

Creating spaces of well-being in academia to mitigate academic burnout: a collaborative auto-ethnography

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Creating spaces of wellbeing in academia to mitigate academic burnout: a collaborative autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

The three-year pandemic resulted in profound shifts in higher education raising concerns of burnout (Gewin, 2021; Wong et al., 2021; Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Burnout refers to the mental, physical and emotional exhaustion from long-term job-related stress (Maslach et al., 2001). Employee stress increases during uncertain disruptive events (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022) such as the pandemic enforced restrictions, which saw academics' working lives upended, research disrupted, career trajectories, and academic performance altered (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Konstantinou & Miller, 2022). A US study examining the effects of the pandemic among 1,122 faculty found burnout indicators rose sharply, as 70% of respondents felt more stressed in 2020, compared to 32% in 2019 (Tugend, 2020). Two-thirds of respondents felt fatigued in 2020, compared to one-third in 2019, and 55% indicating they were seriously considering changing their careers or retiring early. Emotional and workload-related burnout was worse among female academics, as 80% of women and 70% of men indicating their workload had increased and 75% of women reported their work-life balance deteriorated. Similarly in Europe the rates of stress and mental health concerns among the academic scientific workforce increased (Gewin, 2021). These indicators are supported by the literature, as Konstantinou and Miller (2022) found primary

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3 caregivers, mostly women, faced daily struggles in juggling additional demands, as
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5 bedrooms, loungerooms, and kitchen tables were transformed into workspaces and work-
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7 life boundaries eroded during work from home restrictions (Hogan et al., 2021; Idris et al.,
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9 2021).

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11
12 The disruptive effects of the pandemic on the higher education sector and related
13 concerns for academics' wellbeing and has become a rich source of investigation. Authors
14 investigated the response of leaders to a crisis (Dewar, 2020), leaders' perceived disregard
15 of ethics of care and felt neglect (Ling, 2020; Kong & Belkin, 2021; Belkin & Kong, 2021; Liu
16 et al., 2021), the pandemic impacts on loneliness (Cooper et al., 2022), collegiality and
17 compassion as learning and teaching practices changed (Konstantinou & Miller, 2022; Yang,
18 2021) and the negative outcomes of burnout (Wong et al., 2021; Vullingsh et al., 2020;
19 Miguel et al., 2021). During crises, employees look towards organisational leaders and
20 expect care and responsiveness (Harvey & Haines, 2005), yet leaders often prioritise
21 survival. In this way leaders' attention is diverted away from fulfilling the responsibility of
22 care, potentially resulting in *disregarding ethics of care*. Ethics of care holds that leaders in
23 positions of authority show emotional concern for the well-being of their staff (Ciulla, 2009;
24 Tronto, 2013). However, as many higher education institutions announced rapid policy and
25 practice changes through digital one-way communication channels, debate was silenced,
26 thus violating ethics of care and failing to engage in constructive dialogue with employees
27 (Tronto, 2013). The outcomes included reduced autonomy, agency, well-being
28 (Konstantinou & Miller, 2022), exhaustion and cynicism among academics (Idris et al., 2021).

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31 Despite these rich enquiries point to the structuralist barriers in place in higher
32 education, few scholars take an agentic perspective, acknowledging the power of academics
33 (Giddens, 1984; Archer, 2003). Some scholars argue that burnout can be combatted by
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3 allowing employees to take a more active role in job crafting and encouraging social support
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5 (Otto et al., 2019; Urbanaviciute & Lazauskaite-Zabielske, 2022), yet few studies have
6
7 examined how burnout risks can be mitigated by focusing on employee agency. Similarly,
8
9 studies that focus on leaders' responsibilities during the crisis largely take an employer
10
11 perspective. Thus, an overlooked topic within the broader field is the agency of employees
12
13 and how employees can initiate and resist the pandemic impacts, especially on research
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15 practices. As all the authors are academics, we address this relatively neglected area by
16
17 taking a collaborative autoethnographic approach illuminating the agency of academics to
18
19 enhance their wellbeing.
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25 We address these gaps in this paper by asking to what extent academic agency
26
27 alleviates the risk of burnout and facilitate productivity and wellbeing during a pandemic. In
28
29 particular we use the case of a writing group (WG) as an example of employee agency to
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31 promote collegial research practices and resist pandemic pressures, which differs from prior
32
33 work where WGs were studied to examine research skills and research productivity
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35 changes, or as creating safe spaces, free of critique and judgement, to connect with
36
37 colleagues socially (Belcher, 2019). Yet, small group settings have the potential to mitigate
38
39 pandemic-related stress by attending to wellbeing and research productivity. Power
40
41 imbalances are minimised as experienced and emerging scholars interact on equal terms
42
43 (Guerin et al., 2013). Such groups offer a conducive setting for attending to the moral
44
45 elements of care through attentiveness, responsibility and responsiveness (Tronto, 2013).
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47 Pre-pandemic studies suggest WGs contribute positively to the wellbeing of doctoral
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49 candidates (Beasy et al., 2020), therefore we extend this work and explore how WGs can
50
51 mitigate burnout and facilitate interactions between colleagues. As such this paper
52
53 contributes to the emerging literature on wellbeing and collegiality within universities
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3 during crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic (Kong & Belkin, 2021; Konstantinou et al.,
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5 2022; Liu et al., 2021, Vullings et al., 2020) by integrating literatures of burnout, wellbeing
6
7 and ethics of care by taking an **agential** perspective.
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10 This paper proceeds by a brief overview of burnout and **spaces of wellbeing** theory,
11
12 outlining **a case study drawing on the experiences of 11 academics in Business and Creative**
13
14 **Industries at a regional Queensland university in Australia, using collaborative**
15
16 **autoethnography as our method**, followed by the results of a thematic analysis. We
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18 conclude by offering theoretical and practical implications from this shared experience. This
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20 paper, while in the context of a tertiary education workplace, offers insights that may be
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22 applicable to other business settings.
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32 BURNOUT AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

