An investigation into workplace support for bereaved employees

by

Leanne Flux

Canterbury Christ Church University

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my two children for their unwavering support throughout my Ph.D. journey. I embarked on this seven-year academic pursuit when they were young, and their enduring encouragement, understanding, and patience have been my constant motivation. Their presence and resilience have added profound meaning to this challenging journey. My heartfelt thanks also go to my two esteemed professors, Alex Hassett and Margie Callanan for their invaluable guidance, mentorship, and expert insights, which have shaped my research and academic growth. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Mark, my husband, who joined me on this journey when I was halfway through my Ph.D. His unwavering support, role as a sounding board, and companionship have been invaluable to me. Lastly, I extend my thanks to all those who generously participated in my research, as their contributions played a pivotal role in the successful completion of this thesis. Charlie, this one is for you!

Thesis Summary

This thesis presents an exploration of bereavement support in the workplace for employees who have experienced the loss of a loved one. The objective of this research is to create awareness of the impact of support, or lack thereof, by identifying the types of workplace support that is considered most beneficial to bereaved employees. The ultimate goal is to equip managers with evidence-based strategies for offering meaningful informal workplace support, thereby contributing to the well-being of bereaved employees and instilling a sense of value and understanding within the organisation.

Through an examination of supportive workplace practices and their effect on the return-to-work process, this study offers insights into the complex interplay between bereavement, workplace dynamics, and employee well-being. The findings emphasise the substantial negative impact of inadequate support on job satisfaction and mental health, highlighting the significance of effective support strategies. Ultimately, the thesis calls for increased investment into informal support in the workplace and better understanding of the complex interactions between bereavement, grief, managerial practices, and employee well-being.

Contents

Chapter One: Introducing the Research

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis lies in the examination in the role of workplace support seeking to acknowledge the often underestimated impact of grief on employees and their managers, recognising the important role that supportive measures play within the realm of work. At its core, rather than focusing on the creation of formal policies and state level changes, this research strives to unravel the complexities surrounding informal bereavement support within the workplace, to change work-based cultures. Aiming not only to reduce the stress-related absences that stem from bereavement but also to clarify the challenges experienced when offering effective informal workplace support. By doing so, this research seeks to suggest measures to improve the reintegration of bereaved employees into the workplace, promoting enhanced productivity and well-being.

This investigation bears the dual purpose of narrowing the gaps that exists between academic research, organisational policies, and the practical needs of individuals struggling with grief as they return to work. It endeavours to bridge these divides by investigating how bereaved employees navigate the complexities of workplace reintegration and how the support they receive, or lack thereof, shape their experiences. By shedding light on this crucial aspect of employee well-being, this research contributes to the cultivation of a work environment that respects and addresses the emotional needs of its members.

Past literature highlights that grief, and the workplace is an under researched topic (Reed, 2024). It suggests that grief interventions in the workplace frequently fail to be effective due to the complexities of the provision of support in a professional setting (Hall 2014). It indicates that much of the understanding in the return-to-work process is based upon patients with physical injuries and pain-related conditions culminating in therapeutic or professional guidance (Blonk et al., 2006; Gava et al., 2009; Hunot et al., 2009; MacEachen et al., 2006; van der Klink et al., 2001, 2003). Whilst

there are some organisations who have researched bereavement in the workplace, the guidance lacks clear structure and clarity to sufficiently support managers (McGuiness, 2009). Although there is a small quantity of general information available to organisations guiding on support for bereaved employees (Forbes Human Resources Council, 2023; Jarvis, 2022; Keller, 2021; Roepe, 2017), much of it appears to be opinion based, lacking in evidence or clear insight into the challenges that managers might encounter when assisting a grieving employee.

The foundation of this research rests on the contextual exploration of the data, coupled with an exploration of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that inform the studies. The thesis consists of an introduction to the research, followed by four distinct studies that collectively unravel the multifaceted dimensions of bereavement support in the workplace. This is followed by the overall findings, which consist of a reflective paper incorporating the theory, findings and conclusions drawn from the collective body of work.

One of the key underlying factors when developing the methodological design for each research paper was to focus on the use of rich qualitative data rather than a quantitative analysis so as to gain a deeper and detailed understanding of not only the bereaved employees support needs but that of the challenges and experiences from a manager's perspective. Therefore, to clarify current research findings and pinpoint any research gaps a systematic literature review was used to determine how employers have been found to respond to bereaved employees, and what informal support was provided. Furthermore, a qualitative thematic analysis was used in two studies, to gain insight into what grieving employees perceive the support they receive from management as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of support based on an individual bereaved employee's experience. Additionally, to give managers a voice, which was found to be lacking in research, an abbreviated grounded theory was used to further examine the dynamics and challenges that managers experience. These studies, each with their own unique focus, contribute to an understanding of the challenges, and potential solutions surrounding this critical aspect of organisational well-being.

About the Researcher

On the 27th of September 2010 my entire universe imploded. After 12 years of marriage, at the age of 34, I experienced the sudden and unexpected death of my husband which in an instant turned my life inside out. At the time my children were two and five years of age, and I was working fulltime as a manager for a corporate organisation in London. Overnight I became sole breadwinner, sole decision maker, mother and father to my children. I felt incredibly isolated, like I had lost my place in the world. My family reside in a different country, and although did what they could, my close friends provided the immediate support. I struggled to sleep due to the shock of the trauma, I cried a lot, I worried a lot, I was unable to concentrate on anything for more than a few minutes and was eventually diagnosed with acute Post Traumatic Stress. I was granted four months bereavement leave from work and spent most of that time reflecting on the future, trying to come to terms with the loss, my new 'norm' and the feeling of complete disassociation from the reality of life.

When I returned to work, I soon realised that my life focus (and purpose) had changed and after much consideration I decided to embark on a new direction. I left the security and stability of my job, took on a huge student loan and signed up to a BSc (Hons) Degree in psychology at Canterbury Christ Church University, whilst doing two part-time jobs and bringing up my two babies. During my undergraduate degree I completed an internship which focused on the *"Development of a Suicide Prevention Implementation plan for Older Adults in Kent and Medway"*. This fuelled my desire to pursue research on informal bereavement support. I went on to gain (and was so incredibly grateful for) a scholarship for my Master of Science Degree at City, University of London. For my final Dissertation in Organisational Psychology *"Life after suicide: An interpretative phenomenological analysis into the experiences of those bereaved by suicide",* left me with more questions. I knew I wanted to continue research into bereavement support and come to it from a business psychology perspective. I had many conversations with widows/widowers over time and the same theme kept coming up namely, many not feeling supported by their workplace after

experiencing bereavement. I found this interesting because my support experience was neither 'good' nor 'bad', it just 'was', and at the time I was just grateful for the return to a routine.

In conducting further research into this area, I found that there appeared to be extensive studies around supporting the bereaved from a therapeutic perspective, but evidence was lacking around the everyday life after experiencing a bereavement. More specifically around the getting back to being 'functional' and feeling valued within the workplace. I come to this research from a perspective of wanting to understand why some individuals perceived receiving a negative return to work experience, while others had not.

My intention is purely altruistic. I managed to return to work full-time whilst funding my own Ph.D. through Canterbury Christ Church University. It has been quite the journey being sole breadwinner for my two children, a single mother with no family around for support, whilst working full time and conducting research, (experiencing the Covid pandemic halfway through as well as getting married). However, my passion to help others has been and continues to be my driving force.

Definitions

Defining Work

In this thesis, work is defined as being employed, involving physical and/or mental effort, aimed at achieving a specific result. It encompasses tasks undertaken by individuals in exchange for monetary compensation. The study includes participants from all business sectors, irrespective of skill level, and covers various employment types, including those contracted to do full-time, part-time, and zero-hours. By considering employment at all organisational levels, this research accounts for the significant role of differing experiences among employees and managers. The studies do not focus on a specific business sector, role type or gender, ensuring a general, comprehensive and broad examination of the subject and individual experiences.

Defining Bereavement and Grief

In this study it is important to distinguish between two key concepts: bereavement and grief (Charmaz & Milligan, 2008). Bereavement, as outlined by Bell and Taylor (2011), characterises the emotional state of individuals who find themselves in the aftermath of losing a loved one due to death. On the other hand, grief represents a deeply personal response to the enduring absence created by such a loss. This grief reaction can manifest in various ways, affecting one's mental, physical, and social well-being (referred to as bio-psychosocial effects). Additionally, these emotions are often expressed through cultural customs and practices of mourning (Bell & Taylor, 2011).

As noted in Figure One: Bereavement and Grieving, the focus of this research centres on support for individuals who have experienced the death of a loved one (bereavement) and subsequently returned to their work environments without feeling too significantly impacted with grief reactions. It also focuses on support for those who have experienced a bereavement and felt that they were significantly impacted by grief reactions as a result of their loss (bereaved and grieving). The research did not focus on individuals who may be grieving as a result of another type of loss (such as loss of a relationship, divorce or illness).

Figure One: Bereavement and Grieving
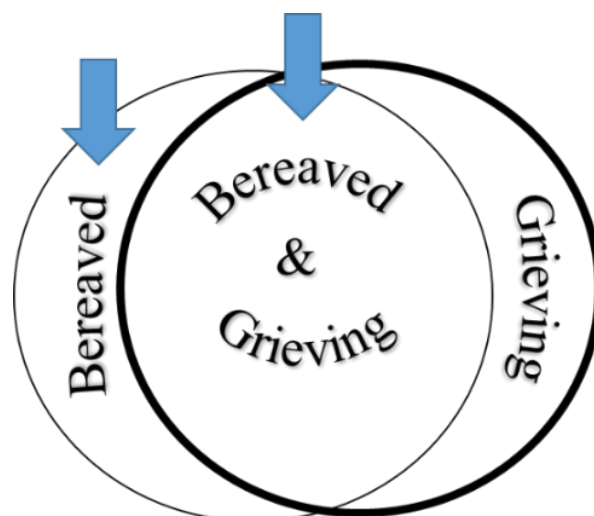
Work and Bereavement

Experiencing the loss of a beloved family member or friend profoundly influences various facets of an individual's life (Bennet & Soulsby, 2012). Re-joining work is usually expected to start within a set timeframe, marking the beginning of the anticipated return to normal daily life (Gibson et al., 2011). A study conducted by Saldana (2023) found that some employees felt supported at the start of their bereavement journey however that support reduced thereafter, which left them feeling isolated and uncertain of how to balance their professional and personal lives. D'Oliveira and Persico's (2023) study suggests that when employees perceive they are not valued or recognised by their organisation, this imbalance can lead to poorer wellbeing outcomes. Nevertheless, the process of navigating this reintegration to the workplace may prove challenging, primarily due to the substantial demands imposed by the grieving experience (Bento, 1994). Research has shown that many individuals who have suffered a bereavement encounter considerable challenges in managing a full workload upon their return to work, prompting a desire for additional practical and emotional support from their organisational leadership (Charles-Edwards, 2005; Eyetsmitan, 1998).

The study conducted by Saldana (2023) revealed that participants reported experiencing one of their most challenging times as the grief impacted them on many levels. They reported facing the emotional challenges of dealing with the trauma of losing a loved one which resulted in feelings of overwhelming despair with some facing physical exhaustion, health issues and a struggle to focus or feel motivated to do their work (Saldana, 2023). Although prior investigations have concentrated on the formal and medical dimensions of bereavement support, such as professional services in counselling or the National Health Service, there remains a lack of understanding regarding informal support – namely, the everyday lived experiences of those who do not seek professional services (Rumbold & Aoun, 2015). It is recognised that the majority of individuals coping with loss may not necessitate formal or professional assistance (Aoun et al., 2018). More specifically research suggests the significance of communication, flexibility and recognition of the loss is what is required (Gilbert

et al., 2021). Granting them the space to express their emotions and ensuring their grief is met with a sensitive response may prove to be the most essential form of support (Breen et al., 2017).

For many, job role plays a key part in the perception of identity and whilst bereavement can have a traumatic impact to wellbeing, the workplace can also provide a substantial element of familiarity and security (Charles-Edwards, 2009). Positive workplace support generally results in helping those bereaved back into effective performance, enhancing their commitment to the organisation (Charles-Edwards, 2009; Gilbert, 2021). A recent study conducted by D'Oliveira and Persico (2023) demonstrates that a supportive environment has the potential to counteract the detrimental effects of workplace isolation and loneliness on wellbeing. On the other hand, an unsupportive environment may reduce productivity as well as alienating these individuals, making their recovery that much harder (Charles-Edwards, 2009). Therefore, to avoid this type of situation and respond in a supportive manner, work colleagues and particularly management need to understand what the bereaved person is going through, that they may be withdrawn, resentful or even depressed for a time (Charles-Edwards, 2009). Supplying helpful support is noted as one of the most powerful determinants of beneficial psychological and social outcomes after experiencing a bereavement (Hibberd et al., 2010), yet many report not receiving appropriate support from their managers or organisation.

In general, the conduct of organisational management has often been a matter of chance, largely dependent upon the personal values and past experiences of those occupying leadership roles (Charles-Edwards, 2009). Therefore, gaining insights into what bereaved employees perceive as beneficial or detrimental can furnish organisations with valuable insights on how to effectively address or enhance their bereavement support strategies (Gibson et al., 2011). Furthermore, comprehending not only the experiences of individuals coping with bereavement but also those of the managers responsible for providing support can contribute significantly to the development of feasible and appropriate support mechanisms during the return-to-work and readjustment process (Gibson et al., 2011).

Grief Theory Timeline

The evolutionary history of grief theory represents a rich mix of perspectives that have emerged over time. These theories collectively provide insights into the intricate facets of bereavement and the grieving process, thereby offering valuable guidance for effective grief management.

Erich Lindemann (1944) shed light on the dual nature of grief, encompassing both psychological and physical dimensions. Lindemann contended that individuals dealing with profound loss embark on three essential tasks: releasing themselves from the emotional bonds with the departed, adapting to the transformed environment, and forming new relationships to rebuild their lives.

Sigmund Freud (1957) conceptualised grief as an intensely personal journey characterised by a gradual detachment from the deceased over time. Freud's insights shed light on the individualistic nature of mourning, emphasising the distinctive paths each person treads whilst navigating grief.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's (1969) research although initially associated with terminal illness, introduced the 'Five-Stage Model of Grief'. Her work, often misinterpreted, unveiled a framework that transcends the boundaries of the terminally ill, inviting broader application to those mourning the loss of a loved one.

Colin Murray Parkes (1972) outlined the 'Four Phases of Mourning', describing a structured sequence – numbness, yearning, mourning (disorganisation/despair), and reorganisation (recovery) – through which individuals must journey to ultimately find solace in their grief.

'Social Support Theory', spanning the 1970s and 1980s highlights the role of social support relationships and support networks in strengthening well-being. This theory continues to drive research aimed at comprehending the complex interplay between social support and grief (Taylor, 2007).

John Bowlby (1980) introduced 'Attachment Theory', reiterating the significance of human connection in the context of grief and bereavement. His model proposed four fluid stages – shock/yearning, protest, despair and recovery – describing the evolving dynamics of attachment throughout the grieving process.

William Worden's (1991) framework highlighted four essential tasks for bereaved individuals: acknowledging the loss, processing the pain, adapting to a transformed reality, and preserving a meaningful connection with the departed through cherished memories whilst forging a new life.

Greenberg et al's. (1992) 'Terror Management Theory' (TMT) proposed that humans confront existential anxiety of mortality by embracing cultural beliefs and self-esteem, which serves as a psychological defence. In the context of grief, this theory suggests that individuals may rely on cultural rituals, religious beliefs, or a sense of continuity with the deceased to manage distressing thoughts and emotions associated with death, thereby providing solace and a sense of meaning in the face of loss.

Klass, Silverman and Nickman's (1996) 'Continuing Bonds Theory', challenged the notion of closure, asserting that grief is an enduring process marked by an ongoing negotiation of meaning of loss. They emphasised the continued presence of the deceased in the lives of those who mourn them, highlighting their enduring role.

Cook and Oltjenbrun (1998) introduced the 'Model of Incremental Grief', acknowledging that one loss can trigger a cascade of secondary griefs, highlighting the compounding effect of multiple losses.

Stroebe and Schutt's (1999) 'Dual Process Model of Coping' proposed that bereaved individuals oscillate between a focus on loss and efforts toward restoration. This dynamic interplay shapes the ebb and flow of the grief journey.

Neimeyer, Prigerson and Davies (2002) introduced the 'Meaning-Making Theory', emphasising the human endeavour to comprehend grief through the creation of a narrative that affords purpose and meaning upon life in the aftermath of a loss.

Bakker and Demerouti's (2014) 'Job Demand-Resource Theory' (JD-R), while originating in the workplace, highlights the broader implications of the balance between demands and resources in mitigating stress and burnout. This theory extends its relevance beyond the confines of the workplace to offer insights into the management of personal grief in various domains.

Collectively, these important grief theories, spanning decades and diverse domains, demonstrates the vast differences in ideas around grief. Not only does it reveal the complex dynamics of mourning but also guides present-day efforts to understand, support and effectively manage grief.

Theoretical Positions

Extensive consideration of various theoretical frameworks preceded the initiation of this research, with a particular focus on identifying the most pertinent frameworks to underpin the research questions. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of these theories culminated in the selection of a few that the researcher believed provided valuable conceptual insights. The chosen frameworks serve as an essential guide, provoking contemplation and ultimately shaping formulation of the research questions, methodological choices, and analytical approaches adopted in the studies.

Dual Process Model

The model proposed by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut (1999) summarised in Figure Two: The 'Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement', suggests that the grieving process involves oscillation between two types of coping strategies: loss-oriented coping, which focuses on the loss itself and the associated emotions, and restoration-oriented coping, which centres on adapting to the new situation and building a new life. Therefore, when trying to manage grief and restoring to a

changed life whilst coping with work pressures, a bereaved employee may experience work-life

conflict. This may in turn, add additional feelings of stress which may result in intense emotional and

physical suffering (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). If sorrow should go unacknowledged, this may increase

or escalate feelings of stress or grief (Palmer, 2004). The researcher aimed to gain insights into the

evolving nature of grief in the workplace and the stressors involved. Therefore, the 'Dual Process

Model' was considered important as it highlights the significance of recognising the impact of grief

in the workplace. By understanding the interplay between bereavement grief and workplace

demands, this model, fits perfectly with the researcher's aim to understand the development of a

more compassionate and effective support structure for grieving employees.

Figure Two: The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement
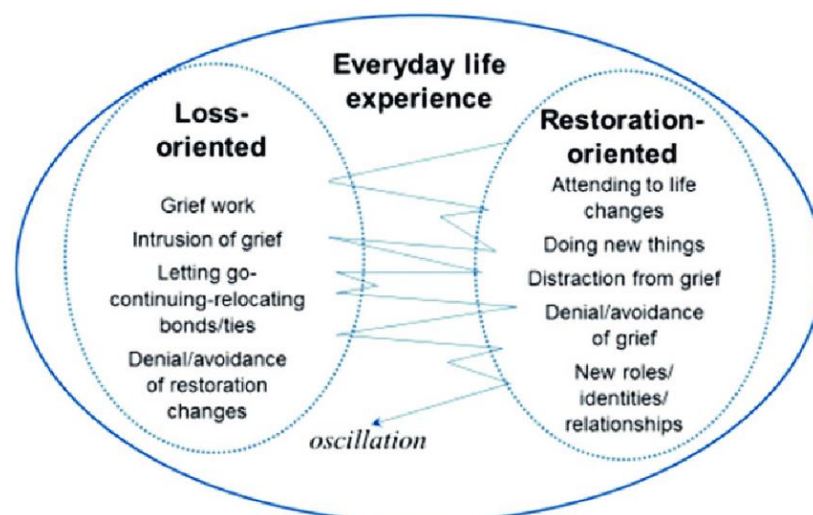
(Stroebe & Schut, 1999)

Social Support

'Social Support Theory' is a valuable framework as it assists to identify, categorise and

evaluate the sources and types of support available to bereaved employees. It acted as a base line

from which to work focusing particularly on the role of social relationships and the possible barriers

of support received from managers. Social support is a complex phenomenon, as the individual is

required to acknowledge the need for assistance as well as it being accessible, substantial and

deemed as beneficial by the recipient (Breen, 2021). This theory is important as it proposes that social support can act as a buffer against the negative effects of stress and loss, including grief. According to this theory, individuals who receive adequate social support, who feel valued and cared for are better able to cope with grief and may experience fewer negative outcomes (Breen & O'Connor, 2011**;** Cacciatore et al., 2021; Taylor, 2007). Studies around social support conclude that it is important for the bereaved individual to be able to adjust to a changed life after experiencing the death of a loved one (Taylor, 2007). The connection with others and the receipt of empathy are noted as two of the most important means of social support (Dyregrov, 2004; Peters et al., 2016). A concept within social support theory is 'Perceived Organisational Support' (POS). This theory proposes that employees form an overall opinion of the depth to which an organisation cares about them and their well-being and how well it demonstrates understanding and appreciation (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Managers are considered as representatives of an organisation, therefore if an employee observes the manager as supportive then they feel compelled to return the support, by demonstrating appreciative attitudes and behaviours that promote performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). There is a need to understand more about promoting social support for grieving employees (Breen, 2021). Therefore, the researcher utilised this theory to identify and assess the various forms of support that was offered, examining the interplay between perceived and received support.

Figure Three: Social Support Model
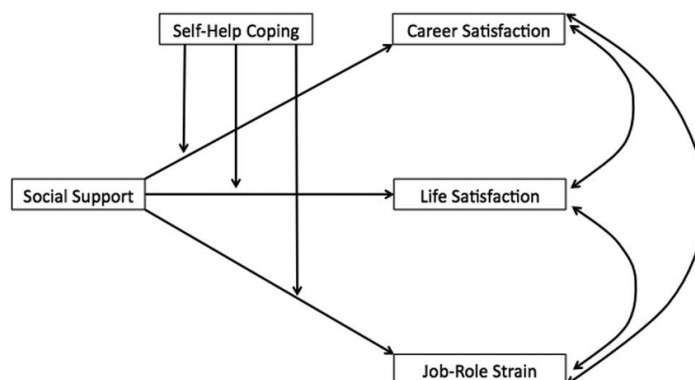
Figure Four: Perceived Social Support Model
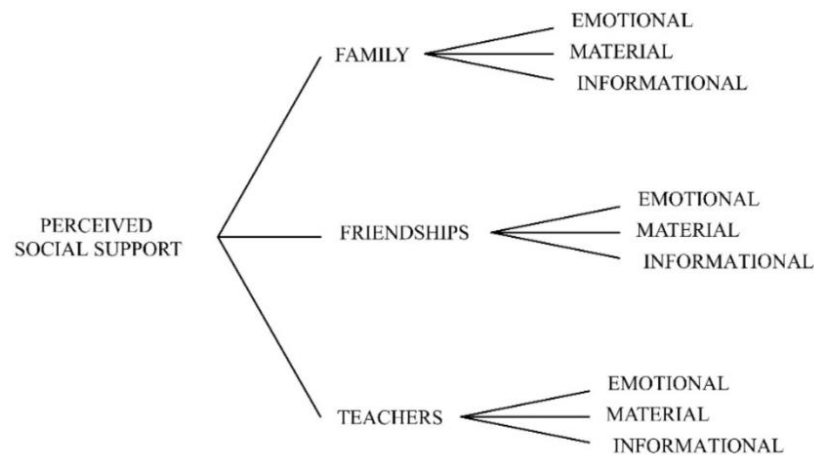
Job Demands-Resources Theory (JD-R)

Whilst JD-R was not originally designed for grief research, it was regarded as significant to this research to understand how job-related factors can influence employee well-being, motivation, and performance. By identifying grief-related job demands (workplace adjustments) and its impact on well-being as well as what job resources help employees cope with grief, the researcher aimed to clarify what meaningful support structures look like. Bakker and Demerouti (2014) proposed that the dual dimension of job demands and job resources within the occupational context, emphasises the relationship and consequential impact on employees' well-being and performance. The theoretical framework proposes that work instigates two distinct cognitive processes: one that can lead to health impairment and the other promoting a motivational approach. Elevated and sustained work demands have the potential to induce exhaustion and even precipitate burnout, manifesting the health impairment process. Conversely, job resources function as essential supports, facilitating the pursuit of motivational work-related goals through the activation of the motivational process (Boyd et al., 2011). Bonanno (2001) highlights the likelihood of recuperation when grief-related distress is reduced, and positive emotions are both activated and effectively managed. In line with Bakker's (2011) insights, it becomes apparent that encouragement and supportive feedback from management is key to elevating employee performance levels, highlighting the important role of leadership in

cultivating a conducive work environment that encourages employee well-being and enhances overall productivity. This theory, therefore, was used to inform what demands and resources were impacted by grief so that a tailored approach could be taken for the needs of the grieving employees.

Figure Five: Job Demands-Resources Model
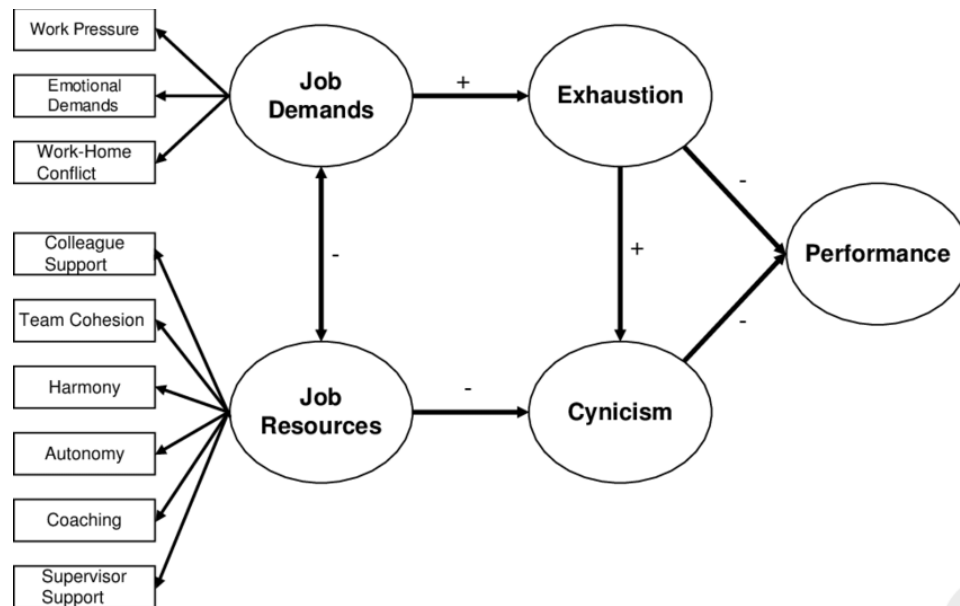
Terror Management Theory (TMT)

Although TMT is not a primary framework for grief research elements of TMT were applied to the understanding of how individuals may respond to and cope with grief. The researcher was led to believe that it is pertinent to understand how employees navigate the experience of grief in a professional setting and how the values of a manager may serve as a support or add to the stress of a grieving employee. TMT is a significant psychological framework that has gathered substantial attention within the realm of social and existential psychology. Developed by social psychologists Greenberg, Solomon and Pyszczynski et al. (1992) it delves into the human existential dilemma: the awareness of our mortality. TMT proposes that humans are unique in their capacity for abstract thought, which includes an awareness of their inevitable mortality.

This awareness creates death anxiety, which individuals seek by developing culture

worldview, belief systems, and self-esteem to provide a sense of meaning and significance.   TMT

asserts that these constructs serve as psychological buffers, allowing individuals to alleviate the

anxiety associated with their own mortality. Consequently, TMT has implications for shedding light

on diverse human behaviours, from cultural beliefs to social identities to prejudice, self-esteem

regulation and even responses to existential threats. This theory was instrumental in highlighting the

intricate interplay between mortality awareness and human behaviour, offering valuable insights that

contribute to the understanding of human psychology and behaviour.

Figure Six: Terror Management Theory
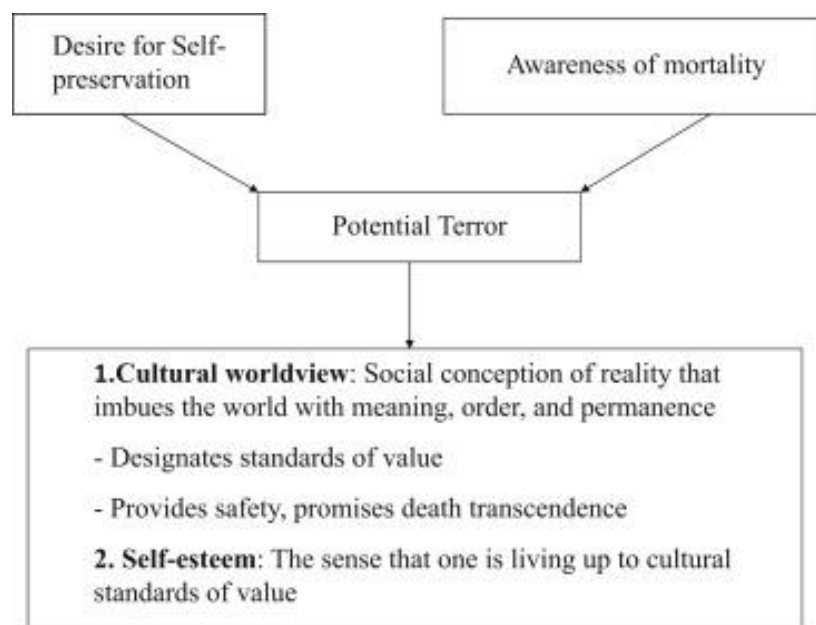
Considering and combining these theories provided this study with a more comprehensive

and detailed understanding of the complex phenomena and relationships that consider cognitive and

affective processes, social support mechanisms and the impact of job demands and resources on

various outcomes. Such integrative approaches can provide a deeper understanding of the complex

dynamics within the workplace and contribute to practical implications for organisational

interventions and support systems.

Thesis Aim

The overarching aim of this thesis is to enrich the current body of knowledge concerning workplace bereavement support. Central to this goal is a twofold objective: first, to uncover the types of support that prove beneficial to bereaved employees, and second, to comprehensively investigate the hurdles and constraints faced by managers in their pursuit of providing informal bereavement support within the workplace. Through a rigorous exploration of these aspects, the research endeavours to offer insights that can guide employers in the creation of effective support mechanisms for their grieving employees.

A key underlying assumption of this research is the recognition that the successful implementation of workplace grief support necessitates a detailed understanding of the subject. This notion is echoed by Bath (2000), who proposes that without a genuine understanding of the nuances of workplace grief support, any interventions or initiatives are unlikely to yield the desired outcomes. The research is geared towards revealing what forms of informal support are genuinely valued by bereaved employees. By unveiling these insights, the intention is to facilitate an environment that not only acknowledges the emotional needs of bereaved employees but also aids in their transition back into a meaningful and productive work life.

Furthermore, the research recognises the importance of promoting empathy and compassion within the workplace, both for bereaved employees and for managers tasked with offering support. By delving into the challenges faced by managers in providing adequate bereavement support, the study aims to cultivate a heightened awareness of the unique experiences and difficulties encountered by grieving individuals. This awareness, in turn, can potentially encourage a more compassionate work culture, one in which supportive behaviours are embraced, and feelings of judgement and criticism are reduced (Peticca-Harris, 2019).

In essence, this thesis seeks to contribute not only to the theoretical understanding of workplace bereavement support but also to its practical application within organisational contexts. By shedding light on the dynamics of support, the challenges faced, and the potential benefits, the research aspires to pave the way for more effective, empathetic, and meaningful approaches to supporting employees during their journey of bereavement.

Research Questions Starting Point

In recognition of the critical need for a deeper understanding of workplace grief support, this thesis endeavours to address the gap in existing research. The literature highlights that conventional grief interventions within the workplace may often prove ineffective due to a lack of understanding surrounding the dynamics of workplace grief support (Hall, 2014). To bridge this gap and enhance the efficacy of such interventions, this research embarks on an exploration by addressing four overarching questions.

- To understand what type of informal workplace support is being offered by managers to their bereaved employees.

- To investigate what informal bereavement support is considered as helpful or unhelpful to a bereaved employee.

- To understand what challenges the managers' face when they support a bereaved employee.

- To explore the perceived impact that workplace informal bereavement support, or lack thereof, has upon bereaved employees.

Guide to the Chapters

This thesis comprises six distinct chapters, each contributing to an exploration of the research domain. The introductory paper serves as a starting point, setting the stage for the subsequent investigations. The four individual research papers each bring a unique perspective and methodology to the forefront. This multi-paper thesis structure not only provides a comprehensive

examination of the research topic but also aims to provide a well-rounded exploration, encompassing theoretical underpinning, empirical evidence and practical applications.

Chapter Two: A Critical Review of the Literature

A literature review on how employers respond to employees who return to the workplace after experiencing the death of a loved one.

This research was undertaken in 2018 and published in Policy and Practice in Health and Safety Journal in 2019 (Appendix A). It explores the relevant literature from a global perspective investigating the ways managers offered informal support to bereaved employees. The systematic review highlights the significance of informal workplace support in the overall process of grieving and highlights the bio-psychosocial aspects of bereavement. The literature also highlights the range of managerial responses, from compassionate to less responsive, and proposes that inadequate responses hinder the recovery of bereaved employees and negatively influences their perception of the organisation. The review identifies three primary types of support offered by managers: Instrumental Support (tangible assistance), Information Support (guidance and advice), and Emotional Support (empathy and understanding). It reveals gaps in long-term support, clarity around time allowed off work, HR guidance for managers, and emotional understanding, all of which were found to hinder the support processes.

Chapter Three: Small Scale Research Project

Grief in the workplace: How do grieving employees in the UK perceive their experience of workplace support from management?

Conducted in 2019 and subsequently published in the Policy and Practice in Health and Safety Journal in 2020 (Appendix B), this research investigated the critical domain of informal support for bereaved employees and their perceptions of the support provided by their managers. The

literature review highlighted a noteworthy disparity in employer responsiveness, with some demonstrating proactive support whilst others exhibiting a less empathetic attitude. Therefore, this study aimed to distinguish the factors that bereaved employees considered genuinely helpful. A qualitative thematic approach was selected for this study due to its ability to explore complex, rich data and provide theoretical flexibility in examining lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview questions were designed to capture the lived experiences of workplace bereavement support.

The findings revealed that, according to bereaved employees, support from their managers should entail a deep understanding of their unique situation and the diverse grief reactions that may manifest in a workplace context. They articulated the need for managers to invest time in listening, open and empathetic communication, and the provision of space to process their grief, seeking appropriate responses that resonated with their individual needs. Regrettably, many participants expressed the absence of such understanding and support from their managers. It became evident that if managers were to dedicate themselves to fully comprehending the intricacies of their employees' experiences, this would enable them to offer a tailored and compassionate form of care that would substantially alleviate feelings of overwhelm and distress.

This study highlights the urgent necessity to strengthen investment in informal support initiatives within the workplace. The failure to acknowledge or respond to bereaved employees' needs inadvertently conveys a sense of neglect and abandonment, promoting isolation and adversely impacting their well-being. In contrast, demonstrating a genuine understanding of their experiences, even amid potential performance challenges, not only generates a sense of value but also reaffirms their integral role within the team.

Chapter Four: Applied Research Project

A grounded theory of how managers provide support to bereaved employees in the workplace.

Conducted over the course of 2021-2022, this research embarks on a journey to understand the complexities of workplace bereavement support. The Small Scale Research Project revealed a disparity in employee perceptions of support, prompting an exploration from the manager's perspective. This investigation sought to delve into the experiences of managers, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that either facilitated or hindered their ability to provide effective return-to-work support for bereaved employees. The qualitative abbreviated grounded theory findings unveiled that manager's struggle with uncertainties, particularly in determining the most appropriate form of informal support across various aspects. Moreover, the research highlighted the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance experienced by managers when navigating the delicate balance between organisational expectations and personal values during the support process.

Interestingly, managers acknowledged the importance of empathetically understanding the bereaved employees' grief experience, with some attributing the success of their support to promoting strong interpersonal relationships. Despite the recognition of their moral compass and instincts guiding their actions, managers reported the challenges they encountered in reconciling humane treatment with adherence to workplace guidelines and the unaltered demands of their roles. These included dilemmas around the fair allocation of bereavement leave and apprehension when engaging in conversations about death. Furthermore, managers struggled with the management of grieving employees who returned to work with diminished performance levels. These findings highlight the ethical dimensions of managerial decision making, often necessitating decisions that diverged from personal values, thus bringing about cognitive dissonance. This cognitive dissonance emerged as a possible explanation for instances where managers seemingly displayed insufficient support, ultimately leading to employee dissatisfaction.

Chapter Five: Report of Professional Practice

How do experiences of support in the workplace impact a bereaved employee? A case study.

This study aims to investigate an employee's perspective regarding their experience and the impact of the informal workplace support they received.   In this context of the UK workplace, this research aspires to explain the intricacies of the return-to-work process following a bereavement, thereby shedding light on the lived experience of a bereaved individual. The research questions, therefore, focused on the employees' perceptions of support and the significance attributed to it, whilst also exploring the ramifications of informal support or the absence thereof when returning into the work environment.

The participant featured in this study, highlights the profoundly negative impact of perceived managerial indifference, expressing feelings of undervaluation, neglect, and insignificance. This emotional response, characterised by bitterness and resentment toward both the managers and the organisation, highlights the potential consequences of mishandling bereaved employees. It serves as a reminder of the substantial implications that inadequate support can exert on an employee's job satisfaction and mental well-being.

Chapter Six: A Reflective Review

This chapter presents an overview of the theoretical contribution and the stages involved in this multi-faceted research. It discusses the gaps in the understanding of how organisations can better support employees dealing with the challenges of grief and loss. The culmination of these four studies resulted in the 'Managers Model of Iterative Bereavement Support' which is founded on a combination of the data drawn from the findings from both bereaved employees and their supporting managers. Finally, the researcher shares reflections of the research journey, discussing the challenges faced, the insights gained and the broader implications of the findings.

The Researchers Philosophical Stance

Deciding on a philosophical position involved a process of reflection and critical evaluation of the researchers ontological and epistemological assumptions. By taking a thoughtful and deliberate approach the researcher developed a philosophical position that was used to guide and inform the research design. The philosophical position adopted by the researcher is one of relativism from an ontological perspective and falls into the paradigm of social constructionist epistemology. By embracing this framework, the study aims to reduce the ways in which subjectivity and reality are constructed and negotiated within social contexts, shedding light on the diverse perspectives and interpretations that share our understanding of the world.

Relativism acknowledges that reality is not an objective and fixed entity, but rather a product of individual and collective experiences, perceptions, and cultural backgrounds. Relativism recognises that multiple realities exist simultaneously, each influenced by various factors such as culture, language, history, and social interactions. As argued by Rorty (1989), reality is contingent and context-dependent, shaped by the diverse perspectives and interpretations of individuals within specific cultural and historical contexts. This perspective challenges the notion of a universal and objective reality, emphasising the importance of understanding subjective interpretations and cultural relativism.

Social constructionism proposes that knowledge is not discovered, but rather constructed through social processes and interactions. It highlights that knowledge is shaped by cultural, historical, and social contexts, and is subject to negotiation, contestation, and change. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), knowledge is socially constructed and transmitted through shared meanings and language within specific communities and social groups. This perspective challenges the traditional view of knowledge as an objective and fixed entity, emphasising the role of power, discourse, and social interactions in shaping our understanding of the world.

The researcher believes that the integration of relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology provides a framework for exploring subjectivity and reality within the social sciences. By recognising the multiplicity of realities and the socially constructed nature of knowledge, this research seeks to challenge the traditional notions of objectivity and truth. It aims to highlight the role that discourse, and social interactions have in shaping our understanding of the world, while also acknowledging the significance of individual perspectives and experiences.

By taking this philosophical stance, the researcher intends to uncover the ways in which subjective interpretations and social constructions influence various aspects of social life, including identity, culture, and social inequalities. Moreover, it aims to contribute to broader debates within the social sciences regarding the nature of reality, the validity of different knowledge claims, and the implications for understanding and addressing social issues. By embracing the complexity of multiple realities and acknowledging the socially constructed nature of knowledge, this research strives to enrich our understanding of the intricate ways in which individuals and societies shape and are shaped by the social world and social interactions.

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Appendix A – Published April 2019

How do employers respond to employees who return to the workplace after experiencing the death of a loved one? A review of the literature

Review Article

How do employers respond to employees who return to the workplace after experiencing the death of a loved one? A review of the literature

Leanne Flux ✉, Alex Hassett ⓘ & Margie Callanan

📄 Full Article   🖼 Figures & data   📖 References   ❝ Citations   📊 Metrics   🖨 Reprints & Permissions   **Read this article**

Abstract

In order to provide insight for employers in maintaining a mentally healthy and productive workforce, it is essential to understand how bereaved employees experience workplace support. A global literature search was conducted between February 2018 and April 2018, resulting in 15 papers directly matching stipulated inclusion and exclusion criteria. Three common themes emerged from the data, namely Instrumental Support, Informational Support and Emotional Support. Findings suggest that while various employers endeavoured to show sympathy and flexibility to bereaved employees, others were found to be less responsive with certain areas of workplace support being reported as insufficient.

🔍 **Keywords:** Death | bereavement | workplace | mental health | support

Appendix B – Published July 2020

Grieving in the workplace: how do grieving employees perceive their experience of workplace support from management?

Research Articles

Grieving in the workplace: how do grieving employees perceive their experience of workplace support from management?

Leanne Flux ✉ ⓘ, Alex Hassett ⓘ & Margie Callanan ⓘ

📄 Full Article   🖼 Figures & data   📖 References   ❝ Citations   📊 Metrics   🖶 Reprints & Permissions   **Read this article**

Abstract

To explore what bereaved employees consider as helpful support from their managers. An online questionnaire was completed by 40 participants from various occupations in the United Kingdom who had been bereaved of their spouse. The data were analysed using a qualitative thematic approach. Two key superordinate themes were found: 'Acknowledgement' and 'Response'. This study supports the growing initiative to set informal support for grieving employees thereby enhancing the provision of impactful and timely bereavement support in the workplace. These findings suggest that managers were considered to be supportive when they 'acknowledged' the bereaved employees' situation and their reactions to grief. Additionally, managers were thought to be supportive when they responded in offering specific support depending on the individual's circumstances and provided sufficient time and space for them to grieve. 'Acknowledging' and 'responding' appeared to promote understanding and instil a sense of being valued rather than the feeling of being just another number within the organisation. All participants were English speakers and a higher proportion were women, which may influence the generalisability of the findings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

A literature review on how employers respond to employees who return to the workplace after experiencing the death of a loved one.

Abstract

This literature review aimed to examine informal workplace bereavement support, focusing on how employers respond to bereaved employees. Employers are managing increasingly diverse age groups in their workforce due to longer life expectations. There is a gap in understanding the long-term impact of bereavement on mental health and the challenges of returning to work after such an experience. To provide meaningful workplace bereavement support, it is essential to gain insight into what support is being offered to bereaved employees, forming the basis for developing effective guidance for managers. A global literature systematic review was conducted resulting in 15 papers directly matching the inclusion criteria. The following databases were searched: 'PsychINFO', 'Web of Science', 'Business Source Premier' and 'Emerald Management E-Journals'. Additionally, a manual search was conducted through references in relevant journal articles. Three support themes emerged from the data namely, 'Instrumental', 'Informational' and 'Emotional' support. However, there were certain areas of support that were found to be lacking. Some managers showed empathy and flexibility whilst others offered limited support. Key findings indicate the need for timely and paid bereavement leave, flexible working arrangements, clear policy guidance and a deeper understanding of employees' situations to inform best practices and develop personalised support processes.

Introduction

Background

In 2017 the Office for National Statistics reported that there were 533,253 deaths registered in England and Wales (age breakdown profile: 90+ years = 28.7%, 80-89 years = 5.3%, 70-79 years = 18.7%, 50-69 years = 11.6%, 0-49 years = 5.7%) (ONS, 2017). Although the number of deaths recorded is affected by the age and size of the population, the Office for National Statics reported that people are tending to live longer. We can therefore assume that employers are being expected to manage a greater age diverse workforce than in the past.   Many of those experiencing the death of a loved one would have been employed and required to resume work responsibilities within several days of experiencing their personal loss (Hazen, 2009; McGuiness, 2009).

Although the experience of grief as a result of the death of a loved one has been studied in-depth, less is understood about the longer term affects that bereavement has on mental health and life events such as returning to work after such an experience (Fitzpatrick, 2008; Gibson et al., 2010). Charles-Edwards (2001) highlights that managers may feel unprepared or uneasy when having to cope with the reality of a bereaved employee. It appears that there may be an absence of clear understanding on exactly what management would find useful guidance when supporting employees during the grieving period and the return-to-work process. Therefore, to develop clear and meaningful forms of guidance for employers, we need to understand the experiences of the bereaved employee (Tehan & Thompson, 2013).

Past Models of Grief

In 1944, Lindemann suggested that to find a life balance, those who have been bereaved and are grieving need to accept the reality of their loss and learn to cope in life without the deceased, by focusing on forming new relationships in their changed life. In 1957, Freud proposed that emotional

bonds are what keep individuals connected and that humans have the means to cope with death in a natural way. He argued that, opposed to the idea conveyed by society, grief does not have a chronological time limit, as it is a process that the bereaved individual needs to work through in their own time (Freud, 1957).

In 1972, Parkes **'P**hase Model of Grief' suggested that bereavement grief bears a resemblance to physical injury rather than illness. He described that wounds heal over time, but realistically more time would be needed should further injury occur. Therefore, he proposed that grief could be additionally complicated by factors such as illness or stigma. Stigma can be described as demonstrating behaviours such as social judgement, avoidance or awkwardness shown towards certain individuals (Palmer, 2004). Further to this, Parkes (1972) identified that there are many factors that contribute to how an individual responds to the death of a loved one, and his research recognised that compassionate support and understanding was a significant factor in the grief recovery process of a bereaved individual. The term support can be split into various elements namely, emotional (empathy), instrumental (practical support) and informational (guidance advice) (Taylor, 2007).

It was also around this time that, Kübler-Ross (1969) established a 'Five Stage Model' to describe the various stages that an individual may experience in the process of grieving. Despite this model being broadly accepted (Downe-Wamboldt & Tamlyn, 1997), as well as currently being used in grief support globally (Bergman, et al., 2010), this framework has been questioned due to various researchers being unable to validate it in several empirical studies (e.g. Bell & Taylor, 2011; Maciejewski et al., 2007). However, many do recognise the value and insight this framework brings to the workplace (Friedrich & Wustenhagen, 2015).

Present Models of Grief

More recent theoretical perspectives have rejected the traditional sequential models of grief and the idea of needing to sever bonds with the deceased as a way of coping with loss (Davies, 2004). Grief research over the last decade has emphasised a focus on self-perception and the process of sense making. For example, the death of a life partner may instil a struggle for the bereaved in their evolving identity, hindering or creating interference in the way in which they perceive and accept themselves and their role in the world (Schaefer & Moos, 2001). A death may push the bereaved to necessitate in relearning themselves, their life and their past assumptions of their life and their worldview (Neimeyer et al., 2002). When an individual endeavours to integrate their grief with their work life, there is the potential for conflict and a series of complex biological, psychological, and social (bio-psychosocial) processes may be activated (Bento, 1994).

