

**Employee Stress and the Implication of High-Power Distance
Culture: Empirical Evidence from Nigeria's Employment Terrain**

Dr Emeka Smart Oruh^{*}, Brunel University London, Brunel Business School, Kingston Lane,
Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 3PH, UK, emeka.oruh@brunel.ac.uk

Dr Chianu Dibia, University of Portsmouth, Faculty of Business and Law, Richmond
Building, Portland Street, Portsmouth, PO1 3DE, UK, chianu.dibia@port.ac.uk

Corresponding author*

Employee Stress and the Implication of High-Power Distance Culture: Empirical Evidence from Nigeria's Employment Terrain

Purpose – This paper explores the link between employee stress and the high-power distance (HPD) culture in Nigeria. The study context is the banking and manufacturing sectors in Nigeria, which have a history of exploitation, uncondusive work environments to productivity, work-life imbalance, work overload, burnout, and employee stress.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative, interpretive methodology, this article adopts a thematic analysis of data drawn from semi-structured interviews with 24 managerial and non-managerial workers to explore the process by which Nigerian manufacturing and banking sectors' work (mal)practices go unchallenged, thereby triggering and exacerbating employees' stress levels.

Findings – The study found that the HPD culture promotes a servant-master relationship type, making it impossible for employees to challenge employers on issues relating to stressors such as work overload, uncondusive work environments, work-life imbalance, and burnout, thereby exacerbating their stress levels in a country in which stress has become a way of life.

Implications/limitation – Research on the relationship between employee stress and HPD culture is relatively underdeveloped. This article sheds light on issues associated with stressors in Nigeria's human resource management (HRM) and employment relations practices. The link between the inability of employees to challenge these stressors (which are consequences of an HPD culture) and increased employee stress has substantial implications for employment and work-related policies and practices in general. The study is constrained by the limited sample size, which inhibits the generalisation of its findings.

Originality/value –The article adds to the scarcity of studies underscoring the relationship between high-power distance and the inability of employees to challenge work-related stressors as a predictor of employee stress and a mediator between workplace practices and employee stress, particularly in the emerging economies.

Keywords: Workplace practices, employee stress, high power distance (HPD) culture, Nigeria

Introduction

Employee (also known as organisational or work-related) stress is a phenomenon the extant literature has explored globally in multiple contexts, including stressors, strains, assumed interventions, and coping mechanisms (see Bewell, Yakubu, Owotunse, and Ojih, 2014; Kihara and Mugambi, 2018; Mxenge, Dywili, and Bazana, 2014; Seaward, 2017, 2019; Sonnentag and Frese, 2013; Yange, Oyeshola, and Aduloju, 2016). This article, however, explores the relationship between employee stress and HPD culture, particularly from the perspectives of emerging economies such as Nigeria, the context of this study. Broadly conceptualised, stress is an unpleasant emotional reaction an individual may develop in the event of perceived threats, which can lead to anxiety, depression, anger, hostility, inadequacy, and low frustration tolerance amongst other health drawbacks (Seaward, 2019). This tallies up with Kihara and Mugambi's (2018) study, which viewed stress as a negative reaction that an employee may develop due to excessive pressure and an uncondusive work environment to productivity –

among other demands – with which they find themselves unable to cope (Richardson, 2017). The UK's Health and Safety Executives (HSEs) highlighted six key employees' stressors. They include the inability to cope with work demands; understand job roles and responsibilities; control how they work; receive enough information and support; address their grievances; and finally, deals with issues of disengagement and overall work conditions (HSE, 2019).

Consequently, organisations are required by employment law to protect their workforce from stress by conducting (and acting on) relevant risk assessments, while the workforce have legal rights to demand that these assessments and appropriate responses are ensured as necessary case (Richardson, 2017; Seaward, 2019). However, as Hofstede (1980) and more recently, Aycan, Kanungo, and Mendonca (2000) explained, the ability of workers to demand their employment rights is largely dependent upon the prevailing national socio-cultural norms. A country's national cultural ethos shapes how organisations operate and behave towards stakeholders (communities, employees, etc.) within such environment (Hofstede and Bond, 1984). While cultural context is broadly explained along seven continuums – power distance (PD); masculinity vs femininity (MF); uncertainty avoidance (UA); individualism and collectivism (IDC); pragmatism and normative (PN) culture; indulgence and restraint (IR); and a paternalistic culture (PC) – PD and PC are considered most relevant to the issue highlighted in this current study. A PD culture (which could be low or high in nature) explores the degree to which power disparity is endorsed and accepted within a social space. In an HPD culture, individuals are less likely than those in a low-PDI culture to speak out against abnormalities due to various 'face concerns' (Ting-Toomey, 1988) that may be perceived to confront or bring disrepute to the traditional order (Kragh, 2016). Most developed countries (including Germany, The Netherlands, and the UK) have a low-PDI culture, which enable employees to speak up to authorities in the workplace (Hofstede, 1980). However, in developing countries (including Asian, Arabic, and African countries) such as Nigeria, which is largely an HPD culture, it is near impossible for employees to demand that their rights are upheld (Umar and Hassan, 2014). Hence, workplace stressors such as work overload, labour exploitation, unconducive work environments, work-life imbalance, and burnout are systematically overlooked.

This study therefore hopes to contribute to the extant literature by exploring the role of HPD culture in aggravating workplace stress, using the organisational practices in the Nigerian manufacturing and banking sectors as an empirical lens. The study is interpretive in nature, so the gathered data will be qualitatively analysed using a thematic framework that facilitates a rigorous procedure of data analysis leveraging six-step thematic content (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Understanding the concept of stress in the workplace

According to Yange et al. (2016), labour is an essential part of human existence, so the workplace and the workforce are considered significant contributory factors in the ability of organisations to deliver on their (short-term and long-term) goals. Essentially, it is this optimal drive for productivity and sustainability that often leads to management issues including stressors (such as work-life imbalance, overlabouring, and burnout among others), which in turn cause employees to develop stress at work (Seaward, 2019; Richardson, 2017). Stress has

become a global phenomenon, which occurs in all facets of life (Sonnetag and Frese, 2013), particularly in workplace (Seaward, 2019, Richardson, 2017). Stress reflects a sense of anxiety, tension, and depression that permeates human endeavours. It is an unavoidable consequence of modern living (Okeke, Echo, and Oboreh, 2016). Defined as a chronic and complex emotional state of the mind and the body, stress is not only created by certain biochemical reactions in the human body (Seaward, 2019), but also, by psychological responses to situations caused by demands from environmental (or internal) forces that cannot be met by the resources available to the individual (Seaward, 2019).

According to the HSE (2019), there are multiple factors contributing to stress, some of which implicate work demands, managerial control and lack of support. For Kihara and Mugambi (2018), stress entails a negative reaction that an employee may develop due to excessive pressure stemming from over-working, uncondusive work environment and other demands, with which they are unable to cope. For instance, Kihara and Mugambi (2018) view stress as the physical and emotional responses that occur when workers perceive an imbalance between their work demands and their capability to meet such demands. Other writers have opined that employees can develop stress when they employees feel that they are not being sufficiently empowered to control and engage in their work in the ways they consider most effective and efficient (Bewell et al., 2014). According to Mxenge et al. (2014), workers can develop stress if they perceive they are not being furnished with the adequate information and support they require to effectively discharge their job roles, or when they feel being bullied in the workplace (Richardson, 2017). Additionally, a poor level of engagement between managers and employees (particularly during change process) may hinder employees' understanding of their job roles and responsibilities, which can also create and exacerbate their stress level (Kihara and Mugambi, 2018).