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35 The academic role is complex, comprising of teaching, research, engagement, and service.
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37 The focus on these four roles varies in intensity and focus between individual academics;
38
39 however, all roles pose specific demands and routinely exceed the recognised workload
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41 allocation (**Barkhuizen et al., 2014**). This can lead to feeling overwhelmed.
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45 **Burnout was already a significant issue prior to the pandemic with** the World Health
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47 Organisation **recognising it** as an occupational phenomenon in 2019 (**WHO, 2019**), **but this**
48
49 **intensified in the pandemic (Gewin, 2021)**. Burnout is linked to feeling a loss of control and
50
51 *being at the end of one's rope* (Jaremka et al., 2020) and includes the mental, physical, and
52
53 emotional exhaustion arising from job-related stress (Maslach et al., 2001). As a caring
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55 profession, the higher education sector represents a high-risk setting with the severity of
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57 burnout (e.g. Salmela-Aro & Read, 2017) similar to that of health professions (Carlotto,
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3 2002). Even prior to the pandemic, over 70 percent of higher education staff self-reported
4
5 high or very high levels of stress (Kinman & Wray, 2013), with more than a quarter of
6
7 university faculty experiencing burnout often or very often (Padilla & Thompson, 2016).
8
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10 There are many contributing causes to academic burnout including unmanageable workload
11
12 obligations (Cadez et al., 2017) and extenuating external factors (Okeke-Uzodike et al.,
13
14 2021). As in other settings, burnout has been exacerbated by the pandemic (Wong et al.,
15
16 2021; Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022), with more than 55% of 1,122 US faculty reporting their
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18 serious consideration of changing their careers or retiring and deterioration of work-life
19
20 balance (Tugend, 2020). Three key features of burnout are loss of accomplishment,
21
22 emotional exhaustion, and depersonalisation.
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27 *Loss of accomplishment* leads to feelings of professional inefficacy; this refers to an
28
29 individual's self-perception of their ability to manage their stress and role demands and is
30
31 associated with lack of encouragement (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2009).
32
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34
35 Feeling ineffective at work threatens academics' identities through feelings of incompetence
36
37 and feeling incapable of performing tasks, inadequacy, imposter syndrome, erosion of self-
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39 confidence and motivation (Jaremka et al., 2020; Vullings et al., 2020; Schaufeli &
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41 Salanova, 2007; Schubert-Irastorza & Fabry, 2014). Therefore, a loss of accomplishment can
42
43 have serious mental health consequences, such as exhaustion.
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47 *Emotional exhaustion* can lead to physical, emotional, and/or mental health
48
49 consequences. Previous research found exhaustion is characterised by irritability or
50
51 emotional instability, difficulties concentrating, decreased ability to cope, chronic fatigue,
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53 dissatisfaction, and depression (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Salmela-Aro & Read, 2017; Schaufeli
54
55 et al., 2009). These difficulties can lead to reduced performance and mental and physical
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57 health problems (Vullings et al., 2020; Schubert-Irastorza & Fabry, 2014). Finally, an
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3 element of the mental health issues that burnout can cause is *depersonalisation*. This arises
4
5 when the individual detaches themselves from co-workers and students to manage their
6
7 stress and can experience cynicism (Schubert-Irastorza & Fabry, 2014), contributing
8
9 inadvertently to a toxic workplace. Therefore, the three factors of burnout are an inherent
10
11 risk in academic job roles, which worsened during the pandemic.
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14
15 In high care professions the pandemic brought about a different form of burnout
16
17 through this relationship known as compassion fatigue (Yang, 2021). Compassion fatigue, a
18
19 negative side-effect of caring too much in professional contexts, where an individual
20
21 becomes immune and resistant to the tasks of caring and concern (Bride et al., 2007), is a
22
23 form of burnout driven by care for and helping others, typified by cognitive and relational
24
25 disturbances (Figley, 2002; Bozkurt & Ozden, 2010). The insidiousness of this fatigue is that
26
27 tasks that once provided satisfaction become stressful and tedious. While compassion
28
29 fatigue has been researched extensively in nursing and counselling, few studies examine
30
31 how it manifests in academia (Walker-Gleaves, 2019). Yet academics experienced
32
33 compassion fatigue in showing care in teacher-student relationships (Yang, 2021) in their
34
35 teaching roles, as well as in higher degree by research supervisory relationships. In this
36
37 paper, we use collaborative autoethnography to investigate how a WG alleviated the risk of
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39 burnout and compassion fatigue and facilitated wellbeing and productivity during the
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41 pandemic.
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50 **ETHICS OF CARE AND WELLBEING**

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53 Ethics of care is concerned with moral values and organising principles centred on
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55 employees' wellbeing, fulfilling their needs, promoting their best interests and valuing their
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57 contributions (Carmeli et al., 2017). As such employee pro-active approaches are prioritised
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3 where flexible responsiveness to complex and subjective problems are deemed appropriate
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5 (Konstantinou & Miller, 2022). Ethics of care accentuates a holistic, contextual and need-
6
7 centred approach, considering the complexity of social relationships, rather than
8
9 accentuating positivistic rationality (Rinehart & Earl, 2016). Recent studies reveal that when
10
11 leaders engage in ethics of care by expressing compassion and concern for employees
12
13 during a crisis, it aids employees to cope with the crisis and display gratitude and moral
14
15 emotions, thus behaving in constructive, adaptive ways (Belkin & Kong, 2021). In higher
16
17 education institutions, Liu et al. (2021) found that enactment of ethics of care was a critical
18
19 element of decision-making among 37 US leaders during the crisis. However, disregarding
20
21 ethics of care, has profound adverse effects on employees, associated with felt neglect and
22
23 hold implications of the meaning of work (Kong & Belkin, 2021). As interpersonal
24
25 relationships and discursive practices are central to enacting and sustaining care in
26
27 organisations, these signals of care and concern for employees are significant (Carmeli et al.,
28
29 2017). Although there is a dearth of care ethics practised in modern organisations
30
31 (Hamington, 2019), its usefulness in making sense of organisational actions have been
32
33 foregrounded during the pandemic (Kong & Belkin, 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Ethics of care
34
35 supports employee wellbeing in fostering attentiveness towards colleagues, through group
36
37 members taking responsibility to ensure members needs are met and showing
38
39 responsiveness. As such trust is cultivated and members competence enhanced through
40
41 caregiving (Tronto, 2013). Small group settings like WGs offer a natural setting for dialogical,
42
43 narrative practices to enact care where the group's collective agency is reinforced
44
45 (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012) by creating spaces of wellbeing.