Stroebe and Schut's (1999) 'Dual Process Model of Coping' proposes that individuals who are grieving alternate between coping; namely loss-oriented coping, whereby they attempt to come to terms with and reconcile the actual loss into their life, and restoration-oriented coping, whereby they endeavour to adjust to the changes that are associated with the life changing circumstances such as the death of a loved one. Bakker and Demerouti (2014) classify elements of work into job demands and job resources, forming the 'Job Demand-Resources Theory' (JD-R). This theory proposes that work environments trigger two specific processes: a health impairment approach and a motivational approach. Continuous exposure to high job demands for an employee can lead to exhaustion, fatigue, and health problems, representing a health impairment process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Rationale

Palmer (2004) highlights that the tone for how an organisation is perceived in responding to a grieving employee is primarily set by management, surpassing the impact of formal organisational

policies and practices. In the course of a manager's career, it is realistic to anticipate situations where they must normalise discussions about death and provide informal support and guidance to a grieving employee (Hazen, 2009). Managers should ideally strike a balance between practical capability and an understanding of the unique situation, coupled with emotional intelligence and compassion (Charles-Edwards, 2001). McGuinness (2009) asserts that managers often seek guidance on appropriately supporting grieving employees (or those facing mental distress) and recommends that organisational policies outline clear and meaningful procedures as a reference framework. Additionally, McGuinness (2009) suggests that such a document could serve as confirmation that the organisation takes the wellbeing of its employees, particularly concerning grief work and mental health seriously.

Over the past decade, there has been a notable emphasis on workplace mental health and wellbeing (Schnall et al., 2009; Thompson & Bates, 2009). The emphasis recognises the necessity for organisations to consider the integration of employees' work and personal lives, with a crucial aspect being the management of grief in the workplace as part of this process (Tehan & Thompson, 2013). By understanding best practice support may assist employers to develop processes that can fundamentally guide managers in how to positively manage employees who are mentally distressed. This is more likely to result in healthy motivated personnel, lower staff turnover, minimise sickness absence and sustained organisational performance and profitability (American Hospice Foundation, 2000). Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to determine how employers have responded to and what informal support was provided to bereaved employees.

Method

This electronic literature search was conducted between February 2018 and April 2018. Search terms were entered and combined to discover relevant literature. The search terms were carried out on databases that were chosen for their relevance to topic, research quality and breadth

offered. The following databases were searched: 'PsychINFO', 'Web of Science', 'Business Source Premier' and 'Emerald Management E-Journals'; as well as a manual search conducted through references in relevant journal articles. The results of which examined titles that focused specifically on bereavement and grief, coupled with workplace demands, and how the managers of bereaved and grieving employees may have offered support. The terms searched included, 'Death AND/OR Bereavement AND Workplace', 'Support to bereaved employees' OR 'Managing bereaved employees'.

The literature search resulted in 963 database articles. Titles were manually screened in the first instance followed by the assessment of abstracts of what were considered as relevant to the research. These chosen applicable full text articles (n=61) were subsequently fully read and reference lists were manually searched (n=13). This resulted in a total of n=74 publications. Inclusion criteria for the literature search comprised English language journals only and evidence based reported findings, which involved processes of conducting research, analysing data and drawing conclusions based on best available evidence around what support was offered to bereaved individuals in the workplace. Dissertations were included if they discussed or examined the ways in which an employer was reported to have engaged with, managed or supported their employees. Literature that investigated formal support such as grief therapy or counselling in dealing with a death (n=9) were excluded. Additionally, any non-work-related bereavement (n=9), non-family related grief such as those working in the caring sector (n=6) or individuals who experienced fatalities when in the workplace (n=4) were also excluded. There was a large amount of literature which did not appear to be evidence based, stating opinions on how employers should support their bereaved employees (n=29). These opinion articles were also excluded from the literature review. Of the papers screened 15 were deemed specifically relevant to this topic. (See Appendix A and B for summary selection process).

A qualitative thematic analysis was applied to the remaining 15 articles. This process allows for theoretical flexibility rendering the capacity for a rich and clear account of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following a method of reduction and abstraction common themes were grouped together into similar categories. Extracts from the articles were allocated to the appropriate theme thereby creating themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Quality Assessment

The studies were assessed for quality in meeting the inclusion criteria and were evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (Table One). Additionally, seven qualitative research guidelines were considered as defined by a framework created by Elliott et al. (1999) (Table Two). Despite two of the 15 reviewed articles appearing to lack specific detail around exactly how the analysis was done (e.g.: Moss, 2017; Penny, 2014), they were not excluded. The reason for this is that the report discussed specific examples on how employers supported their bereaved employees and therefore played a role in contributing to the relevance of the data collected. Findings were assessed by an independent reviewer to ensure objectivity and enhance the study's overall quality and limitations were considered in the reporting of all findings.

Table One: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)

	CASP Questions:	Yes	No
1.	Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?		
2.	Is the qualitative methodology appropriate?		
3.	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		
4.	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		
5.	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?		
6.	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		
7.	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		
8.	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		
9.	Is there a clear statement of findings?		
10.	How valuable is the research?		

Table Two: Reviewing Qualitative Research (Elliott et al., 1999)

Reviewing Qualitative Research:
1. Owning one's perspective (describes particular experiences)
2. Situating the sample (provision of basic descriptive facts)
3. Grounding in examples (offering particular examples of each theme found)
4. Coherence (creating on understanding so all the pieces fit together to form a clear framework for the experience)
5. General versus specific tasks (results are based on a suitable range of events which are described in a systematic and comprehensive way)
6. Coherence (creation of understanding so all the pieces fit together to form a clear framework for the experience)
7. Resonating with readers (the information is represented in an accurate manner and expanded where appropriate to create appreciation and comprehension)

A Review of the Literature: Article Findings

'Social Support Theory' defined here is the experience of support that shows that an individual is valued and cared for (Breen & O'Connor, 2011). To ensure analytical rigor the data were analytically dissected based on the type of support presented in Taylor's (2007) categories of social support framework. They are Instrumental Support which consists of the supply of tangible assistance; Information Support which consists of guidance and advice and Emotional Support which involves the provision of empathy and understanding (Taylor, 2007).

- Instrumental Support – All 15 articles (n=15) discussed various degrees of Instrumental Support experienced by bereaved employees. This theme was further analysed and split into three subthemes namely: Practical Support (n=6), Bereavement Leave (n=11) and Flexible Working (n=6).

- Informational Support - A total of three articles (n=3) explored the theme of Informational Support, suggesting that guidance for management as well as bereaved employees was or would be particularly helpful.

- Emotional Support - A total of 10 articles (n=10) explored the theme of Emotional Support, which was further analysed into two subthemes themes namely: Acknowledgement (n=9) and Empathy (n=6).

Instrumental Support

Instrumental Support defined here as the provision of tangible, physical or practical assistance (Breen & O'Connor, 2011).

Practical Support

McGuinness's (2009) study on bereavement support in the workplace concludes that short-term support immediately after the death of a loved one tends to be relatively good. Studies in this review highlight that this included practical support from management and work colleagues such as making cups of tea (Breen & O'Connor, 2011), facilitating and attending the funeral (Breen & O'Connor, 2011; McGuiness, 2009), keeping colleagues in the workplace informed, managing and facilitating the bereaved employees return to work (Gibson et al., 2010). It also included sending letters and cards of condolence to bereaved employees, (Fitzpatrick, 2008; McGuiness, 2009), food contributions (DiGiulio, 1995), and even a mention of the setting up of a scholarship in memory of a deceased loved one (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

Additionally, reports of employers conducting home visits to offer condolences and lend a helping hand with physical assistance were reported to have made it easier for the bereaved employee. It was mentioned as being helpful knowing there was an individual who understood their position and could be called upon as and when, if needed (Russell, 1998).

Bereavement Leave

In Ireland and the European Union there is no legal entitlement to being offered compassionate, paid or other leave as a result of bereavement (McGuinness, 2009). In a study

conducted by Malacrida (1999) which examined the interactions with social institutions, participants were found to describe not being allowed extra time off work to attend the funeral and some having to return to work the day after experiencing the death of their child. In Charles-Edwards (2009) case study a disgruntled bereaved employee mentions that they found a note on their desk upon their return to work from bereavement leave which queried why they had taken time off work.

Conversely, DiGiulio's (1995) research highlights that bereaved employees repeatedly cited that one of the most helpful ways of support was to receive time off work with pay (51%). Further supported by Breen and O'Connor's (2011) study which highlights that bereaved employees' most immediate concern after experiencing the death of a loved one, was not being allowed paid time off from work. In their study they found that only four out of 21 participants reported that their employers had in fact allowed them to take what they felt was an appropriate amount of time off work to grieve (Breen & O'Connor, 2011).

Research conducted by Bauer and Murray (2018) consisting of bereaved employees who worked for large national corporations concluded that three days leave for mourning the loss of a loved one was offered to them. Additionally, it was felt that some Human Resource (HR) policies reporting on bereavement leave lacked clarity and employees were left feeling unsure how to proceed (Bauer & Murray, 2018). An example can be seen in a case study whereby many of the participants recall not being certain as to how much time they were allowed to take and therefore found that some may push themselves back to work before they were ready (Moss, 2017). Russell's (1998) study indicated that the majority of organisations (83%) did have a corporate bereavement leave policy however in the remaining 11 companies leave was cited as discretionary. Between one and five days leave was found to be granted to 77% of the employers surveyed and 15% were prepared to allow specific amounts of unpaid leave ranging from one to 48 days (Russell, 1998).

In Australia, The Fair Work Act (2009) accounts for the provision of two days of compassionate leave. However, in a study conducted in Ireland, McGuinness (2009) highlights that of 34 organisations surveyed, 91% (n=31) were found to have made a provision for compassionate leave ranging from three to five days depending on a sliding scale of the relationship with the deceased. Furthermore, 38% allowed more than five days, 50% allowed three days and 1% allowed two days off. Hall et al.'s. (2013) investigation concluded that time away from work was allocated between five to 10 days leave with some organisations offering a guide of 20 days of leave for bereavement of a close relative (spouse, parent or child). Additionally, Russell's (1998) survey concluded that the Ministry of Defence staff regulations allow up to five days of special paid leave. This may be extended for up to another five days at the discretion of personnel management with additional time granted for essential travelling. Authority for these decisions were found to be able to be delegated to local line management (Russell, 1998).

Russell's (1998) review examined how various organisations support their staff in their bereavement leave. IBM were reported to have a structured hierarchy of staff responsible for approving special paid leave: Line Manager - up to five days, HR Manager - up to 10 days, HR Manager and Director of HR - over 10 days (Russell, 1998). Shell UK was found to provide up to four working days and if a longer period was required the supervisor would refer the case to personnel (outstanding annual leave was taken into account). However, in a qualitative study conducted by Hall et al. (2013) evidence demonstrates that many HR bereavement policies and paid leave tended to be left to the discretion of the line managers. Some managers were found to stick rigidly to the HR policy documented timings and others tended to not be fully aware of the entitlements of their employees. This conflicting information could potentially be overwhelming not only to the bereaved (Hall et al., 2013) but to the managers as well. This concurs with McGuinness's (2009) findings who highlights that out of the 34 organisations surveyed, half (n=15) of the line

managers were allowed to use their discretion in offering a bereaved employee increased days off for compassionate leave than those specified in the HR policy.

Additionally, a qualitative meta-analysis conducted by Andersen et al. (2012) investigated the return to work of employees with common mental disorders concluded that support from supervisors played a significant part in the return to work. Although this study does not directly relate to bereavement it still links in with time off work due to mental distress possibly as a result of grief. This study found that during their time off, the perception of support could consist of the employer sending a message, thereby showing that the employee is respected, valued, and missed. However, it was noted that several employees reported experiencing a lack of management support during their sick leave, mentioning either that the employer did not contact them at all, or they interpreted the regular contact from their employer as forceful and interrogatory (Andersen et al., 2012).

Flexible Working

Another common theme in this review found that one of the most helpful management responses was the offer of flexible working hours, reduced workloads and helping, or taking over some of the bereaved employees work duties or responsibilities (DiGiulio, 1995; Fitzpatrick, 2008; Gibson et al., 2011; McGuiness, 2009). In a qualitative study at a university setting, one of the faculty members recalled that she had received personal support from the Dean after experiencing bereavement. She was allowed to drop one of her classes which was reported to have lightened her workload and stress levels. However, she recalled that although she had received support from the college, sadly she did not feel she had received any recognition of her bereavement experience from her immediate department (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

In 1995 a study conducted by DiGiulio in the United States, consisting of 106 child welfare workers from four private and two public child welfare agencies who had experienced personal loss, shared their experiences of support in the workplace. The study indicated that 25% of the participants

repeatedly mentioned that the employing organisation had responded with a willingness to change bereaved workers schedules and just 37% reported that the supervisors had actually shown a willingness to adjust their work schedules.

Conversely, Eyetsemitan's (1998) study found that 84% of the 145 volunteers who had experienced bereavement whilst in employment, reported being expected to resume full responsibilities after their return to work and 64% advised they had not received any support from the workplace. In 2006, McGuiness (2009) surveyed 34 Irish organisations bereavement policies and procedures which ranged from 150 to 5,000 employees from a mixture of private, public and local government organisations. Only one third (n=13) of the organisations examined were found to have offered their employees some form of flexible work options. Further studies describe how participants are expected to get back to work and pick up the same workload they were managing prior to experiencing bereavement (Gibson et al., 2011). They recalled how they struggled with the concept of being expected to attend meetings and having to complete tasks that required memory recall and concentration (Gibson et al., 2010). The idea of having to face new challenges and projects was reported as daunting and they felt that energy, confidence, and creativity was significantly reduced shortly after experiencing bereavement (Gibson et al., 2010).

Informational Support

Informational support is defined here as the provision of guidance and advice to either the management or to the bereaved employee (Breen & O'Connor, 2011).

Within the 34 Irish organisations that were surveyed, 88% were found to lack written bereavement policies that would provide guidelines for managers on procedures or best practice support (McGuiness, 2009). Only one government organisation in this study was found to have developed their own guidelines on bereavement which acted as guidance for managers and used for training purposes (McGuiness, 2009). Long-term support was deemed less common, and only four of

the 34 organisations surveyed were found to have information on long-term bereavement support that could be presented to employees, with just three providing guidelines to staff on how to support bereaved employees. Fourteen organisations were found to have made provision for employees to access counselling (McGuiness, 2009). Apart from formal counselling being offered to the bereaved employee (McGuiness, 2009), research suggests that studies discussing any form of bereavement guidance is focused on support for managers rather than to the bereaved employees themselves. However, McGuiness, (2009) argues that there is a lack of structured resources to help managers to support their bereaved staff.

Promoting counselling, may be a two-edged sword. In the first instance, there is an increasing recognition of its potential value by organisations yet care needs to be taken not to deskill managers, albeit unintentionally. As one particular manager reported that they felt they could not talk to their bereaved staff, as it was understood that they were expected to send them to a professional to do that (Charles-Edwards, 2009). McGuiness's (2009) research concludes that although elements such as flexible working, assistance programmes and counselling were offered they were not coordinated in a way that positively supports bereaved employees.

Emotional Support

Emotional support is defined here as the provision of warmth, understanding, acknowledgement and empathy (Breen & O'Connor, 2011).

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement described here is the ability to identify the existence and validity of an individual's experience of loss. DiGiulio's (1995) study highlights that only 44% of the bereaved participants reported that their immediate managers acknowledged their loss of a loved one.

In more recent research, Bauer and Murray (2018) examined how bereaved individuals manage their emotions within a professional setting. One of the 29 participants emphasised the

benefits of care, empathy and emotional connection at work citing that acknowledgement of their grief allowed them to visibly mourn without generating tension around their professional identity. Further studies observed participants mentioning that their employer took the time to acknowledge their bereavement, their feelings and their loss, which in turn left them with the feeling of being a valued member of the organisation. Therefore, acknowledging the impact of personal trauma and showing sensitivity and a listening ear was perceived as particularly supportive (Breen & O'Connor, 2011; Gibson et al., 2011). An example of this can be seen with an organisation, Cisco System, who reportedly have a policy for the CEO to be notified within 48 hours of any employee or their immediate family member falls seriously ill or passes away (Kanov et al., 2004).

A case study conducted by Charles-Edwards (2009) highlights how co-workers met with managers to acknowledge and support their colleague's loss and to discuss concerns. They shared how they felt and to talk about what was on their minds prior to the bereaved employee returning to work. Many reported finding it uncomfortable but also a huge relief to share their feelings. This was followed by a recollection of how the bereaved individual met with their manager upon their return to work and how the supportive manager had checked in on them daily within the first week of return and then once or twice a week thereafter (Charles-Edwards, 2009).

Conversely, Gibson et al.'s, (2011) study found that the most common unhelpful management reaction was a lack of response. This study highlights several participants reporting that there was a lack of acknowledgement of the difficulties following bereavement that they had faced. They described struggling to cope with high cognitively exhausting grief plus stressful and demanding workplace situations. Additionally, two participants reported experiencing bullying and confrontational behaviour in the workplace (Gibson et al., 2011). This review created much discussion around how many people have the assumption that grief is short-term and finite and how this conveys a lack of understanding and thoughtlessness along with hurtful and sometimes flippant comments thereby creating the feeling of insensitivity in workplace social interactions. Examples of

this were recounted whereby coworkers were found to avoid the bereaved individual, as well as some work colleagues telling the bereaved employee to remove photos of the deceased from their work desk. These comments and reactions were perceived as particularly distressing and hurtful to the bereaved (Bauer & Murray, 2018; Breen & O'Connor, 2011; Gibson et al., 2010, 2011).

Moss's (2017) case study posits that some managers and co-workers were visibly uncomfortable and unsure how to behave while in the presence of the bereaved employee. Whereas Breen and O'Connor (2011) found that the impression from employers and staff in the workplace were perceived to convey that the bereaved should just 'get over it' and bereaved respondents reported feeling judged due to their experience of grief not fitting in with the expectations of some of those around them. Gibson et al., (2011) participants relayed that they felt there was a lack of acknowledgement of how difficult their loss or grieving experience was.

Empathy

Empathy can be defined as the capacity to comprehend and actively share in the emotional experiences of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Singer et al., 2004). DiGiulio's (1995) review revealed significant insights into the role of empathy in organisational settings. The findings indicated that a substantial proportion of participants (69%), reported that their managers frequently provided various forms of empathetic support. Words of encouragement were cited by 48% of participants as a common form of assistance. Additionally, 43% recounted instances where they engaged in conversations about personal loss, and 39% recalled being reassured that their emotional responses were normal. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of the managers in encouraging empathy within the workplace. A prominent 75% of participants recalled receiving words of encouragement from their manager, which demonstrates the significant role that managers play in providing emotional support. Furthermore, 57% of participants remembered instances where their manager actively listened to their concerns, indicating a significant emphasis on empathetic listening. Additionally, 45% recounted experiencing gestures of friendship from their managers, highlighting

the importance of cultivating a supportive and empathetic working relationship. Finally, 39% of participants emphasized the significance of their managers providing reassurance, further highlighting the positive impact of empathy within the workplace.

Whereas a more recent study conducted by Bauer and Murray (2018) found participants describing their expressions of grief as having to be restrained in the workplace. They reported that they felt that there was no space in the workplace deemed appropriate to release their grief and that the bereaved employee was expected to show up and perform like always (Bauer & Murray, 2018; Moss, 2017). A survey conducted by Russell (1998) relayed that 47% of participants revealed that they felt that their line manager lacked empathy and did not make performance concessions upon their return to work. A further study demonstrates that bereaved employees had been written up for low performance due to a missing a meeting whilst crying in the bathroom (Moss, 2017). Participants felt that their trauma of being bereaved was not understood by their managers and therefore minimal empathy shown, led to a lack of allowances being made for them in accordance with workplace demands and performance. This resulted in them receiving poor performance reviews which was deemed extremely unfair (Gibson et al., 2010). Penny (2014) found that 32% reported feeling that they had not been treated with compassion by their employer. This poses the question, is this a result of a lack of understanding or a lack of empathy?

Discussion

The aim of this literature review was to explore how employers were found to respond to bereaved employees. This review indicates that the need for support must be recognised, accessible, sufficient, and perceived as useful (Breen & O'Connor, 2011). Although this literature review covered mainly qualitative studies, the small range of available information provided insight into what support was received and what may be lacking. In analysing the available data there were some interesting psychological perspectives as well as significant areas that stood out as lacking.

Psychological Perspectives

The literature cites that many organisations have become aware that employees' productivity may be connected to their well-being. However, it appears that the focus has traditionally been placed on their physical health rather than mental health (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). Harnois and Gabriel (2000) suggest that employment may provide five areas of psychological experience that promote mental well-being namely, social contact, social identity, structure in time, regular activity and purpose. A related element is the degree to which an employer encourages or impedes the development of an employees' performance (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). This is further supported by Bakker and Demerouti's (2014), 'Job Demands-Resources Theory'.

The literature proposes that the mere perception of support may decrease stress with a correlation to benefits for well-being. Therefore, the belief that support is readily available appears to have strong positive effects on mental health, more so than the actual receipt of support (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). Conversely, the receipt of support may have costs. Support is presumed to be helpful in buffering negative circumstances, however some evidence demonstrates that the positive relationship between bereavement and support are mixed (Li & Chen, 2016). Some studies reveal that there is a negative correlation between unwanted support and the creation of mental distress (e.g., Andersen et al., 2012). Others found insufficient evidence to support this (Li & Chen, 2016). Nevertheless, the variability of the results suggests that there may be different ways that individuals perceive support as beneficial with varying results in how it would impact the differing receivers (Li & Chen, 2016). For example, if an individual requires emotional support but receives informational support instead, this misfired attempt to support may raise psychological distress rather than decreasing it (Thoits, 1986). Therefore, the type of support that may be required needs to be assessed and provided on an individual basis.

Other issues around receiving social support may come from the recipient. Individuals who are experiencing distress may end up driving their support networks away (Matt & Dean, 1993). Gurung et al., (2003) concludes that those needing social support the most were possibly less likely to get it and therefore experience gaps in the support required. In Rook's (1984) study of 120 widowed women, it was found that negative social interactions were consistently and strongly correlated to result in negative well-being. The study indicates that having their privacy invaded or the promises of assistance that did not follow through were among the scenario's that worsened the adjustment process. On the other hand, certain individuals are more effective than others in extracting whatever support they may require. Dunkel-Schetter et al., (1987) argue that being socially competent appears to be particularly important for obtaining emotional support but may not predict as much in the ability to gain instrumental support.

Furthermore, the literature draws attention to the significance of understanding cultural diversity in how support may be experienced or utilised. It indicates for example, that the interpretation of social support has been influential in the psychological literature, namely the process of intended efforts to provide help, may be specific to the Western way of thinking and may not extend to cultures that view relationships as interdependent rather than as a resource. Such cultures as East Asia, may draw on suggested support from the feeling that they are a member of an interdependent community to which they have responsibilities rather than receiving for example acknowledgement or empathy (Taylor, 2007).

Instrumental Support

Lack of Response in Long-Term Support

In the review conducted by Gibson et al., (2011) it was found that although short-term support was referred to as 'good', the longer-term support with the unstructured approach of 'whatever is needed' was found to be particularly unsupportive. Many of the participants recalled that they had not been offered the kind of proactive informal support they felt that they needed.

Furthermore, participants point out that a named person within an organisation should be made available to help with the arrangement of informal support and that employers should be more proactive in their approach to supporting bereaved employees rather than waiting for them to ask for specific assistance (Gibson et al., 2011).

As demonstrated in the 'Job Demand-Resources Theory' (Bakker & Demourouti, 2014), findings indicate that specific work strain and emotional demands have frequently been established to predict fatigue in various occupational circles (Demerouti et al., 2004; Hakanen et al., 2006). Conversely, job resources have been found to support employees in promoting aspirational achievement in work-related goals. This is observed as a motivational process (Boyd et al., 2011). Current research highlights that recovery is more likely to take place when grief-related suffering is reduced, and positive emotions are triggered and managed (Bonanno, 2001). As Bakker (2011) posits, resources such as positive encouragement and supportive management feedback result in raised performance levels from employees. Consequently, Penny (2014) found that many employees (56%) who feel they have not received proper support from their employer would consider leaving their job. Therefore, it is essential that employers get the correct balance between showing compassion versus the operational requirements of the business (McGuiness & Williams, 2014).

Lack of Clarity around Time Allowed off Work

Results from this review indicate that one of the main concerns that bereaved employees have is around being granted paid time off from work (Breen & O'Connor, 2011). Studies demonstrate there appears to be an inconsistency within organisations with regards to time allowed off after experiencing bereavement and more often than not these decisions were left to the line managers with minimal guidance. Some managers adhered strictly to the organisations HR policy documents (if there were any), however others appeared inclined to be unaware of the rights of their bereaved staff (Hall et al., 2013; McGuinness, 2009).

Studies also highlight that some policies lack clarity, leaving the bereaved employees confused in their entitlements the result of which left them to return to work perhaps before they were ready (Bauer & Murray, 2018; Moss, 2017). In Fitzpatrick's (2008) qualitative review participants recalled their return to work as being rather difficult, with two respondents highlighting that they found returning to work was beneficial, however, did not mention how. Cowls and Galloway's (2009) study noted that employees were urged to stabilise their grief symptoms before returning to the workplace whereas Noordik et al's. (2011) study found that they were encouraged to return to the workplace whilst still encountering common mental distress such as depression, anxiety and stress symptoms. However, to be noted, none of these studies examined indicators for the employees' readiness for their return to the workplace (Andersen et al., 2012).

Informational Support

Lack of HR Guidance

McGuiness (2009) suggests that there is a lack of written bereavement policies providing guidance to management on how to specifically support bereaved colleagues, the review indicated that any guidance available was mostly focused on general information on loss for managers and not directly for the bereaved employee. In Gibson et al's. (2011), study, managers recall how they had received training to deal with addiction in the workplace however, managing a bereaved employee was not included in their management development programme. The research discusses how participants suggest that staff and managers should be receiving education around the impact of bereavement (Fitzpatrick, 2008; Gibson et al., 2011). More specifically in how to respond so as to enable managers to recognise their personal biases from legitimate business requirements (Hall et al., 2013), as well as a measure of emotional self-protection (Vivona & Ty, 2011).

DiGiulio (1995) suggests that an important area for policy consideration is around the reallocation of work duties, a flexible work program and a flexible modified expectation of job performance. Although various forms of support may be offered within organisations it appeared to

lack co-ordination in a way to be beneficial to bereaved employees (McGuiness, 2009). In

accordance with the Dutch Occupational Physicians Common Mental Disorders (CMD) Guidelines,

it was concluded that 75% of employees on stress-related sick leave who receive work-directed

interventions will have fully integrated and returned to work by three months (van der Klink et al.,

2003). Therefore, obtaining an in-depth understanding of the encouraging or discouraging role of the

return-to-work process, including the perceptions and behaviour of employees could assist in further

development of supportive work-directed interventions (Noordik et al., 2011).

Interestingly, the Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (2015) funded a study which

evaluated the efficacy and value of a standardised letter created by the Council for Work and Health.

The aim of this research was to discover and reach a consensus on how the fit note can optimally be

used by stakeholder groups (GP's, employer and employee/patient) to assist in the return-to-work

process and workplace retention (Coole et al., 2015). More specifically the aim was to assist the

employer who may receive a 'not fit to work' note from the General Practitioner (GP) with

suggestions, modifications, or adjustments to help with coping mechanisms for the distressed

employee in their return to work. For example, if a bereaved employee has been given coping

strategies around dealing with grief, then the employer should be required to give them time to use

these strategies, as well as to acknowledge when they are coping and managing their workload

versus when they may feel overwhelmed (Institute of Occupational Safety & Health, 2015).

Outcomes of this research recommends the provision of training and education for these

stakeholders, modifications to the fit note itself and suggestions around changes to organisational

policies and procedures. It was noted that the current fit note was not fit for purpose and very

unlikely to achieve its objectives without further investment of time, money, and further legislation

(Coole et al., 2015). However, should this research continue momentum this may be a great step

forward in individualised care for employees in their return to work and guidance for employers,

resulting in managers showing independent care and understanding in accordance with what the

employee is going through and thereby creating a sense of value and support.

Emotional Support

Lack of understanding particularly in performance management

This review highlights that one of managements most helpful responses are around offering flexible working hours and reduced workloads (DiGiulio, 1995; Eyetsemitan, 1998; Gibson et al., 2011). Studies in this review indicate that many bereaved employees struggled with how they were expected to pick up the same workloads they had prior to experiencing bereavement and how this negatively impacted their ability to perform at work (Gibson et al., 2010, 2011). Eyetsemitan (1998) found that by organisations pressing their employees to continue with full-time work duties after experiencing a bereavement, was likely to bring about stifled grief that contributed to negative outcomes impacting the employee's wellbeing, mental health and their work performance. In the workplace, grief may be entwined with the creation of the individual's work role and personal identity (Bento, 1994). This finding supports Stroebe and Schut's (1999) 'Dual Process Model of Coping' whereby when attempting to cope with grief, whilst trying to restore a changed life and manage ongoing work pressures a grieving employee may encounter work-life conflict which is likely to put additional stress and strain on them, leading to intense emotional and physical distress.

This review highlights how certain management may neglect to make necessary performance allowances. This lack of action may therefore result in the bereaved employee obtaining a poor performance review which can be perceived as unjust and unfair (Gibson et al., 2010; Moss, 2017; Russell, 1998). Thus, highlighting the importance of creating awareness, showing empathy and acknowledging the bereavement, as it instils a sense of being a valued member of staff (Bauer & Murray, 2018; Breen & O'Connor, 2011; Gibson et al., 2011). This forms part of what is referred to as the 'psychological contract' which is the unwritten belief that employees and employers have about one another. It acknowledges that an employee's dedication is not established through pay

alone, and that employers who show understanding to the mental health, quality of life and wellbeing of their staff, can further secure an employees' loyalty and motivation therefore in turn improve productivity, performance and staff retention (Kanov et al., 2004).

A Brief Overview of the Reviewed Papers

These 15 papers collectively offer an overarching exploration of how employees experience and manage grief in the workplace, highlighting a range of factors that influence well-being and the effectiveness of support. The strengths of this body of research can be found in the methodological diversity, which includes qualitative and quantitative approaches (such as case studies, meta-analysis, IPA), and the ability to delve into specific aspects of various grief support experiences. Some studies are context-specific, providing insights into unique situations, such as returning to work after bereavement in a university setting, or parents coping with suicide of a child in Ireland. Additionally, the papers address the support employees received and the procedures in place that assisted them.   However, there are also several weaknesses to consider. Some studies have a relatively small sample size, which may restrict the generalisability of their findings. Specific contexts, such as road traffic accidents or perinatal deaths, limit the applicability of their results to broader populations. Despite these limitations, these papers contribute valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges faced by managers and bereaved employees and the opportunities surrounding workplace grief (Appendix B).

Limitations and Future Research

Although the papers reviewed were from a global perspective, these findings offer a limited diversity of respondents which provides a snapshot of white-collar professionals self-reported experiences of bereavement support in the workplace (Bauer & Murray, 2018). Furthermore, the research relied predominantly on papers from the USA and UK/Ireland which can present potential bias and a lack of generalisability. Such studies may fail to capture the diverse perspectives and

experiences of people from other regions and cultures around the world. Using English only papers further exacerbates this issue, as it excludes a substantial portion of the global population that may not have English proficiency or access to English language publications. This focus could lead to a skewed understanding of the phenomena potentially overlooking critical insights that are common in non-English speaking countries.

Despite lived experiences providing important deep and accurate understanding into the topic of bereavement in the workplace, these experiences may vary from one employee to another, therefore further extensive examination is suggested so as to investigate this area more thoroughly (Hall et al., 2013). Further studies may investigate more specifically the ways that individuals died, length of service within the organisation as well as the bereaved employees' relationship with the deceased or their manager (Bauer & Murray, 2018).

McGuinness (2009) suggests that managers predominantly desire guidance around suitable options of support for bereaved and grieving employees. They advise that bereavement policies should set out clear and concise procedures/allowances for grieving employees, and management should be presented with a useable reference framework. Therefore, further in-depth research around this topic is recommended and as suggested by Hall et al., (2013) not only should research involve input from grieving employees but also directly from management, so as to understand their experiences and requirements for helpful support.

While it is not possible to completely set aside biases, the researcher aimed to distance herself from her personal experiences to understand and represent the literature more appropriately (Elliott et al., 1999). With regards to the quality of the papers, many of the articles were found to be based on opinion with a lack of evidence or examples to back up the stated beliefs. These papers were therefore excluded from the review. Taking the 15 studies into consideration, despite finding that four of them were deemed as containing poor quality of write up, they were not excluded due to the

fact that they provided specific and useful examples on how employers supported their bereaved employees. Most of the studies were qualitative in analysis, which leaves them open to limitations linked to semi-structured interviews and the way the transcripts were analysed along with the interpretation and the formulation of the findings (Gibson et al., 2011).

Finally, Australian legislation (Fair Work Act, 2009), grants up to two days of paid compassionate leave, while in the EU there is currently no specific legal right to compassionate, paid or alternative leave for a bereavement, which is at the discretion of the employer (O'Connor et al., 2010). Therefore, it would be worth conducting further research into current bereavement policies and practices specifically within the UK, investigating if length of service as well as type of bereavement impacted the kind of support that was offered.

Implications for Research and Practice

Given the inevitability of death, it is reasonable to expect organisations to provide suitable and clear guidance for their management in how to positively manage grieving employees in the workplace (Bento, 1994). By showing individualised empathetic understanding, presenting clear communication and ethical fairness, possible discrepancies between employer-employee expectations, perceptions, ambivalence, stress and strain can be eliminated (Bento, 1994). This awareness and acknowledgement may discourage possible disenfranchised grief, by endeavouring to steer clear of unrealistic norms and stigmas (Bento, 1994). Disenfranchised grief is when grief is perceived to be inappropriate, or the grievers social system of self-belief does not allow them to grieve (Bento, 1994). If grief is not acknowledged or is overlooked and not allowed to unfurl properly the mourner is at a raised risk of adverse physical and mental distress and intensified grief (Doka, 2002).

Therefore, it can be assumed that by understanding what kind of workplace bereavement support may positively impact an employee versus what area's may be lacking, will serve to

enlighten and empower management, to react in an appropriate and helpful manner. As General Practitioners (GP's) are the first and most frequent point of contact for a vast array of physical and mental ailments, if employers can offer their bereaved or mentally distressed employees the first line of informal support and understanding that they require, may in turn release the pressure and lighten the workload on the National Health Services (NHS).

It is not possible to eliminate all suffering, nor can employees be expected to check their emotions in at the door. However, as the lines between personal life and professional life blur, employers can use their position of leadership to unfold and develop a supportive process (Dutton et al., 2002). Through their knowledge, understanding and presence they can model their behaviours that set the stage for the approach of sense making from life changing events (Dutton et al., 2002). With access to proficient support and guidance, they can confidently empower grieving employees or those suffering from mental distress, to support each other and find their way through the pain (Dutton et al., 2002).

Based on personal experiences, many have opinions and preconceived ideas on how they believe others should behave when grieving (Thompson, 2002). Therefore, it is vitally important that employers comprehend that every relationship is unique, consequently every death will have a unique grieving experience (Thompson, 2002). Goleman (1995) determines that when individuals are observed to attempt to understand another situation it is perceived that they have compassion. Therefore, it can be assumed that when employers are observed to recognise the emotions of a bereaved employee and respond with clear supportive communication, understanding and compassion, it is likely to result in a perception of organisational support which is likely to raise productivity and increase morale and a sense of wellbeing (Palmer, 2004).

Conclusion

This review of the literature indicates that while many employers show sympathy and flexibility to bereaved employees, others can be less responsive and make it hard for bereaved employees to take the time they may need and obtain the support they may require (Penny, 2014). This review emphasises the impact on the bio-psychosocial element of grieving and how essential the role of support in the workplace is in the recovery process (Gibson et al., 2010; Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). Findings highlight that there appears to be an emphasis on the need for timeous and paid bereavement leave (Breen & O'Connor,2011; Digiulio, 1995) as well as adjusted flexible working arrangements for the bereaved (Digiulio, 1995; Fitzpatrick, 2008; Gibson et al., 2011; McGuiness, 2009).

Furthermore, findings indicate that clarity in policy guidance (Digiulio, 1995; McGuiness, 2009) and better understanding of an employees' situation (Gibson et al., 2010; Moss, 2017; Russell, 1998) may serve to better support bereaved employees who are experiencing mental distress in the workplace. Therefore, by understanding bereaved employees' experiences of workplace support, will not only create awareness and knowledge of what best practice support looks like but may also assist to develop an individualised support process. Thereby promoting a valued and mentally fit workforce resulting in a healthy and productive organisation (McGuinness, 2009).

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Appendix A: PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram

PRISMA

Identification

Records identified through database searching (duplicates removed):

n=963

Screening

Records left after screening for relevance to research (i.e. inclusion/exclusion criteria):

(n=61)

Additional records identified through manual reference search

n = 13

Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 74)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons
(n = 59)

Reasons: Focus on therapy technique (n=9); Opinion articles (n=30), Fatalities at work (n=4); Healthcare work (n=6); Non-work related bereavement (n=10)

Included

Studies included in review (n = 15)

Appendix B: Literature Review Overview

Search conducted Feb 2018 – April 2018

Authour/Date	Topic Focus	Paradigm/ Method	Context	Findings	Future Research
Andersen, M.F., Nielsen, K.M., & Brinkmann, S. (2012).	This study investigates what opportunities and what obstacles employees experienced when having common mental disorders and returning to work after a period of time off.	Meta-Analysis	Meta-ethnographic, n=8, (Denmark) Six electronic databases were used to identify relevant qualitative peer-reviewed studies for people with common mental disorders who returned to work.	This meta-analysis revealed that employees with common mental disorders encounter various challenges and facilitators when returning to work which are linked to personality, workplace social support and other social systems. They struggled to determine when they were ready to return and faced difficulties in implementing return to work solutions.	More high-quality qualitative research on return-to-work employees with common mental disorders. Further research to identify what organisations can do to minimise gap between intentions and implementation.
Bauer, J.C., & Murray, M.A. (2018)	This study explores how bereaved workers in white-collar jobs manage their emotions as a result of bereavement within their professional workspaces.	Qualitative	Thematic, n=29, (USA). Female = 8 Male = 6 Ages = mid-20's to mid-60s Including: African American, Hispanic/Latin/Mexican, Italian American and White/Caucasian.	This research found how employees' expressions of grief are shaped by the symbolic meaning of workplace space. It also indicates that certain social constructions of workspaces provide opportunities to resist professional norms. However, these opportunities may be limited by factors such as gender, work status, relationships and other features of social identity.	Greater focus to where support is offered and how organisations may move beyond simple public-private boundary framework. A deeper understanding of the interplay between professionalism and the spaces inhabited when dealing with grief to cultivate a better environment for bereaved employees.
Breen, L.J., & O'Connor, M. (2011).	This study investigates the role of the family and social	Qualitative	Grounded Theory, n=21, (Australia)	Although in some instances death of a loved one generates a closer family and society	Sample from a wider range of the bereaved population to better account for the diversity of

			Female = 16 Male = 5 Age = 24 – 71 years (M=47.95, SD = 10.83)	bond it is common for those relationships to collapse and disintegrate.	experiences. Further research to be done to reveal the family and social networks that may be more at risk of long-term relationship problems and how they may be identified and targeted for preventative work.
Charles-Edwards, D. (2009).	Examines how people respond to people bereaved at work.	Qualitative	Case Study, n=4, (UK)	This study highlights the needs for a more proactive and comprehensive approach to benefit the individuals involved as well as the overall well-being of the workplace.	Further research into what reliable written material is needed that managers can use as guidance.
DiGiulio, J.F. (1995).	Surveyed child welfare workers on the type of loss they experienced; the kind of benefits and emotional support they received from their organisation, management and co-workers, their expectations and possible problem areas.	Qualitative	The Loss Survey for Employees, n=106, (USA) Female = 86% Male = 14% Age = 23 – 66 years (M= 38) Caucasian = 79% African American = 20% Latino = 1% Married = 48% Divorced = 21% Never married = 21% Widowed = 9% Separated = 1%	The participants wished for more emotional support, an acknowledgement of their grief and a longer leave of absence than what was provided.	The use of a larger sample in worker losses in a more varied and diverse geographic area, may provide further information which may be applicable to a wider range of individuals.
Eyetsemitan, F. (1998).	This study explores stifled grief in the workplace and how organisational support may or may not be impacting this.	Mixed Methods	Mixed Methods, n=145, (USA) 67% - women 33% - men Ages 18 – 65 years (M=30.96 years)	Findings suggest that workplace practices promote stifled grief and that there is a desire for more formal organisational support and a clearer understanding of the bereavement process.	Future studies to research the impact of stifled grief on employee's mental health as well as on performance in a variety of different jobs. Additionally future studies should examine the type

					and size of workplaces as this may impact the way bereaved employees are dealt with.
Fitzpatrick, T.R. (2008).	This study examines bereavement experienced within a group of faculties following their return to work at a university.	Qualitative	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), n=7, (USA) Female = 6 Male = 1 Ag = 36 – 58 years (M=47 years)	The process of grieving may be ignored due to challenges and demands within the university setting. The university setting could also be observed as supportive. Faculties' perception of experiences suggests their expected work responsibilities make the bereavement support process complex. Two faculty participants reported the university to be helpful and supportive.	Future studies to examine types of informal interventions for those experiencing grief reactions, encouraging more caring and understanding towards colleagues.
Gibson, J., Gallagher, M., & Jenkins, M. (2010).	This study explores the specific experiences and needs of parents bereaved by the suicide of a child and their readjustment to the work situation.	Qualitative	Thematic, n=11, (Ireland) Female = 6 Male = 5 Age = 44 – 57 years	The findings indicate that parents who have lost a child to suicide experience profound trauma and significant life changes. Their greatest challenges at work involve coping with social and emotional issues. This traumatic bereavement notably affects their physical, emotional, and cognitive functioning, as well as their attitudes toward work and life. Most parents return to work within three months, with employers generally providing practical support.	Future research to explore how co-workers, managers, and employees experience the reintegration of bereaved parents. Additionally, further studies might investigate the impact of a child's suicide on siblings, an area that has been relatively neglected and requires more attention and intervention.
Gibson, J., Gallagher, M., & Tracey, A. (2011).	This study explores the experiences of parents in their return to work after being bereaved by suicide and the support they felt they needed and that workplaces should provide**.**	Qualitative	Thematic, n=11, (Ireland) Female = 6 Male = 5 Age = 44 – 57 years	It was suggested that training for managers on how to respond to bereaved employees and training for peers on appropriate responses. Training for all staff on particular needs when traumatically bereaved.	Future research to focus on the perspectives and responses of managers, employers, and organisations. Findings suggest that organisations should proactively support employees who have experienced a traumatic bereavement. This includes implementing formal bereavement protocols and policies, designating a specific staff

					member for support, and providing bereavement awareness training for managers and employees. These training programs should involve individuals with personal experience of traumatic bereavement.
Hall, D., Russell, S., and Shucksmith, J. (2013).	Small interview study with recently bereaved employees looking at ways in which they perceived they were treated in the workplace following the death of a loved one.	Qualitative	Thematic, n=10, (UK) Female = 8 Male = 2	Conversations around death needs to be 'normalised. Discussions around death, dying and bereavement needs to become part of life discussions.	Further in-depth research is required to examine this important topic more thoroughly, particularly involving managers. HR and Training Managers should ensure policies and management development programs adequately support employees, benefiting staff morale and business outcomes.
Malacrida, C. (1999).	This study explores the social economic practices that relate to perinatal deaths and an analysis of interactions with social institutions and workplace measures.	Qualitative	Grounded Theory, n=22, (Canada) Female = 16 Male = 6	Family and community gestures, workplace measures, and medical and legal supports were often discouraged or withheld. This lack of financial and material support creates an informal social economy around perinatal death, sending clear messages to parents about their rights and claims to support. These practices contribute to feelings of illegitimacy and complicate the mourning process.	
McGuinness, B. (2009).	This study explores organisations policies and procedures for supporting bereaved employees.	Qualitative	Thematic, n=34, (Ireland) 150 - 5,000+ employees Mixture of private, public and local	All organisations in this study experienced employee-related bereavement over the previous 12 months, only four had a written policy. Most of them had some kind of provision for compassionate leave, however this varied greatly, and decisions were left to the line managers discretion. This study conveys key findings from the survey and	

			government organisations	suggests a template that could be adapted by workplaces to provide a clear and consistent bereavement policy that would be beneficial to organisations, managers and employees.	
Moss, J. (2017).	Case Study on workplace response to bereaved employees.	Qualitative	Case Study, (USA)	Many organisations lack policies dealing with bereavement and those that do are insufficient. Grief is not linear. Train for emotional intelligence. Communication and checkpoints are important.	
Penny, A. (2014)	This is a paper that considers how employers can better support their employees after experiencing bereavement.	Report	Report, (UK) Written by Alison Penny, Project Coordinator for the National Bereavement Alliance and Coordinator of the Childhood Bereavement Network, with support from National Bereavement Alliance.	A national review of employment practice associated to bereavement is required to improve the way that bereaved people are treated at work, thereby reducing uncertainty, increasing loyalty, staff morale and productivity. This review explores the possibility of minimum statutory paid bereavement leave and recognises ways of making fitness to work certification work in a positive way for bereaved individuals. 87% of British adults agree that employers should have a bereavement policy which includes paid bereavement leave, flexible working and other support. 81% agreed that there should be a legal right to receive paid bereavement leave 82% agreed that providing employees with paid bereavement leave is likely to be beneficial to the employer in the long term. 56% noted they would consider leaving their job if proper support was not provided. 32% said that they had not been treated with compassion by their employer.	
Russell, K. (1998)	This study examines the effectiveness of	Qualitative	Survey, n=62, (UK)	83% of organisations had a corporate policy for bereavement leave and 11 companies	

employees after they have experienced the death of a loved one and the support offered to them within the workplace.		Female = 64% Male = 36%	leave was discretionary. 77% of the companies granted between one and five days bereavement leave. 47% considered that their manager did not make performance concessions on their return to work.	

Chapter Three: Small Scale Research Project

Grief in the workplace: How do grieving employees who have been bereaved of a partner/spouse perceive their experience of workplace support in the UK?

Abstract

Not all bereaved employees require professional bereavement support; some may benefit from informal workplace support where they can express their feelings. However, little is known about the daily realities of those who do not utilise professional bereavement services. Research suggests that many grieving employees lack the informal workplace support they need. Therefore, it is important to understand how managers are perceived to respond to grieving employees and what is considered as beneficial. A written interview was produced, and 40 participants from various occupations in the United Kingdom who had been bereaved of their spouse took part. The data were analysed using a qualitative thematic approach, revealing what bereaved employees found to be significant in the informal workplace support process. Two superordinate themes of "Acknowledgement" and "Response," with sub-themes of "Work Grief Reactions," "Empathy," "Understanding of Experience," and "Space to Grieve" were identified. The findings suggest that participants considered managers supportive when they were observed as understanding the bereaved employees' experiences and acknowledging their situation as well as their reactions to grief. Additionally, they noted that tailor-made support with the provision of sufficient time and space to grieve was important. This approach was found to promote understanding and instil a sense of being valued rather than being seen as a number within an organisation.