While stress can be potentially harmful to individuals' physical and mental state, it is also important to emphasise that it can affect them in different ways, because what triggers stress for one employee may differ from what stresses another (Mustafa et al., 2015). In particular, skills, age, and experience, among other constraints, are some factors that may determine how well or poorly certain employees may cope with stress (Yange et al., 2016; Seaward, 2019). Thus, through effective engagement and communication with employees, employers should be able to identify and address the various symptoms of stress among employees. However, as noted in previous sections, it is essentially the cultural dynamics of the environment in which an organisation operates that determine how effectively employees engage with (or are engaged by) their managers (Hofstede, 1980; Aycan et al., 2000; Kragh, 2016).

The nature of work-related stress and organisational response: global vs Nigerian perspectives

Employee stress is a widespread phenomenon that has varied effects on individual employees (Seaward, 2019). According to the American Psychological Association (2010), around 70% of respondents in a survey conducted between 2007 and 2010 found that work is one the major causes of stress. Similarly, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2009)

concluded in its survey that about 22% of workers had experienced stress at work. Across Britain, a Labour Force Survey (LFS) between 2017 and 2018 provided that work-related stress accounts for more than 57% (15.4 million) of all days lost from work – due to poor health (HSE, 2019), with about 600,000 workers reporting work-related stress or anxiety in 2018 (HSE, 2018). While the prevalence of stress is widespread (particularly in public education, health care, social care, public administration, and the military), workload pressures, including tight deadlines, too much responsibility, and a lack of support from management, were cited as some of the contributing factors to the lost work days (HSE, 2018). Following a similar trend in Japan, work-related stress was recorded at a high level of 65% in survey conducted between 2002 and 2007, which implicated high workload as the main stressor (Purnawati, 2013). Work-related stress appears to be even more alarming in developing countries such as Indonesia (Purnawati, 2013) and Brazil (Victor, Junior, and Sant’Anna, 2017). The implicating stressors broadly ranged from a managerialist corporate culture to economic downturn, leading to downsizing; poor working conditions; work overload; monotonous job tasks; a lack of managerial support; absence of recognition of employee achievements; poor communication and engagement; and a lack of development and job security (Purnawati, 2013; Victor et al., 2017).

Like many countries in the developing world (Akanji, 2015), the Nigerian business environment is characterised by a high level of stress (Yange et al., 2016; Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2018), which is increasingly becoming a way of life in the country, due to the extreme struggle people experience to make ends meet (Bewell et al., 2014). The average Nigerian experiences a high level of stress due to unreliable power supply, long hours of holdup in traffic, and poor healthcare facilities among other factors (Osibanjo, Salau, Falola, and Oyewunmi, 2016). Thus, with the addition of work overload, underpayment, owed wages, strikes, poor engagement, oppression, bullying and job insecurity among other stressors, the Nigerian work terrain has become the central cause of stress for employees (Olukayode, 2017; Ukonu, Serieke-Dickson, and Edeoga, 2019).

Workplace stress clearly exists almost everywhere; however, for Seaward (2019), it is the effectiveness of intervention or coping mechanisms adopted by different organisations that makes the difference in stress management. Unlike in developing economies (including Nigeria) (Akanji, 2015), most developed countries (such as Germany, The Netherlands, Canada, the UK, the US, etc.) have developed effective mechanisms for coping with workplace stress that are essentially backed by law (see Randma-Liiv and Savi, 2016; Richardson, 2017). Hence, organisations are duty-bound to protect employees by assessing and taking appropriate actions in mitigating potential work-related risk factors (Seaward, 2019). Broadly, these response mechanisms are encapsulated in the Talking Toolkit, a six-step conversation processes developed by the HSE (2019), which are consistent with the insights captured in numerous studies (Akanji, 2015; Richardson, 2017). By leveraging the process, organisations can easily identify and manage the various causes of stress as well advice employees on how to build a business case for the actions needed in mitigating workplace stressors. The process involves gathering information through focus groups, surveys, and working groups to identify potential solutions to individual issues (HSE, 2019).

Conversation 1 addresses work demands, which involves ensuring that employees feel that they are able to cope with the demands of their job and that they have the relevant skills and abilities to meet those demands. Importantly, the work environment must be conducive to productivity and health (Seaward, 2017). Conversation 2 focuses on employee control. Organisations must ensure that employees are adequately consulted and engaged in discussions (through regular and one-to-one meetings etc.) concerning how their work processes are organised and undertaken, in order to encourage them to develop new skills for dealing with new work challenges (Randma-Liiv and Savi, 2016). Conversation 3 deals with employee support, which emphasises the need for workers to be able to access information they need for doing their job effectively – including support and feedback from their managers (Richardson, 2017). Conversation 4 addresses relationships. Employers must reach an agreement with employees on what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviours as well as the written (and well communicated) policies for reporting and dealing with these, to drive employees’ confidence and assertiveness (Bewell et al., 2014). Organisations must also encourage and provide opportunities for employees to socialise with each other, and to celebrate their successes. In conversation 5 context, employers must ensure that employees understand their roles and responsibilities, by providing them with adequate, relevant, and clear information, which can help eliminate uncertainties regarding work tasks (Seaward, 2019). Conversation 6 focuses on change and responsibility of the organisation in ensuring that their employees are timely, adequately, and effectively engaged – particularly during change process (including downsizing). This will enable employees to be clear on the reasons for the proposed change, and also enable them to contribute to decision-making process that matters in their development (Richardson, 2017; Seaward, 2019).

Importantly, these processes of intervention are designed to help address issues relating to workplace (Olukayode, 2017; Ukonu et al., 2019). As pointed out by many scholars, the essential elements of intervention against workplace stress are effective communication and engagement with employees (Bewell et al., 2014; Seaward, 2019); however, the way this may play out between organisations in developed and emerging economies differs widely due to cultural differences (Hofstede, 1980; Aykan et al., 2000; Kragh, 2016), which the following section details.

Linking stress and cultural dynamics: the high-power distance perspective

Workplace stress has been recognised as a devastating phenomenon for employees, often caused by work overload; underpayment; bullying; lack of communication and engagement among other stressors (Sonnetag and Frese, 2013). These stressors can actually be mitigated through effective communication and engagement with those concerned, which is central to risk assessment (Seaward, 2019). By law, particularly in developed economies, organisations are required to protect their workforce from stress by conducting and acting on relevant risk assessments, while the workers also have the legal right to ensure that this is the case (HSE, 2018). However, the effectiveness of stress intervention that is reliant on inclusive communication and engagement of employees (Mxenge et al., 2014) is largely dependent upon the cultural dynamics of the environment in which an organisation operates (Aykan et al., 2000). According to Hofstede (1980), culture is a multi-dimensional construct that involves the

crystallisation of history to inform the current generation's way of thinking, feeling, and acting. Culture can be broadly understood from multiple perspectives of continuum; however, the HPD culture is particularly prevalent in Nigeria and therefore the most relevant for this study. Although Nigeria is a collectivist society, this cultural aspect (and others) bears no direct implication on this current study, which specifically explores the relationship between stress and HPD in the country, hence, the focus is therefore on PD.