56
57 The spaces of wellbeing theory (SoWT, Fleuret and Atkinson 2007) is particularly
58
59 relevant to CAE case study of this paper as scholars identify wellness as an antidote to
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2
3 stress and burnout (Gleason et al., 2019). Bigelow et al. (2021: pg511) found the inclusion of
4 wellness activities as a factor in improving the “overall writing yield” during writing retreats.
5
6 In addition, they found evidence for the inclusion of wellness focused activities (e.g.,
7
8 purposeful wellness activities, debriefing, peer mentorship) as having a significant bearing
9
10 on both short-term, and long-term, productivity; a focus on wellbeing enhanced solidarity
11
12 and avoided the pitfalls and perils of too much focus on the *publish or perish* mantra
13
14 (Minnett et al., 2019). Instead, the crafting of a space for wellbeing and solidarity reinforces
15
16 the mantra of *publish and flourish* (Yeo et al., 2022).
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23 SoWT postulates that wellbeing can be understood in four spatial dimensions:
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25 capability, integration, therapeutic, and security. WGs cultivate spaces of *capability* where
26
27 individuals can thrive as they experience a sense of accomplishment through interactions
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29 with others (Fleuret & Atkinson, 2007). For example, progressing research writing goals
30
31 support the academics’ self-affirmations of aptitude and proficiency. Capability is enhanced
32
33 as individuals gain agency and derive satisfaction from goal achievement, enhancing a sense
34
35 of professional wellbeing. Additionally, individuals feel supported and cared for when
36
37 *integrated* within a network of similarly minded members. WGs are integrative spaces with
38
39 social relationships developing from which strong links are created due to being part of
40
41 multi-disciplinary social networks (Zhang & Centola, 2019). Collegiality among academics
42
43 contributes to an integrative space, as it refers to as prosocial behaviour that enhances
44
45 feelings of well-being among co-workers (Victorino et al., 2018). In contrast the lack of
46
47 collegiality within some higher education institutions have been critiqued as hollowed
48
49 collegiality (Massy et al., 1994), contributing to feelings of isolation, especially among pre-
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51 tenured faculty in the US (Victorino et al., 2018). The president of the Australian Association
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53 of University Professors (Graeber, 2021) suggested academic work becomes counter-
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3 productive when purely inwards facing. For example, Joseph et al. (2021) utilised a case
4 study drawing on collaborative auto-ethnographic and showed that collegial (co-caring)
5 environments foster an improved sense of belonging. In writing groups scholarly
6 conversations and reflection contribute to collegiality and deepen relationships between
7 participants where a focal topic provides the opportunity to exchange ideas, experiences
8 and reveal vulnerabilities to forge social bonds.

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18 *Therapeutic spaces have been found to have a direct impact on overall well-being*
19 *(Gesler, 2005; Fleuret et al., 2007). The settings in which one works - or in the context of this*
20 *study, where one writes – has a bearing on the level of productivity and well-being. As the*
21 *environment has an impact on health-related wellbeing, this is of particular interest in our*
22 *study as all our meetings occurred on-line in virtual environments. The therapeutic aspects*
23 *of meeting in virtual environments is explored in our findings. Finally, security is an*
24 *important lens in which we view spaces of well-being. For a space to enhance well-being, it*
25 *must be a secure space. This relationship is generally accepted in the literature as spaces of*
26 *security reduce any negative risks. Within the context of our study, creating secure spaces,*
27 *(psychologically and socially), will be explored in relation to productivity and solidarity.*
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45 RESEARCH METHOD AND APPROACH

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48 *Eleven Business and Creative Industry academics from a regional Queensland university in*
49 *Australia participated in a WG and used collaborative auto-ethnography (CAE) to examine to*
50 *what extent the WG alleviated burnout and facilitated productivity and wellbeing during a*
51 *pandemic. CAE is a qualitative research method in which “two or more researchers pool*
52 *their autobiographical materials related to an agreed upon topic or social phenomenon and*
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3 analyse and interpret the meanings of their personal experiences ” (Chang et al., 2014, p.
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5 376). CAE facilitates the exploration of personal reflections in the presence of others to gain
6
7 joint insight into collective experiences (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Le Roux 2016), drawing on
8
9 multiple, diverse perspectives and experiences for multivocality and intersubjectivity. This
10
11 position removes a layer of intermediation between the lived experience of research
12
13 participants and researchers (Baker et al., 2017) for reflection, comparison, and leveraging
14
15 perspectives and experiences. CAE is a powerful investigative tool (Blalock et al., 2018). This
16
17 multi-voiced approach to autoethnography (Lapadat, 2017) has been used effectively as a
18
19 research methodology, especially when discussing sensitive issues, such as mental health
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21 (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Lapadat 2017); societal impact during a crisis (Roy et al., 2020);
22
23 traumatic events and turning points (Martinez & Merlino, 2014). CAE facilitated a systematic
24
25 examination and shared narrative of what was inherently a solo and individual activity
26
27 (writing). Not only did this enhance awareness among the collaborators, but also further
28
29 cemented the additional benefits of writing groups, beyond research productivity. Thus, CAE
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31 serves not only as a facilitator of personal insight into an activity, but as in instigator for
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33 shared narrative to enhance the activity through greater collective experience. Thus, an
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35 ultimate advantage of using CAE is to “broaden the gaze” (Lapadat 2017: pg599) to enhance
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37 shared understanding of academic roles.
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47 Contextually this CAE case study was undertaken during the 2020 to 2021 global
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49 pandemic. At the height of the pandemic, higher education (HE) institutions mandated
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51 teaching and researching from home as lockdowns, social distancing, quarantine, and mask
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53 wearing became the norm (Hogan et al., 2021). Rapid and unexpected workplace changes
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55 saw academics transform home spaces into workspaces. Work-life boundaries eroded (Idris
56
57 et al., 2021). Primary caregivers, mostly women, faced daily struggles in juggling these
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2
3 additional demands (Konstantinou & Miller, 2022). The rapid changes resulted in added
4 stress on academics' households, and while digital interactions with colleagues and students
5 required academics to demonstrate care, showing patience, creativity and empathy in their
6 responses (Walker-Gleaves, 2019; Bozkurt & Ozden, 2010), Some HE employers'
7 preoccupation with student wellbeing, rather than care for staff contributed to felt neglect
8 (Ling, 2020; Kong & Belkin 2021). These changes contributed to academics feeling
9 overwhelmed, as teaching was prioritised (Konstantinou & Miller, 2022), many academics
10 found it challenging to find mental space and the time to research and write. Kong and
11 Belkin (2021) found employees reported similar experiences with ethics of care being
12 disregarded amid the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of industry or type of business.
13 Therefore, the onset of the pandemic created uncertainty, reactive responses in unrealistic
14 timeframes, and unexpected changes to higher education communication and decision-
15 making structures. Working from home in unfamiliar online environments tended to repress
16 debate and limit opportunities for empathy and care. From this context, CAE is highly
17 relevant. With an emphasis on reflexivity, CAE recognises the potential to facilitate sense-
18 making and liberates scholars through a joint social engagement process (Starr, 2010).
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45 CASE STUDY CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

