, and are therefore likely to pursue the interests of managers.

The above is illustrated by Participant 2 who said, "But if the chairperson did this, and they gave me reasons (why they acted in a bullying way), who am I to say no?". The participant went on to explain that HRPs, in such instances, are "Too scared to say something". The above illustrates that HRPs may be too fearful or hesitant to act as an employee champion, and are therefore unable to truly advocate for employees' interests and rights within WPB incidents, especially when a higher-level manager is involved.

The above is supported by Participant 5 who said that when tasked to deal with a higher-level manager who had been accused of bullying another employee, he/she asked themselves "Do I perceive that there could be negative consequences for me if I did step in?" In the particular incident which was being discussed, the HRP was concerned the manager may retaliate if he/she were to step in. Participant 5 then continued to say "And therefore, I look out for my own best interests instead of saying, you know what, I'm seeing something wrong and something needs to be done about it".

Participant 8 gave an illustrative example of an incident in which they reported a higher-level manager for bullying, and subsequently were targeted by that manager. Participant 8

explained “That manager was so angry at me, the manager even went to my director and said to my director ... that what I did was unacceptable... and in actual fact (I) should get a written warning”. This participant was visibly annoyed, raising her voice in frustration stating “that’s for following processes and proceedings and for advising as per what should have been done”.

Participant 4 believed that even the most senior HRPs would fear manager retaliation should the findings of their bullying report reflect the manager in a negative light. Participant 4 used the example of their departmental HR manager, stating the HR manager has “A role to play to appease a lot of people, ... (and) I’m not sure the HR manager would be courageous enough to keep (high level or top managers) accountable”. In light of the above challenges, Participant 9 acknowledged HRPs’ inability to objectively handle WPB instances explaining “In terms of us as HR, I don’t feel we are well equipped to deal with bullying within the workplace”.

The above is in accordance with a study conducted by Mokgolo and Barnard (2019), which found that HRPs were unable to stand up against a bullying perpetrator who was employed in a more powerful organisational role than them. The study went on to explain that HRPs’ lack of power caused them to become compliant with managerial wishes as they feared punishment and retaliation, rendering HRPs unable to address or mitigate WPB when a higher-level manager is involved. This study’s findings further align with Cowan (2009) who found that HRPs felt powerless and unable to address instances in which higher-level managers were accused of bullying a subordinate. This accounts for why D’Cruz and Noronha (2010) stated that bullying targets negatively view HRPs as a function of management, as it only focuses on the views of the organisation. The above also aligns with the findings of Harrington *et al.* (2014) that HRPs continually adopted a strategic partner role at the expense of their role as an employee champion when managers were accused of bullying a subordinate. In an overarching account which aligns with this study’s findings, Heizmann and Fox (2019) found that HRPs not only had to navigate paradoxical role demands, but further had to navigate power differences among various constituencies when managing WPB.

Sub Theme 5.2: Aligning with the Narrative of an Employee Champion

As an employee champion, HRPs should act as the employees’ voice, express employees’ views and interests, and clearly advocate for employees’ rights (Ulrich, 1997). Employees should therefore trust HRPs to voice their concerns about WPB to upper management, and pursue employees’ interests in bullying incidents, even if the accused bully

is a manager. Some HRPs within this study aligned strongly to their role of employee champion, as they wished to pursue the interests of lower-level employees who had been targeted by bullies. These HRPs could be perceived of in a sense as almost ‘activist’ in their role in protecting employees against bullying by higher level managers

This alignment with employees was expressed by Participant 7 who explained that “Senior managers (would complain) saying that, it appears that you are victim centred”, as they chose to advocate for employees’ rights and interests. This advocacy for employees is further seen by Participant 7 who further stated that they knew of incidents in which staff had acted as an employee champion, stating “I know one or two HR managers that have stepped in to intervene in, and dealt with even heads of departments who are at a higher level than the HR manager” when that higher level manager has been accused of bullying. This is in accordance with Cowan (2012) who is of the opinion that HRPs are drawn to their field of work due to their concern for employee wellbeing and to that extent may continue to embrace their role as an employee champion who proactively works to ensure that employees needs are addressed during WPB incidents, even if it is at their own expense.

Cowan and Fox (2015) found that, HRPs see themselves as an objective party who wished to neutrally investigate WPB complaints from the perspective of both the complainant and accused in order to act as a champion of all employees. This is illustrated by Participant 1 who explained that HRPs’ “Role is to make sure that whatever we do is without fear or favour. And that we undertake a just and fair process” which is not influenced by the power of higher-level managers. This is also illustrated by Participant 8 who stated, “I always stick to what I know is right (writing an honest report irrespective of who the report is on) and stick by it through and through”.

Participant 3 further acknowledged some fear in adopting an employee champion role stating “Anyone would feel that it could negatively affect them (reporting a high-level manager for bullying), but when you come into this office, you must be aware that you have to”. The above clearly highlights HRPs adopting the role of an employee champion, as they are acting as employees’ voice, express employees’ views and interests, and clearly advocate for employees’ rights (Ulrich, 1997).

Theme 6: Culture and Leadership – Antecedent Factors that Foster Bullying

The organisation within this study competes both locally and internationally, and emphasises research and innovation in order to ensure its continued survival. The organisation

within this study further has a clear, hierarchical split between the first group of lower-level employees in clerical positions and the more senior, administrative line managers who manage them, and the second group who are employed in highly qualified, top-level managerial positions and possess high level postgraduate and professional qualifications. The latter, highly qualified individuals possess critical skills and are at the forefront of research, development and innovation and therefore play a key role in positioning the organisation as both a local and global leader within a highly competitive and fast changing environment. These individuals do often have formal positions of authority and power but may also simply have power based on their expertise and recognition as local and international experts, without a formal positional managerial title.

Sub Theme 6.1: The High-Performance Competitive Culture

Competitive organisational cultures have been linked with higher incidents of WPB. For example, a study conducted by Salin et al. (2019) found that WPB is likely to be exacerbated in organisations that emphasise high performance and competition. This was expressed by Participant 1 who stated “It could be the highly competitive nature of the company (that causes bullying)”. Participant 2 further spoke of the highly competitive nature of the organisation encouraging bullying stating

“There's this culture that people work until 12, midnight, or one o'clock AM. A senior manager would send a message at one o'clock AM, you feel guilty because you are sleeping, he was not. But I mean, that is the culture of this organisation, going overboard. Maybe the culture itself is bullying, you know, without allocating responsibilities to it. It's just the culture that shapes us in”.

The above can be understood as bullying through unreasonable work demands as employees are placed under undue stress and pressure (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). The above is further confirmed by studies which found that unreasonable work demands are one of the factors which most strongly predict WPB (Baillien et al., 2017; Van den Brande et al., 2017). This occurs as the above stated job demands result in increased perceptions of WPB (Ariza-Montes et al., 2016).

Participant 1 further spoke of the competitive environment explaining “The organisation is very competitive for resources, for people to position themselves close to those resources as people are continuously striving for excellence”. The participant felt that this internal competition was going to continue to worsen and exacerbate bullying within the

organisation stating “I also think it's going to become even more competitive because of the economic crisis...and it's going to lead to more competitiveness and there will be mental health issues”.

This competition resulted in a win/lose culture, as individuals felt they needed to ensure their own survival and win in order to ensure they were positioned well on the organisations hierarchy. This was expressed by Participant 2 who stated “If I can grab up as much as I can to prove myself as a distinguished staff member, I'll do that”. To elaborate on this point of ensuring your own survival and prosperity, Participant 2 stated “As a manager, I would want to outshine other managers. And therefore, let me grab as much as I can from (my) colleagues so that I can be the shining star”. The above is supported Pilch & Turska (2015) who stated that hierarchical cultures promote WPB as individuals compete with one another for higher positions on the organisation's hierarchy.

The above demands for increased performance, within an economic crisis and a hugely competitive global environment may lead to employees feeling that the performance demands placed on them by the organisation are unreasonable, thereby leading to increased perceptions of WPB within the organisation (Ariza-Montes et al., 2016; Einarsen et al., 2020).

Sub Theme 6.2: Management/ Leadership Style Within the Organisation

According to Onorato (2013), leadership and management style is a key antecedent of WPB. Literature has observed that leaders within highly competitive environments tend to embody an extremely demanding, pressured and often autocratic leadership style which has been associated with an increase in bullying incidents throughout literature (Chukwusa, 2018; Fontes, 2019).

The adoption of an autocratic leadership style within the current study's organisation is seen as Participant 2 stated that there is an idea that in order to maintain quality and high performance you “Need cutthroat managers to manage the organisation for assessing quality”. Participant 2 elaborated further stating

“In managing there could be bully tendencies happening without us even noticing, because it's their style of managing. Some managers manage by intimidating others, because they then feel they get the most (output from employees) if people get intimidated”.

This is supported by Khan et al. (2015) who found that the autocratic leadership can result in employees becoming fearful and tense, leading to perceptions of WPB. Further to the

above, autocratic leadership styles are a strong predictor of the emergence of new bullying incidents in work context (Fontes et al., 2019; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015).

Moreover, the autocratic leadership style has been found to overlap with toxic leadership (O'Hara, 2015). This is illustrated as in a word frequency analysis conducted by Walker and Watkins (2020) it was discovered that toxic leadership "style" was associated with autocratic leadership. Toxic leadership was alluded to by Participant 3 who spoke of how leaders within the organisation use the high-performance culture to pursue their own selfish interests. Participant 3 stated that the organisation has

“A culture of give me what I want, of high performance, of high standards. But a culture, that is sometimes at the tip of losing their worker in the sense that the worker becomes a tool, and a means to get what you want”.