PD, which also aligns with a paternalistic (Aycan et al., 2000) culture, is the degree to which power disparity is accepted and endorsed within a given socio-corporate environment. In a PD cultural setting, the less powerful members of the society, institutions, and organisations accept that power should not be equally distributed; however, this perception can vary between a low and high index. The power distance index (PDI) measures “[the degree] to which power differs within the society, organization and institutions (like the family) are accepted by the less powerful members” (Hofstede, 1997). Essentially, Hofstede (1997) used PD matrix to define the societal level of inequality using a case study of fifty countries following the same pattern of three question-and-answer surveys derived from his previous studies on International Business Machines (IBM). These surveys explore how frequently subordinates (employees) are afraid to express disagreement with their managers, subordinates' perception of their boss's actual decision-making style, and subordinates' preference for their boss's decision-making style (Hofstede, 1997). In a low-PDI cultural setting, the emotional distance between those in a position of power and their subordinates is relatively small; furthermore, their relationship is more democratic and consultative. A low-PDI society encourages power-holders and their subordinates to be interdependent; hence, there is relatively lower inequality in the PD among people (Hoppe, 2004). This cultural dimension is known to be largely characterised by decentralised authority and a flat management structure, which leads to both managerial and non-managerial employees being less concerned with workplace status, as the decision-making process is extensively participatory. Thus, in low-PDI cultures, such as in most Western countries, individuals are able (to some degree) to voice their dissent with mis-governance and managerial malpractice as well as to demand involvement in the decision-making process (McRay, 2015).

However, in an HPD culture – in which the power relations are rather paternalistic, autocratic and the authority largely centralised – the emotional distance between people of different statuses is relatively high. The dependence of individuals upon power-holders (or counter-dependence) and unequal power distribution are considerably high (Hoppe, 2004). Hence, subordinates are readily willing to accept that they are inferior to those in positions of authority. The PDI culture is largely characterised by a centralised and an autocratic management structure, which is also heavily concerned with workplace status, causing subordinates to be unlikely to approach their superiors, directly challenge their decisions, or contribute to the decision-making process (McRay, 2015). Thus, in an HPD cultural setting, which is dominant in developing countries, inequality is not only endorsed but widely accepted (Umar and Hassan, 2014). In these settings, subordinates are constrained by various ‘face concerns’ (Ting-Toomey, 1988) and would not want to be seen as confrontational or bringing disrepute to their superiors (Kragh, 2016). Therefore, in an HPD culture, individuals would not be able to challenge exploitation and work overload among other poor work conditions that contribute to

work-related stress (Yange et al., 2016). Nigeria's employment terrain, which is the context of this study, is rooted in cultural and environmental dynamics of HPD (Umar and Hassan, 2014).

Study context: Nigerian culture and employment relations

Studies have generally shown that employment relations and HRM practices celebrate instrumentalism, which accords greater power and authority to superiors (e.g. employers) than subordinates (e.g. employees) (Oyelere, 2014), which is ultimately fuelled and sustained in Nigeria by its cultural ethos of HPD (Umar and Hassan, 2014). Given the near absence of employee protection in the wake of economic hardship, the recurrent gagging of trade unions, corruption, and poor governance in Nigeria, employers capitalise on this situation to exploit their workers (Yange et al., 2016; Otodo, 2016). The chequered history of employers-employees relationship in Nigeria is well documented (Ituma and Simpson, 2007) – likewise the country's economic outlook – characterised by job insecurity, a lack of fair labour practice, high unemployment rate, low per capita income (Dibia, 2017), work-life imbalance (Adisa, Osabutey, and Gbadamosi, 2016), and unequal power relations in the workplace (Oruh et al., 2018). From a socio-cultural perspective, Nigeria is an HPD society and endorses a work culture that is based on a master-servant relationship and respect for hierarchy (Yange et al., 2016). According to Ituma and Simpson (2007), these broad Nigerian institutional issues frame and sustain HRM practices and organisational culture. The above is consistent with Hofstede's (1980) cultural implications that unravel the HPD index in Nigeria's employment relations system, which inhibits employees' prospects of engaging effectively with employers and contributing to decision-making process (Okpu, 2016), including addressing workplace stressors (Bewell et al., 2014). This explains the stressful situation of employees in the Nigerian employment sectors (Yange et al., 2016), which is fuelled and sustained by the country's culture of HPD (Umar and Hassan, 2014).

Over the past five decades, the Nigerian employment terrain has been dominated by the petroleum sector, which accounts for over 80% of its foreign exchange and GDP (Okpu, 2016). This has shown to be detrimental to the country's economic wellbeing, considering that successive governments have neglected other sectors, especially the banking and manufacturing sectors (Ukonu et al., 2019; Olukayode, 2017), which are the focus of this study. With a population of over 200 million people (Cookson, 2019) and with private consumption expenditures increasing annually by between 15% and 20%, the Nigerian manufacturing industry has tremendous potential for growth, considering particularly, the huge number of market players and size of the potential market (Brown and Stephen, 2017). The top names currently operating in the sector include Dangote Group, Nigerian Breweries, Nestle Nigeria, Flour Mills of Nigeria, Unilever Nigeria, Lafarge cement, and Nexans Nigeria, to mention just a few. There is also a multitude of small- to medium-sized enterprises in the sector, including aluminium producers, beverage manufacturers, blacksmiths, foam manufacturers, furniture makers, leather producers, wood producers, tobacco producers and textile manufacturers among others (Brown and Stephen, 2017). Nonetheless, the industry has failed to contribute its fair share to Nigeria's industrialisation over the years due to excessive dependence on oil revenue and the total neglect of the sector by the country's successive governments (Cookson, 2019). In addition, the sector has continued to suffer underdevelopment due to political

instability, market distortion, weakening infrastructure, corruption, and needless bureaucracy (Yange et al., 2016). Accordingly, the sector largely employs low-skilled, untrained, and unqualified workers due to the inability and/or unwillingness of operators to train and pay skilled and qualified workers (Dibia, 2017), which possibly explains the poor quality of manufactured goods in Nigeria and the rising case of poverty among workers in the sector (Brown and Stephen, 2017). Nevertheless, employees are stretched beyond normal working hours to meet unrealistic targets set by the managerialist work dynamics in a country, where the prevailing HPD culture makes challenging this predicament impossible (Yange et al., 2016), which potentially explains why stress is rising among employees in Nigeria's manufacturing sector (Bewell et al., 2014).

While the Nigerian banking sector, on the other hand, occupies a crucial position in the country's employment sector and has been contributing significantly to its economy, Abefe-Balogun and Nwankpa (2012) highlighted that the sector has been undergoing different levels of reforms in an attempt to rise above its past challenges. The sector is noted to have witnessed distress for many decades due to a multitude of factors that include but not limited to the lack of observance of established banking principles and policies (Ajayi, 2018); banking errors due to inefficient and inexperienced personnel; and misuse of funds, leading to the unpopular Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 and other subsequent regulatory measures (Ogunjuba and Obiechina, 2011). The SAP and other measures, however, failed to resuscitate the bank from distress, necessitating yet another reform in 2004 (Ogunjuba and Obiechina, 2011). The 2004 recapitalisation reform, led by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), mandates all banks to increase their capital reserve from 2 billion to 25 billion Naira, which led to the merging of the then 89 banks to 25 banks (Abefe-Balogun and Nwankpa, 2012). Currently, there are 23 commercial banks operating in the country: Access Bank, Citibank Nigeria, Ecobank, Fidelity Bank, First Bank of Nigeria, First City Monument Bank, Guaranty trust bank, Heritage Banking Company, Stanbic IBTC Bank, Standard Chartered bank Nigeria, Union Bank of Nigeria, United Bank for Africa, Wema Bank, and Zenith Bank (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2019). While the recapitalisation effort and the concomitant mergers were hailed as a tool for sustainable banking in Nigeria, they also precipitated massive employee retrenchment and aggressive policies (among other objectionable practices) for survival, which employees are forced to endure (Ajayi, 2018). These include extended working hours; limited training and development; poor remuneration; rampant use of casual workers; erosion of union relevance and employee voice; and the enforcement of a 'no work, no pay' policy among others, all of which favour employers to the detriment of employees (Otobo, 2016; Okpu, 2016). While the rising economic hardship and unemployment in the country mean that employees are left with no choice but to endure this excruciating ordeal (Umar and Hassan, 2014); the HPD culture, which makes expressing discontent (against stressors) near impossible - only exacerbate the health crises of the already stressed employees (Yange et al., 2016).