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48 The initial goal of the researchers in the writing group (WG) was to increase research
49 productivity and maintain momentum. The WG was formed within an Australian regional
50 university located in Queensland, within a newly merged discipline - Business and Creative
51 Industries. The group met online via Zoom for 1-hour weekly professional conversations for
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58 13 weeks from August to November 2021. In addition to the weekly conversations,
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3 participants committed to writing for two and half hours per week using the Pomodoro-
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5 technique, either self-paced, or in a two-hour online, weekly Zoom writing sessions. The
6
7 Pomodoro technique uses a 25-minute session of focused writing, with a 5-minute break,
8
9 which is then repeated for two hours. Two facilitators prepared conversation topics aligned
10
11 to the work of Belcher (2019). Weekly conversations commenced with colleagues providing
12
13 an update of their research writing progress and reflections on Belcher's text. The 12
14
15 academics, in two groups of six, were at different career stages, publishing experience and
16
17 from diverse disciplines including the Arts, Creative Industries, Management and Tourism
18
19 (Table 1). Participants specified personal goals for the WG, for example, a paper to be
20
21 submit by the end of the 13 weeks.
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28 An online format was required as all were working from home and geographically
29
30 dispersed (over 300 km²). In contrast to on-campus writing groups, this format reduced the
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32 veneer of professionalism as home life interruptions, such as noise and pets making the odd
33
34 appearance. This informality resulted in closer bonds forming between participants and the
35
36 emergence of unexpected topics and serendipitous discussion. Invariably disruptions and
37
38 barriers to writing emerged as a dominant theme, with group members sharing pressures in
39
40 achieving research outputs. As a result, reflective conversation occurred regarding writing
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42 practice, and together with the pressures experienced, these conversations resulted in two
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44 data sources used for this paper, namely participants' self-reflective essays and facilitator
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46 notes.
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DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A concurrent model of collaboration and reflection was adopted, using the weekly 1-hour conversations to reflect on progress in the two groups over the 13 weeks. Reflections were captured in the two facilitators' notes totalling 30 single-spaced pages of text. These reflections were supplemented by each author's self-reflective essays during the mid-point and final stage of the WG, representing another dataset of 45 single-spaced pages of text. This written narrative of experiences was discussed within the group as we reflected on our research writing processes. The ethical challenges inherent to CAE (Lapadat, 2017) were attended to by all authors giving informed consent. We attended to issues of vulnerability and trustworthiness by establishing trust over the 13-week period, where all reflections and contributions were voluntary, contributions were de-identified using codes when citing verbatim quotes, and by respecting autonomy and preserving privacy.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure of theoretical thematic analysis, which provides for rich reflections of the stressors experienced, the productivity gains and well-being dimensions experienced over the duration of the WG were examined. Three co-authors engaged in the coding procedure first through data familiarisation, then generating 15 initial codes to address the research questions drawing on the literature of burnout causes, risks and mitigation, SoWT, and ethics of care. This was followed by searching for themes and codes were collated to eight potential themes after discussion among co-authors. Upon further reflection, iteration and discussion these eight themes were refined into the four renamed themes subsequently presented. The thematic analysis revealed the authors' connection to their lived experiences and reflections, while highlighting emerging and unanticipated themes (Guest et al., 2013). The relatively large number of participants

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3 involved in this CAE (groups of five or more) are rare (Chang et al., 2014), translating into
4
5 greater researcher diversity and increases the richness of our findings.
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10 EMERGING THEMES

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13 *Although the purpose of the WG was not to impact organisational effectiveness, emerging*
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15
16 themes revealed the challenging context of the pandemic's impact on Australian higher
17
18 education. These conditions were conducive to burnout due to increased workload
19
20 expectations and reduced time for research. Yet it was discovered that the digital writing
21
22 space resulted in productivity gains and improved participant wellbeing. The WG provided a
23
24 greater sense of belonging and social bonds, while providing therapeutic space, supporting
25
26 an ethics of care perspective. These themes are subsequently discussed.
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34 1: Gaining insight into the burnout risks

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37 Continuous and unexpected changes at the institution, coupled with the uncertainty over
38
39 the duration of the pandemic, contributed to feelings of alienation and depersonalisation.
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41 Constant implementation of new systems, coupled with reduced administrative support,
42
43 imbued a sense of being part of a hostile, resource-scarce work environment. We observed
44
45 three aspects contributing towards a sense of burnout and its impact on research
46
47 productivity.
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51
52 First, early-career researchers (ECR) new to the institution, including some new to the
53
54 country, experienced difficulties when finding a balance between teaching duties and
55
56 expected research performance, as A1 observed:
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3 *The pandemic requires ongoing resilience and present everyday challenges. It*
4 *has taken an enormous toll and writing time is scarce ... most academics seem*
5 *to be struggling. But having this group means that I have conversations about*
6 *research, even when my week gets swallowed up by more urgent tasks.*
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15 Second, the lack of personal contact with others and replacing connections with a
16 digitised context was stressful. A5 continues:
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20 *My feelings of inadequacy and exhaustion were compounded by having an*
21 *ECR work profile, established in a pre-Covid environment. Milestones in*
22 *teaching, research and engagement were relatively inflexible, yet I had to*
23 *demonstrate flexibility ... time to research and write was squeezed into the*
24 *margin of the week. Not surprisingly, this seems to have been a universal*
25 *phenomenon: key journals in my discipline area prefaced submission points*
26 *with a caveat advising that the reviewing process was expected to be slow due*
27 *to the increased pressures that academics were facing as a result of the*
28 *pandemic. Ten months after submission, I have one article still under review,*
29 *anxiously putting my publication targets just out of reach.*
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45 Third, feeling isolated as we encountered similar situations, was a shared
46 reflection among our group with the pressure of unmaintainable timelines
47 impacting individuals' wellbeing. Reflective conversations revealed additional
48 factors contributing towards burnout: perceptions of employee well-being concerns
49 being ignored, caring responsibilities for our students, feelings of fatigue due to role
50 overload, and a heightened awareness of growing cynicism among staff. The risk of
51 burnout among participants in the group was evident as feelings of exhaustion and
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1
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3 professional inefficacy were intensified by the heightened expectations during
4
5 emergency work from home periods, reflected in A5's observation:
6
7