The above is an example of toxic leadership, as leaders pursue their own interests and in doing so create a dysfunctional work environment which is harmful for employees (Winn & Dykes, 2019). This toxic environment is illustrated as using employees was described by Participant 3 as a part of the organisation's culture. The above is further toxic leadership, as employees are viewed as a disposable resource which can be disposed of and used as they see fit (Winn & Dykes, 2019). Toxic leadership is a key factor in the development and maintenance of WPB (Malik et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2016). The leadership style within this organisation may therefore contribute the development and maintenance of WPB, as many behaviours of toxic leaders overlap with bullying behaviours (Crozet, 2020).

The above accounts for why Participant 3 reflected and stated, “But when you unpack it, you're able to see that bullying is also about management's style. So that need for intervention, around management's style”. The above is in agreement with a study conducted by Duffy and Yamada (2018) who further stated that autocratic and toxic leadership is a large contributing factor towards WPB incidents, and therefore needs to be assessed. This accounts for why Participant 2 stated “I think the big issue with workplace bullying is understanding the role of management in it”.

Sub Theme 6.3: The Need for Management Training

Participants within the study felt that managers need more training, in that they need to develop people skills, and not only have technical and intellectual skills. They further felt that managers without these skills were less able to identify, address or manage WPB, and felt that this could exacerbate bullying within the workplace. As managers are usually employees' first

point of contact in the event of bullying instances, managers play a key role in perpetuating, facilitating, or preventing WPB (Woodrow & Guest, 2017). Managers could therefore mitigate conflict situations before they develop into WPB (Leon-Perez et al., 2015b). The above accounts for why Participant 1 stated that managers must

“Be far more aware of the forms that bullying can take, far more sensitive, far more alert. Because the problem with the organisation is that people come into management because they come from a highly qualified background and go into management, but actually 80% of the job is people skills, so they are going to encounter bullying”.

The above can be accounted for by Robbins et al. (2016) who looked at essential skills of managers and found that managers needed technical skills such as specialised knowledge **and** needed human skills which is the ability to work with people, motivate others, and understand the experiences of those around them. It would appear that managers within this organisation were elected for their technical and intellectual skills alone, resulting in managers lacking in human skills. This is seen as Participant 1 explained that managers are not “Adequately prepared both emotionally and physiologically for this role they play because it is emotional labour”. The above is problematic as managers need both technical and human skills to acquire conceptual skills, which enable managers to identify complex situations, identify appropriate solutions for them, and make effective decisions (Robbins et al., 2016). From the above, it can be extrapolated that managers within this organisation need to develop human skills to enable them to better understand their employees’ emotions, and this will allow them to develop conceptual skills needed to manage complex situations such as WPB.

This is supported by Participant 7 who stated that there is a need for “Skill and development around managing people and dealing with the difficulties that they might be experiencing”. The above was further supported by Participant 9 who stated, “I don't think management has been properly capacitated with training or upscaling or some form of development”. and it is therefore essential that managers are “Able to identify when (bullying) actually happens”. This participant went on to explain that being trained to identify bullying is not enough, and that managers must further be trained “To mitigate or deal with bullying once it has happened and address it correctly”. This ties into what Robbins et al (2016) conceptualised as conceptual skills managers need to effectively identify and resolve complex issues. This accounts for why Participant 3 stated “I think part of where the gap is, is around...management development skills”. The participant went on to express that

management needed to develop the skills which will enable them to better manage bullying incidents within the work context. This view was shared by Participant 7 who stated that the perception that managers were unable to effectively manage WPB was expressed by HRPs as well as other employees within the organisation. “I know there’s this perception amongst staff that managers are not equipped to deal with managing (bullying incidents)”. The above is in accordance with the findings of Woodrow and Guest (2017) whose participants felt that managers were not able to identify, address or manage bullying which exacerbated WPB.

Therefore, in an overall account the HRPs interviewed did not trust managers to be able to effectively identify and resolve WPB incidents. The above is in accordance with the findings of Harrington, Rayner, and Warren (2012) which found that HRPs often distrusted managers to effectively mitigate conflict or bullying incidents between employees. There is therefore a need to better train managers, who are the employees’ first point of contact in incidents of conflict or bullying, as this training will enable managers to mitigate incidents of conflict, thereby potentially reducing the number of WPB incidents (Woodrow & Guest, 2017). The above-mentioned training programmes can be used as a tool to prevent WPB, which is of particular relevance within a time in which HR’s role is changing, and direct line managers are becoming more responsible for personnel issues (Ulrich, 1997; Cowan 2021). This training of managers is intended for them to manage bullying between their staff, and is not intended for them to manage bullying if they themselves are the perpetrators. In this regard, when managers are the perpetrators, it is the researcher’s contention that if the organisation in question had a WPB policy where managers are trained in what is bullying and what is not – this awareness may lead to them having a greater insight into their own behaviour and they may therefore police themselves to ensure that they are not breaking policy and acting in a bullying fashion.

To conclude, the above themes relate to the first research question as outlined on page 42. To follow are themes emerging from the second research question which explores WPB in the context of COVID-19 and WFH.

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of, and possible challenges facing HRPs in the management of workplace bullying within a staff who work remotely?

Due to the present COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals throughout the world are working from home (WFH) in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The participants utilised within this study were working remotely or came to the office on rare occasions which was different to their traditional, full time work arrangement where they

would work on site each day. The sudden transition to remote working under COVID-19 has been found to lead to the blurring of work-home boundaries, fatigue and increased work-demands and stress (Kotera, 2020). The above could facilitate an environment in which workplace bullying could thrive, and this was explored further within this study.

Theme 1: The COVID-19 Pandemic - A Breeding Ground for Bullying:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals have been found to experience higher levels of fear, and increased uncertainty regarding their future (Robinson & Smith, 2020). This fear has the potential to leave people feeling stressed, anxious, and powerless as to how their life unfolds (Robinson & Smith, 2020). The above may therefore leave individuals feeling far more sensitive to their colleagues' correspondences, and in accordance with the frustration aggression hypothesis may encourage bullies to vent their frustrations into others in order to regain control over the turbulent work environment (Broeck et al., 2011). Participant 1 addressed the increased sensitivity among staff and stated

“I think COVID has also brought about a sensitivity amongst people...because I think at large, it's a traumatic experience... I think people become fearful... people are just so anxious about job security, for example, so, any SMS, any message (received) does create panic, fear and worry.”

Participant 6 further spoke of an increased fear and sensitivity among the “Departments that deal with having employees reporting to work”. According to participant 6, such employees fear that they'll “Be considered as a redundant department and in coming times might find that their department is dissolved or rendered redundant”. Participant 6 went on to explain that due to this fear, individuals can be vulnerable to exploitation stating that it may result in managers “Pushing employees more than the limit”, and out of fear they keep up with these unreasonable demands to “Fight for their space within organisation”. When applying the JDC model to the above circumstance, the increased job demands placed on employees as managers “Push employees more than the limit”, coupled with low levels of employee control and high levels of job insecurity increases the likelihood that employees will become victims of WPB (Baillien et al., 2017; Van den Brande et al., 2017; Karasek, 1979).

Further to the above, in accordance with the frustration aggression hypothesis, managers under undue stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are more likely to bully their subordinates in order to restore their own sense of control over their changing work environment (Broeck et al., 2011). The above may account for why Participant 6 stated that

during the COVID-19 pandemic they “Must admit that there has been an influx or increase of staff members complaining about bullying”. The frustration aggression hypothesis can therefore explain how increased levels of sensitivity, job insecurity and increased job demands reported within this study make employees more likely to become both victims and perpetrators of WPB, thereby making COVID-19 conditions a breeding ground for WPB.

Theme 2: Feeling bullied through online communication:

Working remotely has drastically changed how colleagues interact with each other, as they no longer communicate face-to-face in an office space. New forms of communication have left individuals vulnerable, uncertain, and less able to communicate effectively with one another. This climate of reduced communication has given rise to bullying incidents in various different ways, which will be explored in the sub themes below.

Sub Theme 2.1: Misinterpretation and Lack clarification

According to Mehrabian (1967), when individuals are conveying attitude and liking, 55% of this communication is through body language, 38% is through the tone of voice used, and only 7% is from the actual words which are spoken. The above may account for why communicating through technology when WFH may lead to misinterpretations of individuals’ actions, intentions, behaviours, tones and emotional intensity (Laubert & Parlamis, 2019). Such miscommunications arise because the body language and tone of employees communications, which play an integral role in workplace relationships, are stripped away when communicating via emails or text (Achurch Consulting, 2017).

Due to the above miscommunication, employees may incorrectly believe that their supervisors or colleagues are angry with them as they are unable to pick up on aspects such as body language and tone (Laubert & Parlamis, 2019). This miscommunication can result in individuals feeling bullied or targeted as they perceive their colleagues’ communication as ostracising and unnecessarily harsh (Einarsen et al., 2020).

The above was illustrated by Participant 9 who spoke of an incident regarding miscommunication over an email between a manager and subordinate. According to Participant 9, the manager ended up having to explain to the subordinate “No look... it was not my intention for my message to seem as if I was threatening or belittling you”. Participant 9 went on to explain that the above is exacerbated when individuals are unable to clearly gauge non-verbal behaviours. According to Participant 9 “Misinterpretation happens when you start

writing things down (because) the face-to-face aspect is taken away as people can't see your facial expressions ...when you are writing, either via WhatsApp or on email”.