Introduction

Studies on social support have drawn attention to the crucial aspect of being able to adjust to a changed life after experiencing the death of a loved one. Social support can broadly be defined as the experience of support that leaves one with the perception of being valued and cared for (Taylor, 2007). Prior research highlights that being able to connect with others who have been bereaved and the receipt of empathy are two of the most valuable means of social support (Dyregrov, 2004; Peters et al., 2016). Experiencing the death of a loved one, especially a spouse or life partner is considered a significant life stressor which can impact on the emotional, behavioural, cognitive, physical, spiritual, social and financial areas of a bereaved individual's life (Aoun et al., 2015). Despite grief reactions as a result of bereavement being unique to each person, there is an increasing recognition that bereavement can trigger ongoing mental distress in some individuals (Breen, & O'Connor, 2007). Furthermore, research indicates that bereavement symptoms may continue to exist decades after experiencing a loss (Carnelley et al., 2006).

The insights derived from clinical interactions have prompted numerous service providers to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to bereavement care, despite studies suggesting that such professional support may not always be beneficial (Breen et al., 2014; Wittouck et al., 2011). It seems that practitioners and care services have been influenced by the experiences of those seeking assistance directly from mental health professionals, whilst little is known about the day-to-day realities of individuals who do not utilise these professional services (Rumbold & Aoun, 2015). Recently, public health models are beginning to recognise that not all bereaved individuals necessarily require professional bereavement care (Aoun et al., 2015) but may benefit from informal support, providing an avenue for them to express their emotions and feel that their grief is understood and responded to in a non-judgemental manner (Breen et al., 2017). Aoun et al., (2018)

indicates that bereaved individuals more often than not, do not experience the quality or quantity of informal support that may be deemed as beneficial.

In instances of sudden death, such as through suicide or an accident, the bereaved individual may lack the time to prepare for and process the immediate, life-altering event, leading to many challenges (Clements et al., 2003). For instance, grappling with the effort to make sense of the unexpected loss, attempting to quickly integrate this loss into their previously accepted reality, and adapting to this loss in their new lived experience pose significant struggles (Hall, 2014). On the other hand, whilst death resulting from an illness may be anticipated, the surviving individual may feel overwhelmed by emotional distress while caring for their loved one, leaving little time or energy to prepare for the unforeseen daily tasks that follow a loss or the unexpected physical and mental demands (Chentsova-Dutton et al., 2000; Clark et al., 2011). The transitional period post-bereavement, encompassing life, work, and coping abilities highlights the importance of an individualised support approach in assisting the bereaved with their daily life tasks, self-care, and workplace functioning (Caserta et al., 2004; Stahl & Schultz, 2014).

Enhancing an employer's ability to provide effective bereavement support requires a clear understanding of existing workplace practices and procedures. It is ethically crucial to base these improvements on rigorous research conducted with reliable and representative samples (Logan et al., 2018). By understanding the specific types of support that grieving employees find valuable and recognising how grief intersects with workplace demands, employers can develop processes aimed at planning and guiding managers to better support their bereaved employees. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how grieving employees perceive the support they receive from management, aiming to uncover the most beneficial practices.

Rationale

The process of an employee returning to work after experiencing a bereavement is a complex one, as indicated in previous studies (Krause et al., 2001; Muenchberger et al., 2008). Several factors come into play, including the individual's post-bereavement functioning, their interactions with colleagues and clients, and the mental and physical demands of their job (Coutu et al., 2007). To gain an understanding of how bereaved employees cope with work tasks and the return-to-work process, it is important to gather information on their mental processes, behaviour and emotions during this transition. Additionally, it is crucial to explore their perceptions of supportive interactions within the workplace (Noordik et al., 2011).

Much of the existing knowledge about the return-to-work process is based on studies involving patients with physical injuries and pain-related conditions. Unfortunately, there is a limited body of research specifically addressing workers dealing with mental distress within the workplace (Bakker et al., 2007; Blonk et al., 2006; Churchill, et al., 2009; Gava et al., 2009; Hunot et al., 2009; van der Klink et al., 2001, 2003, MacEachen et al., 2006). For support to be truly effective, it must be recognised, readily available, considered adequate (Rando, 1993), and perceived as helpful by those receiving it (Kaunonen et al., 1999). Providing helpful and appropriate support is a significate factor in determining positive psychological and social outcomes following a bereavement (Hibberd et al., 2010). Whilst various factors can complicate the grieving process (Lobb et al., 2010), only a few of these elements can be altered to the extent that support can (Bath, 2009).

Research has shown that there are many factors that can either hinder or facilitate the provision of support to grieving individuals, however the current evidence lacks quality and is limited in breadth (Logan et al., 2017; Bottomley et al., 2017). Given the growing recognition of support as a protective factor against possible complications in bereavement, understanding how managers respond to the bereaved, especially in the context of the return-to-work process, is of utmost

importance (Logan et al., 2018). Therefore, to offer the best possible tailored care for bereaved

employees, it is vital to understand their experiences with informal workplace bereavement support

(Flux et al., 2019). Ethics approval was received from the Canterbury Christ Church Ethics Panel for

this study to proceed (Ref: V:\075\Ethics\2016-17) (Appendix A).

Aims of the Research

Trying to cope with the death of a loved one, adjust to a drastically changed lifestyle, whilst

endeavouring to contain grief emotions in the workplace, may result in exacerbating possible mental

distress the person may be dealing with. Helpful understanding and informal support from an

employer may assist their employee to adjust faster to their changed existence and settle into the

routine of a meaningful and productive work life again.

To gain insight into what support would be beneficial, we need to give the bereaved employee a

voice. The purpose of this paper therefore, was to answer the following question: *How do grieving*

employees perceive their experience of workplace support from management? The aim was to

investigate what bereaved employees found helpful when being offered support upon their return to

work. This paper focused on answering two questions, namely:

a) What type of support received was deemed as beneficial for a grieving employee?

b) What do the reported experiences of bereaved employees tell us about the impact of grief
   coupled with workplace demands?

Methodology

Participants

Forty-five individuals within the United Kingdom completed a written interview. The

participants spanned across various industries including Public, Education, Private, Charity and

Healthcare sectors. The chosen required number of participants was based on having a large enough

sample to identify the less commonly expressed themes however not too large as to end up with data

saturation (Fugard & Potts, 2015). A total of 40 participant's (n=40) data was used consisting of 36

females and 4 males with age ranging from 21 to 60 years. Five participant's data were disregarded

due to the lack of useable input. See table one for participant demographics.

Table One: Participants Demographic Characteristics

Description	Data
Gender:	Female = 36; Male = 4
Current Age Range:	21 – 30 = 3
	31 – 40 = 11
	41 – 50 = 19
	51 – 60 = 7
Relationship:	Spouse = 33
	Partner = 7
Bereavement:	Illness = 23
	Suicide = 9
	Accident = 3
	Other = 4 (Stroke, Sudden death, Heart)
Work Prior Bereavement:	Full-Time = 23
	Part-time = 17
Work After Bereavement:	Full-Time = 17
	Part-time = 20
	Full-Time sick/Unemployed = 3
Occupation:	Public (government and agencies providing public services) = 12
	Education (educational institutions) = 8
	Private (for profit entities) = 14
	Charity (non-profit entities) = 3
	Healthcare (provision of medical and healthcare services) = 3
Returned to same workplace:	Yes = 38
	No = 2
Bereavement Policy in their current workplace?	Yes = 11
	No = 12
	Unknown = 16
Length of bereavement leave taken prior to returning to work:	Mean = 11 weeks
	Minimum = 3 days Maximum = 24 weeks

Design/Materials

A qualitative thematic approach was chosen for this study, as it allows for the exploration of

complex, rich data and theoretical flexibility of a lived experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The

focus of this research was for any employee who was working in any sector at the time they experienced bereavement. The research design was guided by the principles for studying sensitive topics, particularly those outlined by Elam and Fenton (2003), who suggest that qualitative methods, are most effective for exploring sensitive subjects. The development of the interview questions aimed to incorporate the lived experience in what workplace bereavement support was received, and if it was perceived as helpful or unhelpful. The researcher obtained permission from the Facebook group 'WAY – Widowed and Young' to advertise the written interview. Research highlights that the quality of data gathered with the use of online research is indistinguishable to that produced by conventional research methods (Denscombe, 2003). The advantage of this technique is that it is not dictated by geographical distances, and therefore allows for a larger sample set of data collection (James & Busher, 2009; Mann & Stewart, 2000). Additionally, it affords a higher degree of anonymity which aids individuals to feel less inhibited in their responses when discussing topics that may be sensitive. On the other hand, the researcher has considered that with the use of this type of data collection the participants body language or facial expressions are unable to be observed and this could lead to possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation (Chen & Hinton, 1999). However, by relying solely on the data collected may result in a reduction in the potential for subjective interpretation, which is associated with trying to read non-verbal cues, therefore this method may assist to reduce possible researcher bias during data analysis (Ayling & Mewse, 2009).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected to encompass the various stages of grief and the corresponding support systems during this period. This approach ensures that participants have ample opportunity to introspect and contemplate their personal experiences. Additionally, it enabled participants to reflect thoughtfully before responding to the interview questions, thereby reducing any pressure to provide immediate answers and encouraging a more genuine and considered response. Inclusion criteria stipulated that the participant would have experienced the death of a partner (spouse) either having lived together or apart but having been in a relationship at

the time of the death. Additionally, the participants needed to be over 20 years of age, living in, and have been employed (either full-time or part-time) in the UK, with having returned to employment post bereavement. Exclusion criteria stipulated that it must have been at least six months since the particpant experienced their bereavement. This would allow the individual to have had some time to process their 'new and changed life' and for most, have returned to work. They also needed to be willing to share thoughts on their workplace experience as a grieving employee and be willing to share their own attitudes, workplace behaviours after experiencing bereavement. Upon write up all participants were anonymised and de-identified to keep information as confidential as possible.

Procedure

The consent and written interview (Appendix B) were produced with a focus on the individual's experience of their work-life and management support rather than describing any actual events of the bereavement experienced. The written interview comprised of 13 questions namely; perceptions of managers reactions, how they felt they were supported, any changes in their work performance, any special work arrangements offered, whether the organisation has a bereavement policy, whether they felt that bereavement support in the workplace is important, their relationship with their manager, if they returned to the same place of work after experiencing bereavement, how long before they returned to work and how long they remained with the organisation after the bereavement (Appendix B).

Each participant had access to an information sheet (Appendix C). In preparation for the full study, the written interview was piloted by two participants to identify possible problem areas, lack of understanding or clarity in the questions. It also assisted to confirm that relevant data could be collected through the self-administered written interview and allowed the researcher a practice run with the data collection instruments. Feedback from the participants was received and no adjustments were deemed necessary. The full study went ahead, and the written interview was advertised

(Appendix D) on 'Facebook' as described above and made live to be accessed on Bristol Online Survey and Pebbleboard.

Analytic Technique

A qualitative approach was used to undertake this research. Data collected were analysed using thematic analysis otherwise known as template analysis. This process enables the use of hierarchical coding with a balance of structure and flexibility to adapt to the style and the format of the data (Brooks et al., 2015). The final template analysis serves as a foundation for the researcher's interpretation of the data set and was used for final write up on findings (King, 1998).

Stage One: The aim was to identify and summarise the main themes that emerged from the data to create a foundation template of themes which could then be built upon. The researcher endeavoured to understand and analyse the data through the eyes of the participants, therefore taking an idiographic approach. A spreadsheet held the data with distinct worksheets detailing each response which was analysed and coded to various themes and retained as a paper-trail. The data from the first ten transcripts were read thoroughly, several times. The question the researcher focused on was 'what specifically is the participant talking about or referring to in each instance?' With the use of this the researcher added in descriptive comments which consisted of significant words, which aimed to capture the nature of the individuals reported experience. This was done with the use of constant comparison with the data and the researcher's understanding of what the participants were referring to, therefore, following a process of reduction and abstraction. This resulted in the development of common themes which were grouped together into similar categories producing a baseline template (Appendix E).

The pattern of the first ten transcripts generated the following categories:

- Grief Reactions.
- Positive Support Received.

- Negative Support Received.

- Suggestions for Support Needed.

Stage Two: Once the final surveys had been received, the transcripts were examined and a continued process of reduction and abstraction took place, as described in Stage One. Common themes were grouped together into similar categories in accordance with the baseline template and expanded into common themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher concluded that there was an overlap of certain subthemes. For example, some participants recounted the helpful support they received versus others mentioning lacking the same or similar type of support. It was decided to group these into one category whether received or not, the fact that it was mentioned was deemed important.

'Grief Reactions' was changed to 'Impact of Grief on Work Demands' as this was interpreted as being specifically focused on how the individuals struggled to function in the workplace (theme: Functionality), whilst struggling with their newly changed life and trying to cope with their grief (theme: Conceptual). The researcher noted this as an important aspect, as it appeared that the participants felt it proved insightful for others to understand what they were going through to create understanding in how to best support them. 'Positive Support Received' and 'Negative Support Received' were merged to 'Support'. Here participants described the aspects of how they required support in being showed compassion, consideration and acknowledgement of their emotional turmoil experienced. Additionally, they reported receiving practical workplace assistance such as reduced hours and help with their workload, while others reported the exact opposite. Furthermore, there were reports of some receiving insightful information with proper guidance support from their employers, whilst others received negative comments or no guidance at all (theme: Emotional, Instrumental, and Informational). 'Suggestions for Support Needed' was classed as 'Needs', as the researcher reflected on the fact that if a participant suggested what they wanted or mentioned there

was a lack of support in a particular area, this was something that was in fact needed (theme: Responsiveness, Recognition). The resulting summary template can be found in Appendix F.

Stage Three: Having reconsidered the data from this perspective a third interpretative level of coding took place, which was more centred on being data driven. The researcher focused on the question of 'how are the participants understanding (or constructing) what they are talking about in each area of the data?'   The data was therefore reassessed by examining it from this perspective and the themes were re-arranged to reflect this. The theme 'Functionality' under the superordinate theme of 'Impact of Grief on Work Demands' from Stage Two, was grouped into a new superordinate theme termed 'Acknowledgement'. This was based upon the analysis highlighting that in order for the employer to acknowledge how the participants were feeling, they first needed to have an understanding of how grief coupled with work demands may have impacted on their physical and mental ability to do their job or to meet work performance expectations (theme: Work Grief Reactions).

The theme 'Emotional' under the superordinate theme of 'Support' was also categorised into the superordinate theme of 'Acknowledgement' (theme: Empathy). Some participants described receiving sympathy, thoughtfulness and clear communication, and others reported receiving a lack of this. Again, the pattern forming was that for the participants to feel supported, they wanted acknowledgement that their grief reactions may have an impact on their work performance. Therefore, from a psychological perspective receiving assurance from their employer may have made them feel better in the way that, it is acceptable to be 'non-functional' for a while.

The theme 'Conceptual' from the superordinate theme 'Impact of Grief in the Workplace' was grouped into 'Responsiveness'. This was made up of not just wanting an acknowledgement from their employer but an understanding of how much their life had changed (theme: Understanding of Experience). Here the participants explained the wider effects of how unpredictable grief can be,

and the way in which the employer showed an understanding was perceived to be in their response (or lack thereof). This also appeared to have an underlying connection to how much the participant felt valued (or not) in the workplace.   The theme 'Instrumental' and 'Informational' support was also grouped into this theme as it discussed how the employer responded in providing practical support in helping the participants by adjusting work hours or giving them informational guidance. The participants described how they needed (and some received, others not) time and space away from their normal expected work duties, to process their grief (theme: Space to Grieve). The details of analysis of finding can be found in Appendix F.

Quality Assessment

Whilst conducting this research, a meticulous approach was taken to ensure the findings were trustworthy. The process of data analysis involved the active participation of the researcher's supervisor, who played a role in carefully examining the data and the interpretations. Through collaborative discussions, both the researcher and supervisor arrived at an agreement that the findings were in alignment, affirming the robustness of the research outcomes. Furthermore, the data were reviewed by an independent reviewer to ensure objectivity and enhance the overall quality of the study. The criteria were not framed as strict regulations but utilised thoughtful and adaptable interpretation by the researcher. This interpretation encompassed factors like considering the context, transparency, and coherence, all whilst acknowledging the influence and significance of each participants experience (Yardley, 2000).

Quality assessment was of utmost concern throughout the research. Multiple factors were taken into consideration during the design, data collection, and data examination phases. These considerations extended from evaluating how the research could make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of knowledge within the topic area to assessing the clarity and relevance of the research questions. Additionally, careful attention was paid to the suitability of the research design

in addressing the questions effectively. The data collection and analysis processes were undertaken in a methodical and rigorous way. This approach was deliberate to create a clear and transparent audit trail that could be followed by other researchers. Furthermore, the researcher engaged in a continuous cycle of reflection on the data. This ongoing evaluation served to ensure that the study provided meaningful evidence to maintain that the criteria had been met, ultimately strengthening the trustworthiness and credibility of the research outcomes (Mays & Pope, 2000).

Findings

In summary these findings suggest that participants considered their managers supportive when they felt their situation had been acknowledged and responded to. It was important to them for their manager to show appreciation of the unpredictability of grief and the impact that bereavement can have. The life that the bereaved employee knew prior to experiencing bereavement had changed, never to be the same again. The type of workplace grief reactions reportedly ranged from fatigue to lack of memory, concentration, conscientiousness, and efficiency. Support was considered helpful when the manager was seen to offer specific assistance to the bereaved employee depending on their individual circumstances, as well as allowing them sufficient time and space to grieve. This was reported in the allowance of reduced working hours, reduced work duties and time off work to process their loss and newly changed life.

Table Two: Summary of Findings

Superordinate Theme	Theme	Subtheme
Acknowledgement	Empathy	• Compassion • Communication
	Work Grief Reactions:	• Fatigue • Lack of Concentration • Lack of Memory • Lack of Conscientiousness • Lack of Efficiency
Responsiveness	Understanding of Experience	• Grief is Unpredictable • Life Changing

		• Care Navigation
Space to Grieve		• Reduced Hours
		• Time off Work
		• Reduced Duties

Acknowledgement

The superordinate theme 'Acknowledgement' describes the identification, existence, and validity of the bereaved employees experience. Participants reported the importance of the employer acknowledging how the bereaved employee may be feeling both physically and mentally. By acknowledging their situation, the employer may further gain an insight into what can be expected performance wise from the bereaved employee which in turn would enable them to respond accordingly. 'Acknowledgement' was divided into two themes, 'Empathy' and 'Work Grief Reactions'.

Empathy

'Empathy' describes the recognition, appreciation, and acknowledgement of the existence, feeling or situation of the bereaved employee. The participants described the importance of clear lines of communication between manager and employee as well as some reliance on the knowledge that their employer was there to listen or speak with them when needed. Acknowledging the mental anguish that the individual was going through by showing empathy appeared to be an important area. This theme was divided into two subthemes namely, 'Compassion' and 'Communication'.

Compassion

This subtheme describes how the employee wanted their manager to make an effort to show personal understanding of their suffering. Participants explained finding it helpful when their manager showed a human connection by making time for the bereaved employee or with the presentation of cards, flowers, and kind words. Some described their manager as being compassionate and showing genuine concern just by simply recalling anniversary dates or

acknowledging lone parenting issues which in turn made them feel valued, less isolated and kept some loyal to the job. Many noted how much they appreciated their manager continually checking up on them as it implied they were cared for.

> *Yes, in a HR sense, they arranged a phased return etc but not in any sort of human connection. They didn't offer any support once I was back, no meetings, no recognition of the challenges of lone parenting (I have quite unsociable hours and there was no opportunity to discuss flexible working around this). No acknowledgement, recognition of challenges faced. (30)*

> *Not helpful - they basically followed normal 'sick policy' but with no compassion and no effort to build up personal understanding. I had several different people phoned me so no consistency. Give the grieving person time and support to explain circumstances and any barriers to returning. Show compassion and make them feel valued rather than 'just one of many members of staff' - I had two extremes of experience which perhaps should not be compared due to size of organisation, location and the stage on my grief journey. I am aware my judgement and tolerance towards my first employer was seriously affected by the shock of sudden unexpected grief; post trauma distress syndrome; health problems within the first year of bereavement; dislike of the job. However, my new manager showed that it is possible to be supportive, encouraging and flexible, so able to get the best out of her staff. As a result, I continue to work at the same place for over four years. (37)*

Communication

This subtheme is defined here as a two-way process in which the manager and bereaved employee share information to create an appreciation of feelings and circumstances. Here the participants explain the importance of communication and the setting of expectations within the workplace. Many participants mentioned wanting their manager to be approachable and open to discussion with a sympathetic ear. Whereas some participants felt their working environments were

supportive, insofar as they were encouraged to have open dialogue with their manager. The participants appeared to really appreciate it when they felt listened to and were at liberty to speak openly about their emotions and feelings. One even stating that if employees are treated well during tough times, they become extremely loyal.

He has allowed me to talk when I need to but also has not tried to wrap me in cotton wool. My manager was excellent the only thing I wish he had done was to send an email to wider company which he didn't do as he thought it was a private matter. it would have saved some awkward conversations when people asked if I had had a nice holiday as they hadn't seen me for a while. However, I know he did what he thought were my best interests. (7)

Human connection. Check in, talk, support. I'm expected to do that for my team, why couldn't anyone do it for me? Regular one to ones. Ask them if they want colleagues to know and or talk about it and communicate this to company before they return to work. Whilst I was off, I felt supported, but when I returned to work it was difficult. It felt as though people didn't want to talk to me! (30)

Work Grief Reactions

The theme 'Work Grief Reactions' describes how many of the bereaved individuals reported wanting an acknowledgement of their grief reactions when having to deal with the mental distress of experiencing bereavement coupled with trying to cope with the demands of their job. 'Work Grief Reactions' is further divided into five subthemes namely, 'Fatigue', 'Lack of Concentration', Lack of Memory', 'Lack of Conscientiousness' and 'Lack of Efficiency'.

Fatigue

This subtheme describes the effects of extreme tiredness or weakness in mental capacity. The participants recounted how fatigue and exhaustion took its toll impacting on their ability to function in the workplace. This exhaustion may not be felt immediately, however as time moves on, they start

to feel overwhelmed with the change in lifestyle coupled with work demands, one participant stated that from a safety perspective she should possibly not have been working at all, another mentioned that she was just about able to do her work tasks but nothing more.

> *I deal with other people's medication at work and was (and still am) terrified of making a mistake.   I'm tired all the time. Exhausted. I sleep really badly, and work shifts, so sometimes finish work at 10pm and start again at 7:30. Sometimes when I'm driving to work, I panic and look down to check that I got dressed!   Truth be told I'm probably not safe to be working. (5)*

> *I got through the work that had to be done but needed regular breaks to get myself together and I just didn't have the energy to look for other things that needed doing when my specific allocated things were done. (22)*

Lack of Concentration

This subtheme describes the difficulty experienced when trying to think clearly or focus on something without any distractions. Participants describe how they struggled to concentrate and found it extremely difficult to make decisions and juggle tasks which previously would have been an easy for them. Many recounted how they made mistakes and how it took them time to bring their focus from their mental distress back to their work tasks.

> *Absolutely, I found it difficult to juggle tasks as I had done in the past and took longer to make decisions. (7)*

> *It took longer to do things and my concentration wasn't always as it should be. (13)*

> *Yes. In all sorts of ways. I was unable to concentrate / focus on anything for months afterwards. (27)*

Lack of Memory

This subtheme describes how the bereaved employees had difficulty in storing details or remembering information. Participants recount how their memory was severely impaired

immediately after experiencing bereavement with a gradual return over time and how certain

management expected too much too soon.

My memory was also badly affected. (2)

My memory was completely destroyed - it was as though my brain had been reformatted, and
I had lost all previous data! This is still only gradually returning now, 15 months later. (27)

Yes - difficulty concentrating, became more forgetful. (43)

Lack of Conscientiousness

In this subtheme the participants describe how their experience put things into perspective

and sometimes they felt a lack of concern around workplace issues or job responsibilities. Some

recalled a change to their conscientiousness by having a low tolerance of what was deemed as silly

issues or insignificant problems in comparison to what they were going through. Many felt that work

was less of a number one priority as it had been before, whereas others felt they just could not be

bothered at all. They felt there was an expectation at work of being able to go back to a state of

normality very quickly, whereas they felt everything had changed so much that there was no going

back to how things were before their experience.

In addition, I found my tolerance of some of the more silly things around work had lessened.
(7)

Management support should be an understanding that there will be times when grief takes
over, and work feels less important. (13)

Less tolerant of people and their insignificant problems. (18)

Lack of Efficiency

This subtheme describes the difficulties experienced when trying to perform at the levels

prior to experiencing the bereavement. In being able to generate, create, enhance or bring forth good

work performance levels. Participants recount having high stress reactions and their emotions being

all over the place. Feelings of anxiety and overwhelm as well as crying and swearing a lot.

Participants reported finding it difficult to multi-task which also led to a reduction in productivity

and not being able to fully function upon their return to work or unable deal with complicated or

stressful issues in the workplace. They felt they were on autopilot and their ability to manage

personal workload suffered.

> *Yes, my productivity fell through the floor. Also, my professionalism has suffered, crying a*
>
> *lot, swearing in the workplace, not being diligent and thorough as much as I used to be. (32)*
>
> *My productivity was non-existent. I was just being there. But an empty shell of me. (33)*
>
> *If there had been even less support, I just would have never returned to work. Five days in I*
>
> *was still so non-functioning that I couldn't dress myself or eat, much less work. (44)*

Responsiveness

The superordinate theme 'Responsiveness' as described here is the way that a manager

recognises the bereaved employees' situation and the speed and clarity with which they respond or

take a particular action in order to best support them through their experience. These are divided into

two themes, namely, 'Understanding of Experience' and 'Space to Grieve'.

Understanding of Experience

This theme explains how it is not only the acknowledgement that is important, but also the

manager's ability to show an understanding of the bereaved employees' situation, needs and the

challenges they face and respond accordingly. Here participants recount that having an

understanding of the subject of bereavement would enable managers to recognise and respond in a

way that is helpful such as providing guidance appropriately to particular situations. Participants

mention that managers need training in how to deal with bereaved staff as they tend to be the single

point of contact for any questions that an employee may have. Being able to recognise what the

bereaved individual needs and how to deal with their situation in a sensitive manner is important. Some reported having experienced superb support from managers who possibly had themselves experienced a bereavement. In addition to this, clear guidance on work expectations was mentioned as needed. This theme is divided into three subthemes namely 'Grief is Unpredictable', 'Life Changing' and 'Care Navigation'.

Grief is Unpredictable

This subtheme is defined here as grief being a very individual experience, resulting in it being unlikely to be able to predict grief reactions in advance. Participants explained the misconception of there being a time limit on grief. Many participants describe how grief manifests differently in different people and there is no one size fits all solution. Therefore, by understanding the individuals experience, managers are better able to respond in a manner that is deemed helpful.

Understanding that there are good days and bad and that grief can hit you out of nowhere like a tidal wave. Really just a sense of understanding of what's going on and small allowances being made. People react differently to grief and have differing needs. For some people work can be a temporary refuge from grief, for others it's just too much to contemplate. (14)

To me it is recognising what an individual needs. For some it may be coming back into the workplace (even if they aren't productive) and for others it is allowing them to have time away from the workplace. Talking to the person is important to understand what they need. I think it also extends to understanding that grief doesn't dissipate after a few months, that the effects can last years. (16)

Life Changing

This subtheme is defined as life as it was known before experiencing bereavement changes and is never to be the same again. Participants describe how they have become a different person,

how they lost a sense of who they were when their world was turned upside down. They mention that bereavement is not something that people recover from, but that it is something that they try to cope with and manage on a daily basis. It was recounted as an extremely stressful time in their life and sometimes their mental state was left in turmoil.

> *Losing a spouse, especially to suicide and especially when there are children is devastating and life changing, and it takes a long time to adjust and find a 'new normal'. I am still struggling to do this more than two years on. (20)*

> *Very important as bereavement is a life changing event that can have implications for employers. (40)*

Care Navigation

This subtheme is defined as the employer offering some form of suitable internal and/or external support to the employee based on their situation. Here participants describe how their emotions are all over the place and it is helpful to know there is someone they can speak to in the workplace when things get too overwhelming. Participants mentioned how important it is to be advised on what pay they are entitled to or needing clearer guidelines on time away from work or a clear action plan for their return. Furthermore, they described their employer offering a buddy system or referring them for additional support such as Occupational Health or Counselling.

> *Make them more aware of what pay they will be entitled to. I found it difficult getting answers - My employer did things right but there did come a point when I had been off for so long that HR stepped in, and this made me very anxious. I did understand that from a business perspective having me away for so long without a definite return date was not sustainable and this forced me to come back sooner than I was ready. This caused lots of short-term absences which made my anxiety worse as I felt I was letting them down. I think a longer phased return with clearer guidelines would have been better. (17)*

I would suggest that the manager talk with the employee about what would support them best and what the organisation can do for them. I think that clear guidelines are also helpful as managers can be embarrassed by talking about grief and having something to refer to could help. (39)

Space to Grieve

This theme is defined as allowing the bereaved individual time and space in which to process their grief at their own pace. Here they describe needing a reduced workload and less work pressure, as they process a very changed world and a new normal. They explain being unable to return to a state of normality immediately and needed the flexibility from the workplace to adjust. Suggested longer phased returns with the employer offering proactive support, and the flexibility around time needed off work for things such as childcare would have been helpful with altered hours. 'Space to Grieve' is divided into three subthemes, 'Reduced Hours', 'Time off Work' and 'Reduced Duties'.

Reduced Hours

This subtheme is defined here as a reduction in working hours including phased return to work so as to ease any pressure and strain. Participants reported having their hours adjusted whilst others were offered reduced hours, and some were given a phased return to work. Participants noted that they had children who were also adjusting to loss, and they needed to be there for them too so being able to work flexibly with reduced hours was a massive help.

I chose to take a month off, but my doctor was reluctant to give me a sick note as he said bereavement was a normal part of life! I had a phased return to work, but that was only because the business manager had lost her husband to cancer, so she was aware of my emotional state. I had a month off and then a phased return of mornings (but still doing some work at home). (13)

I had a slow phased return to work over four weeks, after 12 weeks off work. I subsequently

requested to drop one day a week. This was supported despite my fairly high-level role. I

have a five-year-old son, so this has been immensely helpful in giving me some time to myself.

I work flexibly though, coming in to work if I need and often checking emails on my day off. I

am still adjusting and largely feel I do the same job as before but in four days. (23)

> *Time off Work*

This subtheme is defined here as time granted away from work thereby allowing the

employee time and space to grieve. Here participants described how some of their employers

showed no pressure to return within a stipulated time period.   Others offered time off to attend

workshops or counselling. Whereas certain participants mentioned having to use their holiday, sick

leave or obtain sick notes from their General Practitioners (GP's) for time off to grieve. The

frustration appeared to come in where they note they were not sick per se, they were grieving. Some

felt the need to return to work so they had something else to concentrate on, but this was made easier

when it was their choice and no pressure to return before feeling ready.

Very supportive, no rush to return to work. Six months off with more time if needed,

occupational health meetings.   I have also been offered time off at the one-year anniversary.

Yes, there is no way I could have returned to work before six months, even then it was still

maybe too early. There should be a lot more bereavement support, but I do believe it depends

on the circumstances. (18)

I worked between my husband's death and the funeral. When I asked for time off for the

funeral I was told to "take as long as you want". On the third day I was phoned (during the

burial of the ashes) and asked why I was not back yet. Each time I have been off with

depression they have applied pressure for me to return. This time I am under investigation for

medical capability. The official policy states half a day for the funeral of a close family

member. I have since discovered that there is an unofficial policy of five working days for the

death of a parent. Three years with long periods of sick leave in each year. I am on the point

of leaving now. It's such a shame - I loved my job, but without understanding reasonable

adjustments are not seen as reasonable but instead as "benefits" that I have wangled out of

the system (35)

Reduced Duties

This subtheme is defined here as a reduction in work duties/expectation so as to ease the

pressures that the bereaved employees may be feeling. Participants described their employer making

arrangements for their work to be covered, offering reduced duties and not pushing the candidate to

do more than they could.

There were aspects of how my workload and team were managed in my absence which

frustrated my return. Things were left which could have been pursued, things were done

which were not within the capabilities of those who did them. I recognise though that they

tried to make the right decisions. My emails were poorly managed leaving me without the

ability to catch up on development in the profession during my absence. (23)

My workload was completely reduced, and my manager said she would be led by me as to

what I was able to cope with. (28)

Discussion

The current findings add to prior research where it appears that the lack of acknowledgement or

response was more than just the absence of support (Aoun et al., 2018). The failure to acknowledge

or respond to the bereaved employee appeared to convey that they or their experience was being

ignored which in turn represented a sense of abandonment generating the feeling of isolation, or

further abandonment. To better understand the return-to-work support process of a bereaved

employee this research aimed to answer two questions. Firstly, 'what type of support received was

deemed as beneficial for a grieving employee?'. Secondly, 'what do the reported experiences of

bereaved employees tell us about the impact of grief coupled with workplace demands?'. Below the answers to these questions are discussed in detail.

What type of support received is beneficial for a grieving employee?

Empathy

Empathy can be defined as an individual's ability to understand and re-experience someone else's feelings. It highlights the ability to reach into someone else's situation so as to appreciate what they may be experiencing (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Singer et al., 2004). Having the ability to understand the experiences of others and how they engage in their lived reality is vital to developing trust and building relationships at work (Gill et al., 2018). In a study conducted by Aoun et al., (2018) the most frequently cited sources of support were those of family, funeral providers, and friends (80%–90%), followed by General Practitioners (GP) (58%). Interestingly, the professional category of sources was noted with the highest proportions of least helpfulness. Almost half of those mentioned seeing a psychiatrist as little or not helpful (46%) along with attending bereavement support groups (41%) (Aoun et al., 2018). Furthermore, evidence suggests that unsuitable referrals for professional care may result in negative outcomes in bereavement support (Waller et al., 2016; Wittouck et al., 2011). It appears that premature and unrequested referrals to a therapist have the capacity to create problems as well as compromise the support and compassion that may be provided by their existing networks (Aoun et al., 2015,2018). In this study participants specifically noted that they wanted the employer to consider the challenges of lone parenting, anniversary dates and the value in being consulted around enlightening their work colleagues so as to avoid embarrassing situations, awkward conversations or questions upon their return to work.

Compassion has been found to create positive emotions in employees (Lilius et al., 2008) and to reduce stress related illness such as depression (Choi et al., 2016). Compassion can be described as an altruistic behaviour that incorporates the desire to reduce suffering (Blum, 1980). It can be expressed in many different ways such as providing verbal and physical support and showing

acknowledgement with the giving of cards and flowers to the bereaved (Choi et al., 2016). A study conducted by Choi et al. (2016) demonstrates how compassion reduced anxiety by raising the perception of being a valued and important member of staff, rather than just a number within the organisation. Sharing a level of closeness as a result of empathy is vital for building workplace trust, however it must be done in a sensitive way so that professional boundaries are not negatively impacted (Gill et al., 2018).

Understanding of Experience

Research indicates that when bereaved employees are endeavouring to deal with their emotions, they wanted to be free from having to satisfy the needs and expectations of others (Noordik et al., 2011). This research supports findings reported in Noordik et al.'s. (2011), study whereby participants stated that they needed support, more specifically they required understanding around their grief reactions and diminished work performance. Participants reported wanting more awareness that their performance may not be up to standard for a while and that taking over some of their work duties ensured that they felt less stressed, and this was a huge help. Focusing on the aspect of spousal bereavement the individual may struggle to take on newly acquired responsibilities, learning to manage new tasks in their daily lives and adjusting to a new role as single parent (Caserta et al., 2016). In this study participants reported wanting an understanding around the loss of their spouse and that when someone loses their partner in life, they tend to lose themselves for a time as well.

This study highlights the intense impact of widowhood, likened by participants to a convergence of bereavement, divorce, and a severe illness all rolled into one. One participant expressed this multifaceted experience stating, "*Understanding that, in practical terms, widowhood was like: suffering a bereavement (grief); a divorce (practical and legal matters took up so much of my time, I had to move immediately, etc); and a serious illness (I was incapable of taking care of my basic physical needs for weeks and had to be sedated with diazepam in order to function to any level)*

ALL AT ONCE." (44). Some participants expressed a desire for clearer guidance from their employers regarding work expectations and leave policies. Additionally, several participants suggested that receiving advice and information on how to move forward, as well as where to access external assistance (such as financial support, connecting with relatives, or arranging funerals), would have been helpful. These observations highlight the extremely individual and unpredictable nature of the grieving process. Bereavement is a life-altering event, and when employers demonstrate understanding of the unique personal experiences of the bereaved, offering tailor made support based on induvial situations is perceived as both helpful and beneficial.

Space to Grieve

Bento (1994) suggests that the competing markets and organisations ongoing struggle for balance-sheet earnings limits the capacity for emotions, therefore employees are allowed a few days leave to cope with the death of their loved one following a sliding scale of love: loss of spouse, parent, child or friend. Sometimes the obligatory cards or flowers are sent and then the bereaved employee is expected to 'get over it' and return to work and to the expected organisational norms of professionalism and appropriateness. There are currently no stipulated laws that give employees a right to bereavement leave, even though as demonstrated in this study, they would benefit from such time for mental and physical recovery (Makoff, 2017). In this study participants mentioned specifically needing a reduction in working hours including phased return to work which would assist with the pressure and strain they were feeling. Additionally, they stated being granted time away from work thereby giving them time and space to grieve along with a reduction in work duties would go a long way to ease the stress and mental overwhelm.

Stroebe and Schut (2016) recommend that while the process of oscillation remains important, in the case of overload it is essential that the individual maintains a sense of control over their stressors and attempts to reduce any negative impact of it. When an employee is not given the space to grieve and is visibly present within the work environment but not completely engaged at work is termed

presenteeism (Hemp, 2004). Presenteeism can be described with two different kinds of behaviours. The first being *sickness presenteeism*, which is when employees are physically present at work but considered to be in ill health (Johns, 2010). A study conducted by Quazi (2013) found that traumatic life events faced by employees such as the death of a loved one, resulted in ill health which led to a lowering of their effectiveness and overall productivity within the organisation. Studies conducted in the United States have described that sickness presenteeism can financially impact companies with costs of over $150 billion per year (Hemp, 2004). Another study conducted in New Zealand reported that the average amount of days an employee was present at work but too sick to fully function was 11.1 and that the annual cost was around $2 billion (Tynan, 2011).

Non-sickness presenteeism, is when employees are physically present in the workplace but are considered to be distracted, and may impact their job performance (Johns, 2010). A number of those bereaved may find themselves in a position of having to conduct personal business at work, for example, administration around the death of a loved one, funeral arrangements or arranging childcare. A study conducted by Demerouti et al. (2009), suggests that presenteeism and emotional fatigue are reciprocal. They claim that work conflict exhaustion leads to presenteeism which in turn generates further exhaustion. Due to the effort needed to compensate for the adverse effects in energy depletion as a result of performance; emotional fatigue led to an improper non-use of sick leave, which then resulted in raised feelings of exhaustion or burnout (Demerouti et al., 2009). When a traumatic experience was felt to go unrecognised in the workplace, it appeared to leave many participants exceeding their current mental capacity as they endeavoured to live up to the employer's perceived expectations by attempting to meet the demands of their job whilst grappling with their grief. This resulted in exacerbating their already limited mental and physical capacity leaving them feeling stressed and overwhelmed and for some dealing with complex work grief reactions.

What is the impact of grief coupled with workplace demands?

Work Grief Reactions

Research has demonstrated that elements of grief, can comprise not only of mental strain, such as a decrease in the ability to concentrate, disassociation, fatigue, severe anxiety, lack of memory, difficulty in decision making and being easily distracted but may also negatively impact physical health (Hobson et al., 2001; Palmer, 2004). These include an increase in blood pressure, a reduction in functioning of the immune system leading to illness and other physical trauma (Palmer, 2004). All of which has the potential in adversely impacting on the individual's ability to function specifically, within the workplace (Pawlecki, 2010). As numerous employees spend more than half their waking hours at work (Sunoo & Sunoo, 2002), it is not surprising therefore, that the environment in which one works may play a significant role in bringing out the best or the worst in a person (Palmer, 2004). Research suggests that for a time period the grieving employee may be unable to separate their personal grief from their professional life (Palmer, 2004). It is very important however, to note that employees attempting to cope with their reactions to grief are not mentally ill or guilty of deviant behaviour; except as determined by their employer (Bento, 1994).

Hazen (2008) suggests that grieving employees can often feel that they are out of sync with events that are happening around them, that they arrive at work, complete their set tasks, attend various meetings or discussions, may not appear to be completely present as their focus is elsewhere. These grief reactions may be openly enacted or subtle; some unpredictably acting out their emotions and others throwing themselves into work trying to forget the painful and raw feelings of loss (Bento, 1994). The pressures of grief coupled with workplace demands may exacerbate feelings of stress at work. As theorised by the 'Dual Process Model', when attempting to cope with grief, while trying to restore a changed life and manage ongoing work pressures a grieving employee may encounter work-life conflict which is likely to put additional stress and strain on them, leading to

intense emotional and physical distress (Stroebe & Schut, 1999).   Stress is generally measured by the loss of productivity, turnover, direct costs, and absenteeism (Ruez, 2004). Therefore, when oscillating between loss-oriented coping and restorative-oriented coping (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), should the painful emotions of grief go unacknowledged, this may exacerbate, intensify, or extend feelings of anxiety, depression or stress (Palmer, 2004). It is no surprise therefore, that if grief is mismanaged particularly in the workplace, the pressure of anxiety and stress can cause individuals to become further distressed and lead to them being less able to exhibit control over their emotions (Quazi, 2013).

Clinical researchers have indicated that when the negative emotions of grief are acknowledged and allowed to be expressed early on in the grieving process the results show a reduction in the long-term impact of bereavement reactions (Bonanno, 2001). Pitimson (2021) described how a participant having experienced the still birth of his child received no acknowledgement when they returned to work, they felt the need for permission to discuss their emotions about their experience. Obviously, grief effects may vary for different individuals, and some may be able to manage effectively without any harmful consequences (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). However, individuals who suppress feelings of anger or frustration which may be considered as an inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour to convey in the workplace, may lead them to emotional exhaustion, burnout and/or a weakened immune system (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). Furthermore, when an employer is insensitive to the needs of the bereaved employee and does not allow enough downtime for their suppressed immune system to readjust and get back in sync, may result in an increased absence from work (Thompson, 2002).

Under normal circumstances a demanding job may be manageable, but when bereavement and grief is added into the mix it may become overwhelming for the individual (Stroebe & Schut, 2016). Bento (1994) argues that the individual may internalise the messages that they are no longer

good at their job, rather than understanding they are just going through a difficult time at present. Unsurprisingly this may cause untold damage to their confidence, motivation and self-esteem which generates a self-fulfilling prophecy of a continued decline in performance. Alternatively, they may reject these negative messages but feel progressively isolated in their pain and deeply alienated from any sense of normality or meaning in their life (Bento, 1994).

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2014) elements of work can be categorised into job demands and job resources, referred to as 'Job Demand-Resources Theory' (JD-R). This theory advocates that work settings evoke two separate cognitive processes, an impairment to health approach or a motivational approach. When an employee is met with continual high demands this may lead to exhaustion, fatigue and health issues, and is observed as a health impairment process. As demonstrated in research, findings indicated that specific work strain and emotional demands have frequently been established to predict fatigue in various occupational circles (Demerouti et al., 2004; Hakanen et al., 2006). Conversely, it has been found that job resources may aid employees in advancing toward their career aspirations. This is observed as a motivational process (Boyd et al., 2011). Recovery is more likely to take place when grief-related suffering is reduced, and positive emotions are triggered and managed (Bonanno, 2001). Bakker (2011) suggests, resources such as positive encouragement and supportive management feedback result in raised performance levels from employees. This study supports prior findings in so much as the participants felt valued and cared for when their employer acknowledged and responded to their particular circumstances and the difficulties they were experiencing (Baggett et al., 2016). Those who reported feeling acknowledged and responded to, felt a sense of being valued, understood, and less stressed.

Limitations

The limitation within this study includes a variety of factors that researchers should be aware of when evaluating the robustness and applicability of the findings. One important feature concerns the

similarity of the participant group, all of whom were English speakers. This focus on English speaking individuals may not fully represent the diverse culture, languages, and perspectives that exist globally. As a result, the generalisability of the research findings highlights the need for caution when deducing the results to broader context.

Furthermore, the relatively small sample size of the study, with a notable gender imbalance, raises questions about gender-related bias in the data. With 36 women and only four men participating, there is a risk of gender specific insights influencing the findings, potentially leading to an incomplete and skewed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This imbalance may require careful consideration when drawing conclusions and warrants further exploration in future research to address potential gender-related nuances. However, the researcher undertook some initial statistical analysis stratified by gender of the available discrete numeric data (length of leave of absence taken following a bereavement) and found no statistically significant difference in the mean length of absence for males compared to the mean length of absence for females. This gives the researcher confidence that if there is no significant difference in length of absence stratified by gender, other traits when stratified by gender may also not show significant differences.

Another limitation to acknowledge is the use of self-completed written interview as the primary data collection method. Whilst this approach offers certain advantages, such as allowing the participants time to consider their answers in their own time as well as participant anonymity and the ability to gather responses from a larger pool of participants, it also comes with associated constraints. The written interview format may limit the researchers' ability to clarify ambiguous responses or delve deeply into participants perspectives, potentially resulting in misinterpretations or missing critical context. The researcher was aware of these constraints when analysing the data and had considered the potential impact of the written interview format on the depth and accuracy of the findings.

Finally, the use of thematic analysis for data interpretation, as suggested by Holloway and Todres (2003), while affording flexibility in identifying patterns and themes, introduces the risk of inconsistency and a shortage of coherence in the construction of thematic insights. The researcher navigated this limitation by identifying themes that most accurately reflected the underlying data and endeavoured to not mislead or reach inaccurate conclusions.

Implications for Practice and Research

The data highlights that in practice the provision for workplace support is founded on the interaction of variables linked to the bereaved, the deceased, the supporter, and the complexity of the type of support received or lack thereof (Aoun et al., 2015). Understanding these elements has significance in the way that unsupportive behaviour and the possible breakdown of social networks after experiencing the death of a loved one my result in the sense of a secondary loss (Model of Incremental Grief), compacting and creating further difficulties in the nature of the primary loss (Breen & O'Connor, 2011; Cook & Oltjenbruns, 1998). A strength of this study was that it investigated bereavement as an individualised experience, allowing the participants to self-evaluate according to their experience and whether they were of the opinion that the support they received (or lack thereof) had significantly impacted on their return to work.