Methodology

This section explains the study's method, respondents, and analytical tools: the three essential components of the methodology adopted in this study.

Method

The study adopts an exploratory, interpretive approach, which can represent participants' opinions, because it interrogates and interprets the lived world (including sociocultural and historical phenomena) (Saunders et al., 2009). This qualitative, exploratory approach to research has enabled the study to gain new, rich, nuanced insights (Patton, 2012) on the effect of cultural dynamics on work-related stress in the Nigerian employment terrain. As Creswell (2013) noted, one of the essentials of qualitative research is that it not only measures outcomes but also processes in-depth study, which the quantitative approach may not facilitate.

The respondents and the sampling process

The study operationalised data collection access by identifying gatekeepers in each of the companies, which (as Saunders et al. [2009] advised) enabled ease of access to data at the initial stage of the study. According to Creswell (2013), gatekeepers control research access and therefore determine if and when access can be given to researchers. The study has adopted this process to deal with the issue of data collection in emerging economies such as Nigeria (Mushfiqur et al., 2018). Given the sensitivity of data collection, especially in emerging economies (Mushfiqur et al., 2018), the researchers also made it clear to the gatekeepers that the data is strictly intended for academic purposes only and that the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents (organisations and interviewees) would be upheld. As required by qualitative research ethics, the researchers sought the respondents' consent and unambiguously explained the reasons for the study (Saunders et al., 2009). Subsequently, the relevant departmental offices were contacted and briefed on the aim and objectives of research for which access to their data was needed. This step was followed by data collection, which took place between January and March 2019. The process of data collection involved semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 24 managerial and non-managerial staff at the chosen two manufacturing and three banking firms across two Nigerian cities (Lagos and Abuja). Lagos is the cosmopolitan former capital of Nigeria, while Abuja is the current capital of the country. Studies have demonstrated that people from nearly all Nigerian tribes/regions live and work in these cities, which essentially have an HPD cultural undertone, like the rest of the country (Orun et al., 2018). Essentially, the researchers focused on Saunders et al.'s (2009) richness of qualitative data and rigour of analysis, as opposed to needlessly gathering a large amount of data (Creswell, 2013). During the interview process, each of which lasted between 45 and 50 minutes, specific questions were asked to which respondents gave answers that were relevant to the research objectives, thereby enhancing the 'dependability' of the gathered data (Patton, 2012). Such questions included: 'What do you understand by workplace stress?'; 'Do you consider your work stressful and challenging?'; 'What do you consider "stressors" in your organisation?'; 'Are you able or unable to discuss these stressors with your boss?'; 'Are there any cultural reasons why you may or may not be able to challenge your managers about these stressors?'; and 'Do you or do you not consider that HPD culture in Nigeria makes it impossible to have equal dialogue with your managers regarding work stressors?' (See appendix for full interview guide). In line with Guba and Lincoln's (1989) explanation, these questions helped the researchers to seek clarification on any possible inconsistency from respondents, in different context such as (for instance) where researchers may need more clarity on intensity of workload or pattern, which may give workers stress. After 24 interviews, the interviewer believed that rich information had been gathered and that data saturation had been achieved, hence, further interviews were not needed (Patton, 2012). While the interviewer took notes in order to ensure that certain salient points were not overlooked, the interviews were audio-recorded (with the interviewees' consent), manually transcribed verbatim, and bias was avoided as much as possible, so as to enhance validity and reliability of the study (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Creswell, 2013). The interview is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 here

Note: These participants were drawn from the three manufacturing and two banking firms highlighted in the previous section ('Study context: Nigerian culture and employment relations').

The analytical tool

In terms of analysing the gathered interview data, the researchers leveraged Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. According to Vaismoradi et al. (2013), this approach facilitates a procedure for vigorous data analysis in such a way that the relationship between theory and the issue of enquiry in a study is clear – relative to the data. This approach helped the researchers to establish the relationship between work conditions, stress (Bewell et al., 2014), and inability to speak up (due to cultural-environmental dynamics) (Hofstede, 1980) within the gathered data. By interactively moving back and forth (and reviewing the data line by line), the researchers were able to establish a coding scheme. Relying on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework, the researchers made no attempt to impose coding categories; rather, a process was developed through which they were able to familiarise themselves with the data, leading to open coding, which amounted to 'the disaggregation of data into unit' (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 509). This was followed by the identification and examination of key themes and semantic content that was pertinent to the data, including several concepts, issues, and phenomena (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process subsequently led to the creation of a large number of codes and axial codes (or categories based on comparable features between codes), which were marked in different colours to facilitate thematic mapping and analysis. These were all pulled together, which helped to form categories that encompassed issues (Vaismoradi et al., 2013) such as domination, control, exploitation, underpayment, overlabouring, exhaustion, centralisation, hierarchy, silence, power differentiation, inequality, and stress. Following further fine-tuning and painstaking analysis of these categories, the two researchers agreed to independently and differently apply the selective coding necessary for reviewing and further interrogating the link between these categories, in order to enhance the reliability of the overall outcomes. This process facilitated developing, integrating, and naming the core themes. The inter-rater reliability among the codes indicated around 82% (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach helped to achieve a nuanced understanding of the effect of the HPD culture on addressing workplace conditions that are considered as triggering and exacerbating employee stress in workplace (Olukayode, 2017). By means of the coding process, the study established three key themes (see table 2) for analysis.

Table 2 here

Findings

High power distance fuels and endorses labour exploitation, leading to stress

The issue of employees' exploitation (including work overload and underpayment) is a well-researched phenomenon in the extant literature (Oyelere, 2014). Such exploitation is often fuelled by a range of factors, including managerial pursuit of high productivity, organisational

profitability, and maximisation of shareholder's value (Oruh et al., 2018). However, labour exploitation is a situation that employees struggle to contain or challenge, particularly in developing countries in which servant-master relationship is normalised. This is consequent of an HPD culture (Umar and Hassan, 2014). Given this reality, subordinates (e.g. employees) 'opt to stay silent' (F1-C) and 'resign any prospect of challenging managerial exploitation' (F3-L), which only exacerbate their stress levels. This experience is evidenced in the following excerpts:

Everybody knows how stressful this country can be. In any case, we are used to stress. That's the sort of life our successive governments have created for us. But that's nothing compared to the stress we face in this company. They make you work so much that you want to drop dead, but who are we to complain in a country where it is forbidden to question those above you? (F4-P).

To collaborate this viewpoint, some managers noted:

There is hardship and rising unemployment in the country. The last thing you want now is to start challenging your job provider needlessly. As far as this country is concerned, they are your superiors, they have dominance over you. They pay you for a living. They are your saviours, not your competitors (F2-G).

The problem with people nowadays is that once you give them an inch, they will demand a mile. Give them a job, they will laze around and complain about one thing or another. So unfortunate, laziness is not part of our cultural value (F3-K).