Further to the above, when WFH individuals are unable to clarify with colleagues as to what they truly meant by an email or correspondence. This failure to clarify occurs as individuals are unable to go to another person's office and ensure that both individuals' interpretation of the situation is correct. According to Participant 1

“It's easy when you at work and someone responds to your email and you feel they've misinterpreted it; you could go down the passage at the office and correct that. But now working from home I think people retain the same tone, they take that same approach, but there is not sufficient awareness of how those emails are crafted and how they land with people.”

The above was further explained by Participant 7 who said “There isn't this opportunity to meet face to face to clear the air, so to speak. So, I do think that it adds to the strain of some of these relationships”. The above is supported by research which has shown that nonverbal communication is a rich source of information during face-to-face communications, and consequently the lack of visual cues during electronic communication often results in miscommunication and misinterpretation between parties (Key-Roberts et al., 2018). This miscommunication is further exacerbated as there is no face-to-face contact in which misinterpretations can be clarified, and no instant feedback from each party's body cues within such interactions (Giumetti et al., 2013). This miscommunication can therefore result in individuals feeling anxious and bullied as they perceive colleagues communication as ostracising, belittling and unnecessarily harsh leaving individuals feeling inter-personally rejected (Einarsen et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2020).

Sub Theme 2.2: Electronic Communication and the Mismanagement of Tone

Participants were of the opinion that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some managers had adopted a harsher tone, or a tone of threat in their communications with subordinates. Participants further believed that the tone of engagement between all employees had become more disrespectful while communicating with each other electronically. The above could amount to bullying as individuals feel ostracised, personally attacked and undermined by the emails which they are receiving (Einarsen et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2020). This form of bullying is known as cyberbullying as it takes place via online communications through forms

such as emails, text messages and organisational communication technologies like Microsoft Teams (Hang & Dahlan, 2019). Participant 7 exclaimed

“What I’ve noticed... is the language and the tone (from managers to their employees) is quite abrupt, almost reprimanding and not really that of colleagues...so, the tone of the engagement is that of you are insubordinate, you are not following your instructions, you're getting paid but you're not doing anything”.

Participant 7 went on to conclude “So people have seen the tone and the engagement via, SMS and WhatsApp are almost that of threat”. The above can be conceptualised as bullying through destabilisation as managers are failing to acknowledge the target’s contributions made, and are undermining them (Rayner & Hoel, 1997). This bullying is occurring online, through online communications, and is thus cyberbullying (Yokotani & Takano, 2021). According to D’Cruz and Noronha (2013) cyberbullying becomes more prevalent as technology is increasingly interlinked with individuals’ jobs, which accounts for why such complaints were increasing in number once individuals were working remotely due to COVID-19.

Participant 1 further felt that managers’ tone with subordinates was unnecessarily harsh stating “It seems like managers are becoming too impatient with colleagues, and issue very demanding instructions because people are in the comfort of their homes. The Participant noted that this form of communication was not acceptable and said “This may suggest there is some bullying happening” through written, online communication. It is important to note that managers themselves may be anxious and distrusting as they cannot see the work their employees are doing (Parker et al., 2020). Therefore, their tone becomes increasingly aggressive due to their frustration with work conditions.

Participant 3 had too received complaints about tone of correspondences, but regarding tone between employees on the same organisational level. Participant 3 explained “We're getting incidents where people are coming forward to say I'm getting an email from my colleague, and the tone is rude. I feel it is disrespectful”. According to this participant such complaints illustrate that “There is a need for individuals to reflect on how and what they write, (and further reflect on) the tone of their ‘written’ voice”.

Participant 1 felt that colleagues communicating with one another in a disrespectful way had worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the lack of face-to-face interaction between colleagues stating, “The lack of sensitivity is far more present than it would have been if you had a combination of both sending an email and talking to the person at work”. The

above is in accordance with findings by Giumetti et al. (2013) that the increased use of media reduced individuals' adherence to social norms, and reduced visual cues which lead to an increased number of communications which were intended and/or perceived to be rude. As previously stated, the above amounts to bullying as individuals feel ostracised, personally attacked and undermined by harsh electronic communications which they are receiving (Einarsen et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2020).

Theme 3: Blurring of work time and personal time

Technological advancements have also blurred the boundaries between personal space and workspace, as through technologies such as laptops, individuals are able to carry out necessary work functions from the confines of their own home (Routley, 2020). The above was true for the participants within this study who were WFH during the COVID-19 outbreak in order to reduce interpersonal-contact and reduce the spread of the COVID- 19 virus.

This blurring of work and personal boundaries has the potential to result in colleagues, managers and clients contacting individuals who are WFH outside of traditional working hours as they are viewed as permanently on duty (Routley, 2020). According to Routley (2020) the above has the potential to overwork individuals and leave individuals without adequate rest. The above could explain the findings from Harvard Business School that individuals work 48.5 minutes more per day on average when working remotely under COVID-19 conditions (Ivanova, 2020). Anecdotal evidence obtained during the course of this study suggest that the amount of extra time may be very much higher but this remains to be rigorously investigated and thereby confirmed. The perceptions that employees are permanently on duty, and thereby on hand to respond to communications at all times could constitute a form of bullying as individuals may be overworked, and placed under unnecessarily large amounts of work pressure as they are denied personal time (Einarsen et al., 2020).

Participant 5 was explaining this complete merging of workspace and home space stating "It's like the lines between the home and the professional are just so enmeshed". Participant 3 further acknowledged the lack of division between work time and personal time stating "I mean there's no work hours, things have changed". The above was further expressed by Participant 7 who asked the rhetorical question

"When do you really switch off? I mean, there's no real switch off in the current situation. You could do work at 10 o'clock at night, you could do it on a Saturday or on the

Sunday... and maybe that's part of the problem, we haven't had a sort of a switch off period.

So, it adds to this antagonism (which is present)".

The antagonism noted by this participant was further acknowledged by others, who too felt tensions emerging due to the above merging of personal and professional spaces. Many other participants felt that this complete merging of work and personal time was not acceptable. According to Participant 9 "Because the person is working from home, you expect them to always be able to take your call, regardless of the time, whether it's a weekend, and I felt that some form of bullying". Participant 9 went on to explain

"The manager's expecting his or her subordinate to constantly be available around the clock, and not taking cognizance of the fact that there needs to be a balance... constantly calling the person, sending emails, sending texts, wanting this to be done at a very late hours and not actually acknowledging that the person has a family and needs also to break away from the work when it's family time".

However, Participant 5 did not believe that this merging of work arose from any form of malicious intent but was rather genuine error.

"But I think sometimes these lines get blurred and people do things (like contact people outside of work hours) without even noticing it. Or they do it but they genuinely don't perceive that it would be an issue... each person sort of has their own standards of what they perceive is acceptable and not acceptable, and not everyone's standards are the same."

This difference of standards may account for why Participant 2 had acknowledged that they had not been sensitive to adhering to work times stating "We gave instructions, irrespective of what time of the day it was".

Irrespective of the behaviour's intent, requiring employees to be on duty at all times is classified as work-related bullying through unreasonable work-related demands as employees become overworked (Einarsen et al., 2009). According to Routley (2020) the above has the potential to overwork individuals and leave individuals without adequate rest.

Theme 4: Insensitivity of Context

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations around the world have adapted to a remote working model on a scale and at a rate never seen before (Thompson, 2020). The above shift to remote working due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a plethora of challenges, which were acknowledged and discussed by Claudine Naughton who is the chief

people officer at Activision Blizzard. Claudine Naughton stated that their organisation's remote work policy could never have anticipated that healthcare services and other essential services would be more difficult to access, and that schools would be closed. Thus, their remote work policy and present procedures could never have incorporated individuals struggling with health-issues, needing to care for children or other dependents while at work, and the need for many of their staff to act as both an employee and teacher during productive hours (Lewis, 2020).

Sub Theme 4.1: Insensitivity to Competing, Incompatible, Work and Home Demands

The above is true for many organisations who were made to suddenly shift to remote work, and this could result in some managers being insensitive to individuals' challenges, struggles and competing duties while WFH. Individuals could therefore be facing unreasonable and competing demands from various roles leading to work-role conflict, and a need for organisations to be more sensitive to and more accommodating of individuals' unique circumstances. This is especially prevalent due to the increasing burden placed on the family duties of the work-life equation as parents are faced with new demands such as overseeing their children's educational programmes, and managing child care previously covered by schools and day-cares before the COVID-19 pandemic (Qian & Fuller, 2020; Schieman et al., 2021). Participant 6 acknowledged this new merging of work and home demands, stating

“Remember when we are at the office, part of my personal circumstances at work are not that important. We meet, we do the work, its production, finish. But, when I'm working from home, there (are) dynamics that I must balance. I have a young family so I must ensure that everything is taken care of, I must ensure that the schooling is done for the four-year-old that I have; I'm a single parent, I must cook, and all those things must be done within that particular day in which person Y expects me to do the work. ... Now, employees are made to deal with this (family stress) simultaneously with the stress that comes with their work, and the stress that their line manager puts onto them to produce results because (their) line managers think that the employee is sitting having tea”.

The above difficulty of balancing work and home demands was further supported by Participant 1 who said

“I think a lot of people's domestic help or housekeepers left at a particular phase ... So, in addition to (individuals' traditional home and work roles) they may have had to do

washing, ironing, and a completely new layer of activities.... which I think would have impacted on people's availability, focus and productivity (when completing their work duties)".