8 *The burden of student care increased exponentially ... but what happens to*
9
10 *academics when the unspoken requirement to care for multiple aspects of a*
11
12 *students' life becomes too much? How can this be balanced against our own*
13
14 *caring and self-care responsibilities, and the institutions' requirements of us,*
15
16 *particularly during times of high ambiguity and change as we have (and are*
17
18 *currently) experiencing? Leading to the question "who will care for us?"*
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22 *(echoed in Smith and Ulus, 2020).*
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Colleagues were aware of the antecedents of burnout; however, WG weekly dialogues were a sense-making opportunity of how burnout functions within periods of stress within higher education. Strategies – such as time management – for alleviating stress and improving productivity were also found to emerge in self-reflections as elucidated in the next section.

2: Beneficial habits enhances research productivity

All participants found the group supportive, caring and motivating. The majority (62.5%) reported that the group helped them achieve their writing goals, and 60% of colleagues indicated that they completed the writing goals they set, with experienced academics reporting higher submission of papers and book chapters. Setting goals when the WG was established, and documenting progress was deemed beneficial as "the shared experience of working alone and together and watching everyone's ticks accrue on our shared spreadsheet was rewarding" (A2).

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3 Developing a habit or daily ritual of writing for 25 minutes was valuable for ECRs as
4
5 this short time is “something that I would have previously thought too small a timeframe to
6
7 offer any value, but it has radically changed the way I think about approaching writing” (A1).
8
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10 Furthermore,

11
12 *the major change was that I would start the day with a writing session – when*
13
14 *my mind is fresh and focussed – writing in ‘snacks’ when I had the opportunity.*
15
16 *The quality of my writing has improved significantly. I also now find much*
17
18 *more enjoyment and satisfaction in the writing process. Because I am doing*
19
20 *this more often, I’m getting more skilled and proficient, and this has built my*
21
22 *confidence (A6).*
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27 Experienced, mid-career researcher A7 agreed indicating

28
29 *the structure of the group helps me to show up and do the work. The positive*
30
31 *outcomes associated with this approach to social learning offers collegiality,*
32
33 *encouragement, and respectful discourse that support, and challenge through*
34
35 *accountability. If I am accountable to the group, I achieve more than if I am*
36
37 *only accountable to my own self-interest.*
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3 Despite challenging working conditions, 20% of the group were more productive by being
4 part of the WG, compared to a teaching period in which there were no writing groups. More
5 than half submitted a paper during or after the 13-week WG, with others progressing
6 significant parts of papers they intend to submit. A11 reiterates that “in the first six weeks I
7 wrote on average 6 hours per week and completed a paper, sent it off to a journal and
8 began another. I wrote 500 words per session on average”.

3: Blocking out time

20 Time pressures made it difficult to maintain research goals and evidence productivity.
21 Peer-to-peer conversations acknowledged a perception of limited organisational support for
22 research productivity, in favour of teaching considerations, during the pandemic, reflecting
23 a disregard for ethics of care. The school, and university leadership, primarily focused on
24 teaching-related priorities and was the focus of most top-down official communications,
25 meetings, and institutional changes. Even colleagues with a longer work history at the
26 institution discerned the pandemic’s influence on research and teaching workload balance,
27 as A2 explains:

40 *This is the second time I have been a part of the writing group. The first time it*
41 *was very useful for staying on track and meeting deadlines. It helped with*
42 *accountability of tasks and general morale and social support. The second*
43 *time is similar but there have been more conversations concerning how the*
44 *pandemic has impacted the ability to balance research and teaching.*

52 This reflection highlights the stark differences of being part of a WG pre-pandemic
53 versus the during the pandemic. Fatigue due to excessive demands can result in feelings of
54 inadequacy and exhaustion, early indications of possible burnout. These sentiments were
55 shared by a mid-career academic A9 who pointed out that:

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2
3 *As my teaching increased during the last month of the group, it's been a battle to*
4 *carve out time for writing, so as we conclude the writing group, I leave in state of*
5 *frustration as I haven't been able to move another paper close to submission.*
6
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10 The battle to block-out-time for writing and research contributes to feelings of inadequacy
11 reinforced by senior leaders within the stressful work environment, reflected in A8's
12 observations on the pressure to publish: "Traditional research remains the gold standard for
13 academics" and "I've been advised 'maybe you're just not cut out to be an academic."
14
15 However, we observed that our WG provided a unique community space of reprieve from
16 shared concerns, as the group morphed into a supportive group, rather than being solely
17 focused on research productivity.
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28 Scheduling of the WG as a conversation session early in the week with writing
29 sessions at weeks' end revealed how blocking out this time could create a supportive space
30 of refuge from other job tasks. A11 suggested the WG provided:
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34

35 *A shelter, a sanctuary, where I could turn off those incessant emails, block*
36 *out a time so no one could schedule an appointment, a meeting or bother me*
37 *with those demands that academics always have to prioritise over research.*
38
39 *The unique supportive space created was unlike any previous task-oriented*
40 *writing groups I have worked in. This group was a microcosmic reflection of*
41 *the difficult conditions for research activity for academics in general during*
42 *these times.*
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52 The writing sessions proved to be highly beneficial, as A6 explains:
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55 *Having a group to check in with on a Friday afternoon and set aside time to*
56 *write made this time super productive Also, this meant that this was the*
57 *last thing I had done in the work week before the weekend - so my research*
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3 *ideas were percolating around in my head during my rest time on the*
4
5 *weekend.*
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10 4: Belonging, social support, and a safe therapeutic space