Furthermore, findings contribute to research in how to offer natural informal bereavement care support in the workplace in a way that is beneficial to bereaved employees (Aoun et al., 2018). By adding in the viewpoint of the employers' experience could serve to further enrich the findings. These findings highlight that each dimension in the bereavement experience may cause substantial distress and a feeling of isolation. Mental distress has been recognised as a stressor (Rusch et al., 2014), and there is a need to develop and trial suitable individualised workplace interventions that challenges the negative inclinations and taboos when speaking about death and tackle the barriers to seeking and receiving workplace support. Educating the employer in appropriate ways of supporting

bereaved employees in their return to work is crucial (Pitman et al., 2018). This study, therefore, supports a growing initiative to set clear expectations around grieving employees and in so doing, enhances the capacity to render timely and beneficial bereavement support in the workplace (Aoun et al., 2015, 2018).

Conclusion

These findings highlight the complexity of providing support that is genuinely beneficial to bereaved employees. The effectiveness of such support is influenced by a multitude of factors that together determine whether it has a positive or negative impact on the person experiencing grief. To truly offer meaningful assistance, managers must strive to gain an individualised understanding of the unique circumstances of each bereaved employee. This personalised insight can empower managers to provide tailored and authentically helpful support by showing acknowledgement in empathising and understanding reactions to grief, as well as responding to the experience and allowing space to grieve.

This study sheds light on the need to strengthen investment into informal support processes for bereaved employees, as well as the importance of revisiting how managers approach the topic of death, dying, and bereavement (Logan et al., 2018). Whilst professional bereavement services are available, it is evident that there is a crucial role for informal support in the workplace. Bereaved employees may, at times, simply require a compassionate and empathetic listener who acknowledges their situation. Subsequently, a genuine response of support which is tailored to their specific needs can make all the difference. This can often be the most meaningful form of support a manager can provide, demonstrating a deep understanding of the bereaved employee's emotional state and promoting a sense of genuine care and consideration during a very challenging time.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

Salomons Centre for Applied Psychology

Leanne Flux
PhD in Professional Practice
Canterbury Christ Church University

27 July 2017
Direct line   01227 92 7094
E-mail   margie.callanan@canterbury.ac.uk
Our Ref   V:\075\Ethics\2016-17

Dear Leanne,

Grief in the workplace: How do grieving employees who have been bereaved of a partner/spouse perceive their experience of workplace support in the UK?

Outcome: Full Approval

The panel would like to thank you for your submission and we are pleased to offer you approval for your proposed study. The Panel requests, however, that the following be attended to:

1. The submission needed more editing, there were examples of poor or mistaken grammar.
2. Appendix A : delete 'and have had the opportunity to ask questions' from the first statement as it is already present in the second statement.
3. Appendix A: page 2 – relationship to deceased is referred to earlier as only husband, wife or partner. Clarify whey parent, child or other is included here.
4. Participant Consent: "It is important that you consent to taking part….". You are advised to rephrase this as it currently seems to be an 'order' rather than an informative sentence. Perhaps saying " Your consent to participate, freely and without coersion, is important, so please:"
5. On second page of information sheet, the term 'cathartic' is used: this is not a word that everyone understands and it is advised that you omit this, and could omit the whole sentence suggesting that this would be the experience.

We look forward to receiving a short report on progress and outcome on completion of the research, in order to complete our file. The report should be the same one that is provided to your participants. Please note that any changes of substance to the research will need to be notified to us so that we can ensure continued appropriate ethical process.

We wish you well with your study and hope that you enjoy carrying it out.

Yours sincerely,

Margie Callanan

Professor Margie Callanan
Chair of the Salomons Ethics Panel
Cc   Dr Alex Hassett

School of Psychology, Politics and Sociology
Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences

Canterbury Christ Church University
Runcie Court   David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road   Tunbridge Wells   Kent   TN3 0TF   (UK)
Tel +44 (0)333 011 7102   Fax +44 (0)1892 520888

Appendix B: Consent and Written Interview

Participant Online Consent

Your consent to participate freely and without coercion, is important, so please:-

- Please ensure that you have read and understand the **Participant Information** (via the tab at the top) for the study.

- If you decide to go ahead you will be prompted to complete your consent form at the beginning of the written interview.

- However, please feel free to contact me to ask questions if you are unsure about anything.

- Please be aware that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

- Any personal information that you provide to the researcher will be kept strictly confidential.

Any Questions?

Please contact Leanne Flux on email l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk

Leanne Flux

Canterbury Christ Church University

BOS Written Interview Questions

Part I: CONSENT:

Name:	
Date:	
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	YES/NO
I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions. YES/NO	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	YES/NO

I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential.	YES/NO
I understand that this research will be used for publication.	YES/NO
I agree to take part in this study.	YES/NO

Part II: PERSONAL DETAILS:

Gender:	Female / Male / Neither Male nor Female
Ethnicity:	**ARE YOU? (PLEASE TICK (√) BOX):** ☐ White ☐ White – British ☐ Other White Background ☐ White – Irish ☐ White –Scottish ☐ Irish – Traveller ☐ White – Welsh ☐ Black or Black British – Caribbean ☐ Black or Black British – African ☐ Other Black Background ☐ Asian or Asian British – Indian ☐ Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi ☐ Chinese ☐ Other Asian background ☐ Mixed – White & Black Caribbean ☐ Mixed – White & Black African ☐ Mixed – White & Asian ☐ Other Mixed background ☐ Other Ethnic background ☐ I do not wish to provide this information
Please state your age bracket:	21 – 30 / 31 – 40 / 41 – 50 / 51 – 60 / >60
Relationship to deceased:	Husband/Wife/Partner/Parent/Child/ Other (please state)

How were you bereaved?	Accident/Illness/Suicide/Other
Date of death:	DD/MM/YY
Employed prior to bereavement	Full Time / Part Time / Other (please state)
Currently working:	Full Time / Part Time / Other (please state)
Job Title/Role:	
How would you describe your role:	Director / Managerial / Staff / Other (please state)
Employment Sector:	Private / Public / Education / Healthcare / Other (please state)

Part III: GRIEF AT WORK

Please share in as much detail as you possibly can.

How did your manager/employer react towards you after hearing the news of the death of your loved one? What did they say/do? How did they behave?	
Please describe if your manager/employer was/was not supportive towards you in your grief?	
Did you notice any changes to your work performance/productivity upon your return to work after experiencing bereavement?	
Please describe. Were you offered any special work arrangements or time off work?	
Does your organisation have a bereavement policy?	Y/N/Unaware

Do you think bereavement support in the workplace is important, and why?	
In relation to grief, what does 'management support' mean to you?	
Did/do you have a good relationship with the manager that managed/supported you at work while you were grieving?	
Did you return to that place of work after experiencing bereavement? • If YES please answer a) and b) • If NO please skip a) and b) and proceed to c)	YES / NO
a) How long before you returned to your place of employ?	
b) How long did you remain employed with that organisation?	
c) If you left that organisation, please explain what made you leave?	
If you could explain to your manager a better way to handle the next grieving employee, what would you tell them?	
If there is anything else, you would like to add please use the following space for comments / feedback:	

Permissions:

You give permission for the researcher to use anonymised quotes in final write up.	YES/NO
If required, would you be willing to be contacted with a follow up telephone interview/call for further clarification.	YES / NO
If yes, please provide telephone number:	
Would you like to receive a draft summary of the results of this research project?	YES / NO

If yes, please provide email address:

Thank you for completing the survey

Should you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me on email: l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk where I will endeavour to assist in any way I can.

Furthermore, if you feel any of the information discussed needs further attention please would you contact your GP or see below for additional contacts:

Support for those bereaved:

Helpline Support:

- Samaritans:
  Tel: 08457 90 90 90. Web: http://www.samaritans.org/

- Cruse Bereavement Care:
  Helpline/to find details of local branch: 0870 167 1677
  Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk
  General email: info@cruse.org.uk Website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

- Cruse Bereavement Care also runs: RD4U (the road for you)
  Helpline: freephone 0808 808 1677 (open Monday to Friday, 9.30 am to 5.00 pm)
  Website: www.rd4u.org.uk
- Help is at Hand Booklet:
  http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Suicide/Documents/Help%20is%20at%20Hand.pdf

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Hi, my name is Leanne Flux and I am doing a PhD in Professional Practice at Canterbury Christ Church University. I would like to invite you to take part in my research which I am conducting as part of my doctoral studies.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to contact me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Background

In 2015 the Office for National Statistics reported that there were over 529, 000 deaths registered in England and Wales. Many of those experiencing the death of a loved one will be employed and required to resume work within several days of experiencing their personal loss. While work can give many bereaved individuals respite from grief, for others it may be difficult trying to cope with grief and work demands simultaneously, having negative effects in their social life as well as mental and physical wellbeing.

Working is a part of everyday life, and along with family and friends, workplace support has been found to play an important part in assisting people to adapt to the loss they have experienced. However, this is an area that has received very little recognition and although some organisations acknowledge the need to provide flexibility to their employees, research shows that in general organisations have failed to provide sufficient workplace support based on the specific needs relating to loss and grief.

In a survey conducted by the National Council for Palliative Care (Penny, 2014), 32% of grieving employees recounted that over a five-year period, their perception was that they had not been treated with any form of compassion by their employer. Although reactions to grief and the effect it has upon those bereaved outside of the workplace, has been well researched, there appears to be a lack of research into what type of support grieving employees need from their organisation/management. It is therefore crucial that the voice of working bereaved individuals are heard to ensure that the appropriate support is offered within the workplace.

To participate in this study, you must:

- It must have been 6 months since you were bereaved.
- Aged 20 or over.
- Living in and been employed in the UK.
- Was working prior to experiencing bereavement (full-time or part-time) and have returned to work after being bereaved.
- Must have experienced the bereavement of a partner (spouse), either having lived together or apart but having been in a relationship with them at the time of death.
- Be willing to share thoughts on your workplace experience as a grieving employee.
- Be willing to share your own attitudes, workplace behaviours and workplace experiences after experiencing bereavement.

Do I have to take part?
- No, participation is entirely voluntary, and if you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent at the start of the survey, however, you are still free to withdraw at any time.

What will you be required to do?
- You will be asked to complete a written interview (link provided) which takes approximately 15 minutes.
- You will be asked if it would it be okay to contact you for further clarification or further information if required?
- You will be offered a copy of the initial findings which should be available in draft format once the write up is complete. The draft will contain a summary of key findings and the relationship to the existing body of literature on the subject.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
- Due to the nature of the topic, participation may bring back memories.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
- In taking part in this study, you may find the experience cathartic.
- The knowledge that you have contributed to the wider community in bereavement research and in creating awareness for management guidance within the workplace creating a better experience for others.

Confidentiality

- All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by the researcher - Leanne Flux.
- After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

What will happen to the results of the research study?
- This project is the first part of a two-phase research project informing my doctoral studies. The findings from this project will aim to be published via an academic or clinical journal and will also be shared via social media. However, all participant details will remain confidential.

Who has reviewed the study?
- This study has been approved by Canterbury Christ Church University Research Ethics Committee. Ethics approval code: *V:\075\Ethics\2016-17.*

What if there is a problem?

- If you have a concern about this study, you can contact me on the email address given. If you remain unhappy and have any complaints you can contact the Research Director at Salomons Centre, Canterbury Christ Church University, Dr Paul Camic at paul.camic@canterbury.ac.uk.

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me, Leanne Flux on email: l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk

Leanne Flux   BSc(Hons) MSc
Business Psychologist
Canterbury Christ Church University

Appendix D: Advert

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

We are looking for individuals to take part in an online survey to share their personal experiences of support received in the workplace while grieving after experiencing the death of a partner or spouse.

We are seeking volunteers who are over 20 years of age who were living and working (part-time or full-time) in the UK prior to being bereaved, who are 6 months or more since experiencing bereavement and returned to work at some point after this loss.

For furthermore information about this study, or to take part, please click on the link below:

https://v3.pebblepad.co.uk/spa/#/public/sfxbw87gxh7qdtnfqfpth3hZgr

Appendix E: Analysis Stages

Stage One: **Baseline Categories:**

1. Grief Reactions.
2. Positive Support Received.
3. Negative Support received.
4. Suggestions for Support Needed.

Stage Two: **Expanded Baseline Categories:**

Superordinate Theme	Theme	Subtheme
Impact of grief on work demands	• Conceptual	• Grief is Unpredictable, Life Changing
	• Functionality	• Fatigue, Lack of Concentration, Lack of Memory, Lack of Conscientiousness, Lack of Efficiency
Support	• Emotional	• Compassion, Consideration, Acknowledgement
	• Instrumental	• Reduced Hours, Time of Work, Reduced Duties
	• Informational	• Care Navigation, Counselling
Needs	• Responsiveness	• Space to grieve, Flexibility, Knowledge
	• Recognition	• Understanding, Communication

Appendix F: Summary Table of Findings

Stage Three:

Superordinate Theme	Theme	Subtheme
Acknowledgement: *identifying the validity of the bereaved employees experience and the existence thereof*	**Empathy:** *the act of recognising, appreciating and empathising for the existence, feeling or situation of the bereaved employee*	**Compassion:** *showing a feeling of sympathy for the suffering of others and a willingness to share their burden and help them* **Communication:** *a two-way process in which the employer and employee share information to create an appreciation of feelings and circumstances*
	Work Grief Reactions: *Acknowledging the possible ways in which individuals may react when having to deal with the mental distress of a bereavement whilst trying to cope with the demands of their job*	**Fatigue:** *extreme tiredness or weakness in mental capacity* **Lack of Concentration:** *difficulty with ability to think clearly or focus on something they were doing without any distractions* **Lack of Memory:** *difficulty in storing details or remembering information* **Lack of Conscientiousness:** *having no care or concern with issues or job responsibilities* **Lack of Efficiency:** *difficulty in efficiently being able to generate, create, enhance or bring forth good work performance levels*
Responsiveness: *the way that an employer recognises a situation and the speed and clarity with which they respond or react to the bereaved employee*	**Understanding of Experience:** *the relationship between employer and employee in which the employer shows an understanding of the employees' situation, needs and the challenges they face*	**Grief is Unpredictable:** *grief being very individual and unlikely to be able to predict reactions in advance* **Life Changing:** *life as it was known before experiencing bereavement changes and is never to be the same again* **Care Navigation:** *the employer offering some form of suitable external support to the employee based on their situation*
	Space to Grieve: *allowing the bereaved individual time and space in which to process their grief at their own pace.*	**Reduced Hours:** *reduction in working hours including phased return to work so as to ease any pressure and strain* **Time off Work:** *time granted away from work thereby allowing the employee time and space to grieve* **Reduced Duties:** *a reduction in work duties/expectation so as to ease the pressures that the bereaved employees may be feeling*

Appendix G: Details of Analysis Findings

Theme	Subtheme	Sub-Subtheme
Acknowledgement: *identifying the validity of the bereaved employees experience and the existence thereof*	**Work Grief Reactions:** *acknowledging the possible ways in which individuals may react when having to deal with the mental distress of a bereavement whilst trying to cope with the demands of their job*	**Fatigue:** *extreme tiredness or weakness in mental capacity* - Fatigue (2) - Exhaustion and fatigue (5) - Fatigue (10) - Exhaustion (14) - Fatigue (21) - Fatigue (22) - Fatigue (23) - Grief was exhausting (38) - Couldn't sleep (44) **Lack of Concentration:** *difficulty with ability to think clearly or focus on something they were doing without any distractions* - Lacked concentration (2) - My concentration was not very good (3) - Lack of memory and concentration. Couldn't make decisions (5) - Took longer to make decisions (7) - Lack of concentration (13) - Poor concentration. Lacked memory and concentration (14) - Lack of concentration (17) - Lack of concentration (20) - Took time for brain to focus back onto work (23) - Lack of concentration (26) - Unable to concentration/focus (27) - Lack of concentration (28) - Unable to think clearly (29) - Lack of concentration (36) - Lack of concentration (38) - Lack of concentration (43) - Lack of concentration 45) **Lack of Memory:** *difficulty in storing details or remembering information* - Lack of memory (2) - Lack of memory (14) - Lack of memory (27) - Lack of memory (43) - Memory severely impaired (45) **Lack of Conscientiousness:** *having no care or concern with issues or job responsibilities* - Low tolerance levels of silly things (7) - Lacked patience (17) - Less tolerant of people and their insignificant problems. Less tolerance of silly issues (18) - Reduction in conscientiousness. Work is not a priority (20) - Work was not a priority at that time (21) - Just couldn't be bothered (27) - Feeling of work being pointless. Struggled at not being able to spend more time with children (30) - Felt like didn't care as much as used to (32) - Don't really care about work anymore (44)

Lack of Efficiency:
difficulty in efficiently being able to generate, create, enhance or bring forth good work performance levels

- Dealing with difficult memories in workplace (1)
- Not as productive as normal (3)
- Terrified of making mistakes (5)
- Found it difficult to multi-task (7)
- High stress reaction (10)
- Reduction in productivity (11)
- Emotions were all over the place. Lack of productivity (13)
- May be sensitive to comment and criticisms. Sensitive and forgetful. Felt anxious and stressed (14)
- Could not deal with complicated or stressful issues upon return (16)
- Lack of productiveness (17)
- Lack of motivation (20)
- There is so much to do in first few weeks with grieving on top of it all. It's overwhelming. Feelings of insecurity (21)
- At times felt overwhelmed and lacked confidence (23)
- Unable to function properly (28)
- Difficult to lead own team (30)
- Struggled to function upon return (31)
- Felt like was letting everyone down. Cried a lot and swore a lot. Lack of productivity and professionalism. Not really diligent and not as thorough as used to be (32)
- Felt very empty. Lack of productivity (33)
- Broke down. Depressed. Felt on autopilot for months. Ability to manage personal workload suffered (35)
- Less confident. Felt overwhelmed and tearful, sensitive and embarrassed. Made mistakes (36)
- Struggled with confidence and struggled with current job as brought back memories. Constantly sick (37)
- A few months after being bereaved started to feel overwhelmed. Had to leave work early handful of times due to being teary. Struggling to juggle everything. Lost the ability to function (38)
- Slower at doing the role. Could not think clearly (39)
- Anxious (40)
- Sensitive (42)
- Difficulty in coping with life/functioning (43)
- Suffered anxiety. Not able to function (44)
- Work situations could trigger grief (PTSD). Less productive (45)

Empathy:
the act of recognising, appreciating and empathising for the existence, feeling or situation of the bereaved employee

Compassion:
showing a feeling of sympathy for the suffering of others and a willingness to share their burden and help them

- Employer telephoned, visited and sent flowers (1)
- Employer showed excellent communication. Employer showed no pressure. Employer was supportive. Employer was sympathetic. If felt not up to work, just had to say (2)
- It is nice when management have empathy and have an understanding of your situation. Received a card with messages from Directors (3)
- Manager kept clear communication and regular contact without hassling (4)
- Had some awkward conversations which could have been diverted had manager confirmed to share the news. Manager allowed time to talk when needed. Received messages and flowers (7)
- Employer was compassionate (9)
- Employer showed compassion (10)
- Employer showed genuine concern (11)

- Listening skills very important. Employer acknowledged by sending flowers and a card (13)
- Management was understanding (14)
- Employer showed good communication. Talking/listening to understand needs short and long term is important (16)
- Employer sent flowers cards and messages (17)
- Employer sent flowers and cards (19)
- Employer showed sympathy (20)
- Candidate felt cared for. Employers send flower, card and donations (21)
- Employer allowed space to grieve which was good (22)
- Had a peer that I spoke with when needed and manager was supportive of this (23)
- Received flowers, cards and emails (24)
- Talking to someone at work is helpful. Employer showed compassion (25)
- Employer was empathetic (26)
- There was no pressure to perform. Response from manager gave space to work through things. Manager gave space to grieve. Employer was supportive and compassionate. Felt thoroughly cared for and supported (28)
- Employer visited (29)
- Employer did not send a card (31)
- Managers were empathetic and kind. Manager visited and reached out. Sent flowers and did a collection (32)
- Managers showed empathy and understanding (34)
- Management don't seem to be listening to what is needed (35)
- Asked if wanted to share information with work colleagues. Managers just need to listen, no answers needed (36)
- Unhelpful conversations with manager. Manager needs to show compassion to make feel valued rather than a number (37)
- Managers were awkward – didn't know what to say. Received a lot of messages and flowers (39)
- Manager was kind and insightful (40)
- Manager showed compassion (42)
- Manager very sympathetic. Received a personal call from manager. Received messages of support from the whole company (43)
- Managers were sympathetic and shocked (44)
- Sympathy shown (45)

Communication:
a two-way process in which the employer and employee share information to create an appreciation of feelings and circumstances
- *Communication from employer is very important. (2)*
- *Be aware of what you say – don't say you understand if you have never experienced the situation. Need to feel able to talk to your manager – relationship (13)*
- *Clear communication from management (17)*
- More day-to-day check inns on the person could be helpful (18)
- Managers should be approachable (19)
- *Management should be open to discussion on how the return to work will be (21)*
- *Having a regular person to meet with to discuss issues would have been helpful (22)*
- *Employer needs to encourage a culture of communication.* Employers need to be approachable (24)
- *Employers need to lend a sympathetic ear (24)*
- *Management should be someone you can talk to (26)*
- *Managers should be available to talk (28)*

- *Managers should ascertain communication to other staff members*
  Managers need a human connection. Managers should offer regular one to ones. Resent management as no human connection during grieving process (30)
- *No one really knew what to say (33)*
- *Managers should provide a place for employees to discuss issues.*
  Relationship and trust is needed (35)
- Weekly contact meetings. Important to be seen as a human being. Managers need to keep in contact (36)
- *Manager needs to be able to listen to what grieving person needs to support (37)*
- *Manager should clearly communicate with bereaved employee to understand what they need (39)*
- *Manager needs to have clear communication i.e.: advise others not to email work issues (40)*

Responsiveness: *the way that an employer recognises a situation and the speed and clarity with which they respond or react to the bereaved employee*	**Understanding of Experience:** *the relationship between employer and employee in which the employer shows an understanding of the employees' situation, needs and the challenges they face*	**Grief is Unpredictable:** *grief being very individual and unlikely to be able to predict reactions in advance*

Grief is Unpredictable:
grief being very individual and unlikely to be able to predict reactions in advance
- Grief is unpredictable and individual (1)
- Grief is very individual. Needs dealing with in a case-by-case approach (2)
- There is no time limit on grief (10)
- Grief is unpredictable. Everyone reacts differently (14)
- Grief is unpredictable (16)
- Bereavement effects different people in different ways (20)
- Grief is unpredictable (23)
- Grief is unpredictable (25)
- Everyone grieves in different ways (26)
- Every bereavement is different, no one size fits all solution (27)
- Each loss is different and experienced differently. Really can't understand bereavement until experienced it yourself (36)
- Grief manifests differently in different people (38)

Life Changing:
life as it was known before experiencing bereavement changes and is never to be the same again
- Living changed life is tough. Become a different person. Life changes drastically (1)
- Loose a sense of who you are. Live a very changed life. World turned upside-down (5)
- Bereavement is a major life event (10)
- You do not recover from bereavement, you cope, you manage (23)
- Whole life changes (25)
- Very stressful time (26)
- Dealing with death was extremely stressful and difficult (37)
- Bereavement is life changing (40)
- Life in turmoil – what to do now? (44)

Care Navigation:
the employer offering some form of suitable external support to the employee based on their situation
- Employer offered a buddy system (1)
- *Managers need training in how to deal with bereaved staff. No one to give guidance at employer re time taken (4).*
- *No idea how to move forward as single parent (9)*
- *Employer needs to be a point of contact for questions (10)*
- *Important that managers understand impact of grief on employees. Managers need to recognise the needs of the employee. Important that managers have some form of guidance (11)*
- Employer offered free counselling (13)

- *Manager needs to be able to signpost. Recognising what the bereaved person needs (16)*
- *Employer needs to create awareness of pay entitlement. Lacked organisational skills. Clearer guidance would be helpful (17)*
- *How to manage the grief on a daily basis. Future plan of action could be helpful (18)*
- Employer referred candidate to occupational health (18)
- Employer offered counselling. *Important that manager knows how to sensitively deal with bereavement. Managers decide how much time allocation for bereavement leave (19)*
- *Employer should have guidelines for discretion (20)*
- *Management should guide on what support to offer professionally.* Employer showed support – offered assistance outside of work (21)
- Employer gave letter directing candidate to emotional support available through work (23)
- Provided counselling and organisation paid. Manager gave candidate telephone number of employee assistance program (28).
- Counselling was arranged (29)
- Manager gave details for helpline for EA Program (33)
- *Managers should be aware of wellbeing at work. All managers should undergo training to enable to support bereaved, disabled or mentally ill (35)*
- *Managers need to give clear guidance in work expectations (36)*
- *No consistency (37)*
- *Managers need clear guidelines on talking around grief (39)*
- Company provided counselling (42)
- *Managers need to guide re support services (43)*
- *Manager should not be afraid to deal with grief (45)*

Space to Grieve:
allowing the bereaved individual time and space in which to process their grief at their own pace.

Reduced Hours:
reduction in working hours including phased return to work so as to ease any pressure and strain

- Employer offered a phased return (1)
- Had extra time out of class (teaching) (2)
- Phased return to work (4)
- Phased return (7)
- Start/end times adjusted (for school runs) (9)
- Phased return (10)
- Employer offered slow reintegration and offered reduced hours (11)
- Phased return to work – due to death experienced of business manager (13)
- Reduced/Adjusted hours (14)
- Employer showed flexible approach – adjusted hours as needed (16)
- Employer offered phased returned (19)
- Work was understanding prior to husband's death and made reasonable adjustments. Showed flexibility. Negotiated a slow reintegration to work (21)
- Phased return (22)
- Slow phased return to work and flexible work (23)
- Phased return to work (27)
- Phased return arranged (28)
- Phased return arranged (30)
- Work reduced hours (34)
- Limited willingness to adapt or accommodate shift around childcare issues. Shift times impractical due to childcare. Manager was inflexible (37)
- Worked reduced hours – but still long hours (39)

- Phased return (42)
- Work shortened hours for first week of return. Managers did not know what to think or how to support re work adjustments. *A longer period of readjustment/altered hours needed (44)*
- Phased return to work (45)

Time off Work:
time granted away from work thereby allowing the employee time and space to grieve
- Employer said not to worry about work. (1)
- Fully paid with no pressure to return. They were very supportive and told candidate not to worry about work and to return when ready (3)
- *Employers need to give person time to grieve (4, 14, 21)*
- *Employer needs to allow time to get back into normality.*
- *Need less pressure to return to work, ensure paid. World is turned upside down!* Policy was dire – 2 days' compassionate leave. Advised if needed time to grieve needed to 'go sick' (5)
- Employer showed no pressure to return to work (7)
- *More time needed off work to grieve (9)*
- Employer had expectation of timeous functionality (11)
- Employer expected candidate to state of normality immediately (13)
- Expected to return to normality immediately. No special work arrangements were made. *Lesson the pressure and expectation (14)*
- Employer told candidate to take off any time as needed. There was no pressure to return. Very flexible (16)
- Employer gave no pressure to return. The later pressure to return when not ready caused more absences. *Longer phased return would be helpful (17)*
- Flexible time off – 6 months with more time if needed. Offered time off at 1-year anniversary. No rush to return to work (18)
- No pressure to return to work. *Managers should not expect too much too soon (19).*
- *Takes time to adjust and find a 'new normal' (20)*
- *Manager needs to allow person space to grieve/say not coping (1, 21)*
- Employer showed no pressure for return to work (23)
- Employer showed no pressure. Told to take as much time as needed (24)
- *Need time to gradually re-enter the world (25)*
- No pressure to return to work. *Previous bereaved person was made to return to work prematurely and hadn't worked, they learnt from this and supported (27)*
  There was no pressure to return to work (29)
- Felt like they expected a return to normality too fast. Would have responded better had there been better support from manager. No other concessions offered. Went to counselling on own time. *Managers should offer time out for counselling (30)*
- Was afforded time off work fully paid to attend bereavement workshops (32)
- Manager said not to worry about work. *Time and space is needed. Managers need to allow time for bereaved staff to take time out for bereavement (33).*
- Pressed candidate to return to work whenever off. Was told to take as long as wanted, but on day 3 was called to ask when back. Manager offered to demote but made no adjustments. Will need to take holiday or unpaid leave for any absence (i.e.: school meetings etc.). Went back to work too soon (35)
- Granted special leave. Told not to worry about work (36)

- *Manager needs to give grieving persons' time to grieve (37).*
- Given paid leave as needed (38)
- No pressure to come back (42)
- Work was flexible (took time off when needed) (43)
- Had a lot of time off work (45)

Reduced Duties:
a reduction in work duties/expectation so as to ease the pressures that the bereaved employees may be feeling

- Employer would make arrangements for work to be covered (2)
- Employer lightened workload for return to work. My workload was lighter than normal when I initially returned to work (3)
- Employer offered reduced duties (11)
- Employer did not push candidate to do more than could (22)
- *People could have taken over some parts of the role, so it was lighter when they returned (23)*
- Workload was reduced (28)

Chapter Four: Applied Research Project

A Grounded Theory of how managers provide support to bereaved employees in the workplace.

Abstract

Experiencing a bereavement can cause immense distress to employees, yet managers involvement when supporting these employees and the challenges they face are less understood. This study aims to develop a theoretical explanation and framework of managers' experiences when supporting a bereaved employee in the workplace. A total of 16 managers took part in a three-stage process. In the first stage, eight managers completed face-to-face interviews, with four of these managers validating the results. In the second stage, an additional eight managers completed an online survey based on the findings from stage one, further validating the results. The third stage involved creating a framework based on the final themes identified. An abbreviated grounded theory method was used, involving ongoing in-depth analysis and line-by-line coding. A core code of 'Cognitive Dissonance' and five theoretical codes consisting of 'Empathy', 'Workplace Demand', 'Uncertainty', 'Compassion' and 'Practical Adjustments' emerged from the data. Thirteen focused codes were identified, including 'Understanding the Grief', 'Workplace Relationship', 'Planning', 'Sliding Scale of Leave', 'Uncomfortable Conversations', 'Work Expectations', 'Acknowledgement', 'Regular Communication',' Reassurance', 'Time Off', 'Practical Support', 'Adjustments' and 'Guidance' was found. The process is composed of two distinct phases: the Consideration Phase and the Response Phase. This study demonstrates the pressure, diversity and complexity that managers face when offering bereavement support to employees. It highlights how managers struggle with uncertainty, leading them to experience cognitive dissonance.

Keywords: workplace bereavement support, workplace well-being, management support

Introduction

It is well known that experiencing a bereavement can present considerable challenges of adaptation to bereaved individuals, however, what is much less considered are the massive challenges that bereavement can thrust upon organisations and their managers (Thompson & Bevan, 2015). For many individuals, work plays an important role in both their personal identity and social life (Thompson & Bevan, 2015). Research suggests that work can provide a source of significant satisfaction and stability, where bereaved employees may find their workplace a great source of support, offering compassion and companionship which can prove to be positive at a very difficult and challenging time (Thompson & Bevan, 2015). Conversely, it can be an influential source of strain, anguish and discomfort where an unsupportive workplace can add significantly to the stress of grief especially if the manager or overall work culture is found to be insensitive and unaccommodating (Burke & Neimeyer, 2013; Jacobson et al., 2017; Juth et al., 2015; Thompson & Bevan, 2015). Thompson (2009) provides an example where two parents experienced the death of their son. The wife's organisation was found to be supportive, providing her with helpful guidance. As a result, she felt pleased that they had taken the trouble to help her to make informed choices. Whereas the husband's organisation did not provide him with any guidance. He ended up leaving the organisation as a result of his dissatisfaction due to their perceived lack of support and their failure to take his well-being seriously (Thompson, 2009).

It appears that a common recurring theme in grief research is the significance of social support, however, it remains to be understood what factors hinder or facilitate managers in providing support to bereaved employees in the workplace (Bath, 2009; Ladegaard et al., 2019). Blau's (1964) original 'Social Exchange Theory' is one of the paradigms used for understanding behaviour in the workplace. It proposes that the interchange of social and material resources plays an essential role in human interaction. 'Organisational Support Theory' which forms part of the 'Social Exchange Theory', details how support from organisations impact the behaviours of the employees

(Eisenberger et al., 1986). It proposes that employees form an overall opinion of the depth to which

an organisation cares about them and their well-being and how well it demonstrates understanding

and appreciation (Eisenberger et al., 2020). This is termed 'Perceived Organisational Support'

(POS). POS is perceived to convey that the organisation regards employees as valuable members and

has pride in their affiliation with the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 2020). POS conveys an

empathetic understanding of distressing experiences and shows a desire to help employees in such

circumstances, which should fulfil any requirement for emotional support (Eisenberger et al., 2020).

Research indicates that low POS is the perception of a lack of concern for an employee's welfare and

the non-fulfilment to meet their responsibility, which results in anger of employees within the

workplace (Ford et al., 2018). Managers are considered as representatives of an organisation,

therefore if an employee observes the manager as supportive then they feel compelled to return the

support, by demonstrating appreciative attitudes and behaviours that promote work expectations

(Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

The way in which managers respond to their bereaved employees may reflect their personal

experiences of grief, or the way in which they would like to have been supported, as well as how the

organisation responds to them. Gill et al.'s. (2018) qualitative study indicates that understanding the

experiences of others is critical to building and maintaining workplace relationships as well as

developing trust in teams. They go on to state that emotional and cognitive compassion enables

people to engage at different levels of support. However, from a manager's perspective, their

findings suggest that a manager who perceives being met with continual high work pressures or

cognitive and emotional demands may feel left in a state of exhaustion and unable to show sensitivity

or sufficient empathy when supporting a bereaved employee (Gill et al., 2018). Research conducted

by Cameron et al. (2019) highlights that showing empathy may be cognitively costly and therefore

creates a desire to avoid showing empathy completely. Furthermore, data indicates that possible

barriers to being able to provide compassionate care comprise of lack of time and heavy work demands which is often due to understaffing (Eganan et al., 2018).

Although there is a lot of recent information for organisations on how they should be supporting bereaved employees (Forbes Human Resources Council, 2023; Jarvis, 2022; Keller, 2021; Roepe, 2017), most of it appears to be opinion based and lacks evidence or consideration on what challenges managers may face when supporting a bereaved individual. Ladegaard et al's. (2019) grounded theory study demonstrates that in general, managers lack knowledge and understanding of the available options to direct complex return to work processes. Findings from a study conducted by Peticca-Harris (2019) using a narrative approach indicates that managers feel a mixture of emotions such as being judged, insufficient, criticised, and anxious due to not meeting the expected emotional response. The study of Flux et al. (2019) suggests that not only is there is a lack of workplace response for long-term support for bereaved employees, but also a lack of clarity around time allowed off work, lack of HR guidance for both managers and bereaved employees and a lack of understanding in how to performance manage bereaved employees. Bath (2009) argues that the vast majority of studies take the perspective of the bereaved and provide little insight into how to enable managers to engage in these supportive behaviours in the workplace.   Until this feature of grief support is understood, the success of any intervention or training focused on supporting the bereaved employee is unlikely to be successful (Bath, 2009). Therefore, by further examining the dynamics and experiences that may help or hinder managing compassionately, this study aims to develop an understanding of the manager's experience when undertaking to support bereaved employees in the workplace.

Rationale

This study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge by gaining better insight into how managers experience supporting their bereaved employees before, during and after their return to work. To reduce the repercussions of stress-related long-term absences, it is important to get a better

appreciation of the facilitators and challenges that a manager experiences in the return-to-work process of a bereaved employee (Ladegaard et al., 2019). This study endeavours to address the 'what' and 'how' questions, while preserving the complexity of social working life.

An abbreviated grounded theory method was used with an in-depth analysis and line-by-line coding to ensure that the detail of the data were meaningful and essential to understanding the social phenomena of the research question (Willig, 2008). For qualitative research to be of high quality the criteria need to be recognised as meaningful to those for whom the research is intended. The researcher acknowledges the potential presence of biases and worked to reduce assumptions whilst aiming to provide the clear understanding of the managers' lived experiences (Crotty, 1996). In keeping with this viewpoint, the criteria do not come in the form of rigid rules but are open to reflective, flexible interpretation such as showing sensitivity to context, commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence whilst keeping in mind the impact and importance of each manager's experience (Yardley, 2000).

Aims of the Research

The aim of this research was to develop a theoretical exploration of the social process around bereavement support in the workplace. Currently there appears to be a lack of widespread evidenced based theory which is focused on manager's experiences in supporting bereaved employees. To gain an insight into what managers would find helpful in supporting a bereaved individual this study aimed to investigate 'How do line managers experience supporting bereaved employees' and develop a framework for managers to use by answering the following questions:

    a. What organisational and/or human elements are reported by managers to hinder them in supporting a bereaved employee?

    b. What organisational and/or human elements are reported to be helpful to a manager when required to support a bereaved employee?

    c.   What impact, according to the managers account, does their own personal experience of bereavement (or lack thereof) have in supporting bereaved employees?

Method

Participants

A total of 16 managers in the United Kingdom (UK) took part in this study ranging from 20 – 70 years of age. They worked for various sized organisations covering the managerial role in departments such as Human Resources, Medical/Clinical Research, Healthcare, Consultancy, Finance and Education. In the first instance, eight managers had a face-to-face interview. Four of those eight volunteered to have a follow up face-to-face interview to validate the findings. To see if any new data collected fitted the theory, a further eight managers took part in an online survey based on the findings from the data analysed from the first eight managers. The selected number of participants was determined with the aim of securing a sufficient sample size to uncover themes that are less frequently expressed (Fugard & Potts, 2015). For this study it was not possible to sample everything for data saturation, due to there being a single researcher and a limit on the number of interviews that could take place in the time the researcher had for the study.   Dey (1999) maintains that data sufficiency is not something that can be identified at a specific time but relies on the judgement of the researcher where sufficiency is reached when the data becomes counter-productive without any new data being found. The researcher, therefore, chose to focus on data sufficiency as this ensured that the available data were sufficient in quantity and quality to support the development of a comprehensive grounded theory. Data sufficiency established that the existing data were robust enough by focusing on the diversity of the sample, richness of the data and the level of detail in the data collected (Dey, 1999).

Inclusion Criteria:

Managers were required to be employed and working in the UK. They were required to have experience of supporting at least one bereaved employee within the last five years. This ensures that

the experience is fresh enough in their minds to relay the events however, enough time having passed to enable them to have processed and reflected on their experience. Finally, the manager was required to be willing to share their thoughts, workplace behaviours and workplace experiences. Only managers with first-hand experience of supporting bereaved employees were interviewed.

Exclusion Criteria:

Managers who reported to currently be managing their own mental health conditions, for example suffering with anxiety or depression, would be excluded from the interview process. This was assessed in the pre-interview conversation.

Table One: Participants Demographic Characteristics

	Age Range	Gender	Years as Manager	Title
P1	51-60	F	20	HR Manager
P2	31-40	F	8	Clinical Research
P3	41-50	F	20	Practice Manager
P4	41-50	F	15	Workforce Transformation Manger
P5	41-50	F	12	Vice Chancellor
P6	51-60	F	5	Head of HR
P7	41-50	F	20	Medical Research
P8	51-60	F	27	Head of Secondary School
P9	41-50	M	20	Practice Manager
P10	51-60	M	31	Managing Partner
P11	61-70	M	40	Consultant
P12	20-30	F	2	EDI Manager
P13	41-50	F	12	Manager
P14	51-60	M	25	Partner
P15	41-50	M	20	Director
P16	61-70	M	35	HR Partner

Design/Materials

The focus of this research was for managers, at any level within any organisational sector or industry, who had experience of managing a bereaved employee, to share their personal experience of giving workplace bereavement support. The questions comprised of their experiences, in what they found helpful or unhelpful in the process. Glasers (1978, 1992) version of grounded theory represents the original formulation (Glaser & Strauss, 1976) and assumes an objectivist perspective, emphasising the discovery of social processes generating theory that is grounded in the data. It follows a formal, abstract, systematic, structured approach to data analysis. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) version are an extension of the original grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It incorporates some interpretive and constructivist elements and involves a structured and systematic approach to data analysis, blending elements of objectivism and constructivism (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Charmaz's (2006) approach emphasises an iterative and inductive process of knowledge generation. It allows for the exploration and discovery of new concepts and theories grounded in data, that acknowledges the belief that knowledge emerges through an ongoing dialogue with participants and the careful analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher's ontological stance adopts a constructivist perspective, emphasising the socially constructed nature of reality and the many interpretations that exist within it (Rorty, 1989). Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory therefore aligns with the researcher's belief that reality is shaped through social interactions, cultural context, and subjective experiences as it acknowledges the role of social construction in shaping meaning and knowledge. From an epistemological perspective, the researcher adopts an interpretivist standpoint, acknowledging that knowledge is context-dependent and emerges through interactions and experiences. In considering the context and goals of the study the researcher was focused on the importance of social construction and her role in shaping the theory.   Therefore, Charmaz's approach to grounded theory was chosen, as the researcher felt that it offers a deeper

interpretive and constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2006) than the Glaser or Strauss versions. This method not only attempted to ensure that data were grounded in the participants' lived experiences but encourages a more flexible and iterative process, allowing for the exploration of multiple perspectives (Charmaz, 2006).

The research design was influenced by guidelines for studying sensitive topics, especially the work of Elam and Fenton (2003). They suggest that qualitative methods particularly semi-structured or unstructured interviews, are most effective for researching sensitive topics. Purposive sampling took place, and the data were analysed with an emphasis on identifying the underlying meanings and actions (Charmaz, 2006; Willig, 2008). This was achieved using the principles of abbreviated grounded theory which is based on an in-depth analysis of the original data only (Willig, 2008). A detailed line-by-line coding process took place used to compensate for any lack of breadth that accompanies the researcher's reliance on using only the original data (Willig, 2008).

Procedure

A questionnaire was produced which focused on manager's experiences of supporting, rather than describing the actual experiences of bereaved employees experience. The 14 questions consisted of the collection of demographics, number of years working as a manager, any formal training received, the number of line managed staff, how many bereaved employees they had supported within the last five years, an explanation of their current job, whether their organisation has a bereavement policy, a description of their experience when supporting a bereaved employee, what would have enhanced their offering support, what they feel their challenges were, if they received any guidance, whether experiencing a bereavement themselves impacted their support process and the balance between compassion and work pressures. The final question was open ended asking if there is anything further that they wished to share. See Appendix A for further details.

In preparation for the study, a single participant tested the interview questions to pinpoint potential issues, gaps in understanding, or uncertainties in the questions. This process also served to

validate that the data could be gathered, offering the researcher a trial run of the data collection procedure. Feedback from the pilot participant was received and no adjustments were deemed necessary. The full study went ahead. The researcher placed an advert (Appendix B) on LinkedIn which was shared with a wider audience. The researcher also advertised to the bereaved employee participants who took part in the Small Scale Research Project to ascertain if any of their managers would consider participating. There was no further response from any of them. All interviews were digitally voice-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants names were changed, and recordings were deleted. The face-to-face interviews varied in length from one to two hours. To enquire further into the coded themes obtained from the interviews, the researcher discussed preliminary findings with four of the first set of eight managers who had been interviewed and who had volunteered to check data validity and finally a further eight managers took part in an online survey to strengthen data validity.

Ethics

An information sheet was provided to the participant (Appendix C) and their consent was obtained before the interview commenced (Appendix D). During the discussion the participant was informed of their right to withdraw or stop the interview at any point without providing reasons. At the end of the interview the researcher offered support suggestions, including contacting a general practitioner or national helplines should they feel any signs of distress (Appendix E). The utmost care was taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. In the write up, the researcher took steps to safeguard the identity of the participant's, including altering personal details and any potentially recognisable information such as participant name or name of any organisations mentioned, whilst endeavouring to ensure that their lived experience was accurately represented (Gabbard, 2000). The study received full ethical approval from the University Ethics Panel (Ref: V:000 Doctorate in clinical psychology/research/_0 mrp/PHD & staff) (Appendix F).

Analysis Methodology

Data analysis started as soon as the first interview was completed, and the process of coding was systematic and iterative (Charmaz, 2006). Firstly, open coding consisting of descriptive ideas that considered actions, reasons, processes and feelings were noted (Charmaz, 2006). This was followed by focused coding for each transcript, which allocated focus categories using a line-by-line process of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). All the while a process of reflection and consideration of the observations and phenomena attached to the data, the researcher aimed to transform the descriptive data into theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). These codes were limited to only those categories that related to the main category and research question. They focused on core variables to identify the codes and concepts that are frequently mentioned or stood out as significant to the managers experiences in supporting a bereaved employee (Appendix G). The theoretical coding was considered in how the categories related to each other and the nature of the relationships between them. The researcher continued sampling and analysing the data until no new data or concepts were found across all the transcripts (Urquhart, 2013).

During the coding process the researcher used theoretical memoing by breaking off to write down thoughts and concepts about the data. This memoing process allowed the researcher to consider what may be going on in the data which in turn assisted to build theory (Urquart, 2013). The theory emerged based on the coding process and the framework was developed over three stages (Appendix H). During the coding process the researcher continually compared all the data and reflected on the meaning and experiences of the managers focusing on the actions rather than their interpretation. Following the analysis, the researcher returned to four of the eight participants who agreed to make themselves available to check and validate that the findings and framework was in line with their experience, and nothing had been missed or added. All four participants agreed with the findings however added further clarity to the detail of the framework (Stage One).

The researcher worked through the data again with the insight of the feedback adjusting the framework and amending the theory, which was then used in the form of an online survey and volunteers were called for via an advert on LinkedIn (Stage Two). This online survey explained the interpretation of the data collected from the first eight participants and the framework in more detail (Appendix I). The researcher chose an online survey rather than meeting a further eight participants face-to-face, due to the scarcity of managers volunteering to take part. Additionally, completing an online survey was deemed more anonymous than having a face-to-face interview and able to be undertaken at any time that suited participants availability and capacity. Therefore, the researcher reasoned that more managers may be willing to take part. This online survey aimed to gain participant validation to account for what was going on based on their experiences to ensure nothing had been missed or misconstrued. All participants were in agreement with the findings and some further insight was added into the data already collected, which during an iterative process of analysis was incorporated into the final framework (Stage Three). Using Charmaz's (2006) approach enabled an exploration of the socially constructed nature of reality and the emergence of knowledge within the specific research context to take place. This allowed the researcher to be objective whilst adhering to a robust and systematic methodology that generated meaningful and contextually grounded findings (Charmaz, 2006).

Finally, the researcher aimed to add further insight into what social processes may be underpinning the managers actions (or lack thereof) by drawing out common words that were used. This was done with the use of a 'word cloud' in Microsoft word. It presented the frequency of the 100 most used words from the transcript with the background noise removed (such as, 'they', 'the', 'and', 'yeah'). A word cloud is a simple yet extensive used arrangement to enhance qualitative research with the comprehension of the construction of textual data (Korab, 2021).