Participant 1 said that she believes "Women may have probably suffered the most" as the majority of the newly introduced household duties would have fallen on their shoulders in addition to their work roles and responsibilities. This is seen in a study conducted by Power (2020) which found that the care burden placed on woman during the COVID-19 pandemic had increased drastically. The above is confirmed by the United Nations (2020) which reported that many families did not have access to usual forms on childcare during the COVID-19 lockdown, and that unpaid childcare responsibilities had fallen disproportionately onto the shoulders of women, which infringed their work abilities. The leader of the Women's Equality Party within the UK, Sophie Walker, stated "This is an old pattern where women are expected to do the majority of care at home and then are at risk of being penalized for seeming less serious about the work and career" (BBC, 2020).

Participant 6 further acknowledged that the employee may also experience an increase in work demands on top of the increase in home demands, as line managers believe they must "Push or give the employee as much (work) as they can so they know that the employee is busy with something". This increase in workload, coupled with increases in family responsibilities which organisations are largely insensitive to may leave employees feeling bullied by managers who are inconsiderate of their present responsibilities and continue to place them under increasing, undue workloads (Einarsen et al., 2009).

Sub Theme 4.2: Insensitivity to Individuals' Differences in access to WFH Resources

Further to the above, the issue of access needs to be comprehensively analysed within the South African context. South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of individuals' financial positioning within nations (Webster, 2019). Put more simply, there is a large gap in wealth between impoverished and wealthy South Africans, with the top 10% of South Africans owning 97% of the country's wealth (Webster, 2019). Therefore, individuals' ability to work from home may be largely influenced by their financial standing as many South African employees may not have access to sufficient WIFI/data, may not have a stable flow of electricity, may not have access to printing or scanning services, or may not reside in a home environment which is conducive to productivity (Hill, 2020).

The above was supported by Participant 7 who stated that many employees, more especially those in lower-level positions earning lower salaries, had approached the organisation and had felt that it was an “Offensive thing, that the tools necessary for them to complete what they were required to do were not made available for them to work from home”. Participant 7 continued and said this may occur as there is “A mis-alignment of what context the workers are in”. The above was supported by Participant 1 who said “What we need to understand more is the varied contexts that people work and live in. Because I think there probably are serious differences in equality”.

Failing to acknowledge and understand individuals’ home circumstances, and subsequently not providing employees with the tools necessary to complete their work tasks is a form of bullying. The above is classified as bullying as failing to give employees all the tools necessary to perform their work function is a form of sabotage (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Theme 5: The Big Brother Eye or Perpetual Gaze

When working remotely, bullying may further express itself in the form of micromanagement. Micromanagement is a form of management in which those in power excessively influence, control and monitor subordinate’s work (Allen, 2019). In a study conducted by McCormack et al. (2017) individuals reported that they were targets of bullying through micromanagement as they felt managers had doubts over their professional reputation, and they were unjustly made to explain their work behaviours and actions. The above can be seen as an indirect bullying behaviour which is intended to damage targets self-esteem (Baldry, 2003; Cowie et al., 2002).

Micromanaging may arise in a remote work environment, as managers may feel disconnected from employees, and that they need to regain control over the work environment due to their lack of oversight/actual line of sight of staff members (O’Connell, 2020). Thus, instead of building teams up and boosting morale within this new work environment, managers become fixated on controlling the work environment and act in a manner which is insensitive to the isolation or heightened anxiety that each individual staff member may be feeling (Parker et al., 2020). This gives rise to micromanagement, and increased dissatisfaction of staff members within their newly found, remote work environment (Kvamme, 2020).

Participant 5 gave an example of how it feels to be micromanaged by a manager desperate to regain control, and compared working from home to being on “Big Brother” and stated its “Feeling like you are always monitored... that there is this all-seeing eye or this dark

cloud that hovers over you, and you know, you're always anxious". Similarly, Participant 6 explained micromanagement as "(Managers) tightening or crippling their hands even more than they used to do when you were having a face-to-face interaction in the workplace".

Participant 5 then went on to explain how micromanagement is exacerbated through communication technologies. Participant 5 stated

"With Microsoft Teams, and with certain softwares, it's easy for people to see who's online and who's not online. So, you do get that message, I cannot see you online, where are you? You should be (working)! Or (a message saying) you were only logged on until one o'clock, what did you do for the rest of the day?"

This is in accordance with Kvamme (2020) who stated the proliferation of spy software which shows what employees are doing, and when they are online could contribute to micromanagement when working remotely. Participant 5 concluded that due to the above, people are exposed to "Unfavourable working conditions". Similarly, Participant 8 explained that employees believe they are being bullied because "My manager (is) all of a sudden is now sending me emails to check how far I am with this job? Why am I doing this at this time? Why am I not on my laptop?"

The above accounts of micromanagement may lead to employees feeling obliged to reply to more emails, to attend more meetings and to be "seen" as online in order to prove they were working (Ivanova, 2020). According to Einarsen et al., (2010) this constitutes bullying through excessive monitoring of employees and unreasonable work demands. According to Participant 7 "This idea of micromanaging then becomes a key issue in (working from home), which we need to look at".

Sub Theme 5.1: Micromanaging due to ill preparation and distrust

The majority of HRPs interviewed believed micromanagement arose due to a breakdown of trust between managers and subordinates, and managers who were insufficiently prepared to manage a remote workforce.

According to Participant 6, micromanagement was prevalent under remote working conditions due to the "Element of distrust between managers and employees as to whether the work is being done". The above was supported by Participant 7 who believed that "All of this (micromanagement) is really about the breakdown in trust". The above is supported by Parker

et al. 2020 who say the breakdown in trust between managers and employees during the online transition in the COVID-19 pandemic largely accounts for the increase in micromanagement.

However, due to this breakdown in trust employees are placed under more pressure to produce larger quantities of work and “prove” they are working while at home. This could be interpreted as a form of bullying through unreasonable expectations and unreasonable work demands (Rayner & Hoel, 1997). Employees could further feel bullied, as they are made to feel that their effort levels are never satisfactory which is why managers are continually monitoring them (Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

Further to the above, participants identified a lack of preparation as a key factor in the emergence of micromanagement. Participant 3 spoke of the above stating

“Managers have not been given the new skill set now that it's COVID-19. We (are) still managing according to those management styles that we learnt years ago...So, there's a gap in terms of the management style that is needed during COVID-19”.

The idea of a lack of managerial skill and training was supported by Participant 8 who believed micromanagement had occurred as managers “Haven't really mastered how they are going to manage their subordinates at home”. Participant 1 further advocated for a lack of managerial preparation, and explained that managers have not been adequately taught to manage a remote workforce, and are therefore more likely to micromanage as they wish to “Retain control in a space which is difficult to control”.

Participant 6 further acknowledged the need for managers to update their managerial style stating “I have realized that through COVID-19 managers have felt that they are not in control of employees. So, (they are) tightening their hands in order to have a grip on how the employees are doing their work”. However, Participant 6 acknowledged this form of management was not sustainable stating “That Rubicon is past”.

The above is in accordance with Parker et al (2020) who illustrated that there is a need for managers to develop new skills when managing a remote workforce in order to steer away from the counterproductive act of micromanaging employees. Further to the above, effective leadership styles which are well suited to work requirements and the work environment are of paramount importance, especially within the COVID-19 pandemic as appropriate leadership has been found to lower anxiety levels as well as reduce depression and stress (Papandrea,

2020). There is thus a need for managers to be equipped with new styles of managing, which are more appropriate for employees who are WFH.

Synopsis and discussion of the themes identified during the COVID-19 pandemic

We now move into a broad discussion on the themes identified when analysing WPB while individuals have been WFH. A study conducted by Xiao et al. (2020) which focused on the after effects of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic found that individuals suffered from a decrease in mental and physical wellbeing status, as well as an increase in physical and mental issues. Within South Africa, without the vaccine in near sight and the second wave approaching, individuals may be more insecure and more vulnerable resulting in a further decline in both physical and mental well-being status, as well as an increase in WPB incidents.

The JDC model is a stress model which states that job demands, coupled with low levels of individual control, leads to strain and reduced well-being (Karasek 1979). As there is no clear end date as to when individuals will stop working from home, and uncertainty as to when the COVID-19 pandemic will pass, individuals may continue to experience high levels of role conflict, job insecurity, unreasonable workloads, and inflated cognitive demands which have been found to be the most significant predictors of being a WPB target (Baillien et al., 2017; Van den Brande et al., 2017). Further to the above, studies have shown that psychosocial working conditions such as a reduced sense of coherence, lower levels of individual control, and emotional exhaustion are job demands which increase employee perceptions of WPB incidents (Broeck et al., 2011; Goodboy et al., 2017). All the above characteristics, which create perceptions of WPB, were reported by individuals within the study which illustrates that bullying is likely to continue and exacerbate within the present conditions of WFH. The above further accounts for why a participant stated that far more bullying complaints had been received since individuals had been working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The stressful work environment created due to the COVID-19 pandemic not only increases the possibility of individuals being targeted but can also escalate WPB perpetration. The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis is aligned with the JDC argument and can be used to describe how stressful work environments, which arise due to high job demands and low control such as those experienced within the present with the COVID-19 pandemic, may result in employees becoming WPB perpetrators (Broeck et al., 2011). The Frustration- Aggression Hypothesis was developed from Breuer and Freud's (1895) concept of Catharsis, which states that individuals need to express their emotions in order to lower the emotions intensity (Denzler

& Förster, 2012). In the workplace, bullying perpetrators therefore vent their frustrations and/or aggression by bullying others in order to gain a sense of control over their work environment, and lower their own emotional burden (Broeck et al., 2011). The above may account for why managers' tone towards subordinates was found to be that of threat, or that of reprimand when speaking to their team members. This may have occurred as managers were venting their frustrations onto targets in order to lower their own levels of frustration and regain a sense of control over the drastically altered work environment which they now found themselves in. Thus, the managers' reduced sense of control and increased frustrations turned them into bullies.