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14 Through the shared experiences of the WG several themes were uncovered relating
15 to a sense of belonging, social support, and having a safe therapeutic space. *As the WG was*
16 *conducted online, it was vital to ensure that each participant felt comfortable sharing in this*
17 *virtual space, and that each conversation was acknowledged and responded to, and each*
18 *participant encouraged and validated.* As we cared for each other through reflective,
19 personal conversations feelings of capacity and empowerment and belonging increased:
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28 *I have found my confidence has grown along with my word count. Surrounding*
29 *yourself with only like-minded people leads to insulation, and this commonly*
30 *occurs particularly in academia, but when we come together to talk, discuss and*
31 *figure out solutions to problems we can shift these ideas to new levels,*
32 *generating new ideas. We are diverse in this group and everyone's approach is*
33 *so different to the next (A3).*
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43 The value of the "social practice of academic writing", that it is not "a wholly
44 solitary task, but... is enhanced by collaboration and consultation with others" (A7).
45 Academics primarily work autonomously, so the sense of belonging and collegiality in the
46 WG supported participants to "think and have conversations about research" (A1) through
47 "new connections. New ways of thinking and looking at problems. Getting to know
48 colleagues and their research, outside of packed school meetings where I would tend to
49 stick to the people I already know" (A1).
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3 The vital social bonds mitigate the disruption that had occurred: “These
4 interactions make me feel more connected to colleagues within the School and develop a
5 sense of ‘caring for and being cared about’ by colleagues” (A9). A4 noted the unforeseen
6 benefits of social support:
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13 *The experience of writing as a group is very different to the solitary*
14 *experience. This was an important catalyst for this sense of collegiality*
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18 Furthermore, recognition for:

19
20 *the boundless generosity of those more experienced researchers who speak to*
21 *their strengths as well as share their weaknesses and failings, has had an*
22 *immense impact on my own mental well-being and feelings of belonging to a*
23 *community of caring academic colleagues during a pandemic, and the rapport*
24 *and unexpected benefits that can be achieved...And importantly for me, when*
25 *the question of whether I am cut out to be an academic looms large, this*
26 *community of knowledge, sharing and support offers a lifeline (A8).*
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37 A5 as an ECR valued the compassionate and therapeutic dynamic of the group:

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40 *For me, hearing that other ECRs were also fatigued, their sense of their recent*
41 *professional achievements being inadequate, and that they felt a lack of*
42 *autonomy over their own time and priorities, offered a point of connection and*
43 *collegiality, and compassion for them and myself. Sharing my experiences*
44 *during this group seemed to ‘download’ thoughts and emotions from my*
45 *headspace and allowed space for thoughts about writing to grow.*
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3 The WG advanced the school's research culture by creating a safe space for sharing
4 collective writing experiences to promote and progress research knowledge and skills for
5 enhanced productivity. The shared interests and similar issues discussed
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10 *are useful for peer support, learning writing techniques, and coming up with*
11 *research ideas. The group is great for short writing sessions and social support*
12 *during an uncertain time where socialising is very restricted. It has helped me*
13 *to write more than I would have, had I not been a part of the group during the*
14 *semester (A2).*
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22 Of import was the WG was more than a social space, and more than a workspace, it formed
23 the juxtaposition between output and care. A therapeutic space for participants to counter
24 isolation, diminishing self-worth, and agency erosion. The group
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28
29 *opened up previously self-censored discussions about research pressures for*
30 *each group member and their short-term research objectives within their*
31 *academic field. These conversations allowed us an opportunity to find*
32 *commonalities across the disciplines as each participant shared their writing*
33 *processes, the dilemmas that they encounter, and shared their perceptions of*
34 *each discipline's overview towards research writing (A10).*
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44 The therapeutic nature of the WG resulted in improved well-being in which
45

46 *the group dynamics also bolstered my confidence and provided collegial*
47 *nurturing during a time when much of our work is conducted in isolation....*
48 *Each week I give thanks for this invaluable resource...Participating in the group*
49 *actually gives me joy. (A7).*
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3 The WG served to counter the isolation experienced by staff in this new environment and
4
5 connection as it was revealed

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8 *that others in the group were suffering from a similar type of hyperactive*
9
10 *trauma. In order to 'do' research, write a paper, work on a project, we needed*
11
12 *to first nurture well-being, support each other and air our frustrations, fears,*
13
14 *paralysis. Twice a week I looked forward to the group activities because of the*
15
16 *unwavering support and community (A11).*
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23 Discovering we are not alone in how we feel offers a sense of relief that can reduce feelings
24
25 of burnout through

26
27 *contact with others in adverse circumstances can simulate what Hansen et al*
28
29 *(2018) offer as the inverse of compassion fatigue, 'compassion satisfaction';*
30
31 *positive feelings that arise from feeling empathy and 'feeling strengthened by*
32
33 *having been able to help' others in difficult situations (A5).*
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39 DISCUSSION

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42 This goal of this collaborative autoethnography was to reflect on how academic agency in
43
44 utilising WGs alleviate the risk of burnout and facilitated productivity and well-being during
45
46 a pandemic [at a regional Australian university](#). The CAE provided a sense-making
47
48 opportunity, addressing calls for more interpretive approaches (Kong & Belkin, 2021). The
49
50 emerging four themes of insight into burnout risk, beneficial habits enhancing research
51
52 productivity, blocking out time, and belonging, social support and a safe therapeutic space
53
54 emphasise the important role employee agency plays when considering wellbeing, ethics of
55
56 care and combatting the loss of autonomy in times of crisis. [Our findings broadly](#) suggest
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3 that by acknowledging and legitimising employee initiatives, feelings of neglect can be
4
5 combatted. Purposeful employee groups, such as WGs in higher education, have the
6
7 potential to create a therapeutic safe space, in addition to their productivity intent, and
8
9 diminish the negative effects of a crisis on organisational effectiveness. Subsequently we
10
11 discuss the theoretical implications of our findings and suggest managerial practice
12
13 implications.
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18 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