Quality Assessment

The researcher endeavoured to remain mindful of potential biases and ensure that personal experiences did not unduly influence the research process (Dodgson, 2019). The researcher endeavoured to show sensitivity in the understanding created by previous investigators on this topic, their assumptions and interpretation of their data (Yardley, 2000). Constant reflexivity assisted the researcher to critically examine her own role and potential influence on the research process. Reflexivity was embraced and a rigorous research practise was adopted to maintain objectivity and credibility (Sherman, 2015) (Appendix J). By acknowledging and addressing biases, the aim was to maintain rigor and objectivity in the analysis (May & Perry, 2015). The researcher acknowledges that experiences and insights play a role in shaping and assisting in the identification of relevant variables when creating meaningful research questions to address practical and theoretical gaps. The researcher considered that experience also facilitates rapport and trust building with the participant managers as they may feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and emotions, knowing that the researcher can empathise with their journey (Dodgson, 2019). This, therefore, contributes to a richer and more authentic data collection. The researcher's personal experiences may provide a unique lens through which data are analysed and interpreted and assist to recognise subtle nuances, themes, or patterns that others may overlook (Dodgson, 2019). The understanding of the emotional and psychological aspects of managing bereaved employees may help generate insightful interpretations and theories that capture the complexity of the phenomenon (Dodgson, 2019).

The researcher's findings in the data analysis from the first eight participants were analysed and assessed by the researcher, with sections reviewed by her supervisor. Findings were discussed in detail, and it was agreed that the researchers understanding of the relationships between the various categories were consistent. The data were evaluated by an independent reviewer to ensure objectivity and improve quality of the study. Considerations ranged from the clarity of the interview questions and the suitability of the design to the concept that the sample of participants included a range of

participants so that generalisability could be ascertained with the findings.   A process of systematic

data collection and analysis was followed so that an audit trail was created to be able to follow the

process and the researcher used a continual reflection process when analysing the data to ensure that

this study provided sufficient evidence to determine that the relevant criteria has been met (Mays &

Pope, 2000).

Findings

Table Two: Summary of phases, codes and core category

Phases	Theoretical Codes	Focused Codes	Core Category
Considerations	Empathy	• Understanding the grief • Relationship at work	
	Workplace Demand	• Planning	
	Uncertainty	• Sliding scale of leave • Uncomfortable conversations • Work expectations	Cognitive Dissonance
Response	Compassion	• Acknowledgement • Regular Communication • Reassurance	
	Practical Adjustments	• Time off • Practical support • Adjustments • Guidance	

Core Category: Managers Cognitive Dissonance

Although not every consideration or response mentioned in this study was offered to every

bereaved employee by each manager taking part, they were the more prominent themes, and some

provided more than others. The framework represents managers' experiences of providing support

to a bereaved employee. Summarised below is Figure One: Model of Managers Response to

Employee Bereavement, which contains two phases namely the 'consideration phase' and the

'response phase'. Within the consideration phase the managers experienced having to contemplate

'empathy' in creating feelings of awareness in which they aimed to understand the bereaved

employee's situation and grief experience as well as weighing up what type of relationship they have with their employee to be able to connect with them during their grief. They also considered their 'workplace demands' in what targets needed to be met and what plans should be put into place so that they could continue to meet work demands with reduced members of staff.

The 'response phase' led the manager to various actions resulting in the provision of an intervention. The 'response phase' is divided into two actions namely, 'compassion' and 'practical adjustments'. The 'compassion' element is the emotional response to empathy and is centred on some form of acknowledgement of the bereavement, trying to communicate with the grieving employee along with some providing reassurance that it is ok to grieve. The 'practical adjustments' focused on trying to allocate time away from work whilst hoping there was not a negative impact on the workload of their colleagues. Some were found to offer a form of practical support whilst some adjusted the working day to the employee's needs, others tried providing guidance to the individual in ways they perceived may be needed both inside and outside of the workplace. Most of these considerations and responses led to a sense of conflicting views between wanting to take the time to show empathy and understanding whilst still meeting expected work demands, or adhering to workplace rules that they may not agree with. These varying conflicting views were found to result in cognitive dissonance, which is a psychological concept first presented over 65 years ago by Festinger (1957). Cognitive dissonance refers to the mental discomfort or anguish that arises from one having contradictory values, attitudes or beliefs (Festinger, 1957, 1962). It advocates that when an individual perceives an inconsistency between two or more attitudes or behaviours, one will encounter dissonance, the resulting impact for the individual is the feeling of extreme unease or frustration with the circumstance (Jones, 1990). Cognitive dissonance can be relevant to differing topics and adapted to a variety of psychological concepts that include interactions of motivation, cognition and emotions (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

The creation of the word cloud found that two of the most frequently used words throughout the interviews were 'know' and 'think' (Appendix K). This serves to confirm the suggestion of the cognitive struggle that the managers face. It suggests that the managers may believe they have an understanding of bereavement and how it impacts individuals but in reality, their knowledge may be limited. It also suggests that what the managers think they should do versus what they are being instructed to do may be a challenge.

Figure One: Model of Manager's Response to Employee Bereavement
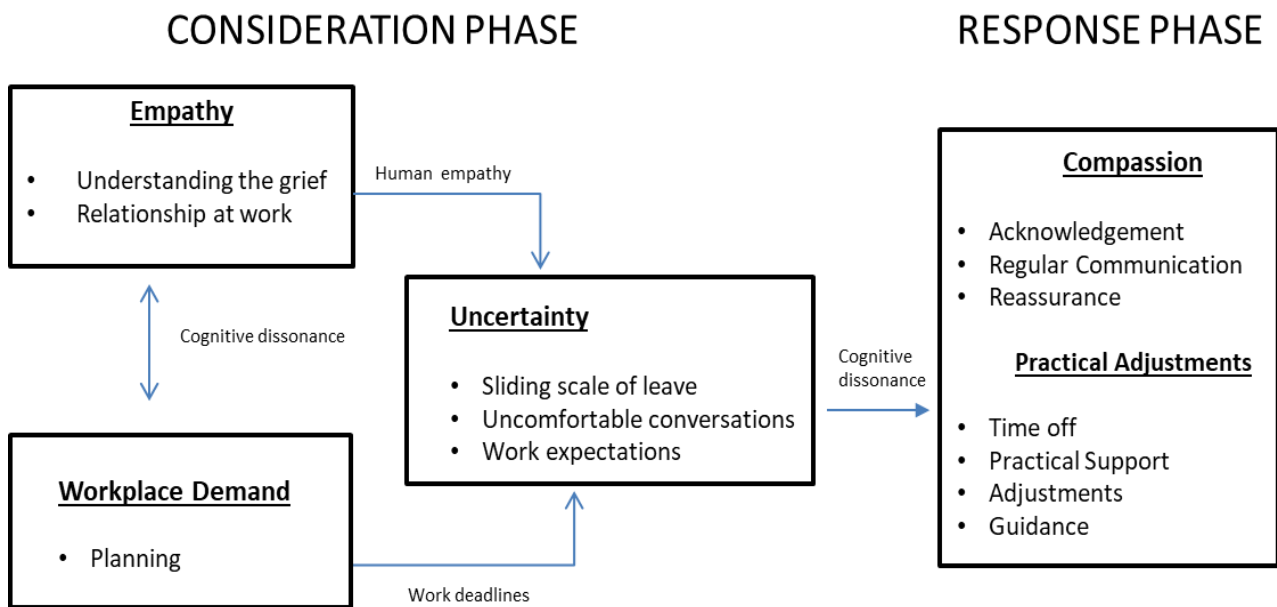
Consideration Phase

Consideration, in the context of managerial decision-making, involves an empathetic process where managers take the time to contemplate the appropriate actions to support a bereaved employee whilst simultaneously ensuring the continuity of business operations with reduced staff. It requires an understanding of the emotional and practical needs of the grieving employee and equally importantly, the strategic planning and adjustments necessary to maintain productivity and meet business objectives. This entails a delicate balance between showing compassion and considering what resources to offer, such as bereavement leave or phased return for the affected employee, whilst also strategising for temporary staffing solutions, redistributing workloads, or adjusting project

timelines to minimise disruptions. By considering these dual aspects, managers can navigate the challenging terrain of supporting their team members during difficult times whilst keeping the business on a sustainable course.

Empathy

The managers were found to be aware that to show empathy they need to invest time in understanding the depth of a bereaved employee's grief and they also need to consider their existing work relationship. This empathy was particularly prominent when managers had established a rapport with the employee, as a pre-existing connection often facilitated a more sincere understanding of the individuals' emotional state. Furthermore, the ability to offer tailored support depends on the manager's comprehension of the specific needs of the bereaved employee. By acknowledging the unique challenges, the bereaved employees face and adapting their support strategies accordingly, managers may demonstrate a level of empathy that not only provides comfort but also promotes a more constructive and supportive work environment during difficult times.

Understanding the Grief

The managers acknowledged that people react differently to grief, and that an individual's experience of grief may be very different to one's own experience. They were keen to understand the factors around the bereavement and what impact it was having on the individual. They also shared that they consider grief to be unpredictable and were aware that some days the bereaved individual would be able to cope whereas other days may present more of a challenge. They reported the importance of understanding what their employee was feeling so they could show sensitivity. Furthermore, they noted that grief is multi-faceted and not linear therefore, understanding the experience around the individual's grief assisted them to work out how much support they were able to offer at work and how much needed to be absorbed by the family and friends. The type of grief was noted as important, such as the death of a spouse whereby the bereaved employee would have additional pressures in supporting their children whilst grieving

themselves. Additionally, they noted that having a personal experience of their own bereavement would be helpful in their understanding of what support their bereaved employee may require.

> *P1: everybody reacts slightly differently so I can think there's probably a sense of I know what I'm talking about but, but you need to recognise that someone else's experience will be different so it's not going to be exactly the same as your own experience, I think it's just recognising there's going to be similarities but just because you reacted in one way, doesn't mean to say you're, you know, you're the person you're managing will react in the same way so I think it's just being sensitive to that.*

> *P6: understanding about what they feel and when they feel it because there's going to be certain days that's just going to be awful. You know, you, you wake up and you realise that it's not as it was. And, and as, as, life…..some days you are more equipped to cope, than other days.*

Relationship at Work

The participants felt that it was easier if they had a rapport with their bereaved employee. They noted that the bereaved individual would probably feel more comfortable in sharing their thoughts and emotions with a manager that they had a good relationship with. They considered that if the bereaved employee was fairly new to the organisation there was a possibility that trust had not yet been established between the manager and the employee. This could hinder how much would be shared with them, which in turn would have an impact on their understanding of the bereaved experience and therefore the type of support they offered to match the bereaved employee's needs. They noted that having a relationship with the individual would help with supporting the bereaved employee as the manager would most certainly be aware of birthdays, anniversaries and other factors that would help them build some kind of individualised support. A few of the participants spoke of

having to consider if the bereaved employee was local to them or perhaps working in a different country as this would also have an impact on the relationship and the support they could offer.

P1: And that probably comes down to having a good relationship with your manager, and being able to have an open and honest conversation where you're saying look, we are very supportive, but you need to let us know where you can and can't do these things.

P13: At first my direct report didn't share with me what was happening, so it made it difficult to support. He started taking time off at short notice, putting me in a difficult position with the people I report to, and it was hard to be patient with the situation/person. When I did realise what was happening, I tried to provide support as best as I could, but the person tried to cover up the issue. He'd just keep telling me it was all fine, but I realised it wasn't and his work performance had massively deteriorated. This put pressure on me too because senior managers wouldn't accept the situation and I was having to pick up on his work.

Work Demands

Managers face the challenging task of strategically planning to continue to meet work demands whilst operating with a reduced staff due to an employee being on bereavement leave or not performing to expectations. This requires an examination of workloads, project deadlines, and business priorities. They have to ask themselves numerous critical questions about what tasks are essential, how to redistribute work, and whether temporary staffing solutions are necessary to ensure targets and deadlines are met. The process of juggling these considerations is crucial to maintaining business continuity and addressing the immediate work requirements during the absence of a team member, all while demonstrating sensitivity and empathy towards the bereaved employee's situation.

Planning

The managers spoke about endeavouring to make sure that they could still meet work targets and expectations, even with the bereaved employee being absent or not being able to perform as they

did prior to the bereavement. They mentioned having to consider how to cover the absent employees

work, contemplating; a) what deadlines needed to be met and by when; b) who in the team would

take on extra work without putting too much pressure on them; c) what work could wait until the

bereaved employee returned to work;   d) what needed to be actioned, and finally e) what

information the absent individual had that they may need access to?

> *P2: Yeah, so that, yeah, making sure that other people can emphasise and have risk*
>
> *mitigation plans and strategies of how we're still going to achieve what we need.*

> *P7: It's juggling the business needs of; they're going to be out. I need to cover their work,*
>
> *who's going to do their work. Is there anybody that can do it, what deadlines are there? What*
>
> *information does this person have in their head that I may not be able to access at the*
>
> *moment?*

Uncertainty

Supporting bereaved employees in the workplace was found to present managers with

significant challenges and sense of uncertainty. Managers often find themselves struggling with a

complex balancing act, trying to determine the appropriate duration of leave to be offered on a

sliding scale, weighing the needs and fairness to both the grieving individual and the rest of the team.

Engaging in conversations about the bereavement was found to be emotionally charged, as managers

endeavoured to offer comfort and support without inadvertently causing additional distress to the

already grieving employee. Furthermore, the performance management of the bereaved employees

posed a unique dilemma, with managers being uncertain of how to handle situations when the

employee's performance fell short of expectations. This uncertainty highlights the delicate nature of

supporting employees through grief, emphasising the need for compassionate, flexible, and

individualised approaches to navigate these complex work dynamics.

Sliding Scale of Leave

The participants mentioned uncertainty around offering the bereaved employee time off. They spoke about the requirement of being consistent, but also needing to consider how much time is given to a bereaved employee so that it was fair to everyone, and that one member of staff was not offered a longer time off than another. Some mentioned having the flexibility to decide on how much time to offer and others noted they had to follow a time limit set in their company HR policy. There appeared to be uncertainty around the human side of giving the individual what they needed versus what the business actually stipulated them to do. Some of the participants knew their organisations policy offered a certain number of days off but still offered the bereaved employee as much time off as they needed. Interestingly some offered the employee as many days as they needed yet called them after the policy stipulated days had been taken to find out when they would be returning. Additionally, it was mentioned that there should be consideration to where the bereavement takes place, and that if there is travel involved. If limiting the bereaved employee time off to five days, the difficulty comes in when the person needs to travel a great distance to family but only has five days to do it in.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that consideration needs to be given to the relationship the bereaved employee has with the deceased individual and how much judgement is needed when allocating days off. For example, if a grandparent has passed away, did the bereaved individual have a close relationship with them? Perhaps the grandparent acted as a parent to them? These are all questions that added to the mix and created uncertainty in what exactly was best practice? When do they follow policy and when do they use their discretion? A further question was posed around bereavement leave and when does it change into sick leave or unpaid leave?

> P5: ……saying the words of 'take as long as you like, we'll manage'. I'm thinking you've got
>
> five days actually. Anyway, if they take more than five days, we'll work around it and blah

blah but I want to be the human being and say look, take as much time as you like, but actually, yeah, we've got a policy that's stronger than that.

P7: ……yeah how much of that is going to be paid not paid? Do they need to take any of it sick leave so that ambiguity around what, you know, you don't want to tell somebody in that moment right you're now going to be entitled to X amount of time of……….

Uncomfortable Conversations

Many of the managers spoke about feeling very uncomfortable when trying to find the right words to convey their sympathy, wanting to come across as being sensitive to the bereaved employee but not knowing how, and feeling quite isolated in the process. Some mentioned not knowing whether to approach the bereaved individual if they were having a good day, as they did not want to ask how they were on the off chance of ruining their day by making them think of the bereavement. Some mentioned reacting on instinct rather than knowing what to do or say. Others spoke about the pressure of knowing that whatever they do or say would be perceived as representing the organisation and that the individual would associate their experience with the organisation, so they did not want to say or do the wrong thing.   There appears to be not only uncertainty on what they should or should not say directly to the bereaved employee but also in how much information to give to their work colleagues to avoid awkward conversations upon the bereaved employees return to work.

P2: How do you say the right words, people are so afraid of saying the wrong words, I definitely have never found the right words I stick my foot into everything. I hope that people know I mean well, yeah, yeah, but I will never say something, insensitive.

P8: Sometimes, I'll be honest, I felt absolutely helpless because you don't know what to say you don't know whether you're saying the right thing or the wrong thing, or even know what to say or whether you know the recent one that I dealt with. I go to our school counsellor and

say, am I saying the right things and we're doing the right things. What do we do? So, it's

that sort of thing that I think as managers, you're not really trained in how to deal with

people's grief.

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Work Expectations

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The participants spoke about bereavement having a negative impact on performance or being able to function at work. They noted that when the bereaved employee returns to work and are seemingly functioning does not always mean that they really are coping or being productive. Therefore, the managers are unsure how to proceed with how long they should be taking non-performing bereaved employees into account. In addition, keeping in mind that the bereaved employee may react differently when returned into their job after experiencing bereavement and end up in a stressful situation. They questioned at what point do they give up and accept that the person is not performing to work expectations. They noted the challenge that the work did not stop and needed to be completed within time frames, but the struggle in still wanting to help and support the individual in their grief and lighten the load where they could.

P1: …… when that person is next evaluated, how do you take into account, you know, the

bereavement in that evaluation so, you know, I think that's something that you have to really

sort of think about because you know, bound to have an effect on your work it's bound to

happen effect on your work for longer than, you know. I think you're back and people see

you back and then they go back to normal and it's just thinking about how long you know,

almost how long do you take that into account when you're doing sort of some sort of

evaluation on that colleague in terms of, you know, what are you expecting from them

performance wise?

P13: The persons work had deteriorated to an extreme level. When I tried to get help and

reported this to a senior manager, I was told that they always wondered what this person did

anyway. I was gobsmacked. I tried to explain to another manager and asked if he could not

be allocated work for the moment until we knew what was going on as he was making so

many mistakes it was taking my time to sort them out and the work was coming to me because

he couldn't deal with it. I was told no, that's not the process.

Response Phase

After careful consideration on how to navigate the delicate balance between empathy and

work demand planning, managers ensure that they respond to the bereaved employee. Whilst they

may still be uncertain about whether their response was ideal, their primary aim was found to

demonstrate compassion and support. Managers would endeavour to acknowledge the bereavement

in the most appropriate manner, maintaining regular contact to offer reassurance and a listening ear.

In practical terms, they would explore potential adjustments, such as granting time off, contingent on

the organisation's policies and procedures, offering practical support, and considering

accommodations such as phased returns or shorter working days. Furthermore, they would provide

guidance and resources where possible to help the bereaved employee navigate this challenging time.

Compassion

Managers extended compassion by revealing a more human side to bereavement support.

This approach aimed to create a safe and understanding environment, giving the bereaved employee

time and space to grieve.

Acknowledgement

Managers spoke about acknowledging the human side to managing people by sending

handwritten cards, flowers or chocolates to acknowledge the bereavement and let the bereaved

employee know they are in their thoughts.

P1: ....and I think you know things like you know we will often send you know something

flowers or chocolates or, or something to someone just to sort of let them know you know that

we're thinking of them. Yeah so, I think there's something like that that's an acknowledgement there.....

P3: .... just really kind would always send them a bunch of flowers and condolence cards and stuff, and all the staff would as well to be fair they are kind like that.

Regular Communication

Managers shared that they felt communication was particularly important and all of them endeavoured to have regular communication to check-in with the bereaved employee, to find out how they were and if they needed anything. They also noted that they would ask how the bereaved employee would like to be contacted such as face to face, telephone, WhatsApp, text, or any other means. Many reflected on how they would try to be flexible in being available for the bereaved employee, to be there to listen or to leave them be if they did not want to talk. They reported having a conversation with the bereaved employee to understand what information they would like to be shared with the rest of their team or organisation. Some managers mentioned how important it was they impress on the employee to be honest and open so they could understand what the bereaved employee could or could not manage to do thereby setting clear expectations and work limitations.

P2: ......with making sure they're okay following up if you haven't heard from them for a few days, making sure they're not alone, that they've with a support network, they've got their family with them if they're able to.....

P6: .....because it's that duty of care. At least they know that if they wanted to talk you are there.   I can't make them talk. But as long as I can tell them that. Look, talk to me......

Reassurance

The managers reported that they reassure the bereaved employees that they did not have to come back straight away, giving them permission to stop working and advise that the workplace would be fine while they took time to grieve. They mentioned that they also reassure the bereaved

employee that whilst they were off, their job was not at risk, and they would be needed when they were ready to return to work.

> *P5:…… making sure that they don't think they're going to be at risk job wise if they're not around or, you know, because when we're when individuals lost their partner, you know when they're the sole breadwinner, the last thing they want to hear is go and take some time off. Because they'll be thinking, Oh, well, you know is my job going to be if someone's going to do my job then am I needed, and so on and so on.*

> *P7:……and mostly it's because they're worried about what's going to happen to the work. And so, it's persuading them that it's covered that we've got back up, that they don't need to worry about, and they can go on focus on themselves and their family.*

Practical Adjustments

Managers offered practical adjustment to the bereaved employee to alleviate their workload and reduce the pressure they were facing. These adjustments aimed to provide the individual with the necessary space to cope with their bereavement.

Time Off

Some of the managers noted that they do not have a rigid number of set days allocated for bereavement leave and in having a conversation they would try to understand what the bereaved employee needs were, such as travel, when funerals were taking place or if the bereaved employee had to support others like children.   Some of the participants noted that they never pressure anyone into returning to work before they feel that are ready and they can take the time that they feel is fair and reasonable. Others shared that they allocate a specific amount of time for bereavement leave and if the bereaved employee is not ready to return to work, they will have a discussion with a focus to perhaps using their holiday, sick leave or unpaid leave for have further time off. Another spoke about being flexible enough that should an employee want to return earlier than agreed, and then

realise that they were unable to function and require further time off, that was fine. They also shared that when there is an agreed return date, and the employee feels not ready to that is when they would ask them to go to the GP to get signed off work.

P1: .....some people want to come back quickly, some people don't, you know, so I think it's just being mindful of what, what, feels right and so I don't think we've ever had anyone who's really taken advantage of that.

P7: What do you need now? Do you need time off work now? I normally suggest, even if it's a relatively distant member of the family that they take the rest of the day off, so that they can do whatever it...

Practical Support

The managers reported offering practical support, such as covering work that may be in their diary, and one specifically mentioned offering financial support or buying and sending the bereaved employee food and groceries.

P1: I think the firm is quite good at sort of also doing things like giving some, some, level of financial support so say for example the lady's husband, you know, just said husband died, I think we paid her an extra month salary because, you know I think there was something during her accounts frozen.

P5: it's just a case of, okay, what can I take off your hands. So, I'll do the practical things around what's in your diary. I can see this. How about we do this, I can see that, how about we do that, but you just kind of judge it.

Adjustments

Managers reported allocating a client facing bereaved employee to a period of non-client facing work for internal work, non-travel for a time while they adjusted to being back at work. Others mentioned trying to alleviate any possible work stress or pressures by doing a phased return

to work, reducing their hours of work for a period of time or having a lighter workload whilst others continued to cover parts of their work while they settled back to work.

P1 ...…when they come back, we can always put them on something internal so it's a) it might be back in the days when we were travelling, you know, they want to be in London, that's fine if they want to do internal work it's much more, you know boundaries so they're not going to be you know up till all hours, you know it's not it's not going to be as pressured not previous time pressures so we can put them on internal stuff so it's, you know, the ramp back to work is a little bit easier, you know, rather than going straight into a client study I mean, it's choice but if somebody just wants to have a little bit of a you know a little bit of a more gentle sort of return to work after something like that, you know, we're very up for helping people to sort of integrate back, you know, as they want to audit to help them do that, you know, reasonably and carefully.

P8:...… have time off to ease their transition back in, you know, either by a phased return, or by, in the case of teaching you know it's like okay well I was taking the class while you were away so I'll carry on taking that teaching you know it's like okay well I was taking the class while you were away so I'll carry on taking that class while you, you know, such as doing it like that so that, or, you know, if there's been cover organised, then letting that cover carry on so they can just get back into school and get their feet back under the table.....

Guidance

The managers mentioned that some of the bereaved employees request guidance. They reported guiding employees to services such as counselling, private medical insurance, employee assistance programs or self-help websites. Other participants spoke about accessing self-help website such as ACAS to give them guidance in how to deal with bereaved employees and what they

should be doing or saying. Other managers mentioned bereavement champions in the workplace would be helpful.

P7: One of the resources that I found myself was the ACAS guidelines of supporting bereaved staff. And actually, that sort of guide and thoughts of what to do, was helpful, I found that relatively early on in my journey. But I think had I not come across that. It would have been challenging.

P6: Well, we have got Employee Assistance programs, where they have got contact with a counselling services. So, I will remind them of that information there. And that there is help available. There's also websites. You can, you can give them, whether they actually access them, like potentially have already. But, you know, it's, I do tend to, to just remind them about our employee access programs. Where they have got help available.

Discussion

Whilst the categories are treated individually in this study, in reality they overlap. What came through as a common theme was the uncertainty the managers felt when providing bereavement support. From the consideration of how best to respond in providing understanding and empathy, to making difficult ethical decisions in how best to provide practical support. In general, the participant managers appeared to be conflicted between feeling that they should provide the bereaved employee with unlimited time and empathic attention versus feeling the pressure of being required to still meet work demands and expectations. Most reported feeling uncertain in their response when navigating bereavement leave allocation. They faced uncertainty in how best to support an employee who did not meet stipulated work expectations, as well as uncertainty in how best to communicate with the bereaved individual. Finally, having acknowledged that not all grief is equal, that grief reactions are based on an individual's experience, the managers felt challenged that by using their discretion when offering support may create the perception of unfairness to other employees due to one employee

receiving more of a particular support than another. The dilemma is that having acknowledged that grief reactions are not equal, by instilling specific rules that all must adhere to, ignores the individualised grief reactions and needs of the bereaved employee. On the other hand, it does ensure that all employees are treated the same. Taken together, these make the support role for the manager a particularly complex and challenging one.

Managers' Experiences of Cognitive Dissonance

Festinger's (1957) research generated numerous studies which have continued to produce further research, modification and debate (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). There are several theoretical paradigms in dissonance research that offer explanations for the psychological stress that individuals experience when exposed to inconsistent information (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Aronson (1968) concludes that dissonance is a result from when an individual acts in a way that contradicts how they perceive themselves. A revision to this was presented by Cooper and Fazio (1984) which proposes that dissonance is the result of experiencing an unwanted consequence. Whereas Steele (1988) believes that dissonance is a result of acting in a way that is perceived to be against one's moral integrity. Regardless of the debate and revisions, cognitive dissonance is still used by researchers to explain and predict human behaviour. In this study therefore, we use the theory and paradigms as a means of explanation for behaviour rather than to make a contribution to the theory itself (Festinger, 1954).

Festinger (1954, 1957) proposed that individuals who have two or more cognitions that are psychologically incompatible encounter feelings of mental discomfort which is termed cognitive dissonance. The experience of cognitive dissonance has been reported as creating psychological discomfort and humans are motivated to avoid it (Cooper, 2019, Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Three important facets of Festinger's concept are 1) cognitive dissonance is experienced as discomfort 2) it activates individuals to take an action and 3) individuals feel rest assured after an action has been taken (Festinger, 1954,1957). In this instance, cognitive dissonance may lead to the

understanding in what motivates the managers in their attitudes, behaviours and preferences towards supporting the bereaved employees (Cooper, 2019). Several studies have examined the cognitive dissonance theory using multiple experimental designs and conditions. One of the many elements to induce significant dissonance and what could explain why some managers are perceived to have a lack of appropriately supporting a bereaved employee, is the knowledge that if an action is an unpleasant one, it tends to lead an individual to not engage in this action (Kretchmar, 2008). When managers make ethical judgements the decisions, they take will certainly have an impact on them and their employees (Lii, 2001). At times managers will put business profit or achieving work demands as their first priority thereby making decisions against their personal values (Lii, 2001). Lii's (2001) findings suggest that managers who have a high sense of right from wrong do not experience cognitive dissonance when making ethical judgements but have to give up personal gains.

Padmini Devi and Saravanakum (2017) proposed that individuals, who face a new experience encounter cognitive dissonance due to a lack of training and their inexperience, as well as the possibility that the circumstances may be different from what they may have been taught. In this study many managers felt that they were making decisions with instinct rather than what they knew to be the best support they could offer. They felt uncertain in how much leave they thought should be allocated versus how much they were instructed to allocate to the bereaved employee. They were uncertain in how to have a conversation with the bereaved employee as they did not want to upset them further. They were also uncertain in how best to manage employees who were not meeting the expected performance levels. Nevertheless, they endeavoured to respond in the best way they considered helpful even though they may feel forced to an action based on a policy that they may disagree with or respond from instinct but feel uncertain that they are doing the right thing.

This study demonstrates that managers struggle with the human side of empathy versus the requirement to perform and meet targets at work and the uncertainty in what should or should not be done. Cooper's (2019) study highlights that the freedom to make a decision makes a significant

difference in the dissonance effect. Interestingly, they found that when freedom is elevated, individuals changed their predicted dissonance, however, dissonance did not take place when individuals were forced into a decision. This means that when a managers' action leads to an unwanted result, they inevitably ask themselves who is responsible. If they feel responsible, they experience dissonance. If a manager is forced to behave in a specific manner, for example being instructed to follow a process or policy then they reason that they can absolve themselves of the responsibility of the outcome. However, the risk here is that they may be perceived as uncaring with a lack of human connection or warmth.

Empathy versus Work Demand

The ability to empathise or recognise and share in another person's experience is one of the most essential skills needed for navigating life (Cameron et al., 2019; Decety & Cowell, 2014). Trying to understand what support a bereaved employee may need requires focused empathy. Empathy has been found to enhance co-operation and beneficial interactions with others (Preston, 2013). A study conducted by Cameron et al. (2019) suggests that empathy and the time spent empathising is felt to be cognitively costly with a specific focus on effort. Effort can be defined as a subjective increase of a physical or mental activity when meeting a goal (Inzlicht et al., 2018). Years of research indicates that people prefer to avoid effort (Hull, 1943; Kool et al., 2010; Westbrook et al., 2013) unless it is offset by adequate rewards (Apps et al., 2015). This study supports this finding whereby three of the 16 participants specifically mentioned *"I think not all people, managers are willing to invest, you know, the time and the effort on this"*, another highlighted, *"I think it's possible, but it's, it doesn't happen without a lot of effort"; "I think it's probably at the cost of quite a lot of kind of soul searching, painful thoughts".* The third commented that, *"increasing work demands means there is less and less time for the pastoral care element of managerial roles. This has always been an issue but growing more and more stark, the willingness is there but the practical time is not, especially depending on the size of the team that you manage."* Empathy support can be

problematic for organisations whose managers are dealing with difficult high stress situations or people with high needs (Gill et al., 2018).   If people are interested in and feel enriched by helping others, they may be more willing to put in the work of empathising and find it rewarding (Cameron et al., 2019). Therefore, there may be some instances whereby empathy is deemed as rewarding and not avoided, however, in general, cognitive costs can lead people to avoid it completely (Cameron et al., 2019).

Research suggest that what plays a significant role in whether someone will offer support to a bereaved employee links to how they perceive the outcomes of support for themselves and the bereaved individual, as well as the amount of self-efficacy and control they feel in providing this support (Bath, 2009). Furthermore, Cameron et al. (2019) proposes that empathy may be observed as less effortful for employees who have a close relationship with their manager or in specific workplaces that links empathy to social rewards. The level of support offered by a manager may be a result of the organisations culture or as a result of the manager's experience, degree of comfort or understanding in dealing with such matters (Barclay & Kang, 2019). However, the manager may consider that achieving work goals is their key focus and that emotional and interpersonal support does not form a part of their work duties (Barclay & Kang, 2019).

Barclay and Kang, (2019) argue that managers may not appreciate the behaviours that underpin this type of support and therefore, may not feel there is a reward for partaking in such practices. Barski-Carrow (2000) proposes that managers may not consider the death of a loved one as an unsettling event and as a result may downplay the requirement for a timeous recovery period. Additionally, Pitimson (2021) suggests that there may be a lack of lasting knowledge and understanding within workplace relationships around the principle interpersonal connections people share outside of the workplace. They propose that workplace interactions are inclined to disallow space for the bereaved employee to explain the magnitude of their loss experienced (Pitimson, 2021). Francis and Keegan (2006) indicate that when a manager's focus is predominantly on business

strategy this will negatively impact the employee-employer relationship. Hobson et al. (2001) highlights that organisations need to investigate the work-life balance of employees based on the stressful life event survey, the top two stressful events are highlighted as death of a spouse or death of a close blood relative. They report that lack of recognition and understanding of these stressful life events may impact the relationship between employee and employer (Hobson et al., 2001).

One of the paradigms within cognitive dissonance research is the 'effort-justification' paradigm which suggests that dissonance is triggered when an individual is engaged in an activity that is perceived to be unpleasant, therefore the individual would avoid engaging in that activity (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).   In the study of Cameron et al. (2019) the participants rated showing empathy as aversive and arduous, some finding it even more cognitively costly when asked to empathise for a sustained period.   When trying to share in other persons' feelings they reported it to be a cognitive struggle and this perception was linked to empathy avoidance (Cameron et al., 2019).

Uncertainty around Uncomfortable Conversations

Dunn et al. (2017) highlights that the cognitive costs of empathy may be a result of uncertainty in dealing with someone else's experience and the risk of making a mistake or saying the wrong thing. Pitimson's, (2021) study indicates that many of the employees reported experiencing uncomfortable communicative exchanges or a lack of communication when they returned to work after experiencing a bereavement. They further highlighted that what was really important to them was to have an understanding that upon their return to work they were allowed to do so with their grief, feeling they had permission to discuss their emotions and being acknowledged for their loss, with active support. This in turn would result in them feeling encouraged in an environment where they could feel useful and productive with the sense that there was a safety net if they needed it (Pitimson, 2021).   In this study the managers mentioned feeling uncertain in what to say to the bereaved employee and showed genuine concern that they may say the wrong thing thereby possibly creating negative implications to the individual.

However, with being unsure in what to say and some saying nothing at all perhaps indicates to the bereaved employee they were disinterested. As reported by a participant in this study, having to worry about uncomfortable conversations with the bereaved individual and wanting to say and do the right thing as this may impact how the organisation is perceived *"this establishes extraordinary expectations on the managers. They have a workplace relationship. They apply to policy to the best of their ability and if in doubt would direct staff to professional sources of support (e.g. Confidential Care)".* Greenberg's (2011) research supports this and suggests that interactional justice which addresses the treating of employees with respect and giving clear, concise communication, should be at the forefront of a manager's agenda, which may put a lot of pressure and expectation onto the managers, particularly those who may be uncomfortable with the situation or experiencing cognitive dissonance or uncertainty in their response. Managers have reported feeling uncomfortable when dealing with employees' grief (Barclay & Kang, 2019) and McGuiness (2009) proposes that bereavement impacts one in ten employees at any one time. Penny (2014) argues that the number of bereaved is expected to increase, therefore, organisations are likely to be affected by bereavement during the grief phase and thereafter.

In this study most of the managers felt that having first-hand experience of a bereavement of their own would afford the manager more understanding, more compassion and enable them to feel more comfortable when speaking to their bereaved employee. They noted that intellectually people tend to understand death however, they tend to lack comprehension in what is helpful and what is not until they experience it themselves. Whereas a manager who had not experienced their own bereavement may be worried in how to deal with it all as they have no insight or prior knowledge of what is helpful. They would be unable to ask themselves the questions around "what worked for them?", "how were they treated?", "what would they have liked?", and then use that experience to manage others. However, it was suggested that the manager would need to be aware that their experience may not be the same as their employee's and although they may recognise similarities,

they would need to be sensitive to that fact that it did not mean that the bereaved employee may react in that the same way as they did.

Along with not wanting to take part in an activity that is perceived to be unpleasant such as an uncomfortable conversation ('effort-justification' paradigm) is the 'new look' paradigm. This paradigm observes that individuals do not want to feel responsible for generating anticipated negative or harmful consequences (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Scher & Cooper, 1989). In this study managers reported feeling uncomfortable having conversations with the bereaved employee as they did not know what to say and did not want to upset the person or be seen to cause them any further distress.

Uncertainty around Time Off

Pratt's (1981) paper suggests that organisational practices may direct the standard of grieving behaviour. They argue that the creation of the modern organisation has resulted in more regulation of bereavement leave in so much as employees being afforded less time off from work (Pratt, 1981). They propose that as organisations systemise bereavement leave, rules related to controlling the behaviour of grieving employees evolve. An example is Honneth's (2005) 'Theory of Reification' which describes the notion that individuals can be treated as objects rather than as emotional beings with whom we have personal connections. This occurs when we forget or neglect the emotional relationships we share with others. In such a state of reification, our surroundings, including people, may start to feel lifeless and devoid of emotional depth, much like inanimate objects. Consequently, our focus may shift towards pursuing material gains or self-interest, leading us to overlook the emotional needs and well-being of others. This theory highlights the danger of devaluing personal relationships and prioritising materialism, potentially resulting in the neglect of essential emotional connections with those around us (Pitimson, 2021). The human requirement to have longer than a few days away from one's job to grieve is replaced by organisational policy focused on the need for productivity to continue (Granek, 2014).

Barclay and Kang, (2019) indicate that there are several forms of organisational justice coming into play within the experience of grief and bereavement in the workplace. Organisational justice refers to an individual's perception around the fairness of treatment given by an organisation (James, 1993). Studies have investigated organisational justice from a variety of perspectives (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2001; Cropanzano & Randall, 1993; Greenberg, 1993, 2011). Masterson et al. (2000) recommends that researchers still have a lack of understanding as to how the perception of fairness impacts attitudes and behaviours. Their research demonstrates that an event such as a family death can set off fairness concerns and ineffective work behaviours. Greenberg (2010) argues that one of the most studied psychosocial determinants of employee wellbeing are perceptions of injustice and that this may lead to negative emotions and unhealthy practices. Consequently, both a manager's actions and the organisational conditions are crucial to take into consideration (Barclay & Kang, 2019). Spell and Arnold (2007) outline that there is an expanding number of studies that examine the connection between organisational justice and the psychological (and physical) health of employees. In this instance injustice could mean that one person was believed to have been offered more understanding or bereavement leave than another. These feelings of frustration or views of workplace injustice can lead to an elevated risk of employee illness (Barclay & Kang, 2019). Likewise, Eib et al., (2015) concludes that feelings of organisational injustice and unjust job elements may have a negative impact on attitudes to work as well as employee health.

Organisational policies frequently map out bereavement leave, concerning the time off for attending the funeral (Barclay & Kang, 2019). At present regulations state for example in the United Kingdom that anyone classed as an employee has the right to time off if a dependent or child dies who is under the age of 18 or their child is still born (ACAS, 2022). However, besides the death of a child, there is no legal right when taking bereavement leave for bereaved employees to be paid. Additionally, the law does not state how much time can be taken off if a dependent who is not a child, dies. It simply notes that the time should be a 'reasonable' allocation (ACAS, 2022). In the

United States the Fair Labour Standards Act notes employees are not entitled to bereavement leave nor is it necessary for employees to be paid when attending a funeral (United States Department of Labor, 2017). In Europe paid bereavement leave is not routine however, statutory bereavement leave is (Jones, 2017). Bereaved employees in Australia are permitted two days of paid leave (Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman, 2017). Similarly, New Zealand, grant their employees three days of paid bereavement leave for close family members and one day of paid bereavement leave for other persons (Employment New Zealand, 2017).

Authors such as Hazen (2008) argues that present-day bereavement policies for most employees do not provide adequate time off to grieve. This may explain why sick days and annual leave days are often used for bereavement purposes (Wilson et al., 2020). Hazen (2008) proposes that as employees may have difficulty making decisions and concentrating, they may inflict financial loses on their organisation. This finding is supported by Flux et al. (2020) study whereby bereaved employees reported suffering from fatigue, lack of concentration, lack of memory, lack of conscientiousness and lack of efficiency whilst experiencing grief at work.

There is significant risk involved in 'forcing' a person to return to work when they are not ready. An example can be seen in Wilson et al. (2020) research, which found that a bereaved employee who had been involved in a car accident had reported it to be as a direct result of being distracted due to grief. This distracted driving could put individuals at risk if driving is part of their job and also puts people outside of the grieving employee's workplace at risk of injury (Wilson et al., 2020). Therefore, imposing strict time confines that pressure bereaved employees to return to work when they are feeling distressed and distracted may conclude in long term problems such as accidents, high staff turnover and a general lack of performance (Barclay & Kang, 2019). More importantly, imagine possible outcomes for job roles such as bereaved surgeons, train drivers, truck drivers or pilots who are unable to concentrate or function safely (Wilson et al., 2020). This is further demonstrated with Flux et al. (2020) research where a participant described their experience; *"I deal*

with other people's medication at work and was (and still am) terrified of making a mistake. I'm

tired all the time. Exhausted. I sleep really badly, and work shifts, so sometimes finish work at 10pm

and start again at 7:30. Sometimes when I'm driving to work, I panic and look down to check that I

got dressed! Truth be told I'm probably not safe to be working". The return to work before being

ready is a very real concern as most employees will experience the death of a loved one at some

point in their working lives (Wilson et al., 2016).

A further paradigm that observes the challenges experienced by the manager is the 'belief-disconfirmation' paradigm. This presents as dissonance when the manager is exposed to information

that conflicts with their belief. If the dissonance is not decreased with them changing their belief it

can result in misperception, misinterpretation, rebuttal or rejection of the information (Harmon-Jones

& Mills, 2019). In this study some managers noted their disagreement with the instructed

bereavement leave time allocation provided to the bereaved employee. Their belief that the

employee needed more time to work through their grief resulted in a few ignoring the rule and giving

their employee the time, they felt was correct. This poses the question, should there be a standard

policy which promotes fair treatment to all bereaved however not taking into consideration the

individualised grief response? Alternatively, should managers discretion be used as everyone

experiences grief in their own way, however this may increase the perception of unfair treatment and

trigger cognitive dissonance due to going against a manager's belief or what they have been taught to

do?

Uncertainty in Managing Expectations

Schut and Stroebe (2005) propose that adjusting to a bereavement could last months or even

years. As discussed above, it is important to consider the possible tension between the employee and

work demands (Wilson et al., 2020). Stein and Winokuer (1989) found that the needs of the

bereaved employee may clash with the performance expectations of the workplace. They highlight

that based on the number of individuals who die every year, bereaved employees could cost

organisations billions annually based on health costs, decreased performance, accidents, and absenteeism (Stein & Winokuer, 1989; Wilson et al., 2020).   The managers in this study reported feeling uncertain as to how to take the grief reactions into consideration. There are very few research studies around bereavement and work that report on how grief can negatively impact on how the bereaved functions at work (Wilson et al., 2020).

Gibson et al's. (2010) qualitative research concludes that parents struggled with a major readjustment when returning to work after experiencing the suicide of their child due to changes in their emotional, cognitive, and physical health which impacted their ability to work. They also reported a change in their outlook to their life and work in general (Gibson et al., 2010). Flux et al's. (2020) study supports this finding whereby participants reported feeling that work became less of a priority after experiencing their bereavement. They also noted that they felt that not only was their productivity non-existent, but their professionalism had suffered due to uncontrollable grief reactions and feeling like an "empty shell" (Flux et al., 2020).

An earlier study conducted by van der Klink et al. (2010) found that almost half of bereaved employees had problems functioning effectively. A large population-based study reported a ten-fold increase of absence amongst bereaved parents as opposed to other working parents in the same workplace (Wilcox et al., 2015). It needs to be considered that if the bereaved individual is forced back too early then absenteeism may turn into presenteeism and although the employee is back at work, they may remain non-functional (Hemp 2004). Presenteeism has two kinds of behaviours namely, sickness presenteeism whereby the employee is physically at work but in ill health, and non-sickness presenteeism when the employee is physically at work but distracted (Johns, 2010). Demerouti et al. (2009) highlights that work conflict exhaustion leads to presenteeism resulting in further exhaustion. Organisations are therefore advised to plan for bereavement leave as it is usually unexpected and frequently taken instantly (Wilson et al., 2019). The Office for National Statistics highlights that sickness absence rate in 2021 was 2.2% more than the 1.8% in 2020, which is the

highest rate since 2010. With an average of 4.6 days per person, nearly 15 million days were lost to sickness or injury.

Wilson et al. (2019) indicates that more preparation should be done by organisations to plan for bereavement leave and assisted work returns. The study of Wilson et al. (2019) found that only 11.3% of 80 organisations where employees had taken bereavement leave in 2018 reported they had concerns about their bereaved employees who returned to work (Wilson et al., 2019). These concerns were based on the behaviour of the employee with observed reactions such as crying, being distracted, unable to focus or irritable. However, not one of those organisations indicated that the bereaved employee had been encouraged to take a voluntary break from work based on the observed concerns (Wilson et al., 2019). This study found no mention of anything in place, or considerations being made for the non-functionality or non-performance of bereaved employees or even a plan around how to mindfully cover the appraisal conversation in keeping the bereaved employees experience and grief reactions into consideration. Whilst many Human Resource Management departments have created standardised policies, our study supports the findings of Barclay and Kang (2019) that these may still be interpreted in different ways by different managers thereby leading to unmet expectations, employee dissatisfaction and staff turnover.   Here again the challenge is around the conflicting views on what the business may need. Wanting to avoid having the difficult conversations ('effort-justification' paradigm), endeavouring not to add too much pressure with a chance of causing further distress ('new-look' paradigm), along with the paradigm where they may be issuing adjustments stipulated in a policy they may not agree with ('belief-disconfirmation'), may result in cognitive dissonance.

The Response

All managers in this study shared that they had offered some kind of adjustment to their bereaved employee at the time of their return to work to help them regain their ability to work.   In Wilson et al.'s, (2019) study 53.1% of the 80 organisations reported that adjustments were provided

and most commonly consisted of a shorter working week or workday. Whereas 18.1% noted that other types of adjustments were made, such as lighter duties or temporary moving the employee to a less demanding role or less stressful work area (Wilson et al., 2019).

Hall (2014) argues that the 'one-size-fits-all' model or approach to grief is not justifiable and that interventions need to be made specific to the uniqueness of the individual, circumstances, and relationship. Furthermore, Pitimson's (2021) study highlights the importance of acknowledging the diversity around individuals' experience of bereavement. The participants in this study all appreciated that there is no 'one size fits all' approach in supporting bereaved employees. They all recognise that from their experience, grief reactions should be considered as individual and unpredictable. In this study one of the participants highlighted, *"It feels important to me that there is a distinction between 'expected' bereavement (loss of elderly relatives) and tragic bereavement (loss of child or partner). The former is significantly more common than the latter - so the needs around supporting the former should not be designed around those exceptional circumstances".* There is a need for workplaces to acknowledge the seriousness of the grief experience (Pitimson, 2021). Charlies-Edwards, (2009) argues that all managers, colleagues, and staff should be prepared to provide support to bereaved co-workers and this support should be available from ordinary colleagues, not just specialists in grief.

The cognitive dissonance 'free-choice paradigm' posits that once a decision has been made, it is probable that dissonance will be aroused and that difficult decisions are more likely to arouse dissonance than easy decisions (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Based on the findings of this research, the researcher suggests that if managers are experiencing cognitive dissonance due to a lack of clarity on how to support a bereaved employee positively, implementing a clear, consistent model, linked to the policy, could be the solution. This model should ensure a standardised process and fair treatment for all bereaved employees whilst allowing for tailored or individualised support.