Further to the above, the organisation may be bullying employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Carr (2015), the organisation's hierarchical and bureaucratic structure and division of labour in terms of those who are less skilled and less educated (administrative staff) versus those who are more skilled and more educated (managers) versus those who are the researchers and innovators with crucially scarce skills, further places undue stress and pressure on managers and higher-level employees, which in itself meets bullying criteria through unreasonable work demands (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). From a psychodynamic perspective, the repressed energy from the undue work stress placed on managers and other higher level employees is vented towards other, lower-level employees (Tomei et al., 2012). The lower-level employees then become WPB victims and scapegoats that build-up frustrations of higher-level employees are projected onto (Tomei et al., 2012). Thus, the organisation itself may be conceptualised as a bully who places unreasonable work pressure on higher-level employees due to expectations of high performance and innovation, and these higher-level employees in turn project their frustrations on others, which makes them WPB perpetrators. The above may account for why individuals within the study reported that the hierarchical structure of the organisation was exacerbating the issue of WPB, as it enabled higher level individuals to abuse their power and bully those below them.

In addition, it is also important to note that within this particular organisation, employees are now being ordered to come back to work. With the exception of those over 60 years of age or those with comorbidities, who will have to provide medical certificates, staff are now expected to come into the office on a rotational basis. Many of these staff use public transport and they may therefore be more at risk to exposure to the virus. While this particular point was not canvassed as at the time of interviewing, staff were not compelled to come into

the office, this may now become a new form of bullying and fear as the organisation itself and its managers insist on workers coming into the office.

Chapter Five: Contributions, Implications, Recommendations, Limitations and Conclusion

Contributions

This research report focused on understanding the experiences and challenges of HRPs when managing WPB within the framework of Ulrich's multiple roles model. The multiple roles model is used to explore HRPs' various roles, and has been successfully used by researchers to investigate HRP' contradictory roles when tasked to manage WPB (Cowan & Fox, 2015; Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019). Within this framework, it is argued that HRPs conflicting role demands prevents them from effectively managing WPB within South Africa, as HRPs are unable to act as a both strategic partner with management who pursue the organisation's interests, while at the same time acting as an employee champion who acts as a voice for employees' interests.

This research found that HRPs adopted either an employee champion role when managing WPB incidents, or a strategic partner role but were unable to adopt both due to the contradictory nature of these two roles. This left HRPs unable to objectively manage WPB, as they advocated for the interests of either organisations or employees. Further to the above, due to HRPs' subordinate position of power to management, HRPs were unable to implement their findings or control the outcomes of bullying cases as 'the hidden hand of the management cabal' would often interfere with their suggested outcomes. There was further a lack of bullying policy which clearly defined what bullying behaviour is and how HRPs should manage it which severely hampered and complicated the management of WPB, as HRPs often viewed bullying as subterfuge, conflated with issues such as harassment and discrimination. Moreover, the organisation's highly competitive work environment, autocratic and toxic leadership styles, and managers' lack of people skills encouraged and maintained bullying making bullying at work more complex to manage.

This research report further explored HRPs' experiences and challenges when managing WPB within a workforce who are WFH as to the researcher's knowledge, this has not been explored within South Africa. This research found that HRPs encountered new forms of bullying and new challenges when managing a remote workforce. These were namely: cyberbullying through the use of negative tones which made employees feel ostracised and

targeted, the merging of work and home life leaving employees without rest, insensitivity to employees' home contexts resulting in employees being overworked, and micromanagement as managers lost trust in employees as they could not see them working; all of which created a hostile work environment.

This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on the experiences and challenges of HRPs when managing WPB in South Africa. Using Ulrich's (1997) multiple roles model as a guiding framework allowed for an in-depth understanding of the organisational specific nature of HRPs' challenges when managing WPB, which is characterised by contradictory role demands. This model contributes to WPB literature, as it provides a framework that could contextualise the phenomenon. In addition, this study contributed to the limited body of knowledge regarding HRPs perceptions of the challenges which inhibited them managing WPB effectively. Moreover, to the researcher's knowledge this is the first study exploring HRPs' experiences and challenges when managing a remote workforce. This provided an understanding of the new forms which WPB may take, as well as the emergence of new challenges and bullying issues being experienced.

The numerous challenges faced by HRPs when managing workplace bullying was highlighted in this research in order to emphasise the seriousness thereof and what is needed to overcome these challenges to ensure that WPB is comprehensively addressed in the organisational context.

Practical implications and recommendations

It is hoped that by raising awareness on the challenges HRPs face when managing WPB, steps will be taken to mitigate these challenges and enable WPB to be addressed more effectively within the workplace, as well as within a staff which are working remotely under COVID-19 conditions. Possible implications and recommendations based on this study's findings will be made below.

Implications and recommendations for the traditional work environment

Firstly, it is recommended as an issue of crucial importance, that organisations develop an anti-bullying policy which states exactly what WPB entails, how WPB incidents will be addressed, and empowers HRPs to implement their recommended outcomes in order to realise good HR practice (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). The above will aid HRPs in the management of WPB in several ways. Firstly, the bullying policy will clearly state what actions are required of HRPs, and will therefore reduce subjectivity and the tendency for HRPs to act as 'only' an

employee champion or strategic partner. By actively managing and overseeing the implementation of an anti-bullying policy, HRPs will be assuming the role of a change agent which is promoting sustainability for the organisation (Ulrich, 1997). In doing the above, HRPs will be able to forge a new role which is less contradictory and will be able to provide value for both organisational profits and employees' needs when managing WPB disputes (Rynes, 2004). As a change agent developing anti-bullying policy, HRPs may be able to help employees and management identify common goals pertaining to employee conduct and organizational productivity thereby overcoming their inter-role conflict which has been found to inhibit their management of WPB (Cowan & Fox, 2015). Secondly, the WPB policy will give HRPs enhanced autonomy, and enable them to rise above the restraints of top management who can use their power to override the implementation of suggested recommendations in the outcomes of investigated WPB reports. This will occur as the WPB policy should place HRPs as the highest power in resolving WPB disputes, ensuring that they are not simply acting as an advisory role to managers, but are rather acting as the final authority in WPB cases and that they are operating in a fair and impartial manner. Lastly, the WPB policy will have a zero-tolerance statement for WPB, and perpetrators will know they will be held accountable for their actions which may reduce the emergence of WPB incidents (Harrington et al., 2015). Conversely, the policy by clearly delineating what is and what is not bullying may reduce the number of frivolous and vexatious complaints. In instances of 'real bull bullying' that are based on solid grounds as guided by the policy, the above recommendations may encourage employees to report more instances of WPB which may not have previously been addressed, as they will have more faith that bullying incidents will be fairly and adequately resolved by HR. In addition, in order to ensure perpetrators are held accountable and people speak up about bullying incidents, the WPB policy should state that employees and managers are able to report the bullying incident and decided outcomes to an ombudsman should they feel the outcome has been biased in any way (Harrington et al., 2015). In this regard it is suggested that labour law within South Africa could even be revised to establish an Ombudsman who deals with such matters at provincial and national level.

Secondly, it is recommended organisations managers and leaders undergo training. The first form of training should be around leadership styles, and alerting managers to the appropriate ways of managing (Mills et al., 2019). This is necessary as autocratic leadership styles which were identified within this research have been correlated with increased WPB incidents throughout literature (Feijó et al., 2019). This training will encourage managers and

leaders to adopt healthier leadership styles such as the transformational leadership style, which has been found to reduce perceptions of bullying within the organisation (Escartín et al., 2017; Fleming, 2017). The second form of training should be provided to managers around people skills, in order to ensure that managers who are hired for their technical knowledge are also able to cope effectively with the human aspects of the job (Robbins et al., 2016). As managers may be the first alerted to WPB incidents, it is imperative that they are able to identify bullying, communicate with their staff about bullying, and make the correct decisions pertaining to HRPs' involvement within WPB incidents (Woodrow & Guest, 2017). In addition, organisations through the establishment of a WPB policy that clearly delineates what is and what is not bullying behaviour, and training for managers *must* have the support of top/senior management who are prepared to drive this process and enact its values; as without such senior support the implementation of such a policy will be hindered (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016).

Implications and Recommendations within a staff working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic

In order to prevent the merging of personal and work time organisations and managers should promote flexible work hours, but combine this with strict rules pertaining to when workers are and are not available for work (Papandrea, 2020). The above is important as it will enable employees to disconnect from their work duties, and reserve time aside for rest as well as for personal or family responsibilities (Papandrea, 2020). Secondly, organisations should focus on work quality as well as work quantity, should clearly communicate expected and measurable outputs so employees with feelings of job insecurity do not believe they are to produce a large number of work outputs to prove their value, as well as emphasise the need for productive work days rather than long workdays which exceed traditional working hours (Papandrea, 2020). Lastly, organisations should advise and encourage employees to create a specific workspace which is free from the distractions of their home should it be possible, as this may reduce the likelihood that employees will feel overwhelmed by work and home duties which are occurring within the same space, as this has been found to result in better separation from work and home duties (Allen et al., 2021). In addition, the organisation must ensure that staff have resources in terms of hardware and data to WFH.