It's baffling. Some individuals want to get paid for doing nothing, and they don't commit to working hard. That's why unemployment is high, and many companies have left the country. Our founding fathers worked very hard to survive, and they were always very humble and respectful to their kings (F1-A).

It is therefore considered out of place for employees to demand their rights to fair treatment or to risk being perceived as confrontational against their employers in any shape or form, particularly in a country in which unemployment is high, as such behaviour would leave them vulnerable to different forms of labour exploitation (Oyelere, 2014; Otobo, 2016). This phenomenon is reflected in the quotations below:

You must complete your tasks, but you are also forced to do extra unpaid work. You dare not complain, unless you want to lose your job. It's traditional in this country – your father has the right to send you on any form of errand he so wishes. If you question his authority, you may be kicked out of the house (F1-E).

I cannot pay my bills, yet I'm working all day every day. This is modern-day slavery. But if I speak out, I will pay – big time. This is what you get where power intoxicates (F5-V).

What they pay us here is peanuts considering the workload. I'm contracted for eight hours daily, but in reality, I'm putting in nine hours. I must respect the will of my boss (F4-R).

My pay package is just enough to pay my house rent. I can barely buy quality food. In this society, holidays or taking families on outings are not considered essential, but luxuries. It kills you slowly, but nobody cares. You will appear stupid if you complain about it, because it is the norm (F5-X).

The above quotations from respondents clearly demonstrate the theme of HPD culture at play, which fuels and endorses labour exploitation, thereby leading to and exacerbating employee stress among organisations. Short phrases, such as ‘contracted for eight hours, but putting in nine hours’ (F4-R), ‘I can barely buy me quality food’ (F5-X), ‘cannot pay my bills’ (F5-V), ‘peanuts considering the workload’ (F4-R), ‘modern-day slavery’ (F5-V), and ‘nobody cares’ (F5-X) are clear evidence of work overload and underpayment, which are forms of labour exploitation. However, employees are unable to challenge these manners of exploitation due to the prevailing HPD culture of deference to superiors (Hofstede, 1980; Aycan et al., 2000). Short phrases such as ‘who are we to complain in a country where it is forbidden to question those above you?’ (F4-P), ‘respect the will of my boss’ (F4-R), ‘your superiors...have dominance over you....., they are your saviours’ (F2-G), and ‘dare not complain....., it’s traditional...’ (F1-E) explain this predicament (Umar and Hassan, 2014; Kragh, 2016). As a consequence of their inability to challenge the status quo, they ‘opt to stay silent’ (F1-C) and ‘resign any prospect of challenging managerial exploitation’ (F3-L), which only worsens their stress levels (Bewell et al.). This is collaborated by short quotes such as ‘how stressful’, ‘[the] stress we face’, ‘kills you slowly’, ‘I will pay – big time’, ‘where power intoxicates’ (F5-V), and ‘want to drop dead, but...it is forbidden to question those above you (F4-P).

An HPD culture weakens employees’ ability to challenge an unconducive work environment, thereby exacerbating stress

Some participants highlighted issue of unconducive work environments, which the extant literature has correlated with a high prevalence of employee stress (Yange et al., 2016; Bewell et al., 2014). The researchers propagating this argument have also indicated that the inability to resolve these issues is simply due to the fact that most Nigerian employers do not really consider the suitability of work environment as correlating to an employee’s wellbeing and level of productivity (Osibanjo et al., 2016; Yange et al., 2016). For some managers, what really matters is that job opportunities are offered in an environment and a time of high unemployment, hence, lucky employees should embrace such an opportunity to work with appreciation and gratitude, regardless of the conditions of the work (Bewell et al., 2014; Okpu, 2016). For some of these managers, ‘beggars do not actually have a choice; rather, they make do with what is provided to them’ (F5-U) and ‘in Africa, there is this adage that one should show deference and be thankful to their breadwinners at all times’ (F3-N). This viewpoint is evidenced in the following comments:

Our tradition mandates you to respect your parents, your elders, superiors, or anybody that puts food on your table. You either go along with what is available or find the exit route. You just don’t rubbish their effort (F1-B).

You can never please Nigerians. Put them in paradise, they will still complain about everything. At least factories are not collapsing and killing workers here, like in Bangladesh (F5-T).

As indicated above, the justification for uncondusive work environments is that other places of work (such as, for instance, the Bangladeshi manufacturing company that collapsed, killing many workers [Motlagh and Saha, 2014]) are far more uncondusive to productivity and more of a health hazard for employees. Furthermore, the expectations based on the socio-cultural environment are that people should show respect and gratitude (Umar and Hassan, 2014) rather than demanding comfort in the workplace. As a consequence, most workplaces in Nigeria are not particularly concerned with the appropriateness of the work environment and the concomitant health implications for workers (Akanji, 2015; Ootobo, 2016). The following extracts below support this contention:

Our office is undergoing renovation, so we are currently using a makeshift warehouse, which is neither ideal for work nor healthy for human beings. Our custom forbids you to question the authority (F1-D).

The air conditioning systems are not effective. It is ok in the morning, but it becomes so warm in the afternoon that you sometime struggle to breathe. They are never in a hurry to repair things here. It's frustrating, and we don't have the power to demand that they fix things. We are just ordinary workers (F4-S).

This place is so choked up, sometimes it feels like we are canned fish. It can be stressful working in this place (F2-J).

We work in a very uncomfortable space. The seating arrangements in particular make you feel like a slave. You don't have any form of privacy. People are sitting too close to each other, and sometimes, people collide into one another (F4-Q).

These comments evidence the increased stress particularly arising from the issues of working in a work environment that is not conducive for work or is unhealthy for human beings (Osibanjo et al., 2016; Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2018). Short phrases such as '*the air conditioning systems are not effective*' (F4-S), '*our office is undergoing renovation, so we are currently using a makeshift warehouse*' (F1-D), '*work in a very uncomfortable space*' (F4-Q), and '*neither ideal for work nor healthy for human..*' (F1-D) capture this position. Such poor working conditions make employees '*struggle to breathe*' (F4-S) and '*feel like a slave*' (F4-Q). However, employees would rather not challenge their bosses on these issues due to the HPD culture that prevails across the country and inhibits employees' voices (Umar and Hassan, 2014). In addition to the work conditions that contribute to work-related stress, respondents noted that the country's '*tradition mandates you to respect your parents, elders, superiors*' (F1-B), '*our custom forbids you to question authority*' (F1-D), and '*show deference and be thankful to...breadwinners*' (F3-N). These are all phrases evidencing an HPD culture (Hofstede, 1980), which makes it challenging for employees to rise up to the occasion and demand a change to a more appropriate work environment (Kragh, 2016), hence, they are resigned to their situation in silence, while stress levels intensify (Yange et al., 2016).

An HPD culture weakens employees' ability to challenge work-life imbalance and burnout, leading to stress

The majority of the respondents referred to work-life balance challenges and the issue of burnout in their workplaces, which have been linked to a high prevalence of employee stress

(Adisa et al., 2016; Osibanjo et al., 2016; Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2018). Their views also indicated that *'the issue has only worsened in recent times, simply because managements/businesses in Nigeria do not really consider work-life balance as a national priority'* (F2-H) nor a *'requisite for employees' mental and physical health'* (F5-W), particularly in a country in which *'stress has been normalised as a way of life'* (F1-D). According to some managers:

Our founding fathers worked so hard day and night with bare feet in the wilderness to survive. They use hoes and cutlasses for cultivation in order to feed their children, but the breed of these days is rather spoilt. They want everything ready-made (F2-F).