Implications for Practice

This study contributes to new knowledge in this area by investigating manager's experiences when supporting bereaved employees. It aims to contribute to the under investigated area of the management population by giving them a voice. This understanding is paramount to establishing why certain managers behave the way they do. This qualitative approach provides a thoughtful understanding of the role that the manager plays in the supportive process and offers an appreciation into the challenges and conflict that managers encounter whilst endeavouring to provide this support. Conducting participant validation and the use of constant comparison assisted to retain complexity of the data and enabled the researcher to gain further insight into the challenges these managers face as well as to validate the initial findings.

Although these perspectives create awareness of some of the experiences managers may encounter, they cannot reveal a standard clear structure or directive that will guarantee the perfect bereavement support. However, what it does highlight is the pressure and uncertainty that managers face with the diversity and complexity of meeting the bereaved employees needs whilst being empathetic and continuing to meet work demands. The cross-pressure and cognitive dissonance that managers face needs to be recognised and better supported by senior management giving them authority to make relevant decisions.

The goal of these findings are to assist managers to provide evidence based informal support that is considered meaningful to bereaved employees. It intends to not only provide guidance to aid managers, but also to assist bereaved employees to feel valued and appropriately supported. The result of which may include a reduction in staff turnover and high costs, managers feeling more confident in providing support, and an ease of pressure on the formal support services within the NHS.

Further Research

This study serves as a starting point in filling the gap in research in investigating managers experiences in providing support to bereaved employees in the workplace. We have explored managers' experiences in supporting a bereaved employee, however, further investigations with co-workers may provide a more comprehensive viewpoint of the challenges that workplace supporters face when trying to show empathy to bereaved co-workers. Grief is not limited to loss of a loved one, therefore, further research may extend to distress caused around the loss of a relationship or divorce, loss of a lifestyle or loss of a pet.   Furthermore, focusing on the managers' perspective, research may examine the results of a manager's experience in supporting a bereaved employee for a longer term and gathering the results from a bereaved employee who has received longer term bereavement support and the impact thereof.

Cognitive dissonance has been frequently used to explain psychological concepts behind moral conflict within the workplace (Lii, 2001), however, cognitive costs in showing empathy in the workplace is understudied, therefore further research could examine the circumstances and reasons that busy and stressed managers may allocate more time than others to empathising rather than avoiding (Cameron et al., 2019). Finally, it would be useful to understand how the relationship between an employee and manger impacts how an employee perceives the support they receive and how the manager perceives they were able to support.

Limitations

Grounded theory studies typically involve a small sample size due to the complexity of the data, and more often than not participants are drawn from a specific population or setting. However, the primary goal is to develop a theory grounded in the data from a specific study. The aim was for the researcher to enhance the transferability of their findings by providing a rich, objective, and detailed description of the experience, and data processes.

There was a high number of middle-aged managers that ranged 41-50 years which may not represent the younger or older population of managers. As all were English speaking and the sample size consisted of 16 managers, this may make it challenging to determine if the results are a true finding to the wider population. However, the sample size was considered large enough to provide data sufficiency and adequately represent the manager's experiences and address the research question whilst avoiding repetitive data.

Additionally, whilst the data analysis was based on grounded theory principles which aims to ensure that data is grounded in the participants' lived experiences; an abbreviated grounded theory method was used in this study. Abbreviated grounded theory limits the data analysis to the original data only and does not extend to new informants or new data to broaden and refine the emerging theory. In this study the framework was based on the analysis of the original data and although additional interviews took place, they were based on the original data with no new data being introduced. However, the depth of the analysis was generated with detailed line-by-line coding which assisted to compensate for any lack of breadth. The managers that volunteered to take part in this study, may have had a positive experience and outcome when supporting a bereaved employee in the past. Although this study examined factors that aided or hindered the managers, it may have inadvertently presented a one-sided view on the positive aspects of supporting a bereaved employee. Therefore, the participating managers may not comprise of a representative sample.

Finally, the researcher notes that as a manager, and grief recovery specialist, and having experienced a tragic spousal bereavement, there will, without a doubt, be experiences of managing grief in the workplace that could bias the analysis produced (Sherman, 2015). As the researcher engaged in the iterative process of data collection, coding and theory development her own interpretation, beliefs, preconceptions and experiences may unintentionally influence the interpretation of the data. This may in turn lead to the findings reflecting on the researcher's perspective rather than an accurate representation of the participants experiences. To reduce this

limitation, the researcher engaged in reflexive practices with the use of memoing and peer debriefing to critically reflect on her own biases and assumptions throughout the research process (Sherman, 2015).

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate manager's experiences in providing support to bereaved employees in the workplace and therefore to understand what facilitates or hinders their workplace bereavement support process. The findings indicate that managers go through two phases when endeavouring to support a bereaved employee. The consideration phase where they ponder the situation, trying to understand the circumstances both from a workplace perspective and for the bereaved employee and how best to respond. The response phase is where they take action both from a compassionate perspective and from a practical perspective. The dilemma comes into play where the managers reported feeling uncertain in how best to respond. Whilst there are numerous factors involved in the support process, this study found an overriding common theme of cognitive dissonance which appeared to thread throughout. Cognitive dissonance can lead individuals to feeling frustrated with the situation or to just avoid it completely (Jones, 1990). The managers in this study appeared to be uncertain in how to provide the bereaved employee with the time and attention they required versus trying to continue to meet their pressured work demands. They reported feeling unsure how best to communicate with the bereaved employee without causing further distress and how to navigate the bereavement leave allocations ensuring fairness for all employees.

Managers make ethical decisions daily for the benefit of their organisation where these decisions may clash with their personal values or beliefs. The experienced challenge of stressful work demands, the cognitive costs and effort it takes to be empathetic, the uncertainty around how to respond to various elements in the support process results in varying degrees of cognitive

dissonance. This mental distress or psychological discomfort experienced may explain why some

managers are perceived to avoid giving appropriate support or to show a lack of empathy altogether.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

<u>**Start of the interview:**</u>

- *Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research.* Have you used zoom before? (Action: If not do an orientation).
- *Introduce myself.*
- *Ask if any questions around the information sheet.*
- If you experience any distress, please feel free to stop the interview at any time.
- *If you decide to withdraw please could you let me know within 14 days of today.*
- *If we lose connection during the call, please try and link in again, alternatively I will call you back on your mobile and if I cannot get hold of you, I will email you to confirm another time for us to speak again.*
- *I will be recording the interview to allow me to transcribe the information correctly (is that ok to begin the recording now)?*

1. For demographic purposes would you mind sharing your age?
     i) Ethnicity
     ii) Gender

2. Experience/Number of years worked as a manager?

3. Any formal training in staff management?

4. How many staff do you currently manage?

5. How many bereaved employees can you recall having supported in the last 5 years?

6. Please could you tell me a little bit about your job, in general?
     i) Employment sector [*Private /Public /Education /Healthcare /Charity /Other*]?
     ii) Geographic location of workplace?

7. Do you know if your organisation has a bereavement policy?
     i) If yes, do you know how many days are offered as bereavement leave?

8. Would you describe to me what it was like to support a bereaved employee? *[Prompt: the process]*

9. What do you think would help or have made it easier for you to offer workplace bereavement support?

10. What do you think the challenges would be to a manager when offering workplace bereavement support? *[prompt: what did you find challenging - things that made it difficult to offer support]*

11. How did you experience bereavement support guidance from your workplace?
    i) Do you feel that you received adequate guidance to be able to support the bereaved employee? [*PROMPT: did you have enough knowledge/ training/ support/ guidance to be able to deal with the situation]*

12. If a manager had to experience the death of a loved one, how do you think it would have an impact on the way they showed support to a bereaved employee?

13. Do you think it is possible for a manager to balance showing compassion and work pressures? *[PROMPT: managing grieving staff member emotions in the workplace]*

14. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel may be important before we finish?

That concludes the questioning. Thank you for taking the time to share your experience with me.

Appendix B: Advert

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
WORKPLACE BEREAVEMENT RESEARCH STUDY

We are seeking managers who have supported any members of their staff who have been bereaved of a loved one to take part in a zoom interview to share their experiences.

<u>To take part Managers need to</u>:

- Live and work (part-time/full-time) in the UK.
- Provided workplace support to a bereaved staff member within the last 5 years.
- Willing to anonymously share thoughts on their experience.

If you are able to volunteer, please email Leanne Flux: <u>l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk</u> who will gratefully forward you further details of the study.

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Before you decide whether you would like to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to contact me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Introduction

My name is Leanne Flux. I have a BSc(Hons) in Psychology, a MSc in Organisational Psychology and currently completing a PhD in Professional Practice: Psychological Perspectives at Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology, Canterbury Christ Church University. My PhD research is a direct result of my experience in the death of my husband and returned to the workplace whilst still grieving. This research forms part of my PhD in Professional Practice.

My first supervisor, Professor Alex Hassett, has a Masters in Educational Psychology and in Research Psychology, a Post Graduate Diploma in Cognitive Therapy and a PhD in Psychology. He is also Deputy Director at Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology, Canterbury Christ Church University.

My second supervisor is Professor Margie Callanan who has a MSc in Clinical Psychology, a PhD in Neuropsychological Investigation of MS and MRI Correlates and is currently the Director of the Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology and the Programme Director of the Clinical Psychology Doctorate at Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology, Canterbury Christ Church University.

Background

It has been proposed that management, more so than the stipulated organisational policies and practices, are the ones who establish the tone for the way in which an organisation is perceived to respond to a grieving employee. Realistically, at some point in a manager's career, they will encounter an instance where they will be required to offer some form of support to a member of staff who has lost a loved one. Research highlights that managers commonly want guidance on how to appropriately support grieving employees and recommends that an organisational bereavement protocols should contain clear and meaningful procedures to be used as a reference framework. Therefore, by understanding managers experiences in supporting bereaved employees, we hope to create a framework of what may be helpful to proactively guide managers to support an employee who has been bereaved or who may be suffering with mental distress.

To participate in this study:

The researcher would like to speak with managers who have experience in managing a bereaved employee and who would be happy to share their thoughts.

Do I have to take part?
No, participation is entirely voluntary, and if you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a

consent at the start of the survey, however, you are free to withdraw up to 2 weeks (14 days) after the interview has taken place.

What will you be required to do?
If you decide to take part the researcher will ask you to an interview via zoom. You will be asked questions about your experiences in managing bereaved staff and the interview is anticipated to last 30 mins to 1 hour.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
You may find that speaking about this topic may bring to mind difficult work experiences or may bring up your own feelings about loss.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
In taking part in this study, you may find the experience cathartic as well as having the knowledge that you have contributed to the wider community in bereavement research and in creating awareness for management guidance within the workplace. Should managers and bereaved employees feel supported and valued within the workplace, this may result in enhancing their work performance and decreasing stress levels.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within researcher's premises in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR) and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by the researcher - Leanne Flux and 2 Supervisors. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

What will happen to the results of the research study?
This project is the second part of a two-phase research project informing my doctoral studies. The findings from this project will aim to be published via an academic or clinical journal and will also be shared via social media. However, all participant details will remain confidential.

You will be offered a copy of the initial findings which should be available in draft format once the write up is complete. The draft will contain a summary of key findings and the relationship to the existing body of literature on the subject.

Who has reviewed the study?
This study has been approved by Canterbury Christ Church University Research Ethics Committee.

What is next?

Please feel free to ask any further questions before completing the Consent Form and returning it via email to l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk . You will then be in contacted by myself to offer a convenient time to have the interview.

If you have any questions, concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me, Leanne Flux on email: l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk

Alternatively, please feel free to contact my supervisor:

Professor Alex Hassett (SFHEA),

Tel: 01227 92 7093

alex.hassett@canterbury.ac.uk

If you have any complaints, please feel free to contact:

Dr Fergal Jones, Research Director at Salomons Institute

Fergal.jones@canterbury.ac.uk

 Many Thanks

Leanne Flux   *BSc(Hons) MSc MPhil*

Canterbury Christ Church University

Appendix D: Consent Form

Title of Project: A grounded theory of how managers experience providing support to bereaved employees in the workplace.

Name of Researcher: *Leanne Flux   MSc*
                            Prof. Alex Hassett (Supervisor)

Contact details:

Address: | 1 Meadow Rd, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2YG |

Tel: | *0333 011 7101* |

Email: | l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk |

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw within 14 days from the interview, without giving any reasons.

3. The researcher and 2 supervisors will have access to the anonymised data however, I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential.

4. I agree to take part in the above study and I understand that the researcher will need to break confidentiality if I disclose information that indicates a risk of harm to self or others.

5. I understand that relevant sections of the recorded interview may be looked at by another member of the research team. I give permission for these individuals to have access to the recorded data.

6. I agree that anonymous quotes from my interview may be used in published reports of the study findings.

7. I agree for my anonymous data to be used in further research studies.

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

1 copy for participant / 1 copy for researcher

Appendix E: Participant Debrief

Review of interview:

- How did you find the interview?

- Would you have preferred anything to be done differently?

- Do you have any recommendations for me to aid improvement of the investigation.

- Would you like us to provide you with a user-friendly summary of findings once the research is completed?

- Would you agree to be contacted again should I (the researcher) require further information or clarification?

Unresolved issues:

- Do you have any concerns around any of the topics we discussed today?

- If any distress is felt please consider making contact with:

    o Your GP

    o The Samaritans (116 123)

    o Cruse (0808 808 1677)

    o Anxiety UK (03444 775 774

    o Calm (0800 58 58 58)

Future concerns and contact with researcher:

- If you have any concerns or further questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my project supervisor – details can be found on the information sheet.
- My supervisor and I will be available for contact up to six months after participation for any issues relating to the research project.

Appendix F: Ethics Approval

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology

Leanne Flux
188 Bishops Oak Ride
Tonbridge
Kent
TN10 3PF

Date: 5th May 2021

Direct line   01227 92 7093
E-mail   alex.hassett@canterbury.ac.uk
Our Ref   V:\000 DOCTORATE IN CLINICAL
              PSYCHOLOGY\RESEARCH_0 MRP\PHD & Staff

Dear Leanne

I am writing to inform you that the Independent Research Reviewer has approved your research project proposal. Please include a copy of this letter in your ethics application.

Information for Ethics Panels and R & D offices: I am writing to confirm that Leanne Flux is a PhD student in the Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology at Canterbury Christ Church University. This research project is in partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Psychology, awarded by Canterbury Christ Church University. Each student is assigned a Lead and Second Supervisor who will closely monitor the scientific and ethical components of this research project.

All research in the doctoral programme at Canterbury Christ Church University is carried out in accordance with the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care 2005 (and also adhering to later amendments). The University provides insurance coverage, against negligent harm, for our doctoral students while undertaking research. A copy of our insurance letter is attached and this is automatically renewed each year.

All doctoral dissertation proposals are independently vetted by a member of the research team at Salomons Institute before being given approval. Only those research projects that are deemed to be of significant clinical and scientific merit are approved.

The above-mentioned doctoral student is bound by the requirements of the Research Governance Framework (RGF) of this university.

The Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology at Canterbury Christ Church University stores research data for 10 years in a locked filing cabinet in the main office. The office is in a building with 24-hour security. The custodian is Miss Deborah Chadwick, a member of the administration staff. We store only anonymised data on a CD, which may consist of transcribed interviews or numerical data from questionnaires. We do not store paper copies, audio or

School of Psychology and Life Sciences
Faculty of Science, Engineering and Social Sciences

Canterbury Christ Church University
Lucy Fildes Building
1 Meadow Road Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 2YG (UK)
Tel +44 (0)1227 927033
www.canterbury.ac.uk

Professor Rama Thirunamachandran, Vice-Chancellor and Principal

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video files. We instruct students and staff to destroy audio and video recordings after transcription and final analysis unless otherwise stipulated in the ethics application.

Yours sincerely

Prof Alex Hassett, Ph.D.
Deputy Director, Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology

Appendix G: Sample of Transcription and Analysis

	PARTICIPANT 1 **General Demographic and Work Information:**	**Open Coding (descriptive)**	**Axial Coding (interconnecting categories)**	**Selective Coding**
63	says, you know, their mother has died, you know it's only my team their mother, so I will just talk to them	Talk to them	Communication	Expectations
64	about you know what sort of support do you think they need and I'll explain that we don't have a set rigid	What support do they need? Explain days off	Days off	Time off
65	number of days. Erm, you know we might talk about does that person have to travel anywhere to go, come	Not stipulated days leave	Days off	Time off
66	back and, you know, and I think it's more a question of just letting the manager know that, you know, (a)	Let manager know they are there to support		
67	we're there support we want to be sort of, you know, helpful and, you know, and what does this know what	They want to be helpful		
68	do we think this person, what do you think this person needs. And in terms of time off, so we'll have a	Try to assess what they think the person needs	Duty of care	Understanding
69	discussion about that, what are they asking for, let's, certainly the beginning it's very much just let's just get	Assessing needs	Duty of care	Understanding
70	their arms around them, and just make sure they, they feel like they are supported and we're not putting	Getting their arms around them so they feel supported	Duty of care Days off	Understanding Time off
71	pressure on them to come back. The other thing I often say is look, remember we've all got private medical	Not wanting to put pressure on them to come back	Days off Guidance	Time off Response
72	insurance that's counselling through that so if somebody wants to you know access that here's, here's how	Offer private counselling on the company	Guidance	Response
73	they can do it. Erm, that those tend to be the two strains and then if it's something. Yeah, that tends to that			
74	that tends to be, it's more about just let's look after this person, and erm and, and I think with xxxxxx a lot	Look after the person	Duty of Care	Understanding
75	of the time often we're dealing with people. It's not absenteeism it's presenteeism, I think it's more like	Dealing with people	Duty of Care	Understanding
76	reassuring them that they don't need to come back, you know straight away and actually, and if it's a	Reassuring bereaved they don't need to return straight away	Reassurance	Response
77	consultant or not you know this consultant, we might say, you know, to the manager look. They don't have			

|		Open Coding (descriptive)	Axial Coding (interconnecting categories)	Selective Coding
78	to do client work so that's the intent, you know, more intense it's longer hours, let's just put you know, when	If consultant – reassure they don't need to do client work	Adjustments	Response
	PARTICIPANT 7 **General Demographic and Work Information:**	**Open Coding (descriptive)**	**Axial Coding (interconnecting categories)**	**Selective Coding**
263	leave and started back the following week, which was absolutely fine.	Unpaid leave then start back following week	Days off	Time off
264	…….and she also had a day where she just wasn't feeling great. And I talked to her			
265	manager and said, might want to suggest this one goes down as a day of sick leave, so she doesn't need to	Was not feeling well, so gave her a day sick leave	Sick leave	Time Off
266	take any more unpaid leave. She doesn't need to take it as holiday does pop it down as a day of sick, it's	Note it as a day of sick leave	Sick leave	Time off
267	fine and it may be that somebody is really, really struggling, and they get signed off, which case you've	If struggling can get signed off	Individual Grief	Understanding
268	got the doctor's certificate that you need to work around. But it's definitely not a one size fits all, percent.	Not a once size fits all	Individual Grief	Understanding
269	But I think it's because a lot of people haven't dealt with it and they don't know what to do and they're	Have not dealt with their grief	Individual Grief	Understanding
	PARTICIPANT 8 **General Demographic and Work Information:**	**Open Coding (descriptive)**	**Axial Coding (interconnecting categories)**	**Selective Coding**
42	days off because it was on the Isle of Wight, whereas the next head made quite well made, it	There was no question around taking time off	Days off	Time Off
43	was it was the uncomfortable situation of a member of my departments, mother passed away in Australia,			
44	and the head expected lady to go there and back in five days. And then wasn't going to pay her if she took	Allocated days of leave for funeral with no pay if late return	No pay if take off for too long	Boundaries
45	any longer than that was even wanting me to check. Had she really tried to get earlier flights or was she			
46	trying to swing the lead, that was where I really had my conflict because I was like, you cannot do this to	Can't check up on bereaved person to check telling truth about flights to funeral elsewhere	Human aspect	Understanding

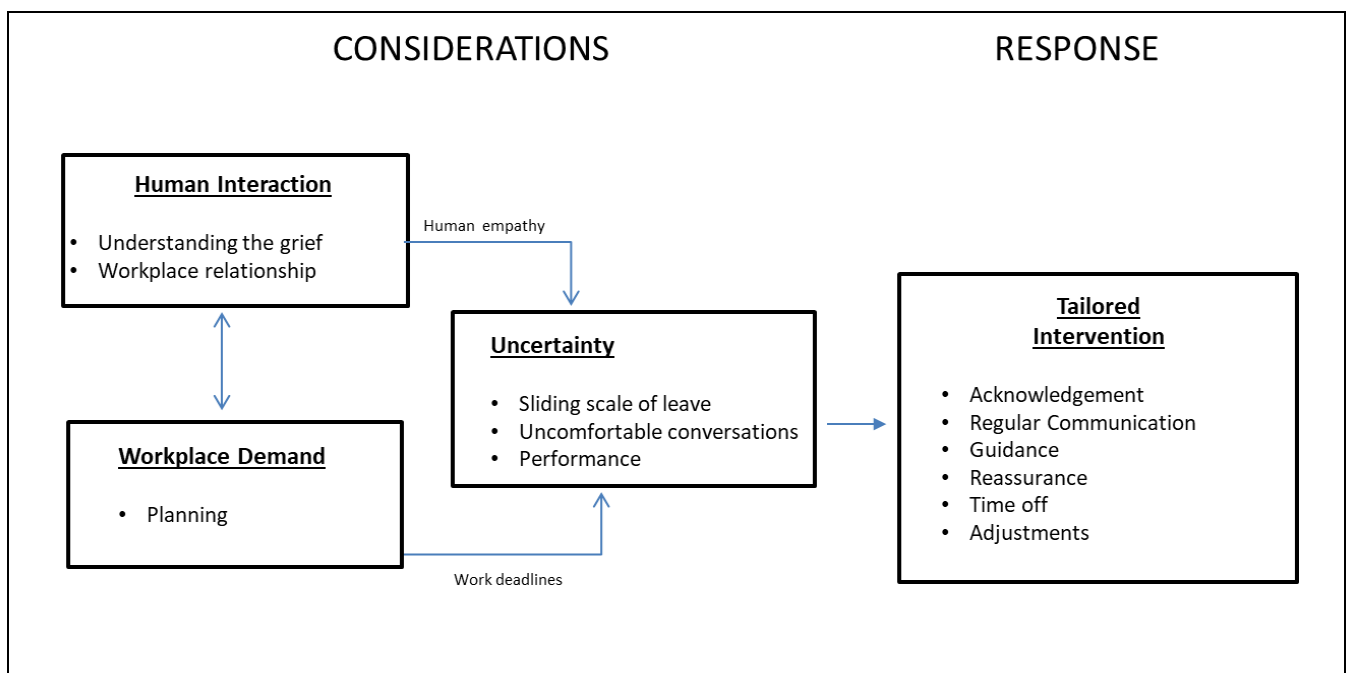| 47	people you cannot expect the lady who has just lost her mother to get there and back to Australia in five	Expected to get to Australia and back in 5 days	Days off	Time off
48	days, it was, that was, that was the one I was saying to you about that he really made me think, how are we	How are we treating people	Duty of care	Understanding
49	treating people? You can't put it all in numbers you have to have some flexibility of, you know, you,	Cannot put it in numbers	Duty of Care	Understanding
50	know, even myself, you know, I'm, I'm down here in the south of England and my parents are up north, so			
55	you know even me having to go up North when my dad died it was, it is a journey, and you can't suddenly			
56	to somebody ah but you can go there and back in a day. Where current school is a lot more understanding.	Current organisation is more understanding	More understanding	Understanding
57	**Q: Yeah, so that conflict, how did you deal with that?**			
58	I found that really hard because I was being asked to sort of go back and check with this lady, and I'll be	Conflict between company demands and human side of things	Felt conflicted	Conflicted
59	honest with you, I didn't, I didn't. I just said, yes, those are the flight she's, she's wanting to get. I then had the	Having to lie to the head because felt that was right	Feeling needed to lie for best of bereaved employee	Conflicted
60	conflict that the head was expecting her to set her, her cover for her lessons. And when she got back, I was	Unrealistic expectations by the head	Performance	Expectations
61	Asked why didn't she set her cover, and I wait, hang on a minute. I told her not to set her cover, because I said,	Easier for direct manager to set up work cover	Performance	Expectations
62	for me as the head of department. It was easier for me to set the cover because then I knew where her classes	Easier for cover to be set by manager	Performance	Expectations
63	were up to. And, but, so I did, I did defend her. And I did go back, But I was met with, with quite a brick wall,	Stood up to heads instructions and defended the bereaved employee	Performance	Expectations

Summary Further Analysis:

MANGERS CONSIDERATIONS		MANAGERS RESPONSE						
Theme:	Explanation:	Theme:	Explanation:	Key Themes				
Guidance	Managers asking for guidance on what they should do	Guidance	Employees wanting guidance, referal to Occy Health	INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT		PHASES	CATAGORIES	SUB-CATAGORIES
Planning	Human side vs manager side			INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT (FOR MANAGER)		Considerations	Human Interaction/Information	Guidance (for manager & employee) / Uncomfortable conversation / uncertainty / communication / relationship / Time off
Uncertainty + uncomfortable conversation	What is the right thing to say so does not lead to awkward conversations			INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT (FOR MANAGER)			Workplace Demand	Planning / performance / time off
Performance	How will it impact on work going forward			INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT (FOR MANAGER)			Conflict	Guidance / Time off / adjustments / relationship / comm s& listening
Listening + Communication	How to have open channel of communication	Listening + Communcation	Making time to listen	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT		Response	Conflict	Time off / adjustments / relationship / listening
		Regular Contact + Reassurance	Cheking in regularly with person to see how they are but reassure them too	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT			Tailored Interventions	Guidance / Listening/communication/regular contact/acknowledgement/time off/adjustements/practical support
		Acknowledgement	Sending card, flowers, a kind word	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT				
Time off	When to give sick leave, paid, unpaid, sliding scale - how many days to allocate for time off	Time off	Offering flexibility	INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT				
		Adjustment	Practical adjustments made to the working day	INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT				
		Practical Support	Things outside of work offered to assist	INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT				
Individual Grief	Grief reactions are individual			UNDERSTANDING				
Relationship	Stronger relationship = better understanding			UNDERSTANDING				

Appendix H: Development of Framework

Stage 1: Interview with eight managers and further validated by four of the eight in a follow up interview.
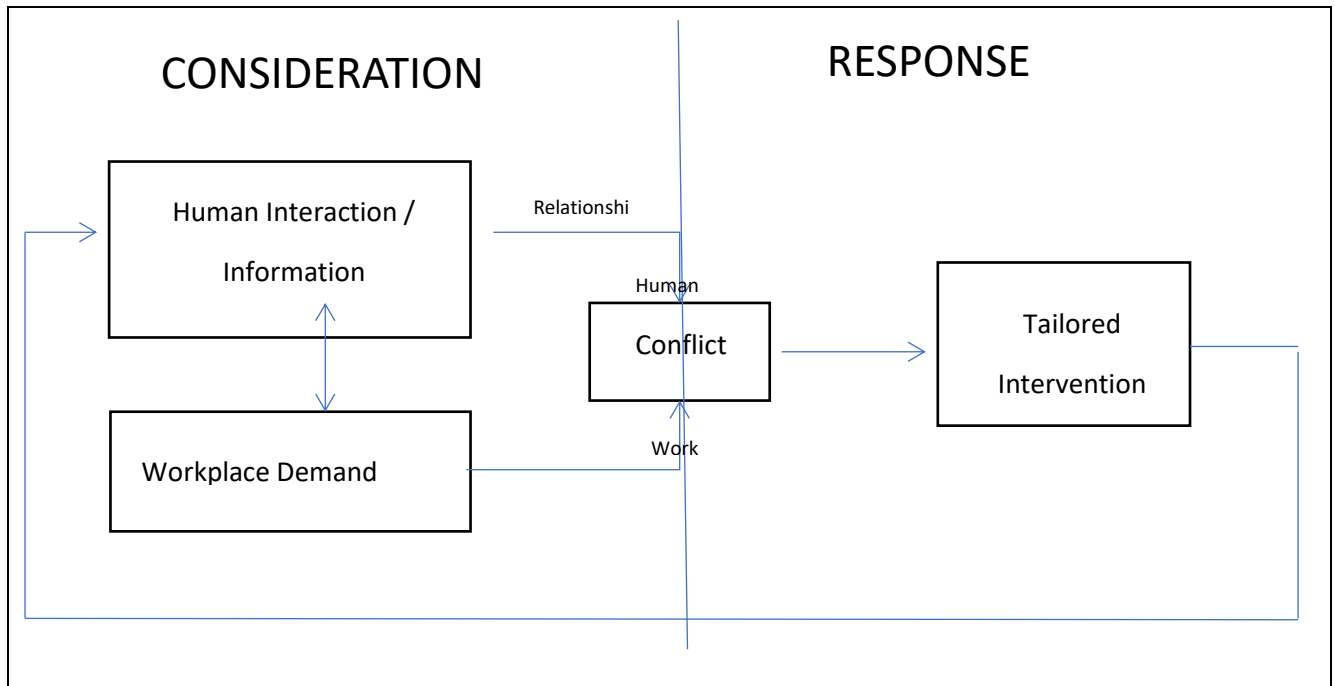
Stage 2: Online survey completed by a further eight and feedback received.

Stage 3 – Final framework after consultation.

CONSIDERATION PHASE

RESPONSE PHASE

Empathy

- Understanding the grief
- Relationship at work

Human empathy

Cognitive dissonance

Workplace Demand

- Planning

Work deadlines

Uncertainty

- Sliding scale of leave
- Uncomfortable conversations
- Work expectations

Cognitive dissonance

Compassion

- Acknowledgement
- Regular Communication
- Reassurance

Practical Adjustments

- Time off
- Practical Support
- Adjustments
- Guidance

Appendix I: Framework Explanation and Online Survey

A Grounded Theory of how managers provide support to bereaved employees in the workplace.

It has been proposed that management, more so than the stipulated organisational policies and practices, are the ones who establish the tone for the way in which an organisation is perceived to respond to a grieving employee. Realistically, at some point in a manager's career, they will encounter an instance where they will be required to offer some form of support to a member of staff who has lost a loved one. Research highlights that managers commonly want guidance on how to appropriately support grieving employees and recommends that an organisational bereavement protocols should contain clear and meaningful procedures to be used as a reference framework. Therefore, by understanding managers experiences in supporting bereaved employees, we hope to create a framework of what may be helpful to proactively guide managers to support an employee who has been bereaved or who may be suffering with mental distress. The researcher has interviewed 8 managers from different industries and produced a framework to show their experiences in supporting bereaved employees. The researcher would be most grateful if you would have a look at the framework below and answer a few questions based on your experiences of managing bereaved employees and if you feel this framework is a good reflection of your experience.
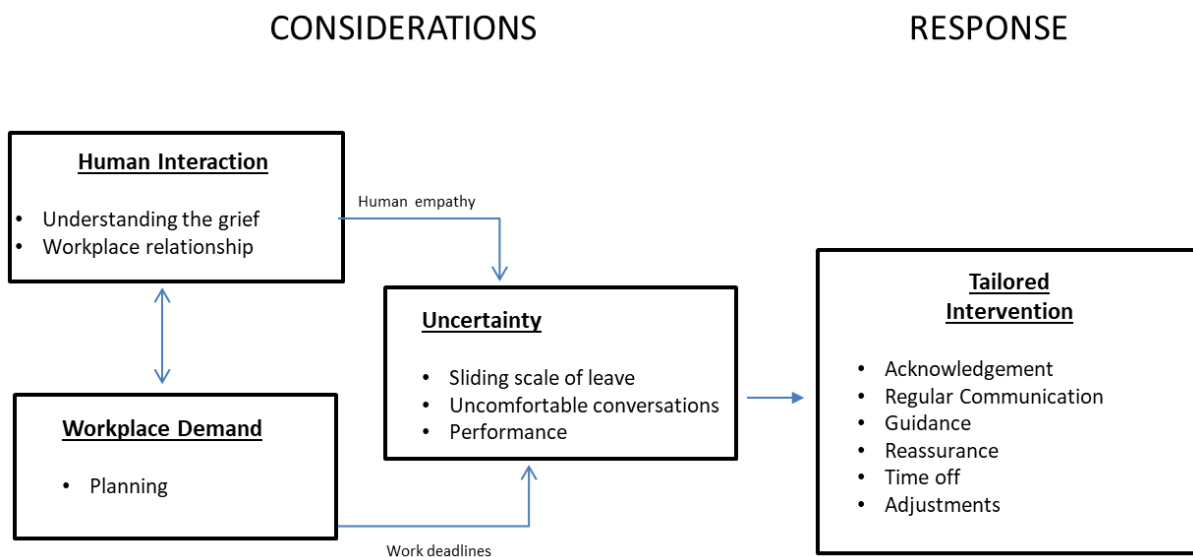
Summary explanation of the framework:

1) **Consideration**

Information is received by the manager from a source, (directly from the bereaved employee, a family member, work colleague, friend or acquaintance) advising of the bereavement. This triggers a process of thigs to be considered.

Understanding the grief

People react differently to grief, and that each experience is individual and unpredictable. Some days the bereaved individual will be able to cope whereas other days may present more of a challenge and that they needed to keep that in mind to be able to understand what their employee was feeling so they could show sensitivity. Grieving is multi-faceted and in trying to understand the grief helped them to know how much support they were able to give at work and then how much needed to be absorbed by 'others' (friends and family). Asking the type of questions around what kind of bereavement had transpired (such as traumatic, expected) and therefore creating an understanding of who else the bereaved person was supporting themselves.

Workplace Relationship

What type of relationship the manager has with the bereaved employee. It was noted that if there was a rapport between the two then the bereaved employee may feel increasingly comfortable in sharing their thoughts and experience. If the bereaved employee was fairly new to the organisation it was considered that trust may not yet have been established which may hinder how much information would be shared (including trigger dates such as birthdays and anniversaries). **This poses a question around how much energy the manager is willing to invest into supporting the bereaved employee?**

Comments / Your Experience:

2) Work Demands

Not only do we need to consider the human side of supporting grief, but the work pressures need to be considered as well.

Planning

Businesses are required to achieve their deadlines with bereaved employees being absent or unable to perform to expectation. Managers need to consider planning ahead of time so that there were no surprises with business as usual. It needs to be considered how to cover the absent employees workload, contemplating what deadlines need to be met and by when; who in the team can take on what work without putting too much pressure on them, what work can wait until they return, what needs to be actioned and finally what information does the absent individual have that they may need access to? **This poses the question again; how much energy and time is the manager able to invest into support knowing they have other drain and work demands on their time?**

Comments / Your Experience:

3) Uncertainty

This study suggests that human interaction coupled with work demands lead the managers to an area of conflict or uncertainty. The human side to managing people wanting to show empathy and concern, versus the work demand side in having to continue to meet work deadlines and business objectives.

Sliding Scale of Leave

Managers feel uncertain around how much time to offer the bereaved employee away from work. They considered the need for consistency and fairness in so much as ensuring one was not offered a longer time off than another (which is challenging considering the individual needs of grief). Some mentioned having the flexibility to decide on how much time to offer and others noted they had to follow a time limit set by company policy. Therefore, bringing to the fore uncertainty around giving the individual the time off that they needed (funeral, travel) versus what the business actually allowed. Furthermore, there is uncertainty around how close a relationship the bereaved employee had with the deceased individual and how much judgement is needed when allocating days off (grandparent versus child). Finally, an area of uncertainty was at what point do they offer sick or unpaid leave rather than force the bereaved employee back to work if they are not ready?

Comments / Your Experience:

4) Uncomfortable Conversations

Managers reported wanted to say the right thing and come across as being sensitive to the bereaved employee but did not know how to do this. They felt uncertain whether to approach the bereaved individual feeling that they may ruin their day by asking how they are and therefore possibly reminding them of their sadness. Many noted acting on instinct rather than being confident in what to say and others mentioned the pressure of knowing that whatever they do or say would be perceived as representing the organisation and that the individual would associate their experience with the organisation, so they did not want to say the wrong thing. Furthermore, consideration around what to share with the rest of the working team so as to avoid awkward conversations further down the line.

Comments / Your Experience:

5) Performance

Many managers found that bereavement had a negative impact on performance. They noted that they needed to consider that when the bereaved employee returned to work and are seemingly functioning does not always mean that they really are coping or functional. The managers were unsure how to proceed with how long they should be taking non- performance of bereaved employees into account. Is there a cut-off point that a manager should consider giving up and accepting that the bereaved employee is not able to perform how they used to.

Comments / Your Experience:

6) Response

Tailored Interventions

Once all the above has been considered then the manager responds to support the bereaved employee in the best possible way they can, working with the tools and knowledge they have at hand trying to adapt to the individual and their individualised grief response.

Acknowledgement

Managers spoke about sending a card, flowers or chocolates to acknowledge the experience and let the bereaved employee know they are in their thoughts. Some spoke about offering practical support in acknowledgement, such as covering their work, offering financial support or buying and sending the bereaved employee food and groceries.

Regular Communication

Communication was particularly important, and all the managers mentioned having regular contact with the bereaved employee. Some mentioned questioning how best they would like to be communicated with (such as face to face, telephone, WhatsApp, text or any other means). Many reflected on how they try to be flexible in being available for the bereaved employee, to be there to listen or to leave them be if they did not want to talk (even if this was out of their comfort zone). Managers reported having a conversation with the bereaved employee to understand what information they want to be shared with the rest of their team or organisation. Some managers mentioned how important it was they impress on the employee to be honest and open so they could understand what the bereaved employee could or could not manage to do thereby setting expectations and work limitations.

Guidance

Managers reported guiding employees to services such as counselling, private medical insurance, employee assistance programmes or self-help websites. Other participants spoke about accessing self-help website such as ACAS to give them guidance in how to deal with bereaved employees and what they should be doing or saying.

Reassurance

It was noted that bereaved employees needed reassurance from their managers that they did not have to come back to work immediately after experiencing the bereavement, that it was ok to take time to grieve. Some also noted that reassurance was required that they would have a job to come back to when they returned.

Time Off

If bereaved employee was not ready or unable to return to work, they were told to see their GP to get sick days or asked to take time off their annual leave allocation or unpaid leave. If a bereaved employee wanted to return earlier than agreed that was fine but if they realised, they were unable to function and required further time off, that was fine too and a further plan would be made.

Adjustments

Some bereaved employees who were client facing were allocated non-client facing work while they adjusted to being back at work. Others mentioned trying to alleviate any possible work stress or pressures by doing a phased return to work, reducing their hours of work for a period of time or having a lighter workload whilst others continued to cover parts of their work while they settled back to work.

Comments / Your Experience:

7) Do you feel this framework reflects your experience in managing a bereave employee?
8) Your age:
9) Years working as a Manager and Gender:
10) Job title and approximately how many bereaved employees have you supported?

Appendix J: Reflexivity in the Process of the Research

Based on the 'Asking better questions' on How to avoid biased thinking by Rose O. Sherman

Considerations	Answer
What am I not considering in this situation?	*I did not consider speaking to the bereaved employees that were supported by the managers that were interviewed. I had not considered this to be necessary, however as the interviews progressed it may have been interesting to have completed a direct comparison to what the manager experienced to what the bereaved employee experienced. Upon reflection I felt confident that I was focused on the managers experience and less so on the bereaved employee's experience in this particular research paper.*
What do those with opposing viewpoints believe?	*Having read around this topic over the last 7 years, it has come to my attention that people slate the managers for not supporting to expectation. Whilst I believe I came into this research thinking what should managers be doing that they are not doing, but leaving the research now thinking why are some managers not seen to be supportive. I believe many individuals may be hurt and disappointed with their managers when they feel they do not receive the support they want and experiencing death is a very sensitive time. I am certain these findings will not completely take away any dissatisfaction in managerial support to bereaved individuals, however it may provide these opposing viewpoint individuals with food for thought around the complexities that managers experience, but certainly does not give the managers an excuse to show a lack of empathy or acknowledgement in any way, shape or form.*
Is it possible I'm wrong in my thinking	*I came into this research comfortably sitting on the fence. I am a manager and was not happy nor was I unhappy with the bereavement support I experienced. I genuinely wanted to understand what was deemed as 'best practice' and why some managers are able to extend this support and meet the bereaved employees' expectations and others not. I, therefore, kept a very open mind throughout this process and was very surprised in my unexpected discovery of cognitive dissonance. I then created the word cloud to see what came out of that and seeing the words 'Think' versus 'Know' being used by the managers the most, was an amazing result. To see the inconsistency just in the words being used. My husband is a statistician, so I have spent a lot of time speaking with him, reflecting my findings.*
Have things changed and am I unaware of new evidence?	*As noted above, I came to the research thinking 'naughty managers' and have changed my perspective in understanding the struggles they go through. I started this process thinking I may do an IPA, with trying to understand the phenomenon. However, in conversations with my supervisors it became clear that this was a grounded theory, an understanding but as a result of a process or framework. This paper what really done in two parts, as I completed research and then the covid pandemic hit and I took a year sabbatical due to working for the NHS and I needed to be working pretty much 24/7. So when I picked it up again, I spent a lot of time re-researching and reading up the*

latest information to see if anything had changed of if I needed to adapt my questions or way of thinking before forging ahead.

How is my own life story affecting how I think about this situation?	*As noted, before, I came into this research more wanting to understand what took place. Much of the research out there is from the bereaved perspective or opinion based on how a bereaved person should be supported. I wanted to understand what a bereaved employee really saw as helpful and then to understand how best it can be delivered by managers, what their challenges were in providing support.*
Do I feel threatened when presented with new information?	*In considering this question, I know my answer should be yes, I feel threatened but do consider feedback however, I feel rather strongly that my answer is actually no! I love learning and feel that we mostly learn by our mistakes, so I do not mind being challenged.*
If I came into this situation without experience, would I make the same decision or hold the same viewpoint?	*Yes, I feel that I would. Although throughout my PhD my knowledge has grown around the understanding that people feel the way they feel, whether it be deemed right or wrong, that is how they feel and it feels very real to them. I think my entry point would have been slightly different where I would have come into the research thinking the managers were the problem rather than how I see in now and entered into the research was there are various influencing factors here and they all play a part in the end game result.*
How would I react if I found out my thinking on a key issue was totally wrong?	*I believe that I would want to understand the details as to why? What had I missed and what had I not considered or perhaps misunderstood.*
Methods of the Case Study used?	*When considering the design of the case study and the analysis used, I took particular care in trying to ensure is was multidimensional and well documented. I also tried not to jump to any conclusions and kept asking myself, what am I missing? What have I not considered? What have I assumed rather than letting the data speak?*

Appendix K: Word Cloud

Chapter Five: Report of Professional Practice

How do experiences of support in the workplace impact a bereaved employee? A Case Study

Abstract

Experiencing the death of a loved one is a significant life stressor which can impact every area of a bereaved individual's life. Bereavement in the workplace is even less understood, with grief often incorrectly interpreted as the bereaved employee being a non-performer. This study aimed to investigate a bereaved employee's experience of workplace bereavement support and its impact through a single case study with the aim of contributing to the current knowledge and assist organisations to develop helpful processes. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was used, focusing on the experience of workplace support after the loss of a loved one. The data were grouped into themes using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged from the data namely, 'External Support', 'Lack of Response', 'Coping Strategies' and 'Unappreciated'. Ten sub-themes were found, and these consisted of, 'External Acknowledgement,' 'Lack of Acknowledgement,' 'Lack of Interest,' 'Lack of Understanding,' Lack of Human Connection,' 'Hiding Emotions,' 'Working as a Distraction,' 'Undervalued,' 'Uncared for,' 'Insignificant'. This study highlights the important role that managers play in helping employees to feel valued and creating a sense of belonging. Feeling recognised as a member of the organisational group increases self-esteem, which in turn has been found to act as a barrier against death anxiety.

Keywords: workplace bereavement support, workplace well-being, management support

Introduction

Research highlights that the average adult will confront the reality of around five bereavements during their lifetime (Wilson et al., 2018). Bereavement, a universally complex and demanding challenge, marks one of the rare shared human struggles. Moreover, the loss of a spouse or partner emerges as a distressing life stressor, reverberating across emotional, behavioural, cognitive, physical, spiritual, social, and financial dimensions (Aoun et al., 2015). The impact of bereavement extends into the workplace, where its complexities remain insufficiently understood. Unfortunately, the workplace frequently misconstrues grief, wrongly characterising grieving employees as underperformers (Bergeron, 2023). A disheartening illustration comes from Kantor and Streitfeld (2015), recounting an instance where an Amazon employee, having suffered the stillbirth of their child, was placed on a performance improvement plan. Consequently, the role of employers becomes vital, yet as revealed by the National Councill for Palliative Care (2014), a disconcerting proportion of bereaved employees report feeling deprived of compassion by their employers. Studies consistently highlight the significance of interpersonal connections and the giving of empathy, emerging as a foundation of effective social support (Dyregrov, 2004; Peters et al., 2016).

According to 'Social Identity Theory' individuals are inclined to place themselves and others into different social categories such as, gender or organisational membership etc (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The two main functions of this social classification are to give order to their surroundings, and it permits them to define self within their surroundings (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Salgado et al. (2015) propose that having a sense of identity within an organisation offers individuals a buffer against the thoughts of the inevitability of death. Jonas et al. (2011) indicates that the values presented by an organisation offers the employee an impression of identity within the workplace. Therefore, the transitional phase following a bereavement, involving life, work, and coping skills, highlights the significance of a personalised support approach to assist the bereaved in managing their daily tasks, self-care, and workplace functionality (Caserta et al., 2004; Stahl & Schultz, 2014).

Consequently, it is possible that the workplace plays a significant role in an employee's identity (Salgado et al., 2015), and the culture of the organisations' environment offers meaning, structure and a sense of stability (Jonas et al., 2011).

Although a considerable amount of present knowledge around the return-to-work process is established upon studies of patients with physical pain-related injuries (Blonk et al., 2006, Gava et al., 2009; Hunot et al., 2009; MacEachen et al., 2006, van der Klink et al., 2001, 2003), there appears to be a limited amount of research around workers suffering with mental distress in the workplace. Professionals and caregiving services have gained insight from individuals who require assistance from mental health professionals. Nevertheless, there appears to be limited understanding of the daily lived experiences of the majority of bereaved individuals who do not make use of professional services (Rumbold & Aoun, 2015). Therefore, by understanding workplace bereavement experiences may enhance the experience for bereaved employees with heightened sensitivity, improved bereavement policies and practices (Bergeron, 2023). The application of this may disseminate to society via the interactions with their family and wider communities, creating more awareness and understanding and how to better support the bereaved (Bergeron, 2023).

From Home to Office

In medieval times workspaces were sparse due to individuals working from their homes (Chevez & Huppatz, 2017). However, quiet-space workstations, which consisted of a desk, chair and storage shelves were especially set up for Monks to study and copy manuscripts (Chevez & Huppatz, 2017). In the seventeenth century, work had once been a family affair, started moving towards separating the professional from the personal. Clerical workers started to move into allocated workspaces, which created a turning point for a distinction between office associated work and the privacy of home working (Chevez & Huppatz, 2017). The nineteenth and twentieth century presented the beginnings of specialised office designs. Not only did this reinforce the contrast between the workplace and home environment but work was clearly being shaped by cultural and

social expectations, such as timekeeping and strict working routines (Chevez & Huppatz, 2017). Furthermore, technology, particularly with the invention of telecommunications, also played a huge role in separating personal from professional. This meant that workplaces could be separated out from warehouses and factories thereby distinguishing blue collar workers from white collar workers (Chevez & Huppatz, 2017).