In order to overcome the issue of micromanaging managers should be trained on the importance of trusting employees who work remotely. Managers need to trust that employees will be accountable for their work as this will empower employees to make their own decisions, think independently and learn to adjust to a more remote work environment (Mize, 2020).

Should an employee's work output not be up to standard, only then may it be appropriate to increase supervision as a way to guide employees (Mize, 2020). Managers and leaders should further be trained to set clear project expectations with clear deadlines in order to ensure that the employees understand what is required of them, and are able to perform the task appropriately (Gilbert, 2020). These very clear and specific deadlines will further ensure that employees understand which tasks are a priority, and will enable both managers and employees to see when check-ins may be required. The above stated check-ins should be routine and scheduled as this will prevent managers from disrupting workflow, and will prevent employees feeling flustered and overburdened by their managers checking in with them unannounced (Gilbert, 2020). Managers and leaders further need to be trained to give regular feedback, and constructively explain areas of improvement, as the employee will learn they are entrusted to correct their work themselves, rather than having their effort undermined (Mize, 2020). The above training will ensure that managers' and leaders' style of managing is more appropriate, and may reduce individuals experiences of stress and anxiety, rather than adding to it (Papandrea, 2020). The above may reduce employees' perceptions of bullying as they will not be required to account to their manager at all times and at unpredictable times and will not feel that managers are micromanaging them as their effort levels are insufficient (Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

Further to the above, in order to overcome the insensitivity to context identified in this study, organisations firstly need to acknowledge that employees' productivity levels may differ from normal during the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore need to adjust both work arrangements and methods of working, such as enabling individuals to work a few days from the office, should it assist them in being able to perform their duties (Papandrea, 2020). Further to the above, organisations may need to redistribute work tasks, taking into account individuals' various capabilities and home situations when WFH in order to ensure that employees receive manageable workloads (Papandrea, 2020). Secondly, organisations need to provide workers with the necessary support, guidance and equipment which will enable them to complete their work tasks from home, or from new work environments which arise due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Wilson, 2020). The above includes any training required by employees as to how to utilise new online work systems and as mentioned hardware such as laptops and data and WIFI connectivity. These steps will ensure that managers and organisations provide individuals with reasonable workloads, are cognisant of individuals home circumstances, and provide individuals with the tools and training needed to meet changing needs during the COVID-19

pandemic. This will reduce perceptions of WPB as individuals are less likely to perceive that they are being placed under unreasonable work demands, being sabotaged, and will feel more supported by their work environment rather than side-lined (Einarsen et al., 2011; Einarsen et al., 2009).

COVID-19 conditions seem unlikely to change within the short term and it is therefore of paramount importance that organisations rectify the above issues in order to create a more supportive work environment for employees. Failure to adequately address the above issues may result in a further reduction of employees' mental and physical well-being (Xiao et al., 2020). There is thus a need for organisations to foster a more supportive work environment which is cognisant of individuals' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to create a positive environment with enhanced social support, the International Labour Organisation recommends that the following occurs. Firstly, teams should use more supportive approaches which enable team members to express their emotions, and relate to one another's shared experiences (Papandrea, 2020). In accordance with the Frustration Aggression Hypothesis and notion of Catharsis, this should enable employees to express their emotions in a healthier manner and lower the emotional intensity, making managers less likely to project their emotions onto others in a bullying manner (Broeck et al., 2011; Denzler & Förster, 2012).

Further to the above, organisations need to establish a work code policy in which strict guidelines are set out regarding the boundary between work and home/personal life and where management is done by objectives (Papandrea, 2020). This work code policy will outline a strict division between home and work life to ensure that employees work traditional hours. This policy will be supported as employees will be evaluated against clearly defined objectives, which may serve to reduce employees' belief that they need to be continually online to "prove" that they are working. The above should be linked to the employees usual KPI's (key performance indicators) used in performance management practices.

In addition, specific channels such as an EAP which employees can use to voice concerns and fears during the COVID-19 pandemic should be set up. This channel can be used to express challenges with work processes such as unreasonable work demands, as well as express fears pertaining to their well-being in order to enable employees to express their emotions (Papandrea, 2020). To the researcher's knowledge the organisation under study has already done this, and this service is on offer to staff and any of their immediate family members. This will allow the organisation to support their employees, despite the employee's

WFH. The organisation should further encourage social interaction through establishing virtual coffee breaks during work hours, encouraging informal break time chatter as this will reduce perceptions of unreasonable work demands as individuals are entitled to specific break times which would occur while working from the office (Papandrea, 2020; Rayner & Hoel, 1997). Lastly, the organisations should recognise and praise good performance and positive contributions made by employees (Papandrea, 2020). The above will create a better working atmosphere, and reduce perceptions of workplace bullying as employees will believe their effort is acknowledged rather than belittled (Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

The above may also increase employees' control over their work environment as they can express concerns which can be rectified, and may lower perceptions of unreasonable work demands as employees are given breaks and are able to communicate work-overload with managers. In accordance with the JDC Model, the above should serve to lower perceptions of WPB. Further to the above, this newly implemented work environment may reduce built up frustrations through enhanced communication and sharing common experiences, which in accordance with the Frustration Aggression Hypothesis may reduce the number and intensity of built-up frustrations which managers project onto lower-level employees, lowering the likelihood that managers will act as workplace bullies. In accordance with the JDC Model and Frustration Aggression Hypothesis, the above work environment should serve to lower the number of bullying incidents reported, and create a more positive work environment.

Future research recommendations

Firstly, further research needs to be conducted analysing HRPs' perspectives on WPB in order to gain a richer account of how bullying behaviours can be more readily identified, the power dynamics at play when resolving WPB incidents, and alternative recourses which could be used to manage WPB more effectively (Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019). The above will contribute a richer and more detailed account of the policy and procedural guidelines which have been identified as a key factor in mitigating WPB within this study.

Secondly, studies should draw samples from a variety of organisations in order to get a more holistic account of the general experiences and challenges of HRPs when managing WPB. The above may further allow for a larger sample selection within future studies, which may generate new insights.

Thirdly, to establish a more comprehensive understanding of challenges HRPs face when managing WPB through the lens of the multiple roles model, it may be useful to explore

various accounts such as those of bystanders, bullies, victims, general line managers as well as HRPs. This, too, may provide deeper and richer accounts of HRPs' challenges and role conflicts, as it will provide a better understanding of the diverging expectations that employees and managers have of HRPs when managing bullying incidents. However, the aim of this particular research was focused on specifically exploring HRPs experiences and challenges in managing WPB.

Lastly, it is recommended that future studies focus on the experiences and challenges of HRPs when managing employees WFH under COVID-19 conditions. To the researcher's knowledge this is the only research which has explored this area, and more research needs to be conducted in order to overcome these newly identified challenges.

Limitations

WPB is a difficult topic of discussion as employees are intuitively fearful of stating something in an interview which is harmful to their work relationships (Salin et al., 2018). The sensitive nature of the bullying phenomenon may thus be a limiting factor in itself. This is especially prevalent in qualitative studies which utilize smaller samples and face-to-face methods of data collection (Fahie, 2014). As a result, participants may have been discerning in what they chose to share or disclose within the interview space. Further to the above, the self-report data collection method used within this study is susceptible to social desirability bias which occurs when participants provide the researcher with information which they believe will please the researcher (Barriball & While, 1994). The above provides a further risk that when conducting face to face interviews the participants may not answer questions truthfully (Barriball & While, 1994).

In order to negate social desirability bias and potential fear due to the topic's sensitive nature, the researcher focused on creating an environment in which participants felt safe and comfortable. This was done by conducting virtual interviews to look after participants' health in the COVID-19 pandemic, reassuring participants about the maintenance of confidentiality, and by actively listening and engaging with participants in order to build rapport with them.

The researcher's interpretation of the findings may further have been influenced by the researcher's values, anticipations, and knowledge of prior research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). However, the researcher took steps in attempt to mitigate this by reflecting in a diary her values, anticipations and biases. The researcher further consulted with her supervisor having constant, critical discussions throughout the research process in order to address this concern.

In accordance with an argument proposed by De Wet (2014), by emphasising a theory, namely contextualising WPB using Ulrich's multiple roles model, the researcher may have viewed the findings through a limited lens. However, the researcher ensured questions were asked outside of this limited lens, and used every attempt to probe beyond this limited view in order to generate additional themes and richer data. Some examples these themes include *"Theme 1: Defining the Contested Construct of Workplace Bullying"*, *"Theme 2: Power Relationships and the Absolute Abuse of Power"*, *"Theme 3: The Hidden Hand of the Cabal"*, *"Theme 4: The Spurious Conflation of Discrimination and Harassment with Bullying and the Need for Policy that Disentangles these Issues"*, *"Theme 5: Irreconcilable Constituencies – One role at the expense of the other"*, and *"Theme 6: Culture and Leadership: Antecedent Factors that Foster Bullying"*. In addition to the above, the majority of the findings within this research were supported using direct quotations from the transcripts which aligned the identified concepts with Ulrich's multiple roles model.

The researcher further avoided generalising the findings within this study. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences and challenges of HRPs when managing WPB. The sample consisted of 9 HRPs who identified their race as Black (n=5), Coloured (n=3), and Indian (n=1). The findings of this study are therefore limited to the description of the sample above.

It is also important to acknowledge the unique culture of the organisation under study and to circumspectly acknowledge that such findings must be examined in differing organisational cultures to determine paths of similarity and difference and thereby the extent of generalisability of the current findings.