19
20
21 The theme related to *burnout risks* confirmed that the pandemic period intensified the
22
23 stressors participants experienced as reflections revealed emotional exhaustion,
24
25 depersonalisation, and reduced professional efficacy. The felt neglect and disregard of
26
27 ethics of care by the leadership contributed to staff feeling their wellbeing was ignored,
28
29 despite being expected to demonstrate an increased duty of care for students, where
30
31 fatigue, role overload and ambiguity, and cynicism expressed was consistent with the
32
33 literature (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Yang, 2021). Kong and Belkin (2021) found generally
34
35 employees reported similar experiences with ethics of care being disregarded amid the
36
37 COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of industry or type of business.
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43 Work intensity and emotional demands increased during the pandemic (see
44
45 Urbina-Garcia, 2020), with participants becoming aware of their feelings of exhaustion when
46
47 sharing this within the groups. Yet, establishing the WG revealed caring for and caregiving
48
49 where expressed needs could be attended to by facilitators and the hands-on work of caring
50
51 through peer support, made the group a safe and secure space, as the SoWT postulates
52
53 (Fleuret & Atkinson, 2007). The burnout risks were mitigated to some extent through peer
54
55 caring for and giving care (Tronto, 2013). The enacted individual and collective agency of
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1
2
3 academics resisted the traditional notions of structuration theory and reveals the
4
5 importance of understanding both the structural context and individual agency, showing
6
7 Archer's framework (2003) as valuable to study the phenomena explored this paper.
8
9

10 Despite the stressful nature work during a pandemic, the WG was a transformative
11
12 space, where participants established beneficial research productivity habits. These habits
13
14 supported participants to achieve goals, where fatigue gave way to the satisfaction of
15
16 supporting each other and celebrating achievements. This space of wellbeing was a
17
18 motivating factor for increased writing productivity. Based on this CAE, engagement in
19
20 employee productivity groups, like WGs, can create effective avenues for participants to
21
22 express their concerns, gain support and affirmation through shared vulnerabilities, despite
23
24 the felt neglect employees experience during times of uncertainty, such as the global
25
26 pandemic (Kong & Belkin, 2021), Aligning with SoWT, WG foster capability and self-
27
28 fulfilment, integrated within a rich social network, to become therapeutic spaces for
29
30 academics, similar to Beasy et al. (2020) findings for doctoral candidates.
31
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37 The *blocking out time* theme reveal that WGs support and promote wellbeing as
38
39 participants gain confidence to reserve time for individual and joint research writing
40
41 activities and responded to the care being received within the WG (Tronto, 2013). The
42
43 agency exercised by participants in establishing blocks of uninterrupted time, is facilitated
44
45 through collective caregiving (Davy, 2019). As the group became a place of refuge from
46
47 other job roles, and a place of learning through belonging (Fleuret and Atkinson, 2007),
48
49 blocking out time was legitimised through group conversations. Being able to implement
50
51 goal-directed behaviour during work hours, assisted in creating balance between work and
52
53 family life. This was particularly challenging during the pandemic but setting boundaries
54
55 where the home office could be closed, afforded personal time on over weekends. This
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1
2
3 promoted a sense of accomplishment and strengthened participants' personal well-being,
4
5 congruent with Bigelow et al.'s (2021) findings, namely allotting times for wellness activities,
6
7 debriefing the writing process between sessions, creating flexible and positive surroundings
8
9 for writing, encouraging external supports, and adjusting the structure as needed (2021).
10
11

12
13 The relational nature of the WG made it a safe therapeutic space offering
14
15 participants belonging and support, which aligns well with the moral stance of ethics of care
16
17 (Ciulla, 2009). Within the group a reiteration of the habits and patterns of care, empowered
18
19 participants to care for each other (Tronto, 2013) and make sense of their cognitive and
20
21 emotional responses to pandemic work-related conditions. The synthesis of burnout, SoWT
22
23 and ethics of care offer compelling explanations to explain the functioning and value of
24
25 joining responsive employee-led productivity groups, like WG, providing a physical, digital
26
27 and social space for employee wellbeing (Fleuret & Atkinson, 2007; Beasy et al., 2020;
28
29 Tronto, 2013).
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34 35 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS 36

37
38 The themes revealed from our CAE are vital to understanding the collective
39
40 experience of employees during the pandemic. The use of CAE to a methodology provided
41
42 participants with the opportunity to engage in professional conversations, which revealed
43
44 emotions related to burnout, as well as provided a safe space promoting staff wellbeing.
45
46 The benefit of such an approach is supported by Lawrence and Maitlis (2012) assertions that
47
48 discursive practices and peer working relationships support employees' sense of wellbeing.
49
50 The peer support and caring responsibility, competence and responsive (Tronto, 2013)
51
52 within employee-led groups can mitigate external stressors, while promoting employee
53
54 wellbeing. While our study focused on participants sharing their collective reflections of
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1
2
3 stressors, emotions and productivity outcomes within a higher education setting, this study
4
5 holds implications for other industries more widely. Our findings suggest that purposeful
6
7 employee groups, such as WGs in higher education, has the potential to create a
8
9 therapeutic safe space, and in addition to their productivity intent has the potential to
10
11 diminish the negative effects of a crisis on organisational effectiveness.
12
13

14
15 Previous research has suggested that age and tenure can influence burnout with
16
17 more experienced academics having lower levels of exhaustion (Sabagh et al., 2018) with
18
19 more experienced staff tending to report lower levels of stress (Urbina-Garcia, 2020). The
20
21 thematic analysis in this study suggested burnout was non-discriminatory of tenure or age.
22
23 Thus, our findings suggest that during times of crisis, like the pandemic, unprecedented
24
25 changes broadly influence burnout effects.
26
27

28
29 The themes from this study also reveal the importance of ethics of care for
30
31 organisational leaders in times of crisis, like the Covid-19 pandemic. While there are
32
33 multiple challenges and uncertainty complicate decision-making, higher education and
34
35 business leaders should take care not to unintentionally neglect employees, as they seek to
36
37 craft a way forward through the crisis. Employees felt neglect contribute to cynicism,
38
39 distrust and lack of engagement, contributing to poor organisational and staff outcomes.
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44
45 This study takes an interpretive approach using a CAE, so care should be taken not
46
47 to generalise the findings. Although the study was conducted at a relatively small regional
48
49 university in Queensland, Australia, and it is acknowledged that metropolitan and
50
51 universities outside Australia may have had different experiences due to and geographic
52
53 sociocultural differences, and COVID government policy regarding lockdowns, yet the
54
55 themes are consistent with prior studies. Future research should examine the outcomes
56
57 different types of employee-led productivity groups across different industries and examine
58
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1
2
3 the relational benefits such groups offer and follow up on how these issues have been
4
5 addressed by monitoring newly formed Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committees to
6
7 ascertain longer-term outcomes on staff wellbeing.
8
9