The global community is going through economic challenges, and this country is not immune. People who believe working for a living gives stress should be ready to starve to death. That is the position of our custom and tradition (F4-O).

Times have changed. In early days, people were delighted to work for the kings all day for free, but today people mourn when asked to commit just a few occasional hours on Saturdays to help meet work targets. We need to be more patriotic (F1-A).

It would be uncultured for someone to plead for a job and then turn around to complain of burnout or stress. That's pure laziness (F3-K).

The above quotations have a cultural undertone of right and wrong in the Nigerian context (Umar and Hassan, 2014), according to which employees are expected to emulate their ancestors who are known to have worked hard, demonstrated joy in serving their kings as slaves, and deferred to their masters regardless of what was thrown at them (Otobo, 2016). This mindset is a way of not only normalising work-life imbalance (which can lead to burnout [Adisa et al., 2016]); but also, of criminalising dissent with such work practices. This situation often increases stress levels for employees (Bewell et al., 2014; Seaward, 2019). The above point is illuminated in the following comments:

It is all about work and nothing else. You work here, and you also work at home. This is the nature of our society, our life. I find it stressful, but that's the way it is. You must be God to challenge this (F2-H).

My dear brother, we have no life. How can somebody leave home at 5 am in the morning and come back at 10 pm when their wife and children are already in bed? It gives you stress and depression (F1-C).

Sometimes you want revolt when the pressure is on you, but it's not about justice, it is about power, authority, and the norms in the country as whole (F4-P).

They make you work weekends, they drain you out, and they promise you rewards or compensation, but you get nothing. Our parliamentarians are unfit for purpose (F4-R).

People normally work five days, but here, we often work Saturdays, too – making six days. Honestly, it exhausts you. We need our jobs, so we smile and carry on. That's what they want – the African mentality (F5-V).

I feel so tired and sick of working, but I must feed my kids. You work here, work at home, and also work during holidays. The government would not intervene, neither would policymakers. Welcome to Nigeria. Only God can save us (F3-M).

Glaringly, these quotations sing from the same hymn book – all bordering on issues of work-life imbalance and burnout from excessive workload. The respondents decry these problems, but they have never summoned the courage to challenge them due to the power differentiation between them and their employers (Otobo, 2016). Consequently, they are left with no choice but to resign (to themselves) in silence (Okpu, 2016) while attempting to endure the vicious cycle, which leaves them vulnerable to increased levels of stress (Bewell et al., 2014). Short phrases such as *'founding fathers worked hard'* (F2-F), *'delighted to work for the kings all day for free'* (F1-A), *'our custom and tradition'* (F4-O), *'nature of our society, our life'* (F2-H), and *'the African mentality'* (F5-V) are all instances of cultural-environmental norms (Kragh, 2016) that are designed to normalise work-life imbalance and the overlabouring of employees (Umar and Hassan, 2014). This is collaborated by short phrases such as *'we have no life'* (F1-C), *'you work weekends'* (F4-R), and *'we work Saturdays, too'* (F5-V). Such a strenuous working life causes employees to get burnout. As some of these respondents lamented: *'I find it stressful'* (F2-H), *'it exhausts you'* (F5-V), and *'they drain you out'* (F4-R), so much that an employee could become *'so tired and sick of working'* (F3-M). According to one quotation, it is regrettable that *'stress is normalised as way of life'* (F1-D) and employees are left with no choice but to live with this condition due to *'power, authority, and the... norms of the country'* (F4-P), which are shaped and influenced by the HPD culture (Hofstede, 1980). Beyond cultural implications, the study also identified issues of weak governmental support, which does very little to address the PD-related stress through policy change. Phrases such as *'our parliamentarians are unfit for purpose'* (F4-R) and *'the government would not intervene, neither would policymakers'* (F3-M) collaborate this perception, which leaves employees with no option but to hope for God's intervention.

Discussion

This article explores the implications of cultural dynamics on workplace stress in Nigeria's banking and manufacturing sectors. Relying on the six-step thematic procedure of the gathered empirical data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the study identified and analysed three key themes (with sub-themes) that underpin the relationship between HPD culture and workplace stress. These include: *'An HPD culture fuels and endorses labour exploitation (work overload and underpayment), leading to stress'*, *'An HPD culture weakens employees' ability to challenge uncondusive work environments, exacerbating stress'*, and *'An HPD culture weakens employees' ability to challenge work-life imbalance and burnout, leading to increased stress levels'*. These factors characterise the nature of employment relations across the relevant sectors with concomitant stress for employees. Thus, Nigeria's context of human resources (HR) practice differs to that of Western countries (Miller, 2009) due to its unique nature (characterised by an HPD culture, widening power differentiation, inequality, paternalism, weak institutions, and the absence of protection of employees' rights). This reinforces the need to investigate the nexus between cultural-environmental dynamics and workplace stress (Otobo, 2016; Yange et al., 2016). In doing so, the study presents both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical implications

In line with other studies (Osibanjo et al., 2016; Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2018), the researchers of the current study propose that employees' stress levels are intensifying across the sectors as a consequence of the HPD culture of respect and deference to people in positions of authority (Kragh, 2016). This makes it near impossible for them to challenge labour exploitation, work overload, underpayment, uncondusive work environment, work-life imbalance, and burnout among other stressors (Umar and Hassan, 2014). These findings are more or less similar to other studies on work-related stress in the wake of the managerialist approach to HR practices (Oruh et al., 2018), to which employees may make no response – just silence. According to Hofstede (1980), HPD culture endorses and promotes a servant-master/superior-subordinate relationship, which means that those considered subordinates cannot challenge the decisions of those considered superiors. Thus, in an employment relations context, ordinary employees (who are considered subordinates) will not be able to challenge workplaces stressors (such as work exploitation; work overload; excessive working on weekdays and weekends; underpayment; and work-life imbalance) imposed on them by their managers (superiors) (Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2018). Our study thus demonstrates that employees' work-related stress (in the relevant sectors) is a function of Nigeria's unique managerialist HR practice (Oruh et al., 2018), which is framed by the country's prevailing HPD culture (Umar and Hassan, 2014). By exploring the relationship between the HPD culture and work-related stress, this study contributes to the knowledge of this topic by shedding light on a relatively under-researched area of the literature. It departs from previous literature on cultural consequences. Although the role played by cultural dynamics in shaping HR practice has been widely researched (Hofstede, 1980; Kragh, 2016), no study (to the best of our knowledge) has specifically interrogated the nexus between HPD culture and work-related stress, particularly in the Nigerian context. This study thus not only expands the confines of the relevant literature by broadening the standpoints regarding how contextual issues can help facilitate explicating HPD (cultural context) within the remit of HR and HRM (Kragh, 2016); but also furthers (in general) the country-specific dynamic of the practice of these disciplines.