For many, going to work represents more than just gaining a salary (McCastle, 2022). It provides some individuals with meaning, for others it offers an upward climb of the proverbial social ladder with various rewards which are made available (Merisotis, 2020). For some, their job enables them to build an identity, develop new expertise and network with like-minded people (McCastle, 2022). The addition of a bereavement is a destabilising and chaotic factor for the individual's manager to oversee. With workplaces being shaped by social norms and culture expectations, this means that the accepted behaviour within the workplace is not well equipped to manage the range of 'private' emotions and reactions that may be unexpectedly brought on by grief. As Bauer and Murray (2018) explain, when an employee goes through a bereavement, they find themselves in unchartered territory as they try and negotiate their new work life balance whilst endeavouring to keep their professional identity complete and at the same time renegotiating their personal identity (Douglass, 1991).

Aims of the Study

The aim of this case study, therefore, is to gain a deeper understanding of a bereaved employee's experience, by producing a single case example of their return-to-work support whilst grieving the death of a loved one. The focus is to explore the 'what' and 'how' around support received and the impact it had on the individual, and how this tangible support may assist to help alleviate the grieving process and work stressors. As seen in previous research, the return to work for an employee can be a complicated process, (Flux et al., 2019, 2020; Krause et al., 2001;

Muenchberger et al., 2008), with many factors to consider such as the functioning capacity of the individual post bereavement, positive interaction with colleagues and clients, as well as the mental and physical strain that their job demands (Coutu et al., 2007).

Supplying helpful and appropriate support is cited to be one of the most powerful determinants of beneficial psychosocial outcomes after experiencing a bereavement (Hibberd et al., 2010). Psychosocial is defined as the influences upon an individual that social factors have on a person's mental health and behaviour (Vizzotto et al., 2013). Considering that there is an increasing significance on support as a protective element against possible complications in bereavement, an understanding of the processes pertaining to how supporters respond to the bereaved specifically in the return-to-work process is crucial (Logan et al., 2018).

Method

Case Study Methodology

A case study can be defined as providing a deep and detailed understanding of the data and gaining an insightful and complete picture of a lived experience of a person in a social setting (Punch, 2009). It centres on specific phenomena and represents the experience in detail as it unfolds (Kekeya, 2021). Both Simons (2009) and Stake (2005) argue that a case study should not be defined by its method choice, it may include various methods and that whatever method is chosen by the researcher plays a critical role in the results of the study.

Case studies have three distinctive features, namely, a) particularistic, b) descriptive and c) heuristic. These features are what differentiate case studies from other research methods (Merriam, 1998). 'Particularistic' is a reference for specific factors, circumstances, and phenomena that takes place in the daily actions of individuals. Case studies address specific phenomena that individuals undertake, encounter, and represent the issue as it evolves (Kekeya, 2021). 'Descriptive' refers to the final result of the case study, which frequently contains rich, thick descriptions of an occurrence

which is being studied (Merriam, 1998). Thick descriptions indicate that complete and specific data of the participants have been presented in the study where the meanings are drawn direct from the data. 'Heuristic' refers to the case study clarifying the understanding of the phenomena in the research (Merriam, 1998). Sense making is made from the meaning of the findings to confirm or challenge the results by linking it to a lived experience. This is referred to as the 'inferential bridge' of the circumstance that is studied (Kekeya, 2021). Qualitative strategies in case studies such as interviews, observations and the inspection of documentation are used to gather rich descriptive data to understand the lived experiences of the participants (Burns, 2000; Mutch, 2005).

In this particular case study, a face-to-face interview took place whereby the direct actions and feelings of the participant were considered in detail. The 17 questions consisted of the collection of demographics, an explanation of her job description, what relationship she had with the deceased, how the managers reacted to her after the bereavement, a description of the support she received, if the managers reactions had an impact on her, any challenges she faced, any expectations she had, if she required support outside the workplace, if there was a stigma attached to people's attitudes, any advice or guidance received by managers, how the manager showed empathy, what kind of working relationship she had with her manager, what stood out as a positive element of support received, any long-term support received, any over-arching views she took away from the experience and anything else she wished to share.

This method of studying the phenomenon gives an in-depth understanding of the experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).   In interpretive studies the issue of credibility, dependability, transferability and agreement is to be taken into consideration (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Neuman, 2000). To maintain integrity the researcher followed protocols such as gaining consent and maintaining mutual understanding with the participant throughout the study (Ary et al., 2002; Bryman, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Punch, 2009). For credibility and trustworthiness, the original verbatim data is shared in the study. The process of inductive reasoning

was used for data analysis (Ary et al., 2002; Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher observed patterns, categories and themes from a baseline working upwards, by arranging the data into conceptual segments of information. This inductive process alternated between the data and themes until an all-inclusive set of themes had been created (Creswell, 2009).

Case Study Selection Process

Although case studies have various definitions, they all share a common dedication to the exploration of complex real-life experiences (Rebolj, 2013). The differences of opinion can be attributed to the differing epistemological bases that various researchers may have (Thomas, 2011). Deciding on a specific type of case study is dependent on the purpose of the research such as in this case study, describing the specific event and therefore remaining at the descriptive level (Rebolj, 2013).

In this instance a single case was chosen, which means one case was examined in detail. Thomas (2011) indicates that there are various types of time dimensions used in a singular case study. 'Diachronic study' is a change over time and are similar to longitudinal research. 'Snapshot studies' whereby the case study is examined at a particular period of time such as a day in the life of a person or a diary entry on a particular day, week or month. This case study, however, uses the 'Retrospective case study', which involves the collection of data associated with a past phenomenon. The data collection is based on historic phenomenon around the situation, person and event (Rebolj, 2013).

Yin, (2009) advocates selecting a typical case with the intention of finding new hypothesis and a deeper layer that may have been overlooked by previous theory is the way to go. On the other hand, this case study was chosen based on Thomas's (2011) suggestion that the case study subject should not be chosen based upon a representative sample, but rather should be something that is

interesting, unusual or where the subject and object interact in a powerful connection. Therefore, it is not intended to be a representative sample or be able to be generalisable to a wider population (Rebolj, 2013).   This case study has particularly compelling factors which the researcher believed made it worth investigating in its own right. Not only did the participant meet her partner online and later in life, it also took place during a prolonged period of lockdown due to the Covid pandemic whereby all the usual social responses and structure of a workplace was removed.

It has been argued that case studies contain selection bias and the influence of the researcher's prior knowledge that results in favouritism toward a specific hypothesis (George & Bennett, 2005). Conversely, case selection established from prior knowledge may lead to a superior research plan as it makes the process of theory testing more rigorous (Rebolj, 2013). The researcher, having completed previous studies around this topic, has past knowledge and experience around bereavement in the workplace. However, there are procedural provisions to defend studies from being influenced by researcher bias, such as consistency and rigour in the tracking process (George & Bennett, 2005) which the researcher continued to keep in consideration. This involves a rigorous and comprehensive explanation of the data collection process as well as the documentation of the analysis of the data (George & Bennett, 2005).

The Participant

In March 2023, an advertisement was placed on the social media platform of LinkedIn. The advert required an employee who had experienced the death of a loved one to share their return-to-work support experience (Appendix A). Two female bereaved employees made contact to take part in this case study. One was chosen based on the explanation above as well as the ease of contact and accessibility which enabled a face-to-face interview, rather than online or over the telephone. The volunteer was sent an information sheet (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix C). Thereafter, the researcher and the chosen participant had a conversation to allow for questions about the study,

to discuss the inclusion and exclusion criteria and to set up a convenient time to have the face-to-face interview.

Inclusion Criteria: To take part in the study the participant was required to be employed or have been employed at the time of experiencing bereavement of their spouse or partner. They were required to be willing to share the details of their thoughts, workplace behaviours and workplace experiences. They had to be living and working (part-time or full-time) in the United Kingdom and had to be over 20 years of age. Finally, they were required to be six months or more past experiencing the bereavement and have returned to work after the bereavement experience.

Exclusion Criteria: This included the participant not being in a distressed state, which was discussed in the first conversation, and any potential participant that did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of the interview is to provide the participant with an opportunity to verbally express their thoughts, experiences, feelings, opinions and suggestions about the specific issues being investigated (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005; Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001; Yin, 1994). This study aimed to collect data around a bereaved employee's experience from managerial workplace support they received after experiencing the death of a partner. The research design was shaped by established guidelines for investigating sensitive subjects, notably the work of Elam and Fenton (2003). They recommended that qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured or unstructured interviews, are the most suitable way for exploring sensitive topics. The semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions (Appendix D) took place with the purpose of collecting verbal data however keeping a focus on answering the research question (Bryman, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Punch, 2009).

This case study analysis consisted of inductive reasoning which involves systematically and constantly evaluating the answers provided by the participant to present the bereaved employee's

reality which relates to the research question (Kekeya, 2021). The analysis focused on the thematic descriptive approach to interrogate the data and group it into themes, thereby producing a multidimensional view (Braun & Clark, 2006; Joffe, 2012). The use of this approach permitted the application of patterns to identify meanings, situations and events (Aronson, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006; Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008). In the first instance the researcher became familiar with the data by reading the transcripts several times. Followed by generating initial descriptive codes. With the use of pattern matching which is noted as one of the most desirable techniques (Yin, 2018) the researcher was able to search for common themes and then review them several times to ensure nothing was missed. To ensure high quality analysis the researcher considered all the data that was specifically relevant to the research question along with the interpretation, whilst attempting to not leave any loose ends (Yin, 1994). To gain further insight, alternative explanation or any missed patterns the researcher shared the data and analysis with the participant and researcher's supervisor.

The order in which the description was presented was not considered as crucial, therefore, it followed an un-sequenced report pattern as it did not modify the content outcome which was studied. The researcher was conscious of the 'test of completeness', in that the overall collection of the data was important. If certain topics were left uncovered the detail may be considered as incomplete however, the researcher was comfortable in the knowledge around the topic to avoid this limitation (Yin 2018). Therefore, the researcher focused on the participants experience.

Finally, to ensure that there were no mistakes, and that the researcher had understood all information shared by the participant correctly, as well as to double check that the themes found were applicable, the participant was offered the opportunity to read the transcribed interview and final analysis (Yin, 2018). A second discussion was had to cover if any alterations were required, and a few further questions of clarification were asked. No changes were made to the analysis, however the participant provided further clarity which allowed for a chance to further reflect on the

data and the accuracy of the recorded experience which reinforces its credibility (Sandelowski, 1993; Stake, 2006).

Ethics

In undertaking an investigation into an individual's experience, confidentiality and anonymity is crucial. The participant's consent was requested prior to the start of the interview. As the topic of bereavement was discussed, the participant was advised that they were able to stop the interview at any time as well as withdraw at any point, without any reasons being given. It was also discussed that should the participant show signs of distress the researcher would offer suggestions of support services such as contacting their GP or national help lines such as Samaritans (which was prepared prior to the interview) (Appendix E). This, however, was not needed. The participant's details were changed to ensure anonymity along with other named or possibly recognisable data, with the researcher being careful not to be misleading on the lived experience of the participant (Gabbard, 2000). As a business psychologist the researcher was fully aware of the duty of care and responsibility she had to the psychological wellbeing of the participant. The University Ethics Panel granted full ethical approval for this case study (Ref: V:\075\Ethics\2020-21) (Appendix F).

Quality Assurance

In this qualitative case study, quality assurance measures were implemented to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Reflexivity was used to acknowledge the researcher's biases and assumptions and minimise their impact on the research. Member checking was used to validate the accuracy of the interpretations and ensure that the data collected was a true reflection of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Birt et al., 2016). Data analysis techniques were used to ensure that the data was analysed systematically for an audit trail and maintain objectivity. These quality assurance measures helped to ensure that the research was conducted rigorously and produced credible and trustworthiness in the findings. However, the study also faced challenges in implementing these measures, such as, researcher bias and ethical considerations. The researcher

kept notes to address these challenges and thought processes to try to conduct the research ethically and systematically (Birt et al., 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Morrow, 2005; Sandelowski, 2000). The researcher examined her own thoughts and possible influence when undertaking this research. She aimed to maintain accuracy and impartiality in the process (Sherman, 2015), whilst acknowledging her experience and thoughts when developing the questions and completing the analysis (May & Perry, 2015). She considered that her experiences helped to identify themes and patterns that others may have overlooked (Dodgson, 2019), however continued to be aware in acknowledging and addressing any biases she may have (May & Pery, 2015) (Appendix G).

Findings

Setting the Scene

Dawn, who is of British nationality, is a 53-year-old divorced mother with one adult son and one teenage son. She works fulltime as an Administration Manager for an organisation in the City of London and has worked for this organisation for four years. She had been with her partner for an eight/nine-month period, which she described as unusual and intense. The reason for this is that the relationships progress did not follow the 'traditional' trajectory due to everything being closed during the pandemic. She describes her relationship with her boyfriend as being in a "little bubble". This case study was undertaken two years after Dawn experienced the unexpected death of her partner whilst she continued to work. It follows her experiences of support both in and outside the workplace and the impact that it had on her mental wellbeing.

At the start of the interview Dawn shared that her relationship with her partner was unusual:

So…he was my boyfriend, who I met during Covid. Online. So, it was an unusual

relationship in that, and it wasn't of a traditional basis because things were closed.

Due to Covid restrictions they were unable to do the usual integrations with the family:

So, you know, he met my children once, but it was almost as if we were in just a little bubble because there was just us. There wasn't anything else at all.

Dawn's partner had underlying health conditions therefore, when he contracted Covid in January 2021 he was admitted to hospital. Dawn described the rollercoaster of emotions they went through due to one day he seemed to be recovering and the next not doing well. Additionally, she shared how she felt isolated in her knowledge of how he was:

Because I wasn't next of kin, because obviously hospitals were absolutely inundated, they were not giving any updates to family or friends or me. Because they only had the capacity to update next of kin once a day, I didn't know the next of kin, so therefore I was in the dark, really, and had to rely on whether I sent a message to James, and he responded as to where we were.

Within a two-week period from when he was admitted to hospital, he agreed to go into an induced coma with life support to give his body time to recover, and when they tried to remove breathing apparatus he unexpectedly passed away. Dawn continued to work from home through this difficult time. She shared that once a week she had an online team meeting where she would inform her managers of her traumatic and emotional situation. She noted that as she did not get daily updates of her partners wellbeing, she would update the managers, even though nobody asked her, when she had information.

So, I have a zoom meeting every morning at 9:00 o'clock and had, you know, just sort of updated them a little bit and then, well there's no more news today.

Table One: Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

	Theme	Sub-Themes
	External support	• External acknowledgement
Experience	Lack of response	• Lack of acknowledgement • Lack of interest • Lack of understanding • Lack of human connection

Impact	Coping strategies	• Hiding emotions • Working as a distraction
	Unappreciated	• Undervalued • Uncared for • Insignificant

The study's findings reveal Dawn's experience in the context of external support, managerial responses, coping strategies, and emotional impact within the workplace following her bereavement. Dawn received a sub-theme of 'external acknowledgement' from her friends, family and colleagues outside of her workplace, forming the overarching theme of 'external support'. Despite being provided with access to a care line through her workplace, Dawn found it unhelpful. Within her professional sphere, Dawn faced a glaring 'lack of acknowledgement' from her managers, where the absence of gestures such as cards, flowers, or emails to acknowledge her grief was noticeable. This lack of acknowledgement was intertwined with a broader 'lack of response' theme, encompassing 'lack of interest,' 'lack of understanding,' and 'lack of human connection.' Dawn perceived her managers to exhibit an outright failure to inquire about her well-being, comprehend her situation, or extend emotional support, highlighting a lack in their response to her needs. The repercussions of this shortfall can be observed in Dawn's adoption of 'coping strategies'. The strategy of 'hiding emotions' emerged as she felt compelled to conceal her grief due to the lack of recognition from her workplace. In her quest to mask her feelings, Dawn turned to 'working as a distraction,' a coping mechanism that gradually transformed into the managers expectation of prolonged work hours, further impacting her emotional state.

The findings also revealed the theme of feeling 'unappreciated.' Dawn's perception of being 'undervalued' stemmed from the feeling that her contributions were taken for granted and not genuinely appreciated. This led to a cascade of emotions where she felt 'uncared for,' sensing an absence of concern for her well-being as an employee and team member. Ultimately, the culmination of these feelings gave rise to a sense of 'insignificance,' as Dawn internalised the belief

that she was easily expendable within the organisation. The interplay of these elements highlights the crucial role that organisational culture and managerial support play in shaping employees' well-being, highlighting the significance of acknowledging and caring for employees during times of personal hardship.

External Support

External support refers to support that is gained from outside the organisation. Dawn spoke about how her grief was acknowledged outside of the organisation, as one of her clients sent her messages wishing her good vibes and strength, checking up on how she was doing. This particular client, as well as one of the receptionists at the workplace on separate occasions personally sent her flowers in acknowledgement of her trauma. Additionally, she shared that she felt her close friends had played a significant role in getting her through the grief. She appreciated that her situation was not the usual bereavement experience, where she could under normal circumstances expect to have support from family members or people that knew him. However, she was frustrated and upset with the fact that her workplace, more specifically her two managers, did nothing to recognise or acknowledge her grief.

> *...it wasn't like a normal bereavement where you would have support from people that knew*
>
> *him and that were going through the same, same experience.   So, I was lucky from an*
>
> *external point of view that my friends and my network are brilliant, and they were checking*
>
> *in on me.*

Later Dawn advised the HR Director that she was struggling so they advised her of some formal external support in the form of a care line that she could ring. She did this and was allocated 6 slots to speak to someone, which she found was unhelpful.

> *In fact, of the person that I spoke to was more interested in the relationship with my children*
>
> *that I had rather than umm, the bereavement and I think I'd spoken to her. It was about*

within about eight weeks of, of, James dying, and she felt that it was too soon to be discussing the bereavement and once I you know, once I got through perhaps three to six months would be a better time to go back to her and so we ended, we ended the sessions. I think I had three.

Lack of Response

A lack of response in context of managing bereaved employees signifies a situation where the managers failed to adequately address or meet the needs of the employee who was grieving. This lack of response can manifest as a lack of emotional support, failure to provide the necessary accommodations or flexibility, and a general disregard for their emotional well-being.

Lack of Acknowledgement

In dealing with the death of her partner, Dawn shared that she felt that the managers did not respond in a compassionate way. More specifically she felt she would have appreciated some form of an acknowledgement from them. She wanted her words to be acknowledged, that what she was saying and going through was important. She noted that if it was important to her then it should have mattered to them. This left her resenting them and feeling that they did not know how to deal with the situation.

I needed them to acknowledge that it was a tough time and ask did I need anything? .... A big thing for me was the flowers, it wouldn't have taken anytime to arrange some flowers to show to me that in that moment they thought of me and send me something that I would've liked. And that was inadequate. You know, even, even, if, they had emailed me and said we are really sorry to hear this. Is there anything that you know, if you need anything from us, please let us know. Even if there was nothing they could do, you know or you know, we have a group HR helpline, you know, nobody sent me those details. I didn't. I didn't know about that at the time and therefore I, I, do resent the whole firm for that.

Lack of Interest

The lack of response left Dawn trying to accept that they were not interested in her or her welfare. When she would tell them what was going on, they would immediately revert to a different topic. She felt that they were only interested in her getting the work done. She reported that she continued to work but not one of her managers ever checked up on her.

I've always felt that they don't need to know about me, they used to be interested in my eldest child as he's an exceptional golfer and better than them, that was of interest to them. They never remember my birthday even though it's on our company portal, the first Christmas during Covid one of the brokers, arranged for a case of wine (very generous) – I don't drink…. Speaks volumes.

…..so through all of that, you know, I continued, continued to work. Nobody ever rang to, you know, HR Director never rang………it made me feel that they didn't like me …….and, that they weren't interested in 'Dawn' the person, or what I was going through.

Lack of Understanding

Included in the lack of response from the managers was lack of understanding of how to support her.   Dawn felt that they were uncomfortable and were not really interested in her response when they would ask the generic, 'how are you?'. She noted that if she mentioned that she was feeling a bit down, they would respond with a 'let's see if we can keep you busy with a list of activities to get through'. She noted that she was the one that everyone went to for emotional support, but no one was there for her.

……..when we used to be in the office, I am the matriarch, you know, they would all come to me and tell me all their woes and everything else. Or I'd go for a coffee, and they would chat to me. The male advisors, my feeling would be, they would avoid me like the plague because they wouldn't know how to deal with it. Umm. And therefore, you know, they might sort of say hello

and probably not look at me and sort of trundle past my desk. And the young support staff they wouldn't know how to deal with it either. Umm because oh, all of a sudden, this person that helps them in their situation. Oh, that person is no longer available because they're dealing with stuff of their own.

She reflected that perhaps a little understanding of the situation would have helped the managers to know what kind of support she needed.

And I'm not advocating that businesses should do that necessarily, except for if they knew their staff, they would know what they wanted 100%. Anyway, that's my final bit that somewhere out there, there are some male white middle class managers that know what to do, what to do, just not the ones I work with.

Lack of Human Connection

Dawn shared that it was just some humanity she was hoping to receive. What came across in the lack of response was a lack of human connection, the warmth that is shown to people that you value and care about.

………But there was never, they never asked me what I needed or what I wanted, or did I need some time, or it was always very much well, you know, that is something that's happened. And that's sorry to you know. But no sincerity in the sorry. Yeah, you know, it was almost as if, you know, you'd bumped into somebody in a supermarket and they'd told you you'd like oh I'm sorry to hear that, alright, let's just move on with my shopping, and that was exactly how it how it was.

She had contemplated sharing her disappointment with the organisation but had received a stern warning that she should not do this.

And I have thought many times I'm going to e-mail them and tell them my experience of what actually happened. But my, one of my direct managers gave me a very stern warning several

months into the year. That said, basically do not ever say anything derogatory about me because there will be repercussions.

Additionally, the lack of humanity shone through when she was having a conversation with her HR Director asking for five days of compassionate leave which was given to her however, she had to take them as five consecutive days. This did not work for her, she required three days for the funeral and then later the additional one or two days to scatter the ashes.

And that really annoyed me that you know, I I could have taken a day off. Nobody would have actually known because we were working from home anyway. But to make a song and dance over one day for scattering of the ashes. Just heightened their unfeeling way that they have dealt with the whole situation. And he, he did give me as compassionate leave. But it was a battle that I had to have rather than some………

She summed it up with:

…..you shouldn't have to have a policy, it should be humanity. But I don't think necessarily everybody is wired that way, and if it's written as a policy then that's good. And actually, you know, we should be taking that more into account. You know, not just an extract.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies refers to how individuals get through their day-to-day life by a process of various actions involving a conscious or unconscious effort. This participant chose to conceal her emotions and immerse herself into work as a coping strategy. By focusing on work tasks and maintain a busy schedule she attempted to divert the attention away from her emotional distress. Whilst this coping mechanism can offer temporary relief and a sense of control, it may risk suppressing emotions, potentially hindering the grieving process.

Hiding Emotions

Although Dawn tried very hard to be matter of fact, trying to remove the emotions from her experience, she noted that she had a regret in that she had not discussed it more with her children. She shared how this impacted them and, in her haste, to put on a brave face and get on with life and work, she became very insular. She also noted that by keeping on with keeping on she may have made a rod for her own back. The lack of managers acknowledgement has a ripple effect into her life outside of work, she was hiding her emotions in the workplace and outside of it too.

....and continuing to work was that the right thing or the wrong thing? Because actually, perhaps they would have paid more attention if I'd have totally crumbled and gone, 'I can't possibly do any work'. Because that then would have given them a reason to stop and look and say goodness things aren't going to happen because actually Dawn can't do it and that, but I'm not that sort of person that that isn't, you know, you just keep going until........I don't know. You just keep going.

Working from home worked well for Dawn because she felt she was able to grieve when she wanted without being in an office full of other people. Again, hiding her emotions with her colleagues and managers.

……….. but it's OK working from home because you know what? If James comes into my thoughts, I can have a bit of a boo and there's nobody there to see and it. Doesn't matter, and I'll compose myself and I'll get on with it.   If Covid hadn't happened, and I'd been in an office environment, I wouldn't have been in. Because I was not in, a fit state, to go into London and sit in an office and you know, boo every five minutes. Because that wouldn't………..I just wouldn't have done that.

However, by doing this, grieving on her own so as to not make others feel uncomfortable as she grieved, the managers did not actually see how the grief was impacting her on a daily basis.

Umm, because I think it would have made other people uncomfortable. And I wouldn't have wanted to put them in that situation. But……..and why I say it's a double-edged sword that would have made the more senior managers, including my own managers, realize actually what was going on.

Upon reflection and knowing what she knows now, she still thought that even if she had grieved in front of the managers, there may have been no difference, except she may have felt less bitter.

Umm looking back, I had, I done that and possibly, you know, and we'll give them the benefit of the doubt they may have you know, they may have done something differently had they realised. I'm cynical about that. I don't think they would, but they might, and therefore I'm a fair person in life with hindsight it possibly would have made me feel less bitter today.

Work as a Distraction

Regardless of the grief reactions, Dawn used work as a distraction, and she recounted working a 15-to-17-hour days which she found helpful to her in coping with her grief. The issue was that the long working days became expected then from her workplace.

Because what then would happen is working 15,16,17 hours. I have done 24 during that period with no sleep, because see, I didn't sleep very well anyway. And there, because there was just so much going on in my head. But then from a work perspective, that became expected.

Unappreciated

The lack of response refers to the feeling of being not fully understood or recognised. This resulted in Dawn feeling unsupported, undervalued and insignificant thereby isolating her during a vulnerable and challenging time.

Undervalued

The lack of response received from her workplace managers appeared to have a negative impact on her psyche and left her feeling undervalued. She shared that she continues to avoid attending any

meetings in person as it sends her into a sense of anxiety. She noted that if they didn't pay her as they do and allow her to work from home, she would have left that organisation a long time ago.

I think it's had long lasting effects, and I still feel very bitter with how they reacted and if it wasn't a good job and I had the convenience of working from home I would not be working there anymore because, because even before that, I sensed that I was a bit of a workhorse, really.

Uncared For

Dawn felt that the managers were just there to do the business and explained how much it disappointed her they could not show any sympathy. She had a sick work colleague so whilst she was dealing with her grief she had an increased workload, and was expected to do their job too, with no assistance from either of her managers.

……….. they should have been looking out for me. But just as in normal human being. That, that you know, that he should have done something. You know, and he's the head of (x) and, nothing, nothing.

……they don't care. You know I don't, I'm not surprised. I don't even get a birthday card or Christmas card, so I'm not surprised that when something major happens in life especially when it's not tangible. Hmm, it's not I mean, I, I, look at how they treated Mary with her illness……and that was shocking. I, I feel that mine was, you know, they sent her a basket of fruit, but they sent it to the office. You know, so, it just goes to show that that they are……useless basically.

Insignificant

Dawn felt that she was not heard, or what she had to say was not important enough to them. She reflected that if something happened to her tomorrow, they would just replace her, and this really upset her. She noted:

I suppose this is also what contributes to how I feel today is, I'm insignificant.

……isn't it of today's news, tomorrow's chip paper.

He didn't take my feelings into account at all, I just wasn't important enough!

I will never forgive them. For how they didn't treat me. ……….and I can't forget it. And if I ever on the grapevine, heard that somebody was going through this, I would reach out to them. Because I wouldn't want anybody to feel how I did, umm that I was ignored and not cared about umm and not important enough umm and I would hate for anybody to feel like that really.

Discussion

Losing a loved one can be an extremely challenging and emotional time and it can be especially tough for employees to cope with their grief whilst endeavouring to continue with their work demands. In this study, Dawn describes that one of the most important ways for her to have felt supported by her managers was for them to acknowledge her grief and recognise her distress. She felt that when her managers failed to respond to her needs appropriately it had a negative impact on her overall well-being, making her feel unappreciated. Research conducted by Petriglieri and Maitlis (2019), found that in general, managers go to work prepared to celebrate birthdays and births but when it comes to death, they appear to go silent. They highlight that the managers default approach is to endeavour to protect the organisation from grief, thereby leaving bereaved employees alone in their grief and emotions in the hope that they will 'bounce back' and return quickly to the workplace ready to pick up where they left off.   Sensitivity, active listening and understanding of the bereaved employees' situation plays a significant role in the acknowledgement of their suffering (Way, 2010). Doka (1987) posits that when a key player such as a manager ignores or fails to respond to a bereaved employee, their grief becomes disenfranchised. Which means that being denied the opportunity to convey their grief and/or the coming to terms with their bereavement, their grief may be prolonged or stunted (Bento, 1994; Hazen, 2008; Stein & Winokuer, 1989). Kauffman (2002), links self-disenfranchisement with shame, whereby individuals do not give themselves permission to

grieve and the result is self-initiating disenfranchised grief. Pitimson's (2021) findings highlight that individuals may choose to use self-directed surface acting in an attempt for self-preservation. They indicate that the self-disenfranchised grief at work is focused on changing how those around them feel about the bereavement so as to minimise their colleague's discomfort as well as safeguard their professional identity. In this study Dawn spoke about not showing her emotions to others to protect them from feeling uncomfortable both when speaking to work colleagues and to her children at home.

As indicated in 'Chapmans Model of Workplace Appreciation' (Chapman & White, 2011) (Appendix H), a few of the factors within a workplace environment that were observed as caring included, specific times set aside for managers to listen and for employees to be heard, collaboration, autonomy and a management style that encouraged trust (Baggett et al., 2016). Managers that were considered approachable and were perceived to understand their employee's intentions were observed as being supportive of a caring work environment (Baggett et al., 2016). Duffy's Theoretical 'Quality Caring Model' (Appendix I) focuses on placing caring relationships at the forefront of practice (Duffy, 2013). This research offers evidence that when managers are perceived to clearly see each member of staff as an individual and customise their acts of caring, staff reported feeling supported, recognised and valued as an individual (Baggett et al., 2016). The experience of feeling valued by one's manager increases the feeling of self-esteem within the workplace (Dasgupta et al., 2012). By recognising and respecting an employee as a person and not just there to complete a job, creates a psychologically healthy workplace (Dasgupta et al., 2012).

Organisations are more than just a place where people work, they form a significant part of one's social identity (Salgado et al., 2015) and the workplace culture presents a sense of meaning, order and stability for employees (Jonas, 2011). If an employee shares in their organisations values and beliefs it has the potential to form part of their worldview (Salgado et al., 2015). Terror Management Theory (TMT) focuses on an individuals' worldview and maintains that people support

their worldviews to keep death anxiety under control (Salgado et al., 2015). TMT posits that an individuals' cultural worldview serves as a barrier against death anxiety when reminded of their mortality, therefore the culture of work also acts as a buffer against this anxiety (Salgado et al., 2015). Dechesne et al. (2000) proposes that being part of a group has been demonstrated to provide self-esteem and a sense of identity. Research suggests that a sense of belonging to a group offers protection and security as it presents the possibility to move beyond death anxiety when an individual's identity is combined with group identity (Castano et al., 2002). Consequently, when an employee perceives themselves as belonging to a group, such as an organisation, it is considered enough to help them cope with the awareness of the inevitability of their own death as the organisation forms part of their worldview (Jonas et al., 2011). The association with an organisation, provides employees with a sense of meaning and this has been found to help shape their reality (Jonas et al., 2011). Therefore, behaviour of the organisation, managers and the employee can be considered as an explanation of individuals striving for immortality and why people align themselves closely with their organisation (Jonas et al., 2011).

In line with the TMT 'Anxiety-Buffering Model of Self-Esteem' (Greenberg et al., 1992) (Appendix J) the fundamental function of self-esteem is to safeguard against death anxiety by persuading people that they have worth. Jonas et al's. (2011) study indicates that an employee identifying with an organisation helps them to cope with death anxiety through the recognised acknowledgement that they have contributed to an establishment that is likely to last long after their death (cf. Castano et al., 2002). As noted in this study, feeling undervalued, uncared for and insignificant may instil a sense of estrangement from the organisation, from the group belonging, thereby creating uncomfortable feelings of death anxiety. Moreover, during the Covid pandemic working from home would have further isolated Dawn and therefore provided a sense of further estrangement from the organisation.

In this instance it is critical that employees feel recognised as valuable experts that belong to a group (Eisenberger et al., 2016). An employee's perception that they are valued in their contribution to the workplace and that their well-being is cared about – also known as 'Perceived Organisational Support' (POS), has demonstrated to have significant benefits to both employee and employers (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Studies have found that employees who have high POS, experience less stress at work and are likely to return to work sooner after an injury or illness (Shaw et al., 2013). In general managers are considered as representatives of the organisation (Dasgupta et al., 2012). If an employee perceives the manager as supportive, they feel compelled to return the support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) by showing positive attitudes and behaviours that foster positive performance (Dasgupta et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the lack of response from Dawns managers, left her feeling insignificant, that she was just there to get the work done and they did not care about her as an individual or as a recognised group member. The impact of which she describes having a bitter resentment towards the managers and the organisation.

In taking the lack of support into consideration Dawn spoke about her belief that the manager's gender was a contributory factor. Research conducted by Logan et al. (2017) highlights that gender does in fact play a significant role in bereavement support. They found that women were more willing to offer grief support than men. Their discovery contributes to current theory in that whilst gender does not predict a grief reaction, it may shape the bereavement experience depending on grief reactions (Doka & Martin, 2010). Logan et al. (2018), posits that men may acknowledge and respond in a different way to woman based on their individualised grief style and if they had been taught to experience grief in a specific manner.

Another consideration that is notable for discussion is the psychological contract. This concept refers to the unwritten expectations and obligations that exist between an employer and employee. When an employee experiences a significant life event such as a bereavement the psychological contract with their employer can be challenged, and the employer's response can have

a significant impact on the employee's experience of grief (McCastle, 2022). However, there is a 'dark side' to the psychological contract that can manifest in the form of unmet expectations and broken promises, particularly when it comes to supporting bereaved employees. Research has shown that when employers fail to provide the necessary expected support for their bereaved employees, it can lead to feelings of betrayal, mistrust, and a sense of violation of the psychological contract (Conway & Briner, 2002). Moreover, the dark side of the psychological contract can manifest in the form of unrealistic expectations on the part of the employee, such as an employee may expect their employer to provide them with unlimited time off, or special treatment during their period of grief. When these expectations are not met, it may lead to resentment and frustration on the part of the employee, which can further strain the psychological contract (Robinson & Morrison, 2000).

In the context of workplace bereavement support, experiences often vary considerably. The effectiveness of such support can be unpredictable, as illustrated by Dawn's case. Had Dawn's managers met her initial expectations by acknowledging her grieving process, her overall experience could have been significantly more positive. Conversely, Dawn's perception of being undervalued led her to withdraw from sharing her thoughts and emotions, a protective measure to shield those around her. Conversely, the lack of awareness about Dawn's ongoing grieving, compounded by her remote work situation, might have led her managers to inaccurately assume that she had moved past her mourning, reverting to a 'business as usual' mind set. An alternative scenario emerges had the managers initiated an upfront, candid dialogue early on, posing pertinent questions and fostering an environment of care and inclusivity. This highlights the significant role proactive and empathetic communication plays in shaping the trajectory of bereavement experiences within the workplace.

Implications for Practice and Research

The insights derived from this case study hold significant implications for both practical workplace strategies and future research. The case study indicates the important role that support

especially from managers, plays in an employee's bereavement experience and reintegration into the workplace. The contrast between helpful and unhelpful support mechanisms emphasises the need for organisations to create a culture of empathy, acknowledgement and genuine human connection. Managers should be equipped with the skills to recognise and address employees' emotional needs, thereby preventing feelings of undervaluation and insignificance. This study highlights the importance of integrating grief-sensitive practices into the return-to-work process, promoting an environment whereby employees are encouraged to express their emotions and seek support without fear of repercussions. Furthermore, this case study identifies directions for research. Exploring the correlation between an employee's sense of value, belonging and self-esteem in relation to their death anxiety opens up avenues for further investigation into the psychosocial dynamics of workplace well-being. By understanding the various connections, studies can contribute to the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at enhancing employees' well-being, job satisfaction and overall engagement within an organisation.

Study Limitations

Case studies have been criticised for their lack in scientific rigour as well as their limited basis for generalisation to the wider public (Yin, 2009). The case study results represent one example of a bereaved employees experience which allows alternative explanations to be considered, whilst findings can therefore be exaggerated or provide false information if it neglects to consider unknown factors (Howcroft & Trauth, 2005). Alternatively, the findings may be considered to incorporate a whole social setting when they only depict a portion of the social system (Merriam, 1998). Given the close rapport that the researcher is required to have with the participant may have influenced the findings (Yin 2009), however, a case study is reported to support theoretical development and therefore can underpin or diminish explanations (Crowe et al., 2011). Finally, the detailed findings of a case study may be too lengthy and time consuming for busy policy makers to read (Merriam, 1998).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study examines the complex dynamics surrounding a bereaved employee's reintegration into the workplace, revealing both the significance of external support and the pivotal role played by organisational culture and managerial engagement. Dawn's journey highlights the contrasting impact of unsupportive approaches, as evidenced by the unhelpful responses she encountered, from her managers. The experience of lacking acknowledgement, human connection and empathy compounded the weight of her grief, compelling her to use work as a coping mechanism. This coping strategy, whilst allowing her to mask her emotions, inadvertently fostered unrealistic expectations of her availability and work commitment. This study further highlights the profound connection between feeling valued and an employee's commitment, as Dawn's sense of undervaluation triggered bitterness and resentment, overshadowing her dedication to the organisation.

Whilst Dawn's continued affiliation with the organisation is sustained by her work from home arrangement and out of financial necessity, the underlying feeling reveals how fragile this commitment is. The findings emphasise the significant role played by managerial support and organisational culture shaping employee' feelings of worth and sense of belonging, which in turn strengthen their self-esteem and serve as a defence against existential anxieties. This investigation ultimately highlights the intricate interplay between personal loss, workplace dynamics, and individual well-being, shedding light on the impact that organisations have in enhancing or exacerbating the challenges employees face in the aftermath of personal loss.

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Appendix A: Participant Advertisement

PARTICIPANT NEEDED FOR
WORKPLACE BEREAVEMENT RESEARCH STUDY

We are seeking a volunteer who has experienced the death of a loved one to share their experience of return-to-work support to take part in a face to face, telephonic or online interview.

To take part:

- Be employed or have been employed at the time of experiencing bereavement of your spouse or partner.
- Be willing to share your thoughts, workplace behaviours and workplace experiences.
- Be living and working (part-time or full-time) in the UK.
- Be over 20 years of age.
- Be 6 months or more since experiencing bereavement and returned to work at some point after bereavement.

If you are able to volunteer, please email: l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk who will gratefully forward you further details of the study.

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Before you decide whether you would like to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to contact me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Introduction

My name is Leanne Flux. I have a BSc(Hons) in Psychology, a MSc in Organisational Psychology and currently completing a PhD in Professional Practice: Psychological Perspectives at Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology, Canterbury Christ Church University. My PhD research is a direct result of my experience in the death of my husband and returned to the workplace whilst still grieving.   This research forms part of my PhD in Professional Practice.

My first supervisor, Professor Alex Hassett, has a Masters in Educational Psychology and in Research Psychology, a Post Graduate Diploma in Cognitive Therapy and a PhD in Psychology. He is also Deputy Director at Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology, Canterbury Christ Church University.

My second supervisor is Professor Margie Callanan who has a MSc in Clinical Psychology, a PhD in Neuropsychological Investigation of MS and MRI Correlates and is currently the Director of the Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology and the Programme Director of the Clinical Psychology Doctorate at Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology, Canterbury Christ Church University.

Background

Experiencing the death of a loved one, especially a spouse or life partner is considered a significant life stressor which can impact on the emotional, behavioural, cognitive, physical, spiritual, social and financial areas of a bereaved individual's life (Aoun, Breen, Howting, Rumbold, McNamara, & Hegney, 2015). Research demonstrates that being able to connect with others who have been bereaved and the receipt of empathy are two of the most valuable means of social support (Dyregrov, 2004; Peters, Cunningham, Murphy, & Jackson, 2016). The post bereavement space between life, work and coping abilities show that an individualised support approach in helping the bereaved with their daily life tasks, self-care and ability to function at work is extremely important (Caserta, Lund, & Obray, 2004; Stahl, & Schultz, 2014). Penny (2014) highlights that one third of employees who experienced bereavement between 2009 - 2014 felt that their employer had not treated them with compassion.

It is not feasible to enhance an employer's ability to provide beneficial bereavement support without a clear understanding of the current supportive workplace practices and procedures and it is unethical to relay this without vigorous researched based on reliable and valid representative samples (Logan, Thornton, & Breen, 2018). It appears that practitioners and care services have been well-informed by

the few that pursue support direct from mental health professionals, however very little is understood about the everyday lived experience from the majority of bereaved individuals who do not use these professional services (Rumbold, & Aoun, 2015). Therefore, by understanding the details of the support received, or lack thereof and the impact of such, may assist employers to develop processes that can be used to plan and guide managers to positively support bereaved employees or those experiencing mental distress.

What will you be required to do?

- You will be asked to share your experience by answering a set of questions via face to face, telephone or online interview.

To participate in this research, you must:

- Be employed or have been employed at the time of experiencing bereavement of your spouse or partner.
- Be willing to share your thoughts, workplace behaviours and workplace experiences.
- Be living and working (part-time or full-time) in the UK.
- Be over 20 years of age.
- Be 6 months or more since experiencing bereavement and returned to work at some point after bereavement.

Feedback

- You will be offered a copy of the initial findings which should be available in draft format once the write up is complete. The draft will contain a summary of key findings and the relationship to the existing body of literature on the subject.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

On a legal basis all data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's own data protection policies. No unrelated or unnecessary personal data will be collected or stored. Personal data will be used by means of it being published via an academic or clinical journal and will also be shared via social media. However, all participant details will remain confidential. Data can only be accessed by the researcher, the researcher's primary supervisor, secondary supervisor and examiners.

After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed) and held for a period of *10 years.*

Dissemination of results

This study forms part of a PhD thesis and will be published in the CCCU library. The researcher also aims to publish this research in a relevant journal.

Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to (i) withdraw consent at any time without having to give a reason, (ii) request to see all your personal data held in association with this project, (iii) request that the processing of your personal data is restricted, (iv) request that your personal data is erased and no longer used for processing.

Process for withdrawing consent

You are free to withdraw consent at any time without having to give a reason. To do this please send the researcher an email noting this.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by Canterbury Christ Church University Research Ethics Committee.

What is next?

Please feel free to ask any further questions before completing the Consent Form and returning it via email to l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk . You will then be in contacted by myself to offer a convenient time to have the interview.

If you have any questions, concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me, Leanne Flux on email: l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk

Alternatively, please feel free to contact my supervisor:

Professor Alex Hassett (SFHEA), Tel: 01227 92 7093

alex.hassett@canterbury.ac.uk

If you have any complaints, please feel free to contact:

Dr Fergal Jones, Research Director at Salomons Institute

Fergal.jones@canterbury.ac.uk

 Many Thanks

Leanne Flux   BSc(Hons) MSc. MPhil.

Canterbury Christ Church University

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: How do experiences of support in the workplace impact a bereaved employee. A case study

Name of Researcher: *Leanne Flux MSc*
Prof. Alex Hassett (Supervisor)

Contact details:

Address: 1 Meadow Rd, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2YG

Tel: *0333 011 7101*

Email: *l.flux164@canterbury.ac.uk*

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw within 14 days from the interview, without giving any reasons.

3. The researcher and 2 supervisors will have access to the anonymised data however, I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential.

4. I agree to take part in the above study and I understand that the researcher will need to break confidentiality if I disclose information that indicates a risk of harm to self or others.

5. I understand that relevant sections of the recorded interview may be looked at by another member of the research team. I give permission for these individuals to have access to the recorded data.

6. I agree that anonymous quotes from my interview may be used in published reports of the study findings.

7. I agree for my anonymous data to be used in further research studies.

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

Appendix D: Interview Sheet Questions

Interview Schedule

Start of the interview:
Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research. Should you experience any distress please feel free to stop the interview at any time. ***If telephone call is the chosen method****: If we lose connection during the call, I will call you back and if I cannot get hold of you I will email you to confirm when a good time will be for me to call you again, alternatively would it be ok if you share with me a different number I can call you back on.*

Let's begin:

1)   For demographic purposes would you mind sharing your age?

2)   Please could you tell me a little bit about your job, in general?

   i)   Employment sector [Private /Public /Education /Healthcare /Charity /Other]?

   ii) Geographic location of workplace?

   iii) Experience / Number of years worked at that particular organisation?

3)   Would you share with me the relationship you had with the person that passed away?

   i)   How long ago did they pass away?

4)   How did your manager react when you told them of the bereavement?

5)   Please describe to me what support you received from work and by whom?

6)   Did their reaction to you have an impact on you in any way (physically or mentally?)

7)   Did you come across any challenges?

   i)   If yes…..How did that make you feel?

8)   Would you describe to me (in as much detail as you feel you can), what were your

        expectations of how you wanted to be supported?

9)   Did you require any support outside the workplace?

   i)   Did they provide information for you as guidance?

10)   Do you feel there was a stigma attached to the bereavement or any workplace attitudes or

        reactions?

11)   How did your manager provide any advice or guidance?

12)   How was your manager empathetic to your grief?

13)   What kind of working relationship do you have with your manager?

14)   Looking back on the experience, what stands out for you as the most positive element of the support you were given?

15)   Since returning to work has there been any further discussions or support given since the bereavement? (Long-term)

16)   All in all, do you have any over-arching thoughts or views that you take away from this e experience?

17)   Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel is important before we finish?

That concludes the questioning. Thank you for taking the time to share your experience with me.

Appendix E: Support Services

Unresolved issues:

- Do you have any concerns around any of the topics we discussed today?

- If any distress is felt, please consider making contact with:

    o Your GP

    o The Samaritans (116 123)

    o Cruse (0808 808 1677)

    o Anxiety UK (03444 775 774

    o Calm (0800 58 58 58)

Future concerns and contact with researcher:

- If you have any concerns or further questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my project supervisor – details can be found on the information sheet.
- My supervisor and I will be available for contact up to six months after participation for any issues relating to the research project.

Appendix F: Ethics Approval

Salomons Institute for Applied Psychology

Leanne Flux

28 February 2023
Direct line 01227 927094
E-mail
margie.callanan@canterbury,ac.uk
Our Ref V:\075\Ethics\2020-21

Dear Leanne

Work-life balance of individuals who have suddenly been bereaved of their partners.

Outcome: Full Approval

The panel would like to thank you for your submission and we are pleased to offer you Full approval.

We look forward to receiving a short report on progress and outcome on completion of the research, in order to complete our file. The report should be the same one that is provided to your participants. Please note that any changes of substance to the research will need to be notified to us so that we can ensure continued appropriate ethical process.