12 13 CONCLUSION

14
15
16 Productivity groups, like writing groups and retreats in academia are vital for staff wellbeing,
17
18 management of burnout (Bigelow, 2021), and the crafting of environments that allow
19
20 academics to flourish within their professional careers. This study advocates for and
21
22 encourages such groups.
23
24
25

26 This study also addresses gaps in the literature and in doing so makes important
27
28 scholarly contributions. First, this study extends the limited research on the understanding
29
30 of how employees, like academics enact their agency in establishing productivity groups and
31
32 their associated spaces, an aspect that was magnified by a global pandemic that
33
34 dramatically shifted physical workspaces to a digital and remote workspace. The agentic role
35
36 of employees taking initiative within a crisis can mitigate feelings of burnout and provide a
37
38 limited sense of control and autonomy amidst uncertainty, contributing to staff wellbeing.
39
40
41 Second, this study integrates theoretical perspectives of burnout, spaces of wellbeing and
42
43 ethics of care to explain how staff wellbeing can be enhanced, by attending to the risk of
44
45 burnout through discursive practices and ethics of care within a peer group. The agency of
46
47 group members to provide care for, caregiving and care receiving contributed to positive
48
49 wellbeing outcomes. When productivity focused groups have strong relational bonds,
50
51 reflected several dimensions of spatial wellbeing, reiterative caring becomes part of
52
53 organisational processes and norms. Finally, SoWT provides a compelling framework for
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3 developing an understanding of the spatial dimensions of wellbeing within a digitally
4 mediated work environment, which shapes different organizational behaviours (Kilpatrick,
5
6 2022). A key tenet of this theory is that perceptions of one's space influences productivity,
7
8 and also has crucial role in shaping the individual's wellbeing (Beasy et al., 2020). Hence,
9
10 based on the foundation of the SoWT, the study has ascertained the importance of an
11
12 employee spaces in shaping career satisfaction and wellbeing.
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18 Even though life is relatively back to normal in 2023 at Australian universities, the
19
20 issues of burnout highlighted during the pandemic are still relevant and present, and the
21
22 need to tackle these issues urgent if management want to retain staff and maintain
23
24 productivity. School-based Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committees have been set up at
25
26 the regional university case site in response to issues arising from staff burnout, and a broad
27
28 cross section of staff and management were invited to participate. A wellbeing program has
29
30 also been implemented for staff by Clinical Services. Similar initiatives have been
31
32 implemented at other Australian universities, but it remains to be seen how this will address
33
34 the issues raised in this study.
35
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40 The findings support the conclusion that employee-led productivity groups can
41
42 alleviate some of the negative stressors experienced during the pandemic, through sense-
43
44 making and flexibility in a digital space where everyone's voice is heard. While such groups
45
46 may aim to increase productivity, collegial respect, care, and mentorship should form an
47
48 integral part of the group dynamics, contributing to individual and group wellbeing.
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52 Furthermore, the use of collaborative auto ethnographic provided an ancillary
53
54 benefit in creating a sense of community and shared narrative among the researchers
55
56 involved. This allowed the researchers to broaden their often-isolated gaze. The academic
57
58 career can be lonely at times as writing is a largely individual activity. Yet through reflection
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3 and shared discussion, CAE techniques served as a conduit through which greater
4
5 understanding was used to enrich our careers. A welcome benefit, considering the COVID-
6
7 19 pandemic acted as a crisis, but also as a catalyst for renewing our daily practices. CAE
8
9 served as a mechanism for bringing people together in what could have been a very lonely
10
11 time. This research adds further support to Lapadat's (2017) wise remark: *the greatest*
12
13 *strength of collaborative auto ethnography is its (hidden) focus on relationship building.*
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Table 1: Authors' Self-descriptions

Code	Description	Stage of career
A1	A lecturer in theatre and performance. She is an early career researcher, a freelance theatre practitioner, and a writer. She completed her PhD in 2018 in New Zealand, before moving to Australia to take up a lecturing position in Theatre and Performance in 2020.	PhD, Early career
A2	A lecturer in management, teaches research and statistics for first year and post graduate students. Her research is in wellbeing and stress with a focus on small business owners, volunteers and employees. This is her second WG.	PhD, Mid-Career
A3	A lecturer in design with international practical experience of the global fashion industry. After completing a Master of Arts by Research in 2015, she is now working towards a PhD. Her research interests encompass fashion and identity, design for diversity, and women's relationships with clothing through material culture. This was her first WG.	PhD Candidate
A4	A lecturer in Business, completed his PhD in 2016 on authentic trust building strategies within franchising relationships. Among others, he currently teaches the core Bachelor of Business and	PhD, Early Career

	Commerce course entitled world of work where students focus on developing strategies for enhancing their career readiness	
A5	A lecturer in creative industries. She is an ECR with 2 years at this university. Her research interests encompass cultural policy, Australian publishing and the creative industry sector.	PhD, Early Career
A6	A lecturer in theatre and performance, a freelance voice coach and award-winning performance maker, actor, director, writer and cabaret performer. She is a mid-career researcher, and her research passions are actor training and performance for social change. After experiencing the benefits of WG, she volunteered to co-facilitate Scribble Society.	PhD, Mid-Career
A7	A senior lecturer in tourism is a mid-career academic in the field of sustainable tourism. Her current research explores the cognitive appraisal and emotion (with a focus on awe) within the visitor experience, the volunteer experience in citizen science and impacts of virtual immersion in gaming, tourism inclusivity and diversity. She thrives on collaboration and regularly joins and participates in WGs.	PhD, Mid-Career

A8	A lecturer in screen media production, an ECR and award-winning documentary filmmaker with national and international credits. Her research interests are documentary films, screen industry practice, film and television. This was her first experience of joining a WG.	PhD, Early Career
A9	A senior lecturer in entrepreneurship and innovation. Her research focuses on corporate entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial decision-making and scholarship of teaching. She has been participant on several WGs and was one of the facilitators of Scribble Society.	PhD, Mid-Career
A10	A lecturer in theatre and performance and researches twentieth century theatre and performance history and performance design. He is a mid-career academic and arrived at the university in 2020 Scribble Society was his fourth WG.	PhD, Mid-Career
A11	School's Deputy Head (Research) who is a researcher in Creative Writing studies, creative practice and post-colonialism, and has participated in many WGs.	PhD, Mid-Career

Note: Only 11 participants collaborated in this CAE, as one participant withdrew in week 3 of the WG.