Practical implications

Beyond cultural implications, the insights gained from this study also have important practical implications for governments, policymakers, organisations, and HR practitioners regarding the ensuing effect of managerialist employment relations practices in Nigeria, occasioned by the HPD culture, all of which inhibit employees from challenging their employers about stressors or work conditions that trigger workplace stress (Umar and Hassan, 2014). Workplace stress is a well-developed area in the extant literature, which presents negative implications not only for employees and organisations but also the country at large (Aderibigbe and Mjoli, 2018). According to Osibanjo et al. (2016), work-related stress pressures a country's healthcare sector, and it is also believed to be responsible for absenteeism and low productivity among employees in the workplace, which in turn results in poor organisational performance. Furthermore, when employees are stressed at work, they are likely to return home tense, which creates family/social issues and challenges to society at large. Hence, factors such as the cultural context of HPD – which can trigger stress among employees – need to be understood and dealt with. First, the study identified practical issues of weak governmental and policy support,

which does very little to address (through policy change) PD-related HR/HRM practices that are considered stressors in the country (Otobo, 2016; Adisa et al., 2016). The Nigerian government should work in collaboration with policymakers to initiate and implement more employee-friendly policies that protect workers against HPD-driven work practices that put employees' health at risk due to stress. Such policies may include stricter regulatory frameworks that mandate employers to genuinely protect employees' rights at work – including the rights to work-life balance, protection against working more than the recommended maximum daily hours, a work environment that is uncondusive to productivity, and adequate/effective representation against work exploitation with regards to weekend and holiday work (Oruh et al., 2018). Furthermore, working in collaboration with policymakers, businesses, and (both profit and non-profit) organisations, the government should champion the launch of initiatives to sensitise public awareness of the need to ease this cultural impediment of HPD, which makes it impossible for subordinates to speak up to the powers that be against factors that constitute stressors and/or trigger stress in work settings. In this regard, a good example of a policy that could be adopted in Nigeria is the Australian 'Champion of Change' initiative (Taylor, et al., 2011). The 'Champion of Change' initiative can be adapted to campaign for equality of voice in Nigerian work settings in order to minimise stress levels among employees, which are fuelled and sustained by the HPD cultural norms and which make it impossible for subordinates (employees) to challenge their superiors (employer) about stress factors.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

While the current study has presented its contributions and implications, it is limited by a number of factors. First, the sample size of 24 interviews may not be considered a limitation in a qualitative study since data saturation was realised (Creswell, 2013), and the use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic framework helped to ensure that a rigorous data analysis procedure was achieved. That said, a combination thereof with quantitative data in future studies will help facilitate the generalisation of this study's findings (Saunders et al., 2009). Second, the use of two (banking and manufacturing) sectors and the involvement of only two cities may not be entirely adequate in gauging the relationship between stress and HPD in Nigeria's employment terrain. Hence, the involvement of other sectors and cities in future studies is recommended, in order to provide a more holistic overview of the phenomenon being investigated. Last but not least, a multi-country perspective of the African continent would be useful in providing a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the relationship between stress and HPD culture.

References:

Abefe-Balogun, B., & Nwankpa, N. N. (2012), "National development: the significance of e-banking". *Advances in Arts, Social Sciences and Education Research*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp.121-128.

Aderibigbe, J. K., & Mjoli, T. Q. (2018), "Occupational Stress as a Correlate of Organisational Citizenship Behaviour and Psychological Capital Among Graduate Employees in Nigeria". *European Review Of Applied Sociology*, Vol. 11, No. 16, pp. 51-62.

Adisa, T. A., Osabutey, E. L., & Gbadamosi, G. (2016), "Understanding the causes and consequences of work-family conflict: An exploratory study of Nigerian employees. *Employee Relations*, Vol. 38, No. 5, pp. 770-788.

Ajayi, S. (2018), "Effect of Stress on Employee Performance and Job Satisfaction: A Case Study of Nigerian Banking Industry". Available at SSRN 3160620.

Akanji, B. (2015), Organizational stress: Theoretical reflections and proposed directions for management research and practice. *Economic Insights – Trends and Challenges*, Vol.IV, No. LXVII, pp. 27-36

American Psychological Association (2010), *Stress in America findings*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Aycan, Z., Kanungo, R., Mendonca, M., Yu, K., Deller, J., Stahl, G., & Kurshid, A. (2000), "Impact of culture on human resource management practices: A 10-country comparison". *Applied Psychology*, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 192-221.

Bewell, H., Yakubu, I., Owotunse, D., & Ojih, E. E. (2014), "Work-induced stress and its influence on organizational effectiveness and productivity among Nigerian workers". *African Research Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 112-125.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*", Vol. 3, No. 2, pp.77-101.

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011), "*Business research methods* (3rd ed.)". New York: Oxford University Press.

Central Bank of Nigeria (2019), "*Supervision*". Available at: <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/Supervision/Inst-DM.asp>. (Accessed 06/07/19).

Cookson, C. (2019), "Africa to propel world's population towards 10bn by 2050: Sub-Saharan region on track to overtake central and south Asia as most populous". *Financial Times*. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/868e20d0-90ec-11e9-b7ea-60e35ef678d2>. (Accessed 06/08/19).

Creswell, J. W. (2013), "*Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*" (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Dibia, C. H. (2017), "*Lean manufacturing and employee working conditions in organizations operating in Nigeria: The managers' and supervisors' perspective* (Unpublished doctoral thesis) Available at: https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/files/11068479/Lean_Manufacturing_and_Employee_Working_Conditions_in_Organisations_Operating_in_Nigeria_The_managers_and_supervisor_s_perspective.pdf (Accessed 06/06/19).

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2009), "*OSH in figures: Stress at work—facts and figures*". Luxembourg: European Communities.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989), "*Fourth generation evaluation*". London: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (1980), "*Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*". Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Hofstede, Geert H. (1997), “*Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* “. (second ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 27. ISBN 978-0-07-707474-6.
- Hofstede, G., & Bond, M. H. (1984), “Hofstede's culture dimensions: An independent validation using Rokeach's value survey. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 15, No. 4 – 4, pp.17-433.
- HSE (2018), “*Work-related stress depression or anxiety statistic in Great Britain*”. Available at: [Http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf) (Accessed 06/07/19).
- HSE (2019), “*Tackling work-related stress using the management standards approach: A step-by-step workbook (WBK01)*”. Available at: [Https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wbk01.pdf](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wbk01.pdf). (Accessed 06/09/19).
- Ituma, A., & Simpson, R. (2009), “The boundaryless' career and career boundaries: Applying an institutionalist perspective to ICT workers in the context of Nigeria”, *Human Relations*, Vol. 62, No.5, pp. 727-761.
- Kihara, L. N., & Mugambi, H. (2018), “Effect of stress management strategies on employees' performance in the public service”. *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.2383-2405.
- Kragh, S. U. (2016), “Tribe and village in African organizations and business”. *Personnel Review*, Vol. 45, No.1, pp.51-66.
- McRay, J. (2015), “*Leadership Glossary: Essential Terms for the 21st Century*”. 1st edition. CA: Mission Bell Media. ISBN 9780990730002.
- Motlagh, J., & Saha, A. (2014), “The Ghosts of Rana Plaza: In Bangladesh, one year after the worst accident in the history of the garment industry, recovery remains a fragile process, justice seems elusive, and reform has a long way to go”. *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 90, No 2, pp.44-89.
- Mushfiqur, R., Mordi, C., Oruh, E. S., Nwagbara, U., Mordi, T., & Turner, I. M. (2018), “The impacts of work-life-balance (WLB) challenges on social sustainability: The experience of Nigerian female medical doctors”. *Employee Relations*, Vol. 40, No.5, pp.868-888.
- Mustafa, M., Illzam, E. M., Muniandy, R. K., Hasmi, M. I., Sharifa, A. M., & Nang, M. K. (2015), “Causes and Prevention of Occupational Stress”. *Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences*, Vol. 14, No. 11, pp. 98-104.
- Mxenge, S. V., Dywili, M., & Bazana, S. (2014), “Organisational stress and employees' intention to quit amongst administrative personnel at the university of Fort Hare, Eastern Cape, South Africa”. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 5, pp.13-29.
- Ogujiuba, K., & Obiechina, M. E. (2011), “Financial sector reforms in Nigeria: Issues and challenges”. *International Journal of Business and Management*, Vol.6, No.6, pp. 222-233.
- Okeke, M. N., Echo, O., & Oboreh, J. C. (2016), “Effects of stress on employee productivity”. *International Journal of Accounting Research*, Vol. 2, No.11, pp. 38-49.
- Okpu, T. (2016), “*Employee Voice and Workers Commitment in Nigerian Workplace*”. Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Olukayode, L. (2017), "Work stress factors and employee job performance in a Nigerian manufacturing firm: an empirical assessment". *IFE Psychologia: An International Journal*, Vol. 25, No.2, pp.218-233.