Lastly, a limiting factor in this research was that the interviews took place over Microsoft Teams in order to protect the researcher and participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewer was able to build rapport with participants virtually, however, this may not have been to the same extent had the meeting occurred face to face. The researcher could further view the facial expressions of participants and hear changes in the participants tones, but the virtual nature of the interviews limited the extent to which the participants body language could be observed.

The overall summation and conclusion of this research report is conveyed below.

Conclusion

WPB is a serious and growing problem affecting many organisations around the world. The negative consequences of WPB are felt by victims, bystanders and organisations at large making its impact widely felt. Even more alarming are the numerous challenges facing HRPs when managing WPB, reducing HRPs' ability to effectively manage this counterproductive behaviour. Further to the above, the new WFH environment within COVID-19 has fostered new forms of WPB, and more challenges which HRPs need to mitigate when it comes to managing WPB within organisations. Further research which explores factors that contribute to the identification of workplace bullying and interventions to combat WPB is needed in order to assist HRPs' plight in managing bullying behaviours both in traditional work settings and while employees are working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aligned to the multiple roles model, HRPs' ability to manage WPB is exacerbated by their conflicting role demands. Although limited, this research report provides reasonable evidence that implementing new WPB policies and practices may enable HRPs to transition into the position of a change agent and overcome conflicting expectations which inhibit their actions. This study also offers the basis for further studies concerning challenges facing HRPs in the management of WPB within a wider variety of South African organisations. This is necessary to create a healthy work environment for all employees, and introduce a zero-tolerance statement for WPB which deters perpetrators and reduces WPB incidents. It is therefore suggested that more comprehensive studies are done on the challenges facing HRPs when managing WPB using Ulrich's multiple roles model framework. Moreover, it is suggested that further studies explore the experiences and challenges facing HRPs when managing remote workers under COVID-19 conditions as to this researcher's knowledge this is the only study which has done so. This will provide much needed insight into a less researched area, which is affecting employees all over the world. WPB appears to be crippling our organisations and the solutions to this challenge lie in the hands of rigorously conducted research, the findings of which will enable the enactment of interventions aimed at redress.

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**Appendix A - Letter of Access to a Large Institution in Gauteng – Participant
Information Sheet for the Human Resource Director**



**SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND**

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500

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Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Sarah Mayne and I am a Master's student at the University of Witwatersrand. For the research component of this Master's programme, I would like to explore the experiences and challenges of Human Resource Practitioners (HRP's) in the management of workplace bullying incidents. Despite HRP's playing an intricate role in the management of workplace bullying, their perspectives on bullying incidents have been largely omitted within research.

To carry out the above research, I would like to invite the HRP's within your organisation to participate in this study. Participation will involve HRP's participating in a semi-structured interview, which will be approximately 1 hour in length. The interviews will ensue at a time and place best suited to the relevant HRP's, and will be audio recorded and or/ audio-visually recorded depending on the participants preference. If these interviews cannot be conducted face-to-face due to COVID-19 constraints, the interviews will ensue at a time most convenient to the HRP's via a video-calling best suited to them. The HRP's will also receive a Participant Information Sheet which will inform them of the studies details.

Please note the following:

Participation within this study is entirely voluntary, as individuals will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way if they to choose to participate, or not to participate in the study. Within this study, anonymity cannot be ensured as the researcher will see participants during the interview process. Confidentiality will, however, be strictly maintained in the research report, possible journal articles or any conference proceedings that may ensue as the above will contain no identifying information of participants or the institution which they belong to.

The findings of this research will be reported in generalised themes to protect participants' identities. Quotes will be used to substantiate the identified themes; but the quotes will contain

no information which links the answer to a participant or their organisation. The obtained information will be kept on a password protected computer which only the researcher has access to, and all hard-copy information will be stored in a locked cupboard in the researcher's study. In addition, no one will have access to the data, that is recordings and transcripts, other than the researcher and her supervisor. The researcher will further use pseudonyms when transcribing the data to ensure that participant's answers cannot be traced back to them. No identifying information from this organisation will be mentioned, as the reader will simply be informed that the information was obtained from a "large institution within Gauteng". Further to this, the findings of this research will be reported in general themes which will be given to you and the involved HRP's, upon request.

Once the study is complete, and with permission as contained in the Consent Form, the anonymised interview transcripts will be stored in an electronic form on a password-protected computer, and kept for possible future conference proceedings, publications, and/or future analysis.

Ethical clearance for this study will be obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) (hereafter (HREC) at the University of Witwatersrand. You are welcome to contact Shaun Schoeman from the HREC on 011-717-1408 or Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za should you have questions pertaining to this study's ethical clearance.

The HRP's will be able to withdraw from the interview at any point and will not be made to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering. This is because the well-being of participants is of the utmost importance. In the event that an HRP feels anxiety or distress as a result of a topic discussed within the interview, the researcher will refer that participant to either "Life-Line" or the Emthonjeni Centre at the University of Witwatersrand for post-interview counselling. The reference will depend on the participants preference, and the counselling options will be available free of charge. For more information on "Life-Line" please visit their website on "<http://lifelinesa.co.za/>". In order to obtain counselling at the Emthonjeni Centre, participants can contact Paballo Lepota on 011 7174513 to book an appointment. The contact details of the researcher and her supervisor are also provided at the end of this document should you have further questions.

Allowing HRP's within your organisation to be invited to participate would be appreciated, and would contribute to a body of literature which looks at HRP's perspectives on the management of workplace bullying incidents. Additionally, the findings of this research could

facilitate a better understanding of the challenges facing HRP's in the management of workplace bullying, enabling later studies to focus on addressing the identified challenges. This research may, therefore, have long-term importance in addressing workplace bullying which has been found to have direct and negative implications on the well-being of both individuals and organisations.

Further to this, to the researcher's knowledge no research within South Africa has explored the experiences of, and challenges facing HRP's in the management of workplace bullying within a staff who work remotely. The above is becoming increasingly prevalent within the era of COVID-19. This research will therefore explore this, in order to contribute to this gap prevalent within the existing research.

This is an independent research study, and will be conducted under the supervision of an Industrial Psychologist at The University of Witwatersrand. Please note that data collection for this study will only commence once ethical clearance for this project has been obtained by the University of Witwatersrand, and your organisation has given clearance allowing HRP's to participate. Please do formally respond to this letter, indicating your willingness or not, to grant the researcher access to the Human Resource Practitioners within your institution. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or my supervisor, should you have any questions pertaining to this research on the contact details below.

Kind Regards,

Masters Student/Researcher: Sarah Mayne

Supervisor: Dr. Colleen Bernstein

Email Address: 2202282@students.wits.ac.za

Colleen.Bernstein@wits.ac.za

Cell Phone Number: 0718709131

Cell Phone Number: 0827709200

Office Phone Number 011 7174538

HREC (Non-medical) for queries related to ethical clearance

Shaun Schoeman: 011-717-1408

Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Emthonjeni Centre contact person for appointments:

Paballo Lepota: 0117174513



Appendix B – Invitation to Participate:

SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500

Fax: (011) 717 4559

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Sarah Mayne and I am a Master's student at the University of Witwatersrand. For the research component of this Master's programme, I would like to explore the experiences and challenges of Human Resource Practitioners (HRP's) in the management of workplace bullying incidents. Thus, if you are an HRP and have any experience in the management of workplace bullying incidents, I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participating in this study will require you to participate in an interview, which will be approximately 1 hour in length. The interview will ensue at a time and place most convenient for you. If these interviews cannot be conducted face-to-face due to COVID-19 constraints, they will take place via a video-calling application most convenient to you such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Skype, and will occur at a time most suitable to you. Participation within this study is voluntary, and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way if you choose to participate, or not to participate in the study. Confidentiality will be strictly maintained as no identifying information about you, or the institution you work for, will be disclosed within this research. Please note that this study has been approved by the HR Directorate of the University of the Witwatersrand and has also been approved by the University Ethics Committee (HREC Protocol Number; MAORG/20/01).

A participant information sheet and two consent forms (in a single document) are attached below for your convenience. Should you wish to participate, please reply to this email by completing the both consent forms, and the researcher will then organise an interview at a time convenient for you.

Thank you for considering this invitation, your participation would be appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Masters Student/Researcher: Sarah Mayne

Email Address: 2202282@students.wits.ac.za

Cell Phone Number: 0718709131

Supervisor: Dr. Colleen Bernstein

Colleen.Bernstein@wits.ac.za

Cell Phone Number: 0827709200

Office Phone Number 011 7174538

Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet for the Human Resource Practitioners



SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500

Fax: (011) 717 4559

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Sarah Mayne and I am a Master's student at the University of Witwatersrand. For the research component of this Master's programme, I would like to explore the experiences and challenges of Human Resource Practitioners (HRP's) in the management of workplace bullying incidents. Thus, if you are an HRP and have any experience in the management of workplace bullying incidents, I would like to invite you participate in this study.

Participating in this study will require you to participate in an interview, which will be approximately 1 hour in length, and will be audio recorded and or/ audio-visually recorded depending on your preference. The interview will ensue at a time and place most convenient for you. If these interviews cannot be conducted face-to-face due to COVID-19 constraints, they take place via a video-calling application most convenient to you such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Skype, and will occur at a time most suitable to you.

Participation within this study is entirely voluntary, and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way if you choose to participate, or not to participate in the study. Anonymity cannot be ensured within this study, as the researcher will see you during the interview process. Confidentiality will, however, be strictly maintained as no identifying information about you, or the institution you work for, will be disclosed in the research report, possible journal articles or any conference proceedings that may ensue on this research.