We wish you well with your study and hope that you enjoy carrying it out.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Britta Nagel
Salomons Ethics Panel
 Cc   Alex Hassett

Appendix G: Reflexivity in the Process of the Research

Based on the 'Asking better questions' on How to avoid biased thinking by Rose O.Sherman

Considerations	Answer
What am I not considering in this situation?	*I spent a lot of time considering all possibilities that may have impacted the way the participant was interpreting her experience, as well as other possible influencing factors to why the participant was stating what they were. I tried very hard to keep an open mind at all times.*
What do those with opposing viewpoints believe?	*In considering this question, I did not believe that this did not impact the research due to it being a case study, so the researcher was only interested in the participant's thoughts and feelings around the situation.*
Is it possible I'm wrong in my thinking?	*The researcher tried to take a multidimensional view in the way the questions were asked, understood, and analysed.*
Have things changed and am I unaware of new evidence?	*I took the transcription and coding back to the participant and asked a further few questions so as to ensure that I had not missed anything, and I understood exactly what was going on for the participant.*
How is my own life story affecting how I think about this situation?	*I worked very hard on trying to stay neutral in my thought process. I had a good return to work process after experiencing bereavement, however having heard many horror stories I wanted to ensure that I captured the feelings of the individual but also having the knowledge from past research that managers do face challenges in supporting bereaved people within the workplace.*
Do I feel threatened when presented with new information?	*In considering this question, surprised myself. I rather enjoy being challenged and love learning new information. My husband is a statistician, so he is all about quantitative stats and everything being black and white, so we often have conversions around my 'it depends' to his clear answers, and often I am moved to his way of thinking, other times I stand my ground. But ultimately, I do not feel threatened. My usual stance is I ask lots of questions to find out more on what I may have missed?*

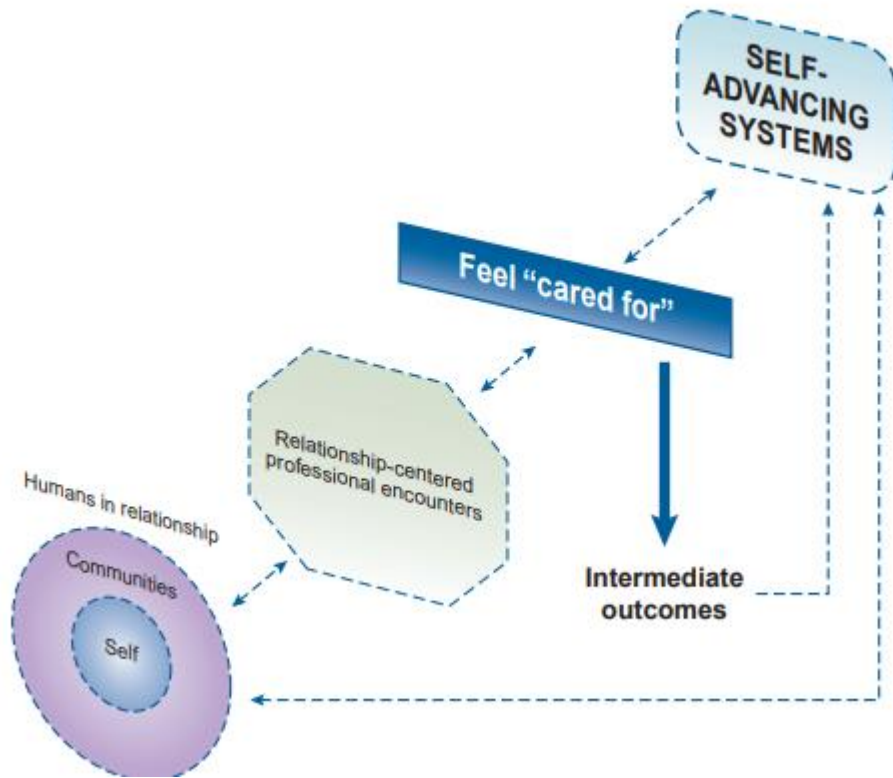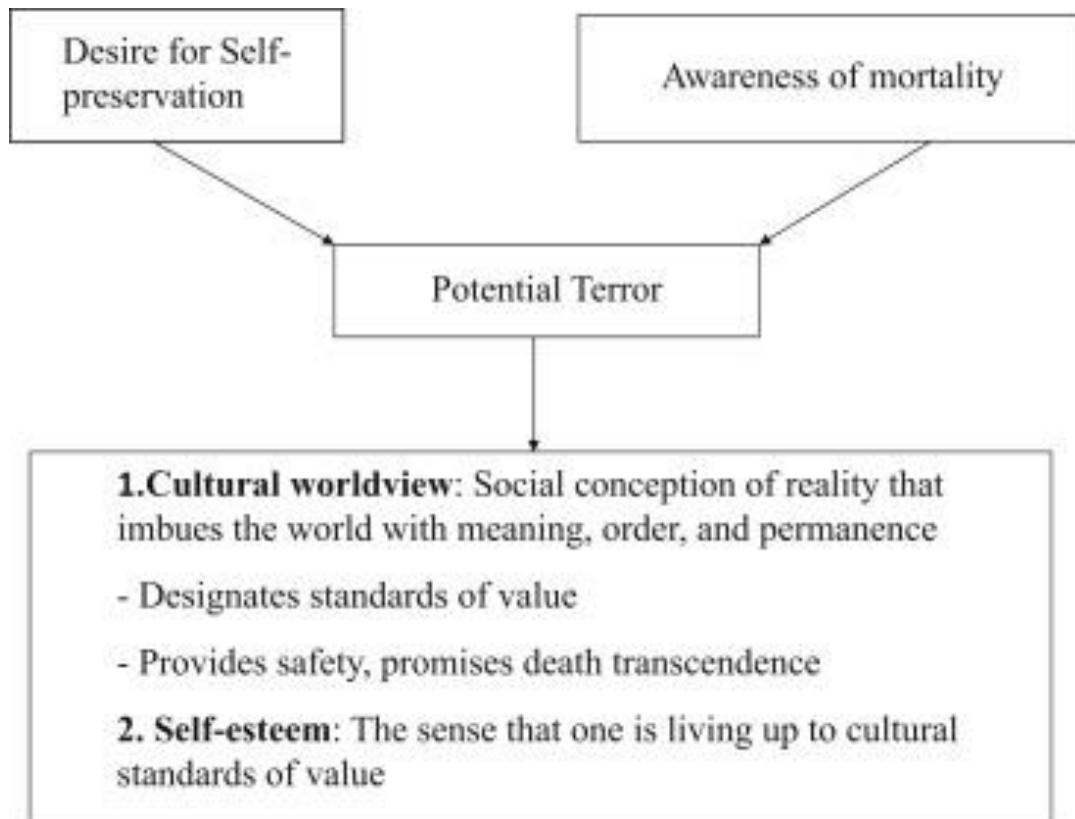|	
If I came into this situation without experience, would I make the same decision or hold the same viewpoint?	*This question I had to ponder of for quite a while, and I have come to the conclusion that I think I would. The only part I would not have had was a balanced view. By this I mean I think I would have sided by the bereaved individual and felt awful for them, however with the knowledge I have, I was able to keep a balanced view and really hear what the impact was on the individual, but knowing that this was very real for this particular individual and we do not have the information from the managers side and how they felt about the experience.*
How would I react if I found out my thinking on a key issue was totally wrong?	*I believe that I would want to understand the details as to why? What had I missed and what had I not considered or perhaps misunderstood.*
Methods of the Case Study used?	*When considering the design of the case study and the analysis used, I took particular care in trying to ensure is was multidimensional and well documented. I also tried not to jump to any conclusions (which I feel I did a few times and had to reign myself back in). I had to keep reminding myself that this was about a particular person at a particular time on their particular experience, and about their individualised feeling.*

Appendix H: Chapmans Model of Workplace Appreciation

Tangible Gifts   Quality Time   Words of Affirmation   Physical Touch   Acts of Service

Appendix I: Duffy's Theoretical Quality Caring Model

Appendix J: Terror Management Theory

Desire for Self-preservation	Awareness of mortality

↓   ↓

Potential Terror

↓

1.Cultural worldview: Social conception of reality that imbues the world with meaning, order, and permanence

- Designates standards of value

- Provides safety, promises death transcendence

2. Self-esteem: The sense that one is living up to cultural standards of value

Chapter Six: Theoretical Contributions and Reflective Review

The primary objective of this doctoral research has been the investigation of workplace bereavement support, specifically focusing on employees coping with the loss of a loved one. This chapter serves as a collection of the various stages of the research journey, revealing original insights whilst also assessing and reshaping existing knowledge pertaining to the topic of bereavement support within the professional sphere. Throughout this research journey, the aim has been to promote a deeper understanding of the subject, culminating in the presentation of a model outlining managerial experiences. By associating theoretical underpinnings with practical considerations, this study offers relevant recommendations for future workplace practices and policies, while carefully addressing the research limitations.

Overview

Research Questions Answered:

To understand what type of informal workplace support is being offered by managers to their bereaved employees.

The findings reveal that managers are beginning to recognise the importance of providing informal support for grieving employees. Several types of informal support initiatives have emerged, including:

- Practical Adjustments (bereavement leave, practical support, flexible work arrangements)

- Emotional Support (acknowledgements, regular communication, reassurance)

- Informational Support (guidance, counselling, EAPs)

- Peer support groups and mentorship programs

However, it is important to recognise that while progress has been made, there is still room for improvement. The study reveals variations in the availability and utilisation of support initiatives across different organisations and industries. Some managers may lack knowledge around policies

and practices specifically tailored to address the unique needs of their grieving employees. This study also highlights the importance of clear communication and awareness of available support resources, as employees may be unaware of the support options provided by their organisation. Moving forward, it is crucial for managers to continue developing and refining their workplace support initiatives for grieving employees. Managers should prioritise communication and awareness efforts to ensure that employees are informed about the available support resources and encouraged to utilise them.

To investigate what informal bereavement support is considered as helpful or unhelpful to a bereaved employee.

This study demonstrates that informal workplace support is a fundamental determinant of the emotional well-being of bereaved employees, significantly shaping their experience of grief and the impact on their overall functioning. Adequate informal work support positively influences the productivity and performance of bereaved employees.

Supportive measures include:

- A constructive and supportive work environment which is characterised by understanding colleagues, empathetic managers, and an organisational culture that encourages open communication enabling a safe space to express grief and emotions thus leading to a reduction in feelings of isolation, stress, and emotional burden.

- Acknowledgement of the impact of bereavement on an employee's focus and performance as it can prevent a decline in productivity.

- Flexible work arrangements, reduced workloads, and temporary adjustments to job responsibilities, enabling bereaved employees to address personal matters and adjust to their grief without undue stress.

- For some, access to resources like grief counselling, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), and peer support groups. These resources offer professional guidance, a safe space for emotional processing, and connections with other who share similar experiences.

- Clear and transparent communication channels are crucial for effective support, including providing information about available resources, expectations, and any adjustments to work arrangements.

- Policies such as bereavement leave or compassionate leave, as well as the establishment of memorial rituals, contribute to a nurturing work environment.

- Giving the bereaved employee enough time off work to grieve and take care of administration such as arranging a funeral.

Unhelpful practices for bereaved employees involve:

- Neglecting, disregarding or ignoring the loss, the absence of support, evident in an unsympathetic or dismissive workplace, can exacerbate grief-related distress, contribute to emotional exhaustion, and hinder the natural grief process.

- Imposing unrealistic expectations on a quick return to work.

- Excessive work demands without sufficient support, and a lack of understanding and empathy can lead to detachment, decreased commitment, and even intentions to leave the organisation.

- Promoting professional services when the individual feels they do not need it. Note of caution, if managers feel they cannot speak to their employee as they have been advised to send them to formal support this may result in deskilling them from having helpful informal conversations with their bereaved employee.

To understand what challenges the managers face when they support a bereaved employee.

It was found that supporting bereaved employees presents managers with a complex array of challenges that stem from the overlap between various categories of support. One recurring theme is the common uncertainty managers experience when offering bereavement support. This uncertainty manifests in decisions concerning how to provide empathy and understanding, as well as in ethically challenging situations requiring practical assistance. Managers reported finding themselves torn between the instinctive desire to offer unlimited time and empathetic attention to grieving employees and the pressure to fulfil work demands and expectations. The allocation of bereavement leave becomes a particularly intricate challenge, as managers struggle with deciding the appropriate amount of time off. Additionally, managers face uncertainty regarding how to support employees who do not meet established work expectations as well as how best to communicate with grieving individuals without feeling they may upset them further.

A significant challenge arises from acknowledging the diversity of grief reactions. Managers recognise that each employee's grieving experience is unique, and this complicates the allocation of support. Managers may feel conflicted when using their discretion, fearing that providing tailored support may create perceptions of favouritism or unfairness among other employees. Conversely, implementing uniform rules to ensure consistency and fairness may neglect the personalised needs of bereaved employees. This dilemma reflects the intricate balance that managers must strike in addressing individualised grief reactions while maintaining a fair and supportive workplace environment.

Festinger's 'Cognitive Dissonance Theory' offers insights into managers' experiences in navigating these challenges. Managers experience cognitive dissonance, a psychological discomfort stemming from inconsistencies between their actions and beliefs, when faced with decisions involving bereavement support. This discomfort motivates them to take actions to resolve the

dissonance and regain a sense of equilibrium. Managers may experience dissonance when making ethical judgments, particularly when business demands conflict with their personal values. This conflict may lead to decisions that prioritise business outcomes over ethical considerations, potentially resulting in cognitive dissonance. Further to this and linked to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) is the concept of emotional dissonance which is defined as the conflict between experienced and faked emotions (Morris & Feldman, 1997) resulting in conflicting emotions between self and values (O'Brien & Linehan, 2019) and even burnout (Nielsen et al., 2023). Burnout is experienced when the commitment of a job exceeds the capacity to complete the stipulated commitments (Hsieh, 2014). Therefore, if the individual does not possess the tools to recover from their work commitment, they may experience burnout (Grandey, 2000). Studies suggest that performing emotional labour may be harmful to an individual's well-being and job satisfaction (Morris & Feldman, 1996), due to the psychological impact that governs their feelings about work (Hochschild, 1983). Alacovska and Kärreman's, (2023) study suggests that overall, emotions guide individuals work identity which may be prevalent in emotionally charged circumstances where emotions and emotional clashes are experienced therefore experiencing emotional dissonance.

The uncertainty of managing bereaved employees who require emotional support and practical assistance can intensify cognitive dissonance as well as emotional dissonance, especially when decisions are made based on instinct rather than established protocols. This study highlights that managers struggle with profound tension between empathetic, humane support and the professional necessity of meeting work objectives. The inherent uncertainty and ethical dilemmas in offering bereavement support highlight the complexity of the managers' role. This complex interplay between empathy, ethics, and work requirements reveals the multifaceted nature of managers' experiences when supporting bereaved employees, ultimately impacting their decision-making processes and interactions within the workplace.

To explore the impact that workplace informal bereavement support, or lack thereof, has upon bereaved employees.

Bauman (1992) claims that individuals take part in activities and create legacies they feel may outlast their lives such as a lasting career or contributing to culture. This assists them to feel connected to something greater than their physical existence. By taking part, and feeling part of a cultural or social organisation, instils a feeling of collective identity that surpasses their mortality. Bauman (1992) suggests that the pursuit of this tactic can serve as a distraction from thoughts of mortality and creates a sense of purpose for the individual. Becker (1973) suggests that an individual's fear of death influences behaviour, therefore, to manage this fear people construct cultural worldviews, a shared belief about reality that gives them a sense of meaning, purpose and value to their lives. This view provides a feeling of continuity and order which assists individuals to feel part of something bigger, thereby living up to the standards set by their culture worldview and reinforcing their sense of feeling valued and contributing in a meaningful way of existence. Taking this into consideration, when a bereaved employee is feeling isolated from the workplace, due to the lack of supportive behaviours, lack of acknowledgement, or lack of recognition of what they are going through, they feel further isolated from the group that they identify with, which in turn increases their perception of isolation and despair which heightens their loss.

The impact of work support, or the lack thereof, on bereaved employees is a multifaceted phenomenon with implications for their emotional well-being, work performance, and overall quality of life. The absence of training in managing bereaved employees within management development programs is evident, underlining the need for education specifically on the impact of bereavement in the workplace. Participants suggest that such education should aid managers understanding in navigating personal biases and organisational demands, thereby encouraging emotional self-protection and balanced decision-making.

The impact of bereavement on workloads emerges as a significant challenge. Many grieving employees struggle to maintain their pre-bereavement workloads, leading to negative consequences for work performance and well-being. Organisational pressures to resume full work duties following bereavement may stifle grief and contribute to unfavourable outcomes for employee well-being and mental health. This is tied to the interplay between personality identity, work roles, and the portrayal of grief behaviour, which further intensifies the emotional strain on grieving employees.

The repercussion of bereavement extends beyond the emotional realm to encompass physical health. Grief-related mental strain can result in a decrease in concentration, fatigue, anxiety, memory difficulties, and decreased decision-making abilities. The physical toll includes an increase in blood pressure and a reduction in immune system functioning, which can impact an individual's ability to perform effectively in the workplace. The connection between the workplace environment and an individuals' well-being is evident, with the workplace serving as a context that can either heighten or reduce the effects of grief on employees.

The personal and psychological contract between bereaved employees and their managers plays a significant role. The research highlights how the managers' responsiveness, or lack thereof, significantly influences the employee's well-being and perceptions of appreciation. Violations of the psychological contract, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of appropriate support contribute to a negative impact on the employee's experience of grief, feeling of being valued and their relationship with their manager.

The impact of organisational support, training, work demands, and managerial responsiveness significantly influences how bereaved employees navigate the challenges following a significant loss. This study emphasises the need for tailored support, education, and understanding within the workplace to promote a supportive environment that eases the burdens of bereavement,

enhances well-being, and ultimately contributes to a more compassionate and empathetic work culture.

Implications for Professional Practice and Psychological Theory

Whilst grief is a universal human experience, its impact on the workplace is often overlooked, therefore this research makes a contribution to knowledge and learning in the field of practice and psychology (Bento, 1994). It does this by creating awareness of the impact of grief support in the workplace and encouraging a better understanding of the psychological processes involved (Bento, 1994). This contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional challenges faced not only by grieving employees but also as indicated in the Applied Research Project, the challenges faced by the managers who are providing the informal support, thereby helping to fill the gap in knowledge (Wilson et al., 2020). Furthermore, it assists to bridge the gap between academic research and practical application. It translates theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies that professionals could take into consideration real-world settings. As indicated in the Small Scale Research Project, examining workplace support and understanding the challenges creates a detailed understanding of what works and what does not when it comes to supporting bereaved employees. This enables managers to make informed decisions and implement evidence-based practices that are grounded in psychological theory.

Additionally, it contributes to the development of training programs for managers (Pitman et al., 2018), by providing empirical evidence and insights that can be integrated into professional development workshops and training initiatives. This contribution helps to shape the competence and expertise of professionals ensuring they are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and evidence-based principles and assists to identify various informal support strategies that may contribute to leave policies, peer support or beneficial flexible work adjustments. By understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by bereaved individuals and their managers, assists to act as a guide to

develop appropriate support, policies and interventions that are tailored to the unique circumstances of the workplace (Bento, 1994).   Investigation into informal workplace support often involves collaboration between professionals from different disciplines such as occupational health, human resources, and counselling. This interdisciplinary collaboration enriches the field of practice by integrating diverse perspectives, theories, and expertise. This collaboration contributes to the growth and development of professional practice by creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and innovation (Aoun et al.,2015, 2018).

Thesis Findings Summary

The combination of literature provides valuable insights into the impact of work support, or its absence thereof, on bereaved employees within the workplace. Whilst some employers exhibit compassion and flexibility, others fail to provide adequate support, making it challenging for many bereaved individuals to access the assistance they require. The review highlights the overpowering bio-psychosocial impact of grief and the vital role that workplace support plays in the recovery process. The findings highlight the significance of timely and paid bereavement leave, as well as flexible working arrangements tailored to the bereaved individuals' needs. The clarity of policy guidance and a better understanding of employees' situations emerge as essential factors to effectively support those experiencing mental distress in the workplace. By grasping the experiences of bereaved employees, organisations can develop bespoke support processes, promoting a valued and mentally resilient workforce for a productive organisation.

The research reveals that the provision of support that may be perceived as beneficial is a complex interaction of a variety of variables, culminating in outcomes that may positively or negatively impact the bereaved employee. The importance of gaining a personalised understanding of the bereaved employee's situation becomes evident, enabling employers to offer tailored, impactful, and meaningful support. The research suggests the need to strengthen investments in

informal support and to promote empathetic responses from employers towards death, dying, and bereavement. Sometimes, what is required most is a compassionate ear, followed by a genuine response which is tailored to the employees' specific needs, thus constituting helpful support.

Centred on managers' experiences in providing support to bereaved employees, the study identifies two phases: consideration and response. Managers struggle with uncertainty when attempting to balance the bereaved employees' needs and the organisation's demands. A common theme of cognitive dissonance runs through their experiences, reflecting on the tension between providing time and attention to grieving employees while fulfilling work obligations.

This research has uncovered the intricate web of challenges facing managers in supporting bereaved employees, influenced by ethical dilemmas, cognitive dissonance, and the pressure of workplace demands. The interplay of these factors shed light on the potential reasons behind some managers' perceived lack of appropriate support or empathy. Furthermore, the case study illustrates the impact felt from unsupportive approaches from managers and organisational culture on an employee's well-being, sense of value, commitment, and coping mechanisms. This research provides an understanding of how organisations can either alleviate or exacerbate the intricate challenges that bereaved employees encounter, ultimately emphasising the significance of effective support, organisational culture, and managerial engagement in promoting individual well-being in the aftermath of personal loss.

Theoretical Framework Development

The researcher considered the dilemma of standardising support to ensure that all employees feel they are being treated fairly versus offering bereavement support that is tailored to each individuals need and circumstances. The data from the findings of the four research projects were considered in detail. The researcher analysed the findings, compared, and contrasted them and extracted relevant common themes. A key focus was the support preferences that were shared by

bereaved employees in the Small Scale Research Project alongside the support capabilities or limitations perceived by managers in the Applied Research Project. The researcher then compared these to the global findings in the literature review and validated all sections from the Case Study. The result was the discovery of the 'Managers Model of Iterative Bereavement Support' (MMIBS). By using MMIBS to standardise the approach to informal workplace bereavement support to all bereaved employees thereby ensuring fair consideration throughout the process, the support provided can still be tailored to each individual's situation. The MMIBS framework has been composed to contribute to the understanding and implementation of effective and fair bereavement support within the context of the workplace however, the considerations below are not exhaustive.

Figure 1: Managers Model of Iterative Bereavement Support
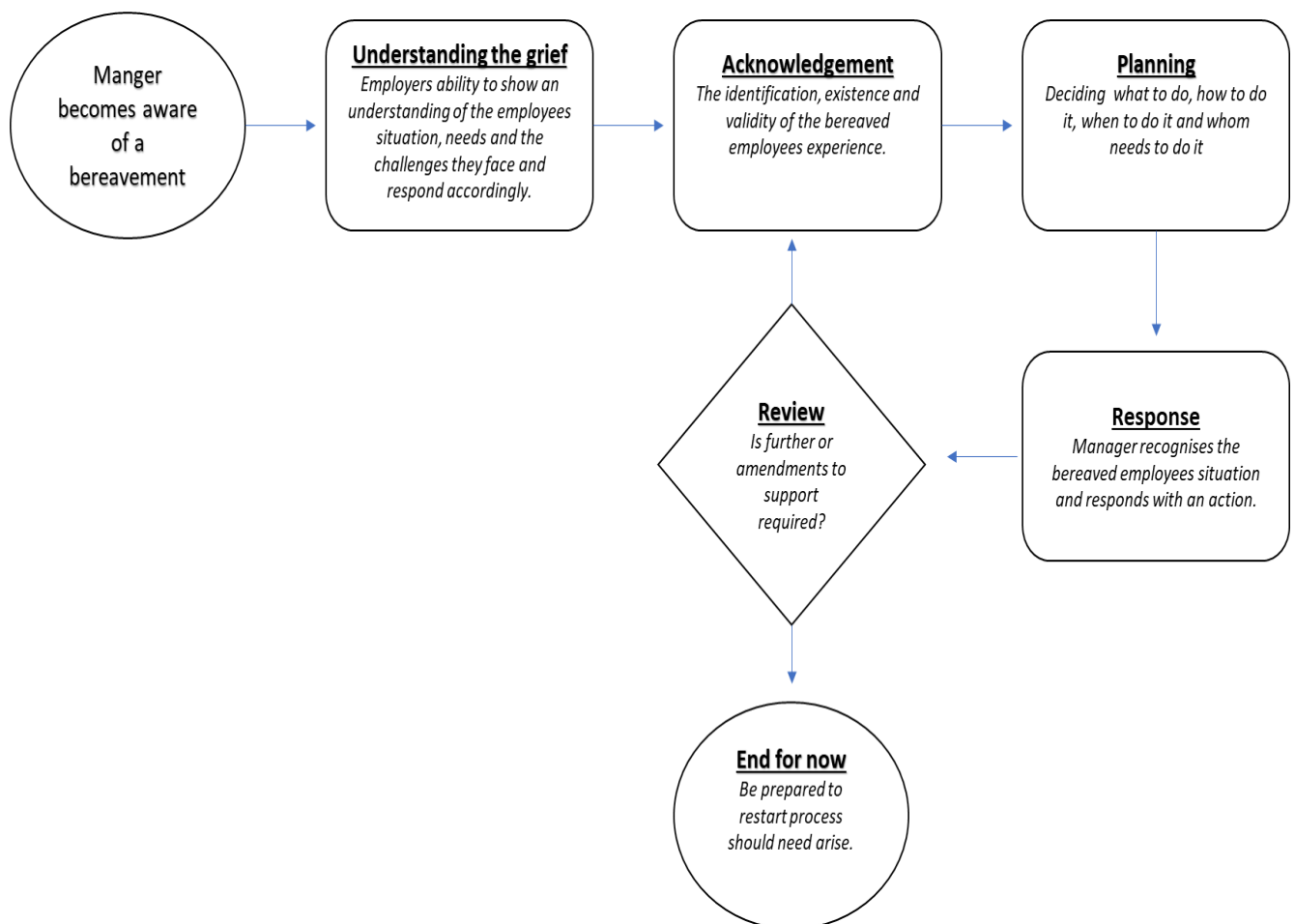
<div align="center">**Explanation and Development of the Model**</div>

Manager Becomes Aware of a Bereavement

Information is received by the manager from a source, (directly from the bereaved employee, a family member, work colleague, friend, or acquaintance) advising of the bereavement. This triggers a process of actions and factors to be considered.

Understanding the Grief

- Manager to understand the circumstances of the grief (long-term, short-term, sudden), any family support for the individual, any trauma experienced.

- Is the manager the correct person to be offering support? (what is their relationship with the individual?).

The Literature Review found that people tend to assume that grief is short-term, and this conveys a lack of understanding. It notes that employers who show understanding can further secure an employee's loyalty, motivation and therefore improve productivity, performance, and staff retention (Kanov et al., 2004). The literature draws attention to the need to understand cultural diversity and that support should be specific to the cultural way of that particular bereaved individual's needs.

In the Small Scale Research Project the bereaved employee participants noted that they wanted their managers to show an understanding of their situation and the challenges faced. They noted that understanding the grief, would enable the managers to recognise and respond to their needs appropriately.

The managers in the Applied Research Project noted that they were keen to understand the bereaved employees experience so they could be sensitive to their needs, and they recognised that it would assist them to plan on what support to offer them. Additionally, they noted that having an experience of a bereavement themselves would be helpful in their understanding of what support

may be required however they would need to keep in mind that their experience would not necessarily be the same as their bereaved employees experience.

The Case Study validates these findings as the participant shared that the perceived lack of understanding conveyed by the managers, instilled a feeling that they were uncomfortable with talking to her and not really interested in what she had to say. It felt like they had no idea what she was experiencing, nor did they have an interest to, and therefore did not know how best to support her. This left her feeling unappreciated.

Therefore, noting the importance of the above elements 'understanding the grief' is the first section in the model.

Acknowledgement

- Manager to acknowledge the employees experience directly to them (flowers, cards, conversation).

- Agree what information is to be shared with the rest of the team in the workplace.

- Reassurance to the bereaved employee that taking time off to grieve is ok, and that their job will be waiting for them upon their return.

- Confirm how and when 'check-in' will occur (telephone call, online, weekly, daily).

The Literature Review highlights that an acknowledgement of grief from a manager gives the bereaved employee permission to grieve and results in the employee feeling like a valued member of the team (Bauer & Marray, 2018).

In the Small Scale Research Project, the participants shared the need for their feelings or experience to be acknowledged as this was observed as empathetic. Just by the acknowledgement from a manager of the challenges of lone parenting can make the bereaved employee feel valued and less isolated. It was considered important that work grief reactions were recognised and acknowledged, such as fatigue, lack of concentration or lack memory. The findings demonstrate that

the failure to acknowledge a bereaved employee appears to convey that they or their experience is being ignored which in turn instils a sense of abandonment leading to a feeling of isolation, or further abandonment.

The Applied Research Project found that managers acknowledge their bereaved employees in the most appropriate manner, whilst maintaining regular contact to offer reassurance and a listening ear. Additionally, they reported reassuring the individual to give them permission to take time to grieve.

This Case Study validates these findings when the participant shared that she would have appreciated some form of acknowledgement from her managers as their lack of acknowledgement led her to believe she was unimportant to them and resulted in her feeling resentful. Furthermore, the lack of acknowledgement was reported to negatively impact her outside of work as she hid her grief emotions to everyone. Way (2010) sums it up well in noting that showing sensitivity and taking time to actively listen plays a vital role in the acknowledgement of grief.

Planning

- What deadlines need to be met and by when?
- Who in the team would take on extra work without putting too much pressure on them?
- What work can wait until the bereaved employee returns to work?
- What needs to be actioned? (short-term/long-term)
- What information the absent individual has that the organisation may need access to?
- How long until the support needs to be reassessed?
- What measures need to be put in place to support the bereaved employee and the rest of the team? (flexible working, work adjustments, phased return).

- How much paid time off will be offered based on the understanding of the circumstances of the bereavement?

- What additional support can be offered? (Employee Assistance Programme, Counselling)

The Literature Review and Small Scale Research Project lacked the mention of planning ahead however, the focus of these papers was to investigate what response the bereaved employees received rather than the planning ahead.

Most of the managers interviewed mentioned planning in the Applied Research Project therefore, the researcher regarded this an important area to consider. The managers spoke about having tight work demands and tough workloads, and that having a strategic plan for when members of staff were off for a long or unforeseen period of time would assist them to maintain productivity and meet their business objectives. They noted the planning was twofold. Firstly, they mentioned the need to examine their workloads, deadlines and priorities and then based on the result, to work out how best to redistribute the work. Secondly, they mentioned the need to plan what response the bereaved employee required. How much time they should allocate for bereavement leave, how best to communicate with the employee, what guidance did the employee require (internal or external to the organisation) and when returning to work what kinds of adjustments did the employee need (such as a phased return or flexible working pattern).

They felt that planning how best to communicate would be a good option too, to find out how the employee wanted to be contacted (telephone, face to face, online), the regularity of these contacts, and when would they make themselves available to set aside the time to speak to the bereaved employee, as well as finding out what information the bereaved employee wished to be shared with the rest of the organisation or their colleagues. Then to future planning, what the work expectations to be met were and how the work would be performance managed.

Review

- How is the bereaved employee now? (Conversation directly with bereaved employee).

- Manager to assess what are the current business needs/demands? (Have they changed?)

- Does the current support need to be amended or stopped? How will this impact the bereaved employee, the team and the work demand?

- What are the trigger dates? (consider offering first anniversary of the death as a day off)

When considering the findings from the research and comparing all the data, the researcher pondered the question of 'when is this process finished'? As noted throughout the research, everyone grieves differently, it is not a 'one size fits all approach' therefore the researcher is of the opinion to abruptly stop the process once the individual has returned is not helpful (which appears to be what happens in most instances, once the bereaved employee has returned to work, they are considered as back in usual routine). Circumstances change, work life pressures change, people can be fine one instance and then again grieving the next, therefore the researcher felt that it is advisable for managers to adopt a dynamic and responsive approach to support. This entails continual periodic reviews and potential adjustments based upon the evolving circumstances. An iterative process making minor adjustments each time they move around the model from element to element. Managers are encouraged to consider factors such as the efficiency of adjusted working hours, the employee's performance in relation to predefined expectations, and the employee's comfort with the current work arrangement. If these assessments yield positive outcomes, and both the manager and the bereaved employee are content with the existing support framework, it may be appropriate to conclude the process. Conversely, if the bereaved employee continues to struggle with challenges, the process should be reinitiated. This reinitiating is characterised by an acknowledgement of the prevailing circumstances and the subsequent adaptation of the support structure to better align with the needs and experiences of the bereaved employee, underlining the significance of a responsive and empathetic approach to bereavement support within the workplace.

End for Now

- Individual and manager agree they are both comfortable with the work expectations.

- Managers remember to check in with the individual as and when needed (long-term).

Once the above has been reviewed and considered and the employee is happy to comfortably recommence work, then upon agreement the support put in place can stop. However, be prepared to recommence support should the need arise, reiterating around the model each time as required.

<p align="center">Contribution to Theory</p>

This research has made contributions to the theoretical underpinnings of informal workplace support for grieving employees by incorporating and extending established theories whilst introducing the 'Managers Model of Iterative Bereavement Support' (MIMBS) as a novel theoretical construct. By encompassing the 'Dual Process Model', 'Social Support Theory', 'Job Demands-Resources Theory' and 'Terror Management Theory' into this research, it has enriched the existing theory, offering an understanding of the complexities involved in providing effective support in the workplace following a loss.

The 'Dual Process Model', has highlighted the necessity for organisations to adopt multifaceted support strategies that encompass both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented aspects, promoting resilience and healing amongst grieving employees. By recognising the individuality of grief experiences and the need for a holistic approach to informal workplace support, this research has paved the way for more bespoke strategies within organisations.

Furthermore, this research has highlighted the crucial role of 'Social Support Theory' in facilitating the grieving process within the workplace. The significance of supportive managers and informal support networks in mitigating the negative effects of bereavement on work outcomes has come to the fore. By advocating for a culture of empathy and accessible support systems, this

research contributes to the development of a compassionate work environment that acknowledges and addresses the grief experiences of employees.

The application of 'Job Demands-Resources Theory' has offered insights into the intricacies of managing the demands and resources associated with supporting grieving employees. It highlights the challenges faced by managers in navigating their emotional responses, work demands, and the provision of necessary resources. This understanding has paved the way for the development of strategies that optimise resources, ultimately enabling managers to effectively but informally support bereaved employee's, whist safeguarding their own well-being.

Moreover, the integration of 'Terror Management Theory' into this research has provided a unique perspective on how individuals cope with existential concerns in the workplace context. By acknowledging the existential aspects of loss and being made aware that employees need to feel valued, this research contributes to a more holistic approach to bereavement support.

The introduction of the 'Managers Model of Iterative Bereavement Support' (MMIBS) represents a significant contribution to the field. This theoretical construct captures the multifaceted dynamics of the support process, synthesising the perspectives of both bereaved employees and managers. The MMIBS framework offers a lens through which managers can understand and implement effective bereavement support within the workplace, bridging the gap between employee preferences and managerial capabilities.

In conclusion, this research has extended the existing theoretical framework of workplace support for grieving employees as well as introduced a novel and practical concept in the form of the MMIBS framework. It emphasises the importance of continued exploration in this area, with the potential to yield tangible benefits for organisations in terms of reduction in staff turnover, lowering costs, increasing managerial confidence, and thereby making it likely in offering a reduction in the strain on formal mental health services within the NHS. Ultimately, this work has highlighted a path

towards a more compassionate and effective approach to workplace support for grieving employees, enhancing the well-being of both employees and managers whilst encouraging resilience in the face of loss and bereavement.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights gained from qualitative research methodologies it is important to acknowledge the limitations.   There are a few limitations encountered in this study. Firstly, limited generalisability. This study's findings may be specific to the sampled bereaved employees and managers that took part. The experiences of grieving employees and the support provided in other regions or cultural contexts may differ significantly. The participants provided a self-reported experience of bereavement and experiences described from white-collar managers in the workplace (Bauer & Murray, 2018). These experiences may vary from one employee or manager to another (Hall et al., 2013). All the participants were English speakers, consisted of a higher proportion of women than men, and represented a high number of middle-aged managers which therefore may not be a full representation of the wider population.

Secondly, is sampling bias. The written interviews, online surveys, selection of participants for face-to-face interviews and the case study may introduce sampling bias. The sample may not adequately represent the broader population of grieving employees or managers in the UK, potentially skewing the results and limiting their applicability to a wider context. All of the studies were qualitative in analysis, which leaves them open to how the researcher understood and represented the literature (Elliott et al., 1999, Gibson et al., 2011). Furthermore, the researcher was involved in most of the interviews which may have influenced the way the participants answered the questions (Yin, 2009). The reliance on self-reported data through written interviews and online surveys may introduce the possibility of response bias. Participants may provide socially desirable or inaccurate responses, leading to potential distortions in the data and findings. Similarly, the face-

to-face interviews with managers may be subject to their own biases, such as self-presentation bias or recall bias, influencing the accuracy of the information obtained. The researcher continued to engage in reflexive practices and endeavoured to communicate in a neutral way when interviewing the participants (Sherman, 2015; Crowe et al., 2011).

Thirdly, is the limited depth and breadth of data, whereby whilst the combination of qualitative methods provides an understanding, the depth of insights obtained from a single case study may be limited. The findings from one individual's experience may not capture the full complexity and diversity of workplace support for grieving employees, potentially hindering the robustness of the conclusions drawn. Additionally, conducting in-depth qualitative research, such as interviews and case study's requires considerable time and resources. Given the limitations of the research timeframe, it was challenging to explore the topic exhaustively and include a larger sample size or multiple case studies, which could further enhance the study's trustworthiness and credibility.

Finally, the model put forward in this research is open to adaptation and improvement. It is probable that as further research takes place around bereavement support in the workplace these factors will be open to interpretation and even moulded into specific sectors or industries within the workplace.

Reflection

I feel that my journey as a qualitative researcher has been marked by significant personal and professional growth. My primary motivation has been to make a meaningful contribution to society, by enhancing the return-to-work experience for bereaved employees without compromising the well-being of their managers. However, this path was not without its obstacles, most notably the persistent challenge of working full time, time management and my imposter syndrome, required unwavering perseverance to overcome. Throughout this research, I encountered moments of immense struggle mixed with those that were somewhat easier to navigate. Two key methodologies,

grounded theory, and the case study approach, posed distinctive challenges. Grounded theory challenged me with the complex analysis and conceptualisation, demanding a deep understanding of its intricacies. Meanwhile, the case study method challenged me to maintain a scientific rigor, ensuring that my research was not based on storytelling.

Initially, my research began with a focus on understanding the needs of bereaved employees. However, as I further examined the subject matter, I recognised the crucial role that managers play in the support process, along with their own limitations and sacrifices. I feel that this shift in perspective added depth and complexity to my work. Balancing my identity as a business psychologist and practice manager not an academic per se, proved to be an ongoing challenge. Switching between my day-to-day professional responsibilities and the academic demands of a PhD thesis required constant adaptation. Nonetheless, this dual role enriched my research by grounding it in practical, real-world considerations.

Despite the rollercoaster of emotions, I can honestly say that I have both cherished and wrestled with every moment of this process. This journey has been driven by my unyielding passion to do justice to a subject that I deeply care about. My focus on understanding behaviour through the lens of psychological underpinnings has been a key pillar of my research. In the end, my journey as a qualitative researcher has assisted me to grow in confidence and equipped me with the knowledge and determination to contribute meaningfully to professional practices. My pursuit of a better return-to-work experience for bereaved employees and the well-being of managers remains steadfast. I am committed to ensuring that my research goes beyond the confines of academia and has a tangible, positive impact on the lives of those who seek help. Whilst this study has primarily centred on the return to work following a bereavement, it is essential to acknowledge that there are various types of losses that can massively affect an employee's well-being. One such significant category includes the breakdown of relationships, which can take diverse forms and impact individuals in unique ways. It is critical to recognise that the absence of a focus on these other types of losses in this study does not

diminish their significance. Instead, it highlights the need for separate investigations into the experiences associated with these forms of losses within the workplace (Pitimison, 2020).

Throughout the course of this research, which specifically concentrated on employees who had experienced a bereavement with some experiencing grief reactions, it became evident that the findings extend beyond this specific focus. I began to consider that the insights gained in this study may hold relevance for individuals who have undergone various other types of losses, such as divorce or grieving the decline in health or even a traumatic event. The common thread is the profound impact of personal loss on one's ability to navigate the challenges of returning to work and the need for tailored support systems to address the complexities of these diverse life experiences.

Figure 2: Bereavement and Grieving
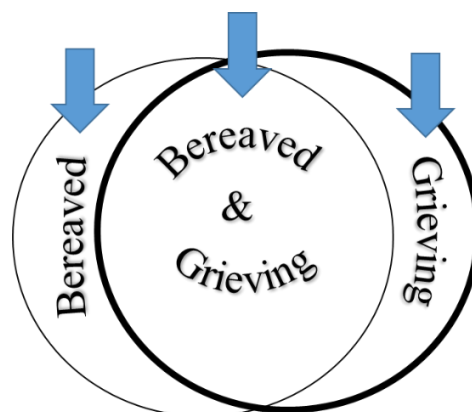
Future Research

Whilst the present investigation focused on bereaved employees in the UK, conducting comparative cross-cultural studies may provide valuable insights into how workplace support for grieving employees varies across different cultural contexts. Exploring cultural norms, beliefs, and practices surrounding grief and bereavement in various countries can deepen our understanding of the effectiveness and appropriateness of support strategies. Such research could contribute to the development of culturally sensitive and context-specific interventions that better address the needs of grieving employees in diverse organisational settings.

A longitudinal approach to studying workplace support for grieving employees can offer valuable insights into the long-term impact of support interventions and the trajectory of grief experiences over time. By following bereaved employees and tracking their support experiences, coping strategies, and work-related outcomes over an extended period, researchers can better understand the fluctuations and changes in grief and the effectiveness of support measures in facilitating the healing process (Bauer & Murray, 2018). Longitudinal studies can provide a clear understanding of the dynamic nature of grief in the workplace and guide the development of targeted and sustained support programs and policies (O'Connor et al., 2010).

Whilst the present investigation explored the challenges faced by managers in providing support to grieving employees, further qualitative studies can delve deeper into their experiences, perspectives, and coping strategies. Examining the specific factors that facilitate or hinder effective support provision by managers may enhance our understanding of the complexities involved (Bento, 1994). By identifying the key competencies and support needs of managers, organisations can design targeted training programs and resources to equip them with the necessary skills to navigate these challenging situations successfully (Dutton et al., 2002).

Building on the existing knowledge base, intervention studies can be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of specific workplace support programs for grieving employees. Implementing and assessing the impact of evidence-based interventions, such as peer support groups, grief counselling, or flexible work arrangements, can provide valuable insights into their efficacy in improving employee well-being, reducing work-related stress, and enhancing organisational outcomes (Aoun et al., 2018).

These areas of further research may contribute to an all-inclusive understanding of workplace support for grieving employees. By exploring different dimensions, contexts and approaches, we can advance our knowledge and improve support strategies, ultimately promoting supportive and

compassionate work environments that facilitate the healing process for grieving employees and organisational well-being. Finally, research could further investigate how grief unfolds in the context of the workplace and how individuals navigate the grieving process while fulfilling work related responsibilities. This research could assist to refine existing theories and provide new insights into the intersection of grief, work and coping mechanisms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation into workplace support for grieving employees has highlighted the intricate dynamics and challenges surrounding grief within the workplace. Drawing upon established theories such as the 'Dual Process Model', 'Social Support Theory', 'Job Demands-Resources Theory' and 'Terror Management Theory', this study has shed light on the multifaceted nature of bereavement in the workplace (Gibson et al., 2010; Moss, 2017; Russell, 1998). It has highlighted the formidable task faced by managers, who must navigate the delicate balance between meeting the needs of bereaved employees and fulfilling their work-related responsibilities. Moreover, the research has emphasised the crucial role of robust and inclusive support strategies tailored to the unique requirements of grieving employees. In light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on work dynamics, there is a compelling call for organisations to cultivate resilience and take a proactive stance towards workplace support (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). This involves investing in managerial training to equip leaders with the skills and awareness necessary to effectively recognise grief reactions and respond to employees' grief experiences. Promoting a workplace culture characterised by empathy, openness, and understanding is imperative for creating an environment that not only acknowledges but also validates the grief experiences of employees, thereby facilitating their healing process (Gibson et al., 2010).

This research significantly advances the theoretical foundations of informal workplace support for grieving employees by introducing the 'Managers Model of Iterative Bereavement

Support' (MMIBS) whilst integrating and extending existing theories. By incorporating the said theories this study enriches our understanding of the complexities involved in providing effective informal support in the workplace after a loss. The 'Dual Process Model' highlights the importance of multifaceted support strategies that address both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented aspects, promoting resilience and healing amongst grieving employees. This research emphasises the individuality of grief experiences and the need for holistic, tailored informal support strategies within organisations, hence paving the way for more personalised approaches.

Furthermore, it highlights the vital role of 'Social Support Theory' in facilitating the grieving process at work, emphasising the significance of supportive managers and informal support networks in easing the negative effects of bereavement on work outcomes. By advocating for a culture of empathy and accessible support systems, this study contributes to the creation of a compassionate work environment that not only acknowledges but also addresses employees' grief experiences. The application of 'Job Demands-Resources Theory' provides insights not only into the challenges faced by bereaved employees but by managers in balancing emotional responses, work demands, and resource provision when supporting grieving employees. This understanding informs the development of strategies that optimise resources, enabling managers to effectively support bereaved employees whilst safeguarding their own well-being. The integration of 'Terror Management Theory' sheds light on how individuals cope with existential concerns in the workplace context, emphasising the importance of valuing employees. Overall, the introduction of MMIBS offers a framework for managers to understand and implement effective bereavement support, bridging the gap between employee preferences and managerial capabilities.

Research suggests that simply by perceiving support being available can reduce stress and enhance well-being, often more effectively than actually receiving support (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). Some research indicates a negative link between unwanted support and increased mental distress which means offering the wrong kind of support or offering support that is not wanted may

actually raise psychological distress instead of alleviating it (Thoits, 1986). Therefore, it is essential to assess and tailor the type of support based on the individual's specific needs.

In essence, this research highlights the need for a holistic and adaptable approach to workplace support for grieving employees, acknowledging the ever-changing dynamics of work and the unique challenges posed, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. By consistently reassessing and refining support strategies, organisations can encourage an inclusive, compassionate, and resilient work environment that not only aids grieving employees but also enhances overall well-being and productivity (McGuinness, 2009). This study serves as a call to action for organisations and their managers to prioritise the well-being of their employees during times of grief and uncertainty, recognising that a compassionate workplace ultimately benefits everyone involved.

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