Oruh, E. S, Nwagbara, U., Mordi, C., & Mushfiqur, R. (2018), "Legitimisation strategies and managerial capture: a critical discourse analysis of employment relations in Nigeria". *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, pp.1-27. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1474940>).

Osibanjo, O. A., Salau, O. P., Falola, H.O., & Oyewunmi, A. E. (2016), "Workplace stress: implications for organizational performance in a Nigerian public university". *Business: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 261-269.

Otobo, D. (2016), "*Reforms and Nigerian labour and employment relations: Perspectives, issues and challenges*". Lagos: Malthouse Press limited.

Oyelere, M. (2014), "*Regent's Working Paper 1404. Political developments, trade union and social movement unionism: A case of Nigeria labour congress*". Available at: <https://www.regents.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/RWPBM1404-Oyelere-M.pdf> . (Accessed 06/09/19).

Patton, M. Q. (2012), "*Qualitative research and evaluation methods*". London: Sage.

Purnawati, S. (2013), "Current issues on job stress in japan and worksite mental health application among Japanese company: A case study analysis". *Bali Medical J (BMJ)*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 81-88.

Randma-Liiv, T., & Savi, R. (2016), "Managing the public sector under fiscal stress". In G. Hammerschmid, S. Van de Walle, R. Andrews & P. Bezes (Eds.), *Public Administration Reforms in Europe: The View from the Top* (231-243). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Richardson, K. M. (2017), "Managing employee stress and wellness in the new millennium". *Journal of occupational health psychology*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 423 -428.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009), "*Research Methods for Business Students*" (5th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Seaward, B. L. (2017), "*Managing stress*". Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

Seaward, B. L. (2019), "*Essentials of managing stress*", (2nd ed.). Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

Sonnentag, S., & Frese, M. (2013), "Stress in organizations. In N. W. Schmitt, S. Highhouse, & I. B. Weiner (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 560-592). New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Taylor, A., Cocklin, C., Brown, R. and Wilson-Evered, E. (2011), "An investigation of champion-driven leadership processes". *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol,22, No.2, pp.412-433.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1988), "Intercultural Conflict Styles: A face-negotiation theory". In Y.Y. Kim & W.B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in Intercultural Communication* (pp. 213-235). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Umar, M., & Hassan, Z. (2014). *Influence of Power Distance on Voice and Silence Behaviours of Employees in Nigerian Tertiary Educational Institutions*. Paper presented at the National Research & Innovation Conference for the Graduate Students in Social Sciences. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ida_Bahar/publication/324438043_Fusions_of_Animistic_and_Islamic_Practices_in_Anthony_Burgess's_The_Malayan_Triology/links/5ac687
(Accessed 06/05/19).

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013), “Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 398-405.

Victor, A. M., Junior, P. L. D., & Sant`Anna, A. S. (2017), “Occupational Stress: A study with supermarket professionals in Brazil. *International Journal of Business Management and Economic Research*, Vol. 8, No.6, pp.1115-1119

Ukonu, I. O., Serieke-Dickson, R., & Edeoga, G. (2019), “Job-related stress among public junior secondary school teachers in Abuja, Nigeria”. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, Vol.9, No.1, pp. 136-158.

Yange, J. T., Oyeshola, D., & Aduloju, A. A. (2016), “The politics of workers rights protection: International labour organisation and promotion of labour rights in manufacturing industry in Nigeria. *Critique*, Vol.44, No. 3, pp. 267-290.

Appendix I: Full interview guide

- What do you understand by workplace or employees stress?'
- Do you consider your work stressful?
- Do you consider your work challenging?
- How would you describe your work relationship with your manager?
- What do you consider "stressors" or factors that drive or increase stress in your organisation?
- How would you describe the management style in your organisation?
- Are you able or not to discuss these stressors or stress factors with your boss'?
- 'Are there any cultural reasons why you may or may not be able to challenge your managers about these stressors or stress factors?'
- Do you understand cultural dimensions such as high power distance, which border on respect for superiors?
- 'Do you consider (or not) that HPD culture in Nigeria makes it impossible to have equal dialogue with your managers regarding work stressors?'

Table 1. Interviewee details

Serial Numbers	Codes	Role/position	Gender	Office Branch	Years of Experience
<i>Firm 1</i>					
1	F1-A	Cite manager	F	Abuja	9
2	F1-B	HR manager	M	Lagos	8
3	F1-C	Non-managerial employee (NME)	M	Abuja	10
4	F1-D	NME	M	Lagos	7
5	F1-E	NME	F	Lagos	8
<i>Firm 2</i>					
6	F2-F	Line manager	M	Abuja	8
7	F2-G	Operation manager	M	Lagos	6
8	F2-H	NME	M	Abuja	9
9	F2-I	NME	M	Lagos	7
10	F2-J	NME	F	Lagos	5

Firm 3

11	F3-K	Executive director	M	Abuja	11
12	F3-L	NME	M	Abuja	9
13	F3-M	NME	F	Lagos	7

Firm 4

14	F3-N	Middle line manager	M	Abuja	6
15	F4-O	Area manager	M	Lagos	10
16	F4-P	NME	F	Abuja	8
17	F4-Q	NME	M	Lagos	4
18	F4-R	NME	F	Abuja	5
19	F4-S	NME	F	Lagos	7

Firm 5

20	F5-T	Brand manager	F	Abuja	6
21	F5-U	Marketing manager	M	Lagos	8
22	F5-V	NME	M	Abuja	5

23	F5-W	NME	F	Lagos	4
24	F5-X	NME	M	Abuja	6
Total = 24		Managers =	Male - 15		
		9,	Female - 9		
		Employees			
		= 15			

Note(s): F1, F2, F3, F4 & F5 = Firm 1, 2, 3 operates in manufacturing – while 4 and 5 in banking sectors

Non-managerial employee = NME

Table 2. The main themes, illustrative quotes and codes

Main themes	Illustrative quotes	Codes
HPD and Labour exploitation (Work overload and underpayment)	There is hardship and rising unemployment in the country. The last thing you want now is to start challenging your job provider needlessly. They pay you for a living, ... You must complete your task, but you are also forced to do extra unpaid work. You dare not complain...	Centralisation Domination Hierarchy Power-differentiation Inequality Suppression
HPD and Un-conducive work environment	Our tradition mandates you to respect your parents, your elders, superiors or anybody that puts food on your table The air conditioning is ineffective. The ventilation is very poor, you feel sick sometimes. You can only get used to it, that's all This place is so choked us. so stressful .., but who care!	Silence Exploitation Underpayment Overlabouring Exhaustion Stress
HPD, Work-life imbalance and Burnout	Uncultured for someone to plead for a job, and then turnaround to complain of burnout or stress. That's pure laziness I feel so tired and sick of working.... You work here, work at home and... during holiday. They ...drain you out....but you get nothing	