The findings of this research will be reported in generalised themes to protect your identity. Quotes will be used to substantiate the identified themes; but the quotes will contain no information which link you, or the institution you work for, to the given statement. The obtained information will be kept on a password protected computer which only the researcher has access to, and all hard-copy information will be stored in a locked cupboard in the researcher's study. In addition, no one will have access to the data, that is recordings and transcripts, other than the researcher and her supervisor. The researcher will further use

pseudonyms when transcribing the data to ensure that your answers cannot be traced back to you. Once the study is complete, and with your permission as contained in the Consent Form, the anonymised interview transcripts will be stored in an electronic form on a password-protected computer, and will be kept for possible future conference proceedings, publications, and/or future analysis.

Ethical clearance for this study will be obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) (hereafter (HREC) at the University of Witwatersrand. You are welcome to contact Shaun Schoeman from the HREC on 011-717-1408 or Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za should you have questions pertaining to this study's ethical clearance.

You will be able to withdraw from the interview process at any moment, and you will not be made to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. Your well-being is of the utmost importance, and in the event that you feel anxiety or distress as a result of a topic discussed, the researcher will refer you "Life-Line" or the Emthonjeni Centre at the University of Witwatersrand for post-interview counselling free of charge. For more information on "Life-Line" please visit their website on "<http://lifelinesa.co.za/>". In order to obtain counselling at the Emthonjeni Centre, participants contact Paballo Lepota on 011 7174513 to book an appointment. You will be able to choose the method of post-interview counselling you are most comfortable with. The contact details of the researcher and her supervisor are also provided at the end of this document should you have further questions.

Your participation would be appreciated, and would contribute to a body of literature which looks at HRP's perspectives on the management of workplace bullying incidents. The findings of this research could thus facilitate a better understanding of the challenges facing HRP's in the management of workplace bullying, enabling later studies to focus on addressing the identified challenges. This research may therefore have long-term importance, in addressing workplace bullying which has been found to have a direct and negative implications on the well-being of both individuals and organisations.

Furthermore, no research within South Africa has explored the experiences of, and challenges facing HRP's in the management of workplace bullying within a staff who work remotely. The above is becoming increasingly prevalent within the era of COVID-19. This research will therefore explore this, in order to contribute to this apparent gap within the existing research.

If you would like to receive the findings of this research in terms of general themes, you will be able to request this when completing the consent form. This is an independent research

study, and will be conducted under the supervision of an Industrial Psychologist at The University of Witwatersrand. If you would like to participate in this study, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers on the contact details below in order to organise an interview at a time, place, or on a video-calling application, most convenient to you.

Please note that this study has been approved by the HR Directorate of the University of the Witwatersrand and has also been approved by the University Ethics Committee (HREC Protocol Number; MAORG/20/01).

Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Masters Student/Researcher: Sarah Mayne

Supervisor: Dr. Colleen Bernstein

Email Address: 2202282@students.wits.ac.za

Colleen.Bernstein@wits.ac.za

Cell Phone Number: 0718709131

Cell Phone Number: 0827709200

Office Phone Number: 011 7174538

HREC (Non-medical) for queries related to ethical clearance:

Shaun Schoeman: 011-717-1408

Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Emthonjeni Centre contact person for appointments:

Paballo Lepota: 0117174513

Appendix D – The Consent Form

SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND



Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500

Fax: (011) 717 4559

I hereby confirm that: (please check alongside each relevant statement)

- ☐ I have been briefed on the research that Sarah Mayne and Dr Colleen Bernstein are conducting on the experiences and challenges of Human Resource Practitioners (HRP's) in the management of workplace bullying;
- ☐ I understand what participation in this study entails;
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for participating, or refusing to participate, in this study;
- ☐ I understand that I may refrain from answering questions within the interview, and that there will be no penalty for choosing not to answer any question(s);
- ☐ I understand that I will be able to end the interview at any moment, and I will face no penalty for doing so;
- ☐ I understand that confidentiality will be maintained, and that information I disclose within the interview will be held with the strictest confidence by both researchers;
- ☐ I understand that no identificatory information, such as my name or the name of the institution I work for, will be included in the interview transcriptions;
- ☐ I understand that the researcher may use direct quotes (which contain no identifying information) in the reporting of the research findings.
- ☐ I understand that the findings obtained from this research may be used in future academic publications and conference proceedings, but that any information linking me to the study will be completely sanitised (i.e. any identifying information will be removed, relating both to the individual and to the institution that for which they work);
- ☐ I understand that the original audio/ audio-and-video recording of my interview will be destroyed when the study is complete.
- ☐ I understand that once the study is complete, the sanitised transcripts will be kept in an electronic format on a password-protected computer, and will be kept for possible future conference proceedings, publications, and/or future analysis.
- ☐ I understand that in order to participate in this study, I need to sign this consent form as proof of my acceptance to participate;
- ☐ I understand the above conditions, and accept to participate in this study voluntarily.

Optional clause (please place an "X" in the relevant box):

- ☐ **I would like** to receive the findings of this research in terms of generalised trends
- ☐ **I would not like** to receive the findings of this research in terms of generalised trends

Signed by (full name): _____

On the date of: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix E – Consent Form for Audio and/or Video Recording**SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT****UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND**

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500

Fax: (011) 717 4559

I hereby confirm that: (please check alongside one of the below statements)

- ☐ I consent to my interview being audio recorded;
- ☐ I consent to my interview being audio- visually recorded;

Signed by (full name): _____

On the date of: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix F - Interview Schedule

I understand that your work situation has changed this year, and that you are now working mostly from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am going to ask you to think back to last year, and the years before that, within the beginning phases of this interview. I am going to ask that you remember a time when bullying incidents occurred while everybody was at work. I would like to explore your experiences as a Human Resource Practitioner who was tasked to investigate, and manage bullying incidents within an office while everyone was still at work.

I am aware that bullying may be taking place presently while individuals are working from home, through forms such as cyber bullying. I am aware that this new “working from home” environment may present a whole lot of new challenges that you are presently facing in managing these more virtual bullying forms. I will ask you some questions at the end of this interview about the type of bullying incidents that may have occurred while individuals have been working from home, in order to fully comprehend your experiences in the management of workplace bullying in both pre-COVID and current times.

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your marital status?
3. Do you have children
4. How long have you been working for your present Organisation?
5. How long have you been working in Human Resources?

Workplace Bullying Questions:

6. How would you define workplace bullying?
7. What do you perceive both verbal and non-verbal bullying behaviours to be?
8. What are the specific “criteria” which need to be met for you to define an incident as workplace bullying?
9. In your personal opinion, what has made your management of workplace bullying incidents more challenging?
 - Are there processes in place at your institution when it comes to managing bullying situations? And would they/do they make the management easier?
 - Do you believe the presence of a comprehensive policy framework would better enable you to manage workplace bullying effectively?

- Ask why after they have said yes or no

10. Have there been any bullying incidents amongst staff that have been brought to your attention (probe – get them to describe)
11. Are you able to manage bullying incidents that occur between staff and managers objectively?
12. If you were to discipline a manager for bullying, do you fear it may negatively impact upon you?
13. Have you ever experienced staff targeting you, or directing negative attitudes towards you when you are unable to manage their bullying situation effectively?
14. Do you believe it is/ would be easier to manage bullying incidents between staff members on the same level?
15. Is it harder to manage bullying incidents if the employee being accused of bullying is a “top performer”?
16. Do you think employees trust you to manage their bullying complaints effectively and fairly if a manager is involved?
17. Do you think managers trust you to manage bullying complaints effectively and fairly between themselves and employees?
18. Do you have enough authority to manage bullying effectively within the organisation?
 - If no - How you think an increase in authority would better enable you to manage bullying incidents?
 - If yes – How does this authority make you effective in managing bullying incidents?
19. Have managers ever used their position of power in attempt to stop you managing bullying incidents/ complaints against them or their colleagues effectively?
20. How do the attitudes of management towards bullying complaints impact your ability to manage bullying?
 - Explore this – do attitudes of management inhibit or facilitate HRP’s ability to manage bullying
21. In your experience does bullying sometimes occur between staff on the same level, or is it more between people who differ in terms of level of seniority?
 - If they just say yes/ no explore further
22. Would you use a different approach to managing bullying between staff members on the same level?

23. Do you believe the culture within your organisation encourages a bullying environment? Prompts = levels of competitiveness (between departments, staff in the same departments) or a high emphasis on “getting ahead”
24. Are there any other questions or issues that you think haven’t been asked in this interview regarding WPB that you would like to share with me?

Bulling while working from home:

25. Have you encountered any bullying incidents while individuals have been working from home? What happened in these incidents?
26. How has the nature of bullying incidents changed now that individuals are working from home?
27. Are there any factors that have prevented you from successfully managing these new forms of bullying?
28. Have individuals complained that they are being contacted outside of working hours now that they are working from home?
29. Have individuals felt “micro-managed” and placed under larger stress since working from home?
30. Is there anything you would like to contribute about bullying while individuals have been working from home that you feel have not been addressed in this interview?

Appendix G - Ethical Clearance



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAORG/20/01

PROJECT TITLE:

Experiences of Human Resource Practitioners in Managing Workplace Bullying

INVESTIGATOR

Mayne Sarah (2202282)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

05 June 2020

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Minimal Risk

EXPIRY DATE

31 December 2022

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

21 June 2020

CHAIRPERSON

(Dr Colleen Bernstein)

cc: Dr Colleen Bernstein (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

Date

29 / 06 / 2020

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES